

**CENTER FOR FLORIDA HISTORY
ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM**

INTERVIEW WITH: ARMANDO RODRIGUEZ

INTERVIEWER: DR. JAMES M. DENHAM

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D= DR. JAMES M. DENHAM

R= ARMANDO RODRIGUEZ

Today is May 27th, and I'm here once again with Armando Rodriguez, and we're beginning another day of taping. Today we are going to talk about your consecration in 1968. Can you go through some of how that process worked?

R: Yeah. Yes, in February 1 to 4, 1968, we celebrated our Autonomy Conference in Havana, with the permission of the General Conference in USA. We met to establish our Autonomous Church in Cuba. And we met in the El Vedado, or the University Methodist Church in Havana, and then, our first action was to elect Dr. Angel E. Fuster as our first Bishop of the Methodist Church in Cuba *posthumanly*.

D: Posthumously

R: Posthumously. OK; because he died in January 1967, one year before. In that very busy conference, we approved the constitution of our new Autonomous Church in Cuba. We approved the Articles of Faith, and we approved also our little Discipline as good Methodists. In this Discipline, it was established that the Cuban Bishop must be elected every four years. Not by life, but every four years. And then, also, we had the election, on Saturday the 3rd of February, 1968 and thanks be to God we had a very good understanding and I was elected unanimously for this post, the work of Bishop, the first active Bishop of the Methodist Church in Cuba. In that autonomy conference we had only one delegate. We didn't have representation from the Board of Missions. We didn't have representation from the Council of Bishops in the States. We had also only Dr. Karl Orund, one layman from the Methodist Church in East Germany. He was the only representation from outside that we had in that conference, but, in our consecration service on Sunday, Feb. 4th 1968, we didn't have, of course, any Bishop for my consecration. Then, we had a wonderful congregation, we had a lot of distinguished Cuban visitors, for example, the Catholic Arch-Bishop of Havana was present, the Ambassador of Switzerland was present and we had also a wonderful representation from the embassy of Italy and other countries in Havana. But, we had our service without consecration, because we didn't have, eh... the Cuban government, the Revolutionary government didn't grant the visa to Bishop James Henley. He was officially our Bishop until that moment because he was the Bishop in Florida and also he was in charge, officially, of the Methodist Church in Cuba. He traveled to Mexico City and asked for the

Cuban visa, but they didn't grant him the visa. Then on Monday, the Autonomy conference agreed to be in permanent session until we had some Bishop for the consecration. And thanks be to God, the next Sunday, on February 11, 1968, we had with us Bishop Alejandro Ruiz from the Methodist Church in Mexico, and he was the Bishop who consecrated me. We had also a wonderful congregation, a very nice representation from embassies and others, and the Catholic Church, and we had a very, very happy consecration service that day, one week after our plan in our conference. Now we can reflect on that occasion. For example, as I told you in some other occasion before, when the Methodist leaders in Cuba thought about the autonomy of the Methodist Church in Cuba, the Board of Missions and the missionaries said "Oh, this is a good idea but we think that the Church in Cuba is not prepared to be an autonomous church. We need to have more leaders, more pastors, etc., etc." But in this moment in 1968, we had the worst time to be autonomous. Why? Because we were alone in Cuba. Because we lost all our American missionaries. We lost the majority of the national Cuban pastors. We lost all our institutions and all the social work. We lost all of our schools and colleges. We lost all our dispensary and cleaning. We lost the majority of the laymen and the membership of our church. Some amount of them left the country, but many of them also had fear to come to the church and to be integrated into the church work. And also, we lost a big amount of our sanctuaries in Cuba and also we lost many of our parsonages and many of all our property. But more than that, our losses and we have only a little amount of Methodists in Cuba, more than that, this was a time of great ideological struggle. The Revolution, the ideological process in Cuba, they attacked in a big way God, the Bible and the church. They accused us that we were connected with the CIA in the United States. That we were in favor of the bad American Government, and so, and they said to the people that the Christian belief and the church was something that belonged to the past. That they don't help the Cuban people in their future, when they like to have a people that are in line with science and so, and so, and they said very drastically "the church and God don't have a place in our new Cuban society. This belongs to the past and we need to have a Cuban people without any idea in that way, because this belongs to the past; this will not help the future of Cuba."

D: I have a question.

R: Yes.

D: You mentioned the East German representative. Did you ever converse with him at the time and ask him whether he was having the same kind of struggles and obstacles in his country as you were? Did you have problems in common?

R: Well, of course, in my personal opinion, this wonderful man Dr. Karl Orund, he was a very intelligent person, but he also was in favor of the socialistic thinking, and in my opinion, he was one of the national leaders in East Germany of the other party that they have together with the communist party in Germany. This means that his mind was in a good way very different, politically, to our mind.

D: Do you think he was allowed to come to Cuba because he thought in that way? Maybe he was acceptable to the Germans and the Cubans and maybe he was trying to influence you in that way?

R: I am sure, personally that the Cuban government granted him, only to him the Cuban visa, because they thought that in that way they will convince us to be more open to the Revolution and the atheistic matter. But, of course, we must understand the difference between Cuba and East Germany. In East Germany and also in the other communist countries in Europe, the communist or socialistic government had more respect for them and so, because they belonged to a more organized society. They had more rights. In Cuba, the protestant church in that time, had only less than 100 years, and maybe they thought that if Cuba was a Catholic country nominally, and the protestant church was very new, they can make a better job ideologically in Cuba than in these countries. But of course, I am sure that they, our Cuban government, thought that the influence of Dr. Karl Ormund with us would turn our church in a more open situation before the Revolution.

More than that, the problem that the Methodist Church in Cuba lost missionaries, all the schools, the college, the clinic the social work, many of our national pastors left the country, many of the laymen and members of the church left the country and others were close to the Revolutionary movement, more than the ideological battle that they had against God and the church and so. We had a lot of personal battles also. They... they worked to influence all the leaders and specially myself as the new Bishop of the church. For example, my wife shared with me the situation that many times, somebody called her by telephone to our house and said to her that I, her husband, I was in trouble, that I was in very different difficulties, and "he must be aware of that situation." In our opinion, they liked to put fear in her and to make some personal problem with me. And even personally, in one occasion, when I was in the parsonage of the Marianao church in Havana, one morning, somebody called me by telephone and said "I belong to the political police and I'd like to tell you that we will go to pick you up and to put you in jail." I said "ok, I will be waiting for you." There was one hour or more and I didn't receive any visitor. And they called me again and they said "oh, are you..., do you have fear?" "No, I don't have fear." "Well, we called you as a joke, but we will not go to put you in jail." And this was only an example of the many ways that they tried to put us in personal conflict and in fear. But thanks be to God, we were faithful in God, and so, when I was elected as Bishop, in some way, God told me two important things in my mind, in my conscience. He told me "I will be with you and I will take care of you in all the time" and second "you will be the Bishop of the Methodist Church in Cuba until I decide to end your contribution to the Methodist Church in Cuba." And this was a great spiritual comfort, very good for me personally, because I was sure that I was doing the, the church, the God work in Cuba, and he will take care of me fulfilling the promise in the Bible. Of course, there were some friends, personal friends, that also had some concern about my personal security and my future. And some of them came privately to me and told me "oh, Armando, are you aware of your complication? You as the Bishop of the church, you will have all the attention in all the levels of the government and the Revolution looking for you and looking for different opportunities to do bad things with you." But thanks be to God my friend, all the time I was very sure that if God was with

me, no body and nothing will be against me and my personal security, my family and so. This was the normal situation, or the real situation that we had when we had our autonomy and we began our church work in a new organization. Of course, eh... when I was consecrated, I asked for an appointment with the chief person in the office of Religious Affairs in the Central Committee of the party and I asked for a courtesy visit with him. And this was pretty good when he received me. Dr. Jose Felipe Carneado was a very special man for the task. He was very smart person. He knew everything in general about the church and so. And he was of course a very, very good communist. But he was a person to whom we can talk and work.

D: Did you know of him before?

R: Yes, I, for my work as District Superintendent, etc. I was in some meeting with him before this occasion, but now, this was a courtesy visit as elected Bishop in the Methodist Church, and then I told him “well, Dr. Carneado, I am here to greet you in my new task as Bishop of the Autonomous Methodist Church in Cuba and I’d like to tell you that I am open and ready to have our best relationship and we are open to have an open *diálogo*...

D: Dialogue?

R: Dialogue with you and so and so, and I think he was happy with that presentation, and he told me something that was very good for me all the time, the twenty two years that I was Bishop. He answered me, “Bishop, I’d like to tell you that we, the communists, the Revolutionary government, we are not interested to have one church *sometida*, a church that is under the communist ideology.

D: OK, they are not interested in having a communist church

R: A communist

D: or a church that is sanctioned only by the communist.

R: By the communist.

D: They don’t believe in the fact that there is a communist church

R: Yeah, and then

D: Which, which means, what does that mean to you? What did that mean to you?

R: *Sometida*, that the church needed to ask them what they can do, how they can work, and so and so. But we like to have a church with the guidance of God only. This was... I was happy with his answer and I told him “we will have the best relationship under that principle.” He said that he didn’t like to have an *iglesia sometida*, one church only under the guidance of the Revolution and the Communist Party. This means that we, as

Methodist Church in Cuba, myself as Bishop, we were autonomous also in our Christian work.

D: And you interpreted that to mean that that would give you some freedom in your work.

R: Of course.

D: And that you would not take orders from the government. The government would not tell you what to do.

R: Yeah.

D: Even though you understood the government would always be there watching.

R: Of course.

D: They would not be an official... they would not direct you as to how to direct your work.

R: Yeah.

D: Do you think that these were similar meetings that he might have had with the leaders of the Episcopal Church, with the leaders of the Presbyterian Church, with the leaders of other churches?

R: I am not sure of that because they have some individual goal for every protestant church.

D: The government did.

R: The government had.

D: A different policy.

R: A different policy, a different goal. And then, may be that meant that as they didn't grant visa to some Bishop for my first consecration service and so, they had some bad opinion about the Methodist church in Cuba.

D: They were suspicious.

R: Suspicious. Yeah. Of course, I told Dr. Carneado in that occasion that we, as Christian people, as the Methodist Church, we will ask to our membership in Cuba, that they, as Christians, as part of their testimony, they must be the best citizen, Cuban citizen, the best workers and the best persons in our society. And then I think that it was good for him to hear that. When we organized our autonomous church in Cuba, we had a lot of

work to do. Of course, we were not prepared. We did not learn how to become an autonomous church. I didn't learn how to become a Methodist Bishop and so, and also, of course, as our Bishop was the Florida Bishop of the United Methodist Church, we didn't have one office for the Bishop in Cuba. We didn't have one home or house for the Bishop's family and we had many different struggles in that way.

D: What was the status of the big church at the University? Was that taken over by the government? Was that church being occupied?

R: No. We, we lost different churches and sanctuaries in different parts of Cuba, especially in the rural areas, but not in Havana.

D: OK.

R: They took all our schools and colleges in Havana, in Matanzas in Cienfuegos, in Camagüey, etc., etc., but not the big churches, or the churches in bigger cities they didn't take. Thanks be go God.

D: So were you living there at that time? Were you operating there at that time as Bishop?

R: Oh, well. We started our office in the Vedado church, in the place where we had one *Universitary* student center. This facility we used it as Bishop. The main problem was a house for us to live.

D: Yes.

R: Because we didn't have a Bishop, we didn't have a parsonage for the Bishop, and then, in the first two years, my wife and myself with our five children we needed to share one home with other three persons. Because I was living in the Marianao parsonage, but when I was elected as Bishop and another pastor was appointed to that place, I left the parsonage and so. After that, we found a home that was a missionary home before, but Dr. Carlos Perez had put some of his family living in that missionary home. And then, my wife and I with our children, we lived for two years with some of his relatives, three of them in one house. But the other relative of his left the country and then the government permitted us to use this house for our home and this was our home for more than twenty years.

D: And was that within Havana?

R: In Marianao, yeah. About five miles from the office.

D: OK, ok.

R: And was a big house, and very good house, thanks be to God. We, in spite of the situation, the struggle, ideological struggle with the government, we the Cuban

Methodist, the remnant that were faithful to God and church, we had a wonderful time. We were very happy and we enjoyed the life and the work of the church. One of the first steps...

D: Can I ask you something?

R: Yes sure.

D: In 1968, when you were beginning a new... is there any way for you to think—I know it's hard to describe right now, but would there be any way to say who, what kind of people, what kind of person, would have been in the Methodist church? Would it have been wealthy people? Would it have been poor people? Would they have been highly educated? Would they have been very minimally educated? Would there be any way to estimate the kind of people that were attracted to the Methodist Church as loyal, as loyal members?

R: Yeah. This is a good question, brother. In my opinion, all the wealthy people left the country.

D: That were in the church before?

R: Yeah. That were in the church before, they left the country. And many professionals. They left the country, many management company people left the country. We had... of course very educated persons, for example, Dr. Nice Fernandez in the Matanzas Central Church, she was the director of one of our colleges, "Irene Toland" in Matanzas and she stayed in Cuba until her death, and she made a wonderful contribution to the church. But not many as them. Our membership and our new leadership were common persons. Well, there were some medical doctors, a few of them, and so, but in general were the people in the low middle class.

D: And were not very highly educated necessarily.

R: And not very highly educated.

D: OK. OK.

R: But they gave to the church and God the best. And they did a great job in that way.

D: OK. OK I'm sorry I interrupted you.

R: No, no, no, it's ok. The first program that we had after the Autonomy conference was to ask every local church to have a service of autonomy and reaffirmation of faith. And then we asked all our Cuban pastors, to ask his membership who would like to sign a new covenant with the Autonomous church. We'd like to know who, with whom we can count.

D: And that's lay people. Lay people?

R: Of course.

D: And you are asking them to recommit themselves to the mission of the church.

R: To the mission of the church.

D: The new church.

R: Yes, the new organization.

D: Before we go any further with that, how did you, in 1968 and in early 70's, how did you communicate with people? Did telephones work? Were the telephones working? Was there telegraph? How did you communicate with Santiago de Cuba, for example, on a daily basis. How did you manage that?

R: This is a good question and I thank you because this gave me the opportunity to explain. In that occasion, not all the Methodist churches and parsonages have a telephone. Some of them have but others don't have. And we used...

D: What about letters? What about the postal service? Was the postal service working?

R: the postal service. Not very good as in the States, but we paid a little more and we send all our mail by certification.

D: Did you have confidence that it would not be tampered with by the government or read by the government? Did you know that it would be..., or did you think that it might be tampered with by the government?

R: In the Cuban situation, we must be aware that they can do everything that they like. And then, we were ready to have this censored or not censored. We sent our material and so and so, and we know perfectly that they intercept some telegraph messages and so, but we were free of preoccupation, because we only speak and write and work with our spiritual matter. And we said in that time that we were happy if there are some secret police in our service, because they will hear our Christian message.

We were happy if they read our mail, because they will read the Christian message. Then we worked freely and happy with our real situation and God helped us in everything. Of course...

D: What about the telephones? Did they have, did you think that they were listening to your telephone messages?

R: Specially to my telephone. I think so, and I don't know if in my office they had some microphone or so. But this reality helped me to be very specific and clear with my

conversations, with my gatherings, with the meetings of our cabinet, our pastoral conversations with pastors and leaders and so. We were aware of that, but this helped us to consecrate...

D: Concentrate.

R: Concentrate in our spiritual matters, even later, when I had a car, I think that maybe they can put some microphone in my car. Why? Because in the garage where I put my car many years after being elected as Bishop, in the first of eight or ten years I didn't have a car for my traveling. I traveled by bus, by train, by any social transportation, but without car. But in the garage of my house, that was a two car garage, somebody took one of these parts of the garage. And he was a person that worked painting and doing work with other cars, and I asked, and asked to have this part, but never they gave me this part of my garage and was open one and other place, and of course, if the government support the person to have this, this was because he was a good instrument for them. And now, I am sure that he put in my personal car some microphone or so, but never I had any problem. Because in my car, in my home, in my office, in the meeting I spoke only the church matter, the spiritual matter, and thanks be to God, I didn't have problems in that situation.

But, as a result of our re-consecration appeal to our congregations, we had only around three thousand Methodist members in all Cuba. Before the revolution, we had more than ten thousand, but we lost more than two thirds in one way or other way. I mean leaving the country or leaving the church and staying in the revolutionary government, but we, the leader group, we didn't have any congregation with one hundred attendance persons each week. Even in the churches in Havana, or in the capital provinces, we don't have that amount of people in the Sunday service. If we had one church with sixty or eighty persons, this was a great group.

D: How were you able to sustain the numbers? In other words, did people come and go very frequently? Did they not stay very long? Did they leave and did they, was there more movement than normal, than you experienced before the revolution?

R: Well, we had our book of membership, of course, after the autonomy we began a new page with the number of people who made the agreement with the autonomous church and we had our book of baptism and all the Methodist books and so, but of course, there were people of two kinds: people who came to the church and they were baptized and they took strong part in the church work, and we had other persons who didn't participate regularly but in some occasion and so. We had, I would say, the same situation that in other country and other situation in that time. But we were clear before our membership in Cuba, and we told them: "if we want to have a church, we must pay the price, and to pay the price is to support the church with our prayers, with our participation, with our work and with our offering." And in that situation, these three thousand people, they support all the work of the Methodist church, about eighty pastors, all our seminary bills, all our conference gatherings, the Bishop's salary, the Bishop's office, they supported all our work. Of course, we had had in my opinion, a great blessing in our Methodist church

in Cuba from this first time. We have a Methodist Church in Cuba that is working in the same economical level of our people in Cuba, of our congregation. And right now the salary of our Methodist pastors is about twenty or twenty-five dollars a month, the same salary that the normal worker in Cuba has. And I think that this is a great, great, great blessing. Because we know many other countries in Latin-America and other places, that the Bishops and the pastors, specially in the main city, they live in a very high level than their congregation, and this is not good. The church and the pastor and the Bishop must be in the same level of the congregation and the people in general. Of course, we have, we enjoyed all the service and all the activity in the church. We were a little group of people, but people with the same goal and with the same experience, and together with the same purpose of, to be faithful to God. And then, in the time, we called our service, our district gatherings, our national gatherings, as the Festival of the Christians. This was our festival. Every Sunday we had a service that was our Christian festival and every year we had our annual conference and this was our great festival. Every year we had our District conference, not one day, but at least two or three days. And these were regional festivals. Why? Because in each province and in each district, they had different specifications, different realities, but all of them celebrated that as our great festival, and this helped us to have one victorious gathering and very happy gathering people and being an example for all the society that was around us. And we had one united church in Cuba. We didn't have political problems. Even we had people who supported the revolution in more amount than others and so, but we asked them to respect the personal, political and social and economical point of view of each one. When we met in the church as congregation, as conference and so, we were all Christian, without a surname, you know? And this was great for us, because we respected one to other in every situation. And even in my cabinet, I was happy to have all the different realities that we had in our churches, in our group of pastors. We had pastors with more intellectual and theological level and we had district superintendents also that were not so well prepared, but they loved the church and they did a great contribution to the church. And of course, in front of our ideological struggle, we had one motto: *Dios y yo somos mayoría*. This means "God and I, we are the majority." What this means? That a Christian, a member of our church, within his work center, maybe many others are communist, are different in their ideological position, but they must think that he, if he is faithful to God, he and God, they are majority, and this was a great experience for our members. They were not disappointed, because there were not many other people who called themselves as they think. And also, we had one experience. We had one point of view. We said in that time, "We, the Christian people, we can do for God everything that we plan or that we wish to do." And this group work, all the little groups in every church, with the victorious experience that they, in spite of the community, the reality in public and general were against us, but we, in the church, we can do everything that we'd like to do for the glory of God.

There are other blessings that we had in that difficult and different situation. The reality that we were isolated in Cuba, the bad thing that we cannot receive any Christian literature from the outside for Sunday school, for Bible Study, for the pastor and so. God made this a great blessing. What was? Well, we with our leaders we need to write and to prepare all our material; the Sunday school class for children, for youth, and adults and

so. And we established one Biblical Theological course that a group of 15 or 20 of our leaders we gathered every quarter, every three months or so, and we prepared the material for our local churches for the future. And this was a great blessing. Why? Because we, the main leaders of the church in that opportunity, we met, and every one of us expressed their theological and Biblical and personal point of view and then we put ourselves together to write our lessons. This means that we, all the Cuban Methodist persons, we were together in our faith, in our theological interpretation of our reality, of the message of the Bible. In my opinion this was one of the biggest of the great blessings that God gave us in our bad situation of isolation. And then, for that reason, our church always was a church united in their theological and Biblical position and so, and then we had the same thought in the leadership at the National level with the local level and with all our pastors. And in some occasion we had a great annual conference. How? Well, some time before the Annual conference we sent to all our local churches in Cuba a number of questions, important questions, and we asked all the local churches to study that question and answer them. And then the pastor and the local delegates, lay delegate from each church come together in that Annual Conference and they express their thought and then we discussed, not from the top leader to the low level, but in the reverse, we had the opinion from the low level to the upper level, and this was great, because in that Annual Conference, all the persons, even the more humble leaders, they spoke what they think about the Bible, some point and so, and this was a great, great blessing and happiness for us in Cuba. And, this was our experience.

We were little church, we had a lot of problems from outside, from the government and so, but inside the church, in our people, we were together, we were happy, we were victorious people in Cuba. And we were conscious about our task in the new society in Cuba: to be the light and the salt of the people in Cuba. I was a very, very happy person in spite of my difficulties and so, and I can tell you, never, never I had some health problem. God gave me one great health, energy and so, and the more happy time for me was the time when I went to every District, I visited not all of them all the year, but every year I visited a number of districts, every church. I was one day in every local church speaking with our... the pastor and family and having a gathering at night with the membership of the church and asking their questions and answering them and so. We were really a happy God's people in Cuba in spite of our situation, the lack of food, the lack of dress, in spite of the problems that the children have in..., the Christian children have in the schools and so, but, in the church, in our experience as Christians we were happy, happy people.

D: OK. In 1969 there was a special gathering in Chile, Santiago de Chile.

R: Yes

D: Not Santiago de Cuba, Santiago de Chile.

R: Santiago de Chile. Chile, South America. All the Methodist churches in Latin America and the Caribbean had a gathering in Santiago de Chile to establish CIEMAL. The Latin American Methodist Organization, and of course, we in Cuba, we were invited

to participate, but in that time, it was very, very hard to obtain permission from the government for a Bishop or leader of the church to go and participate in that gathering. Then, there was about three days before the established beginning of this gathering in Santiago de Chile and I didn't receive the permission, the visa, the permission from the government. And they used this system: they didn't say "no, you cannot go" but they didn't grant you the permission. Then, two days before the beginning of this gathering, the ambassador from Switzerland that was in my consecration and maintained a pretty good relationship with us and ...

D: He was very friendly with you?

R: He was very friendly with us and then, in that occasion, I can say that we, the leaders of the different churches, we were special guests at the National celebration of each important country in the world. For example, the English Ambassador invited us to their special day of celebration and so, and the same with the Switzerland embassy, the Canadian embassy, and also after the 1970s when Carter was the president

D: Jimmy Carter?

R: Jimmy Carter

D: President Carter

R: Jimmy Carter was the president in the United States and he started the interest section of the American government in Havana, they invited us also to their consulate.

D: Not a real embassy but a, some sort of location.

R: Yeah, the American Consulate that worked under the Switzerland embassy in Cuba. But the Switzerland embassy in Cuba was also, had also the representation of the Chile government, and then two days before the gathering in Chile was started, the ambassador called me and told me "Bishop, I received here in the Chilean consulate your visa for the trip to the South American gathering there," and I told him "well, I thank you for the news, Mr. Ambassador, but I must tell you that Cuban government hasn't granted me the permission." And he said "oh, is that so?" I said "yes, I didn't receive the "No," but I didn't receive the permission either." And he said, "Well, I will see what I can do." And then, some hours after that, two days before the meeting, he called me and said to me "I spoke with Dr. Carneado in the office for religious affairs in the Central Committee of the Party, and I wish you the best trip." And I said "oh, thank you, you are very kind." But I didn't receive the permission from the government. What happened? The day after that, very early in the morning, Dr. Carneado called to my home. But I was on the way to the office. My wife told him that, and then when I arrived to my office, I received a call from Dr. Carneado, very kind and so, and he told me, "Bishop, we have thought about your permission to this gathering, and we, the government, we are interested in your participation. Then, go to that, and that office, and you will have the permission already for you." This was one day before. Immediately, when he said that, everything was ok in

every place. I had my passport, I had my permission and so, but how can I get to Santiago de Chile? Because in that time, Cuba had only three times in a week a flight from Mexico to Havana. No flight to Miami, no flight to Panama, no flight to other country. Only Mexico. But what happened? The Mexican government didn't grant transit visa to any Cuban. It was impossible to have a visa to go to Santiago de Chile. Then I went to the Cubana Airlines office and with my permission, with my visa, my passport, and told them "I have this and I need to go to Santiago de Chile. What can you do for me?" And then they looked and looked and they found a place in one airplane that left Havana to Praga, one *turbo-élice* machine, do you know?

D: Helicopter?

R: No, no, no, a plane with motor *élice*, eh...

D: Propeller?

R: Propeller, turbo-propeller plane, and they had, thanks be to God, one place for me. And then, on Thursday in the midday of that week, I flew from Havana to Prague, 18 hours of flight.

D: Prague Czechoslovakia?

R: Yeah, Prague, Czechoslovakia, Prague, and by propeller, 18 hours. We flew from Havana to some place in Canada, some island of Canada, and then to Europe. Then I went to Prague more or less at nine at night. I slept in Prague for 5 or 6 hours, and then I went to the airport. The weather was bad and so and so, but I flew from Prague to Frankfurt and then this was Friday, Saturday, and then I took in Frankfurt, one German, Lufthansa flight and then I left Frankfurt to Accra, Africa, to Rio de Janeiro, to Sao Paulo, to Montevideo, Uruguay, to Buenos Aires, Argentina, and then on Sunday mid-day I arrived to Santiago de Chile.

D: And you stopped on all those places? You stopped and took off? You landed and took off?

R: Yeah. I ... from Thursday mid-day to Sunday mid-day I only slept and passed about 5 or 6 hours in a hotel in Prague. All the other time was in planes or airports. This was a great experience, but I enjoyed it. I was prepared and I had in my personal suitcase everything that I needed to shave and to do everything and was a great experience for me because there were many times that I could not leave Cuba and so, and this was a great experience. Of course, there was a lot of more experience there. In that time, when we were in Cuba struggling for the ten million tons harvest, sugar cane harvest in 1969. There was nothing for dress, for shoes and so. And I made the trip with my only...

D: Suit?

R: Suit, and then, what happened? I had the idea that to have some help for my dear pastors and their families in Cuba. Why? Because in that time, the workers of the state had everything through the worker organization. But we, the pastors, we were out of all the worker organizations, and then we didn't have opportunity to buy anything. And I made this trip with only one suit, two shirts, one pair of shoes repaired, and without any penny. Because in that time was impossible, it was illegal to take out of Cuba any, and we didn't have any dollars. And then,

D: How did you do it? How did you pay for the plane ticket?

R: No, no, I paid in Havana for everything.

D: How did you pay for the hotel? How did you, in Prague?

R: No, no, this was included. And in that time the plane gave wonderful meals. I was in my happy time. But I don't have any penny.

D: When you landed, when you got to Santiago, where did you stay?

R: In the church facility where all the delegates without cost, the Board of Missions and the church paid for that. But, we had one suit, two shirts and nothing more. And then, I passed one week with the same things. This was very, very bad for me. All the persons as you can see, every day with new dress. And myself with the same. I didn't like to ask anything for me, because I had one list of all my pastors, their families, wife and children, boys and girls, and so. We expected to have some money to buy things for them, and then from Spain, to send a package for each of them. But I don't like to ask for a penny for myself, because I like to ask for \$15,000 I need to buy everything for all the pastors and their families and to send these packages from Spain. It was legal to send packages from Spain. Then, after one week, some Peruvian leader that had some Cuban relatives of his wife, he asked me to give their family in Cuba some money, and I don't know how, this reality, makes you think of the other person, and maybe because they were seeing me with the same clothing, that I didn't have any penny. And some person gave me \$100. Ah! How great a thing was this! My brother! Immediately, when I received this money, I left the conference, I went to the first store, and I buy a new suit. And I was happy. But my problem was, how I can have \$15,000 for the packages? Well, I spoke with somebody of the Board of Missions that was in the meeting. I explained to her my plan, my desire, but she didn't answer anything. When I was back in Spain, because then I flew from Chile to Spain, and then from Spain to Cuba. We had weekly flights from Iberia. And then I was ready to go back to Cuba and I didn't receive any answer. Then I called by telephone to Dr. Eugene Stobway, who was the secretary for Cuba in that time. I knew him in the gathering in Buenos Aires, three, four or five years before, when we met for the first time as the life and mission of the Methodist church in Latin American, and he was the secretary for the Board of Mission for Cuba, and I called him and hold him "oh brother, I have this situation. And today I need to decide if I go back to Cuba without anything, or if I stay in Spain to buy these things." He was a great man and he told me.

“Oh Bishop, I will call you back” to the hotel where I was. Two or three hours after that he called me back and said “you have fifteen thousand dollars.”

D: Fifteen thousand?

R: Yeah. With that amount, in Spain, everything was very low price, in that time in 1969. Now, some people say that Spain is the most expensive country in Europe. But for that time, we can buy everything. And then, we stayed one week more in Spain, and we buy everything, because I had with me the name, the address, and the size of every pastor, every pastor’s wife, and children and so and so, and this was a great blessing for me. To go back to Cuba in that way. Of course, there was some Methodist, Cuban Methodist persons in Spain waiting to come to the States, and they were in charge to send all these packages to everyone in Cuba, because this was another saga.

D: Did you, did you have concern that it would be confiscated by the government, or... I’m sure you were worried about that, weren’t you?

R: My main worry was how Dr. Carneado and the religious affairs office will react in that way. This make me be very nervous. But I said “oh God, you know why I am doing this, and for what I am doing this. In your name I will go ahead.” And thanks be to God, this was a blessing. My brother, when every pastor received a letter from the Iberia Air company saying “you have a package here.”

D: In the airline office... so that’s the way you did it?

R: Yeah

D: That’s the way you did it.

R: Yeah, they needed to pick up the package in the custom office, but the airline sent all the information and so. This was the more happy reality for each pastor. Because we put in each package all that the Cuban government permit for a package, with all things, and this was a great blessing. And my blessing, do you know what it was? That my children had the same color and the same things that all the other pastor’s children in Cuba had. This was another one of my great experiences. To be able to be an instrument to help my dear pastors. I can tell you that the wife of one of the pastors called me before my trip and told me “oh Armando, my husband, (one of our pastors,) has only one *pantalón*, *pantalón*?”

D: Umm... One pair of pants?

R: One pair of pants. And he needs to be at bed during the time when I am cleaning them. Please, will you be able to bring him one other pair of pants?” And I was happy that this pastor, not only this pastor, but all the pastors will have, two pants, two suits, and so, many, many pieces of clothing in that time. This was one of my biggest experiences. And for that reason, you can think that, myself as Bishop, we were together, we had a united

people. We had not difference between the Bishop and the pastors, we had no difference between the pastors and the members of the church, and that was very, very happy reality, because we were one, we were together, we had the same thing in our reality, in our experience. And for that reason I think that the Methodist church in Cuba in that time grew up a lot, because we are together with all the Cuban people, and then now, after the 50 years of Revolution, when they are seeing that the promise of the Revolution didn't come, and they saw how we, the Methodists, the Christians, we lived and we are together and we are happy and so, this is a great challenge for the Cuban people. And for that reason, even we are having in this time, some officials, retired officials of the Army, colonel, major, and so, that have been converted in our church. We have had many youth communist members that have been converted to the church. We have many, many people that were very integrated in the Revolution that now they are members of our churches. Why? Because they can experience, they can see the difference between the Christians and the other persons. And then, for that reason, you saw, in our congregation that we have a very happy people, very happy congregation. Of course, I think that you were with the people who were given some food to the elderly persons in the mission, we saw what is the real situation for many persons, for many families, but when Jesus for them means the difference, the church for them means a difference. In the church, they are happy to praise God, because God means the difference in their life, personal life, in their family and so.

D: Umm... ok, good.