

**CENTER FOR FLORIDA HISTORY
ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM**

INTERVIEW WITH: ARMANDO RODRIGUEZ

INTERVIEWER: DR. JAMES M. DENHAM

PLACE: LAKELAND, FLORIDA

DATE: June 9, 2008

D= DR. JAMES M. DENHAM

R= ARMANDO RODRIGUEZ

AR= ALIDA RODRIGUEZ

D: Today is June 9th and I'm once again here with Armando Rodríguez and we are beginning a new day. Again this is June 9th. We are going to begin today by discussing and talking about the dissident movement of 1973 through 1976.

R: Yeah. This was the year when we had a big trouble with the dissidents because they went to our sanctuary and having their activity and so, but thanks be to God...

D: Now let me ask you make sure we understand, the dissident movement were people within the church or people outside the church who were opposed to the government or the church? Explain what that means.

R: Yeah. We call dissidents a group of pastors and members who had a very special experience with the holy spirit, and they were, as I said in some moment in other previous interview, the pastor and members that were more evangelistic, they had a biggest life of prayer and...

D: So they were dissidents of the Methodist church within the Methodist church.

R: But they were, I repeat, the group of pastors and members who had a better spiritual life, and their churches were the more growing churches and the more evangelistic churches. But they, in the Annual conference in 1973, they resigned from the Methodist church, and they began to make some trouble with the Methodist church. Of course, they made some prediction that "the Methodist church in Cuba will be destroyed by God" and they were only the best people of God. But our membership, the majority of them, maybe 90% of our membership, they were loyal and faithful to God and the Methodist church and they began to pray and to seek more blessing from God and to ask God for a great revival in the Methodist church in Cuba. In that emphasis, we had different pastors who had special participation, spontaneous participation in that movement, and this was the pastor Emilio Gonzalez that was pastor in one of our churches in *Oriente*, in *Báguanos*, *Oriente*, one sugar cane mill belonging to some American enterprise before the

Revolution, and also other pastor who was very active was *Rev. Ricardo Pereira*, the actual Bishop of Cuba.

D: Today.

R: Today, actually, yeah. They had some big experience in their personal spiritual life, and they began to pray together with their congregation and the theme was growing and growing spontaneously, and then they had some special experience. For example, in the prayer group that they had, they felt some special perfume, and they

D: Perfume?

R: Perfume

D: Odor, aroma.

R: Yeah, aroma, yeah, *perfume*. And they understood that this was a sign of the presence of God with them. And this was a very, very exciting experience for them, but of course, some of them had the experience to speak in tongues and they had good experience, they were praying for sick person and the person was in good health after that and so, and so, and also in all our gatherings, in the district or national in our annual conference, they had simultaneously with our session, they had little groups of prayer of intercession, praying for the church, the conference and for the future of Cuba. And then, this was growing and growing. Of course, there were in some churches some other members that disagree with that movement. All of them came to me asking to finish this situation. But my position was that they were spontaneously; this was not promoted by anybody, and in that time we were isolated in Cuba. This was not in any way one impact from the charismatic movement that in that time was in many other countries, because we didn't receive any visitors from outside, and was a little more than impossible to have visitors in Cuba at that time.

D: So you viewed it as a spontaneous movement within the church that was naturally inspired by God and was not influenced by any other source from outside the country.

R: And then I cannot stop this spontaneous manifestation. I supported them, but understanding the people who did not have...

D: So your impression was that this was just a spontaneous movement, and where did it proceed from there?

R: I heard the people who were not in accordance with this movement, they disagreed with that experience and so, but I explained to them, I will repeat, that I understand them and I appreciated them as members of the church, but this was an spontaneous manifestation of God, and I cannot stop these persons, but I do my best to put their activity and experience in the disciplinary way of our Methodist church. For example, always we made clear that we don't have campaign for healing. We had service and

evangelistic campaigns that also we prayed for the sick persons as it is normal in the Methodist church, but we don't call our movement one charismatic movement, and we don't have any healing campaign in our churches. We had evangelistic services, preaching services, but of course, we do as any church does, to pray for the sick persons. If God was making some big manifestation and healing the persons, this belonged to God, not to our purpose or so.

D: So you understood it at the time that people were out there going around and healing people and that kind of thing. Was that actually taking place at the time?

R: Yes.

D: And your concern was that should not be a stated policy. How did you discipline those pastors that were out there doing that kind of thing? [END OF TAPE 15]

[TAPE 16, SIDE A]

R: And I explained to them I support you and I'm sure that everything that you are doing is under the inspiration of God, but we must be careful about what we are doing, because in other way, the enemy of the church and the people in the church that don't agree with this kind of service, they will have reason to speak against the Methodist church, and I had a good understanding and response of that way, and we didn't have the same problem that we had before in the seventies with the other dissident persons,

D: So they accepted it.

R: Well, in some amount they accepted but they saw that it was a God manifestation and we cannot be against the word of God in our life, in our situation, but this was growing and growing and growing and we had some official reaction, specially from three lay leaders in the Oriente province or District that was *Nelson Delgado*, *Hidalberto Carbonel* and *César Blanch*. They were very good Methodists, they were very good leaders. They worked in the church but also of course, they were very close to the Revolutionary government, and I am not sure if this document that they presented was their own thinking or if they were instruments of the Revolution to stop in the Methodist church this situation. Of course, we received their document and we explained the same thing: we are not a charismatic church, we are not promoting healing services in general, we are having evangelistic and normal services in our church in what we are having prayer for sick persons and this was more or less the way that we went ahead with this situation. But what happened, that in 1986, in one of these evangelistic or revival campaign in Pinar del Río, they had one good young pastor, *Ramiro Expósito*, and they had a great revival in that occasion, and they had a great experience with praying for the sick persons and healing and so, and this was a very important point.

D: And this individual's name was again, what was his name?

R: *Ramiro Expósito*.

D: Ok, and just so that we understand, this occurred in 1986, so the charismatic movement had progressed and continued through 1980, the Mariel boatlift, the visit of Jesse Jackson, and then now here we are in 1986, and so there is a certain amount of momentum that is building here.

R: Yeah. For me this is the way God works. In 1983 and 1984 we had the visit of Fidel to the Methodist church in Vedado and then we had the book writing by *Frei Betto, Fidel y la Religión*, Fidel and Religion.

D: Now that church that Fidel visited was named *Vedado*?

R: Yes. V E D A D O

D: Ok, in Havana.

R: Yeah, where the central office of the Bishop is in Cuba, and then, as we talked about that before, this was a very important contribution because the Cuban people felt freer to go to church. Then, in the same time God was doing some spiritual experience in some of our pastors and members, and they found that the people in general don't have the fear that they had before the visit of Jesse Jackson and the Frei Betto book. God worked in a very, very special way, and for that reason we had more free, we had more reason to have our activity, because this situation. Then, all of this was without planning. All of these experiences were spontaneous and with personal experience, every one of them. But thanks be go God, there was a great spirit of unity between these different people, and then with this people and myself and the national leaders of the church. We didn't have, thanks be to God, the situation that we had in 1973 with the other group of dissidents. Now we were having a natural spontaneous and united group. One of the aspects that they emphasized more and more was the love, the love between all the Methodists and all the people, and the love between the people who are having this special kind of spiritual experience and the other pastors and members who were not having the same experience. They said, we are together, we are the same church, we are the same people, but some of us, we are having some special experience, and other don't have the same experience, but maybe in the future the situation will change, but with a very, very good comprehension and dialogue between one group and other, and this was a great blessing. Why? Because the government was very angry about this situation and for that reason we suppose that they supported these three leaders that I mentioned before from Oriente church, and then they put inside in the leaders of all the churches their problem, that this perfume movement was diabolic.

D: Diabolical.

R: Diabolical, not from God and so, but we managed the situation and we went ahead in that occasion. I personally many, many times, I had calls from the director of the Office of Religious Affairs in the Central Committee, asking me in a very strong way, that I must finish this movement, but I explained to him one and every time that this was

something spontaneous and we cannot stop the people who want to come to the church, and if they ask to our pastor to pray for their sickness and so, we must fulfill our pastoral task. But this was very difficult, because this situation was growing, and growing, and growing, in the way that considered that in these three or four years that we had this experience, we had maybe one hundred fifty or two hundred thousands of different Cubans that came to our services in these three or four years. But what does this mean? That all these thousands and thousands and thousands of Cubans that participated in our service, I am sure that they spoke with their family, with their neighbors, and with the other workers in their work centers, and can say to you that maybe, two or maybe three million of Cubans heard about the movement and about the way that God was working in many persons in that time, and in my opinion, this was the beginning of the great revival that we are having in all Cuba. Because this was a great impact and we are having now the result of that movement. Of course, the problems that we had with the government were big and many. For example, in the beginning, when the situation was started in the little chapel in *Entronque de Herradura*, where I appointed a young lay missionary, with the name of *Ernesto Betancourt*, this chapel, this sanctuary in *Entronque de Herradura*, was in one side of the central highway in Pinar del Río, and then the multitude of the congregation was maybe five hundred to eight hundred, and in the chapel there was only capacity for one hundred twenty, one hundred thirty persons. This meant that all the people were outside around the church, and then they had fear to have some traffic problem in the highway. Then, they were pushing the other people in front of the church. Then we had a sign in the church between the sanctuary and the highway, and the group was pushing in some amount the other persons, that the signs go down, and then some people had a little injury. And then, two or three days after that situation, doctor Carneado, from the Office of Religious Affairs in the Central Committee in the Party called me very angry telling me that I need to stop that reality, because this is very dangerous for the people and so, and so. And I expressed to him that I will take some steps and I will do my best in the way that this will not be repeated. And then I asked *Ernesto Betancourt* and his District Superintendent, *Ricardo Pereira*, that they must ask the people to come to the church in different days and hours. For example, I suggested to them that on Thursday they could have

AR: Good morning

D: Good morning

R: Well, I suggested to *Ernesto Betancourt* and *Ricardo Pereira* that they must have service for people from different regions in different days. For example, on Thursday they can have service for the people who were living on the North side of the chapel; on Friday they can have service for the people coming from the South side of the church; on Saturday for people coming from the East side of the church and in Sunday, for the West part of the church. But, what happened? That every day we had the same situation, because people coming from only a little part of the region, they came in the same big amount of people. Then I asked them to have services in the other churches in the *Pinar del Río* province in the same way, with the same emphasis, but the situation didn't change. Not only in *Entronque de Herradura*, but also in *Pinar del Río* and other

provinces, they had a big, big gathering in each churches coming to our service. Then I recommended to them that every church made some ticket or little card with different days and hours and the number of these tickets or little cards from each hour of every day, must have the amount of people who can be in the church without any complication and then they distributed between the multitude that came, and then they gave to everyone a tickets for the day and the hour that will be possible for them to come to the church, and in that occasion they will be the only people we would receive, but what happened? After that doctor Carneado also called me and told me: Oh Bishop, this is impossible, because there are in many different towns in the *Pinar del Río* province people saying “I have a ticket to go to the service in the Methodist church in two weeks or three weeks. You must stop that.” I told him well, I told you that I would take some steps to solve the problem that we are having. And he said, “Well, you cannot do that, you cannot give persons this kind of tickets or little cards.”

D: Do you think that people were selling the tickets maybe, or that the government was afraid that people would think that this was such a wonderful thing that you had to have tickets and it would even attract more people, that kind of thing?

R: Yeah, I am sure that they were not selling the tickets, as we have in the sports gatherings here in the States.

D: But the very idea of having tickets indicated that there was a very attractive thing, so this would have caused a lot of excitement.

R: Yes, the government was very angry.

D: Did you think that might happen when you started that process?

R: No, no, no,

D: Did you have idea?

R: No, no, no, we did that without any bad purpose. We did it with the intention to solve the problem that we were having, but giving the all people the opportunity in one, or two, or three weeks to come to church and praise God and receive blessing in their life and their family. But the government was very angry, because when a person said “oh, I have ticket to go to the Methodist church in two or three weeks, this means that there are a big amount of Cubans in that region that are willing to go to the church. Then we asked to *Expósito* and *Pereira* that they must go to other churches in other provinces, because people were coming from as far as one hundred miles away from these *Pinar del Rio* churches, and then some neighbors around the *Entronque de Herradura* church told me that every weekend there was a traffic congestion in the highway that went to *Entronque de Herradura* that this was very different than the other days when they don’t have activities. And then they went to *Santa Clara* province and they had a big and wonderful gathering in the *Cienfuegos* church, in the *Caonao* church very near to *Cienfuegos*, in *San Juan de lo Years*, in *Manicaragua*, and so, and when they were in these places, the

amount of people would interrupt the traffic in the street around the church and it was very interesting, we had some problems, but we had also very great experiences and anecdotes of that situation. For example, one weekend I visited the churches in *Santa Clara*, and then when I was in the service in *San Juan de los Yaguajayes*, I saw a person very enthusiastic telling his testimony and so, and after the service I asked him, oh, where are you from? And he told me that he was coming from a town maybe twenty miles from there, and I asked to him “Why are you coming from such a faraway place?” “Oh—he told me—do you know I received a kind of blessing from God here in this church and I am happy to make this trip. When I was in other little church in a little town, I had a gathering with the leaders asking about their experience and they told us an experience that was that some communist leader had in the service in that town, that he said that he was very sick with some gastric problem, and he, as a communist leader, he went to the hospital in *Cienfuegos*, he went to the hospital in *Santa Clara*, he went to the hospital in Havana and he didn’t receive any help. But he asked personally to his wife, “do you think that I must go to the service in the Methodist church? And his wife told him “well, if you have not had help from any hospital in any place in Cuba, maybe you can go to the Methodist service. And in that way he went to the service and he participated in all the activities and so, but when he went back to their house, their home, he said to his wife “oh, I am hungry.” A different situation than before when he was sick. And the wife prepared some food and he ate it and he was completely healed of his bad problem. And there was other situation in the Caonao service where there were hundreds and hundreds of people, not only in the church, but in the garden around the church, and there was a blind person in the community that all the persons knew that he was blind. And the pastor prayed for him and he received his... how do you say?

D: His sight.

R: His sight, and then there was a police man in a motorcycle there taking care of the gathering and so, and he called this blind man and he asked “Oh, I’d like you to answer me. I have some light in my motorcycle“ and when he didn’t have light he said, “no, I don’t see it.” And then he put the light in front of the bicycle: “what light I have now in my motorcycle?” and he knew that really the blind man was healed, and then there were many, many, many other experiences that were, of course, a very special new in all the region, in all the area. And so, this was, I will say, a great blessing. We made a letter from my office to all our pastors and congregations telling them that we must have evangelistic services, revival campaign, but we cannot have healing campaign, that only we must have the preaching of the gospel, and after that, preaching of the gospel and calling the people to accept Christ as he savior, but after that, if they liked to pray for the sick persons they could do, but we are not promoting campaigns of healing in our churches. And this was very interesting time, a very difficult occasion but, of course, God made great blessings as I think I told you. I consider that we had in all, in these three or four years of revival, not only in the *Pinar del Río* province, but in other places, maybe one hundred fifty or two hundred thousands of Cuban participating in some of our services, but what means that each of them, I am sure that they told the story, the experience that they had in our service, and then this means that if each one of these one hundred fifty or two hundred thousand people told the story to other ten relatives,

neighbors and workers in their work center, we preached the message of Christ in the occasion to more or less two million or more of the Cuban people. In that way, we think that we have the real beginning of the revival that we are having not only in *Pinar del Río*, or *Las Villas* or other places, but also around all our country.

Of course, this means some difficulties for me and for the church. The government in the different areas of *Pinar del Rio*, they wrote in the local newspapers some articles against the Methodist church and the services that we were having there, telling the people that this was a certain kind of *santería*. You know? *Santería* is the African religion

D: Oh, spiritual?

R: African religions, but they had the contrary result, because this was a propaganda for our services, because many people said, we will go to see what is happening in that place.

D: Kind of like the tickets.

R: Of course, yeah. And then we are very thankful to God for this kind of experience, but of course, I had some great difficulties in my personal situation before the government, in the way that we had some problem before we had the General Conference in our church in Cuba in 1980, there was some proposition to the church that we, the Methodist church in Cuba, we cannot have a Bishop, but we must have three presiding different persons. And then, I suppose that this was a way to interrupt this situation. But when they presented the proposition to our little General Conference, the people did not agree, because the episcopacy in our church is in the constitution of our church, and this needs to change, this needs to be a change in the constitution, and this is not possible to do in one General Conference. One General Conference can suggest the change, but after that, without to do the change, to consult the annual conference and all the church the Cuba and so. And then they saw that it was impossible, but they developed some political emphasis to have other Bishop, not myself, and then Rev. Aldo Martin, who was the District Superintendent here in Lakeland, he told me that the high level of revolutionary leaders in the Party, in the government, called him and asked him to be one candidate to the episcopacy in the Methodist church, but he told me that that he told them that this was impossible and that I will have the election, not him. And of course, in that General Conference, he had only ten percent of the vote and so, but I was elected as Bishop, but after that, I felt that God was telling me that my time of Bishop would be in the end. And then in the General Conference of 1987, I declared to all the church in Cuba that I will be retired in 1990. And then we must prepare the church for that situation, that every one of our pastors and laymen leaders must take more participation in the administration and the development of the Methodist work in Cuba and we were teaching them, training them in that way. And then, in 1989, I asked for six months of sabbatical leave. And they didn't understand why I was asking for six months because I don't take any...

D: Vacation?

R: Vacation in my work, but I explained to them that this will be good and because in those six months they must have the annual conference matter without my presence, and this will be a good training for them in the way to be ready to manage the church in Cuba. We discussed that for four hours, but in the end they understood the idea, the purpose of that sabbatical vacation, and they granted it to me and I came six months to United States and Canada and they had by themselves the experience in 1989 all the responsibility. And then, when I went back to Cuba, I was retired in 1990. It was very interesting because the day that I was officially retired was the eleventh of February 1990. That was exactly twenty-two years when I was consecrated the first time as the Bishop in Cuba. I was re-elected in the Autonomous conference in 1968, but this term was only three years, because we liked to put our little General Conference in Cuba one year before the General Conference in the United States, in the way, the Bishop that will be elected in Cuba, in the next year he can come to the General Conference in the United States and to have this experience and this participation and to know the leaders of the church around the world. And when I was elected in the Autonomous Conference in 1968 for three years, and then I was re-elected in 1971, I was re-elected in 1975, 79, 83 and 87, and then, my last quadrenium ended in 1991, but I explained to them that will be good if I finish my work in the episcopacy in Cuba in 1990. Why? Because after that day there will be some special gathering with the General Board of Global Ministry and so, and then the new leader that elect in 1990 can have the direction of the church in the gathering with the General Board of Global Ministry and other church people, and to have the direction of the church in Cuba after that. This was accepted and I was officially retired in February 11, 1990.

D: Did you have any roll at all in selecting the new Bishop? Were people coming to you and saying, "Well I would like to be a Bishop," would you support me? Would you use your influence to help me?"

R: No. Thanks be to God, we established a church without any kind of politics. And I assure you and the Methodist people in Cuba knew perfectly well, that I didn't do anything in pro- or against any other pastor. I finished my work with a great amount of security that God will guide the church after my work. And I had a great amount of confidence of the Methodist church in Cuba. And we taught them not to do politics inside the church, but only to seek, to ask God what every one of them must do and what they think will be the best leader after myself. Of course, many, many leaders came to my office before this occasion February 11 of 1990, and asked me "oh Bishop, why you are asking to retire? You are in good health; all the Cuban Methodist churches approve your work and so. [But I told them] that my time was finished and then I have a total confidence that God will guide you and you will be able to do the best for the future of our Methodist church. You must be ready to take all the responsibility of the church. The church is not mine; the church belongs to God and to you. And then, before my retirement there was an special session of our little General Conference seeking to elect the Bishop who will succeed me. But they had around eighty different ballots without election, because we in Cuba, we need to have the two thirds of the votes to be elected. This means the sixty six percent of our voting people.

D: How many people were on the ballot?

R: Well, we had the election of the Bishop without nominations and without debate. Debate?

D: Debate.

R: Debate. And then we put before the General Conference all the names of the elders in the Methodist church and each elder can be elected as Bishop.

D: So that would be as many as a hundred people?

R: In that time not so much. Only elders, because we had pastors but in other categories. We had around, in that time, around eighty-eight pastors, but only as elders thirty-five or forty. And then this was the amount, and then by ballot and secret vote, everyone put the name that they chose and then we had the, what do you call?

D: The run off?

R: Run off?

D: Select maybe two or three people, the highest votes?

R: Well, but not officially. We didn't exclude any person. They can vote for the same people even when the person has only one vote. But of course, they followed the people who had the big numbers of votes and so. And then, they had as I said, about eighty ballots without election, and then was presented to the General Conference a motion telling them as they don't have the two thirds of the votes, no elder had this amount of votes, they must finish the session and to appoint the person who had the most votes in the ballot and the president of the cabinet as two leaders to manage the church in one year. And in the next year they must have a new General Conference and to elect the new Bishop.

The problem was that the elder who had the main capacity and so was Rev. Joel Ajo, the pastor in the Vedado church, the main church in Havana, but he had one political inclination to the left and to the government, and for that reason, it's my personal opinion, the people didn't grant him enough votes to be elected. But he and Rev. Roy Rodríguez, the president of the Cabinet, were the two co-presidents for the church in one year. They did the administrative work but they cannot ordain new pastors or to do any office of the Bishop. In the next year they met again and then they had about fifty different ballots, and Joel Ajo didn't have enough votes to be elected, but after that occasion he spoke to the General Conference, to the pastors and lay members and he told them: I know you are a little... you think that I will not be a good Bishop in the church and so, but I promise to you that if I can be elected I will follow not my personal philosophy or opinion, I will do the matter that the leaders, the national leaders and the Cabinet make for the church. This will be my work. And then, in the second time, in the

next year, in 1991, after fifty ballots he was elected as Bishop of the Methodist Church in Cuba. He had a lot of trouble and many people thought that he was not doing the right thing and two years after his election officially, the General Conference was asking him to resign, and then they had a special session of the General Conference and he asked to them “why are you asking me to resign?” And he defended the position and so and so, but he told them, if I was elected with the two thirds of the vote, if you like to ask me to resign, this petition must be with two thirds of the votes here. And of course, this was impossible, because he had of course a group of pastors and laymen who supported him and so, and in that way he finished the quadrennial period of his episcopacy, but he had a lot of trouble. Some local church and even some district called him as a “persona non grata” in that church and in that District, and when he finished the quadrenium and there was a new General Conference, he had maybe twenty or twenty five percent of the votes. In that occasion he was not elected and then was elected the *Rev. Gustavo Cruz*, the new Bishop, a young person and so, but *Gustavo Cruz*, even when he was a young person in his forties, after two years of his election he had a very big stroke and he was alive but with a great amount of disability. But he made a wonderful work of reuniting

D: Reunification.

R: Reunification in the church because he is a very lovely person and I told him that even when he was Bishop two years before his stroke and after that he was not able to do the best work but his contribution to the unity of the Methodist Church in Cuba was great and then this was in 1995, and after four years, in 1999 was elected a different Bishop, *Rev. Ricardo Pereira*, and then he has been Bishop for this time until now, nine years, and he will finish in nineteen eleven. But I am sure that he will be elected many other times because he is doing a great job.

D: Now in 1990 you decided to come to the United States?

R: Yes.

D: And, can you go through that process and how you decided to do that plus how difficult was it to do that?

R: Yeah. This was my decision and I explained to the church before my retirement, during the time of preparation, because I told them that it had been myself as Bishop for twenty-two years and all the leaders and all the persons were around me. I don't like to be a difficulty for the new leadership. And for that reason, only for that reason I will plan to go out of the country and to give the new leader a freely situation without any interference intentional or not intentional from my part. And of course, when I asked to the government for my permission to leave the country, they were happy and they told me two or three months before that my permission was granted. And then of course, I had a very easy also the residence visa from the United States for two of three things; the first time because any official pastor in Cuba that had an appointment in the United States, the consulate from the United States in Cuba granted their visa; and also we had the approval from the government because they were very, very happy to have myself out of Cuba and

out of the Methodist church in Cuba. Because they thought the leader in the government, in the Revolution and in the Communist party, they thought that this revival movement and all this special growth in the Methodist church I was the...

D: Responsible, you were responsible for it.

R: I was the responsible for everything of that. And they knew that they would not have more than I gave to them. I gave to them the respect. I accepted them as our government in Cuba and so, but they didn't have more contribution from myself. And they thought that having me out of Cuba and out of the Methodist Church in Cuba, they will finish this spiritual movement and they will take control in some way of the work of the church, and of course, as they knew what was the personal philosophy and political position of my successor, Joel Ajo, they liked to support him without my interference.

And then I came here to the United States, in the first time I came in April of 1990, but of course, as you know, the appointments here in Florida are made in January. I didn't have an appointment in the Annual Conference of 1990, but I spoke after that with Bishop Hughes, that was the Bishop here, and I asked work from him and he asked me "what do you like to do in Florida?" And I told him, I'd like to be what I am, a pastor, and I ask you if it's possible some appointment in some Hispanic Methodist congregation here in Florida. Then, in the Annual Conference of 1991, I was appointed to Peace United Methodist Church, very close to Perrine, in the south part of Miami, and then I was pastor there for three years until June 1994. This means that I was there in August 24, 1992, when hurricane Andrew visited us in that place and so, and we participated in the reconstruction and the help of the people in that occasion. But in 1994, as I told you in some previous conversation, I was appointed to Lake Placid United Methodist Church, where I had two congregations, a little Anglo congregation and one Hispanic congregation. And then, in 1997, the General Board of Global Ministries approved us, my wife and myself, to go to Honduras in Central America, and we started there the Methodist church in Spanish—en español there—because in we had Methodist churches in Honduras before, but was the Methodist Church in the Caribbean and the American, this means the England tradition that came with the people who moved to Honduras from the West Indies, Jamaica, Barbados and the others, and they had Methodist work but in English, in the English language only. And we started the Methodist Church there. Of course, we were visited for one other hurricane: the—how do we call? —We had in 1998, in October, the hurricane Mitch that made a great destruction in Honduras, but this was the occasion to do the best in the name of Jesus for the poor people, and we immediately started one medical commission who visited different rural places and we gave them medicine and medical assistance, and we did our best in that very, very bad situation. And we were working the two years that the General Board of Global Ministries granted us to work there, because in 1999 I was seventy eight years, no sixty eight year person, and they thought maybe that I was very old person and they didn't renew a contract to work there, but we, thanks be to God, started the Methodist church in seven different locations in Honduras. Two places in *Tegucigalpa* the capital, in *Talanga*, in *Lloro*, and other places where my mind doesn't remember. And this was a great experience for us because we liked to prove ourselves and to go a different country without any contact,

without any acknowledge of the situation and so, this was a great challenge for us, and we accepted it with faith and we think that, thanks be to God, God blessed our work and right now they have a pretty good work and so. Of course, I have a different strategy for the work in Honduras. I told the Honduran people that we were Methodist missionaries living there and we liked to help them to start the Methodist church, but the main task to gain the Honduran people for Christ, this will be a task for the Honduran people. We the missionaries were there transitorily, but the main task must be for them, and then our vision was to train and to develop a wonderful and big group of Honduran people for helping them to develop the Methodist work. The strategy of the General Board of Global Ministries that I don't agree, I respect but I don't agree, is to develop some leaders but the main task is upon missionary, coming from other country, and even when they belong to Puerto Rico and other Spanish speaking countries, but it is not the same philosophy, the same situation. And in my opinion, the task of the missionary personnel must be the same task that the Apostle Paul did in the New Testament. I call the apostle Paul as a journal, the "misionero viajero"—a traveling missionary.

D: Ok, traveling missionary.

R: Traveling missionary. What does this mean? As he did it, to be six months, one year and so in one place, to train leaders and then to go to other place and to do the same and so, and so, and so, as he did it in all the journey, and also, to be in control of the faith principles of the people, don't permit that other doctrine that are not really Christian has been taken for the people. But in my opinion, one missionary don't be, must not be pastor or executive of the church. He must do the training work and then to put under the national person the responsibility to be the preacher and the executive and the leader of the church. This is an opinion that I have in my interpretation of the missionary work in Cuba, because we had wonderful American missionaries. They did all that they were able to do, but they remained as pastors, as District Superintendents and leaders of the church, and in my opinion this is not good, because the...

D: It's two different jobs, two different tasks.

R: Two different tasks, and when a missionary with all his training, a great training, when the missionary with some resources from the mother church is in a place, they don't develop enough the leadership in this place and also they don't teach the Christian stewardship to the church, because in my opinion, the main task of support the pastor must be their congregation. Of course I am not against that in the beginning the board of mission and other church as is right now with the covenant Cuban-Florida, they can help in some specific project that the National leaders have, they help in their plan, they help in their plan with offering and support, but they must do that from very far from them, you know? And this was my strategy when I was in Honduras. But now, in my opinion, eighty percent of the pastoral, the seventy or eighty percent of the pastor in Honduras are missionary supported by the General Board of Global Ministries and there are a little group of Honduran people as pastors. Of course, the more, not the biggest church, but the little churches and missions, and they don't have the ability to do by themselves their

work. I respect, I appreciate a lot the work that the American missionaries did in Cuba, but this is my own...

D: Well this seems to me the difference is that you don't consider the missionary activity a permanent thing, in other words in a certain country you do your best, you train up the people to create the institutions that you help them create and then you move on, you don't stay.

R: And then you do the same in other part. Even in the same country. For example...

D: Yes because it created the notion of colonialism in a way, doesn't it? It's almost a dependency.

R: Yeah, but colonialism or dependencies not in the political way.

D: Right, not in the political way, but in a spiritual way.

R: In a human way, you know? When you are the father of a creature you feel more responsibility than if you have an adopted son. Is that not right? Well this applies to the church and we have the best example as I'm telling you in the apostle's work. He was not the pastor in Corinthian, or Ephesus or in any place. He was the traveling missionary and he was in contact with them through letters and so. This is the model that I love for the missionary work and I like to start in Honduras. I did my best I suppose, but of course, who has the money? They decide. But I am not angry. I am expressing you only my personal view of that.