

Interview with the Reverend Christine E. Ritter by William Cutler, Episcopal Diocese of Pennsylvania Oral History Project, Abington, Pennsylvania, December 1, 2014. Words in brackets were added for clarification after the fact.

WILLIAM CUTLER: So I'll turn it on, and I wish you good morning.

CHRISTINE RITTER: Good morning.

WC: We're going to do this oral history interview, and we'll talk informally about your career in the church, and more than that, about how you got to that point in life. So I'd like to begin by asking you to tell me where you were born, and where you grew up, a little bit about your family life, and your childhood.

CR: I was born in Trenton, New Jersey, but my family lived in Morrisville, Pennsylvania, which was outside of Yardley. We were very connected to Saint Andrew's Episcopal Church. As a child, my mother took my brother and I, and went there. My father was Roman Catholic, and I was, growing up I think, always impressed by his faithfulness. He was just—he would always go by himself, and he was very regular about attending, and going to confession. We always had fish on Friday. So I grew up in—in sort of a suburban, almost country setting, and attended Pennsbury High School.

But before I went to the high school, I went to Newtown Friends School for three years, from nine, ten, and eleven years old, and that had a profound effect on my life because it was Quaker, and I was very much involved with the light, and the fact that the Quakers would sit in silence—that was very appealing to me—and their social justice ideas.

I had had an experience of God at age seven, I would say, probably six or seven, sitting in the church at eight o'clock. My mother always went to eight o'clock church. Sitting in the church with my mother, and probably my brother was there, too, and I had this knowing that someday "you'll be up there," was what I heard. And the priest was Father Bill Stimson, Father William Stimson, and he of course had his back to us, because everything was—the priest was always facing the altar, which was against the wall. And I wanted to see. I know I was incredibly curious to see what he was doing. I remember sitting there, going, "What's he doing?" [Laughs] And then having this experience that some day I would be up there. And I didn't have any question in my mind about who it was. I just said, "Oh, no. I won't do that." And I sort of slunk down in the pew. "Oh, no."

So then I had this experience of going to Newtown Friends School, and it was like God was always right there. When I was in my teens, around sixteen or so, and could drive, I would go to Saint Andrew's in Yardley at night, and the door was always unlocked. And I could go in, and I would flip on the light, and I would walk around the church, and I would talk to God. So that was—it was just something in my life that was always there. I can never remember a time when it wasn't. And I thought it was weird, and odd of me, and I thought, perhaps I'll outgrow this. But I was sort of drawn to go to the church, and sometimes it was as if I was having kind of a conversation with God; sometimes, it would be like a response that I would hear, or something. And often, God being God, God would say

things like, “You’ll have children but no husband.” I heard that one time, and I thought, oh, that’s ridiculous! God is ridiculous!

WC: You didn’t interpret that to mean you’d have a virgin birth?

CR: Oh, no! No. I just thought—I just realized it was impossible, so I thought, ignore that! [Laughs] But I struggled, because . . . I didn’t know what I wanted to do in life. I knew, I had the sense, that I wanted something about God, but I didn’t want to become a nun because I liked boys, and I liked men, and I didn’t want that kind of a life. And I didn’t want it to be strictly education. So I didn’t know what to do with myself. And of course, there were no women priests, and so there was nobody to model after. And at Saint Andrew’s there was no choir that I could join. There was a choir, but it was only for adults, and not for children, and there was no youth group. So there was just these walks in the church with me and God, and this constant—

WC: This was when you were about sixteen?

CR: Sixteen or seventeen.

WC: That would put it somewhere in the late sixties?

CR: No. I graduated from high school in ’59. I was born in ’41, 1941.

WC: You and I are exactly the same age.

CR: Yeah, 73? Uh-huh. So, finally as I got older, I got tired—I got just annoyed that I just couldn’t figure it out, and frustrated, and so I said, “Well, I’m not going to bother about this anymore. I’m going to put God aside. I’m not going to have anything to do with that.” And I was in my twenties. Father Bill had retired, and so . . . I was sort of lost at that point. His message to us every week was the same: God loves you. That was what I remembered, over and over. So I never

had any sense of a God that was cruel, or in any way going to hurt me. I just knew God loved me; I just had no question about that whatsoever. But, I decided that I wouldn't pay attention to this God thing anymore, and it was in that sense that I—I went off to college. I stayed about a year. I was back and forth, just restless.

WC: Where did you go?

CR: I went to Juniata College at first, in Huntington Valley [PA]. And then I came home, and then I went to work for Town Topics in Princeton, which was a newspaper. Then I went to work for Van Nostrand Publishing Company, as a copywriter. And then I got married to Baird Ritter, who was a child psychiatrist, and moved to Wayne with him, and then to Bryn Mawr, and we had a home there. We had three children. We had Jennifer, who was born in 1969, and then Rachel was born in 1972, and Elizabeth was born in 1973. Rachel died after ten days, and she had a rare disease, and she just didn't live very long. And that was a terrible blow to Baird and me, and certainly to our relationship, but we were having struggles with our relationship anyway.

So, I guess—so what I was doing then—one day I had this experience of being hungry, and I couldn't figure out what was the matter with me, and I kept wandering around the house in Bryn Mawr. All this time there'd been no God in my life. And I finally started to pray, and cried, and went back to God.

WC: Were you married in the Episcopal Church?

CR: We were married—yup. We were married at Saint Matthews in Pennington, New Jersey. That was just a pro forma kind of thing, because I had been Episcopalian, and Baird had no faith. So as I say,

I had, again, this experience, and I said to God, “I’ll do whatever you want.” So at that point I belonged to the Junior League of Philadelphia, and we joined the Bryn Mawr Presbyterian Church because it was such a nice social place to be, and it was huge. And then I had both the children baptized there; I had Elizabeth and Jennifer both baptized there. And we attended on a regular basis. But I started then to work on this project with another woman, building a group home for girls.

WC: Phoenix House.

CR: Phoenix House, because I was—I had been working as a volunteer down at the Youth Studies Center, and I was very much upset by the fact that the girls were put there because they were deemed “incorrigible,” and their parents at that time—this was like the early seventies—their parents could take them to the Study Center and just drop them off with the clothes on their back. So they were incorrigible, and they would take them in, so they didn’t have any real rights. I was very concerned about that. And I really wanted to do something in Philadelphia, but I couldn’t find a way to do it, but it did work out that Bryn Mawr Presbyterian Church had a house, and they were willing to give it to us, to let us develop this group home. So we got a federal grant, and we started the group home, Phoenix House.

WC: We, meaning?

CR: And oh yes, there were volunteers from Bryn Mawr Presbyterian Church. There were volunteers from the Junior League that freely came and gave their time: doctors, lawyers, nurses, [and] teachers. All kinds of people stepped forward. They were very enthused about Phoenix House. Phoenix House was a great success, and lasted for

ten years until the money ran out, the federal grant. I had been the person that was at home with my children, so I had the time to be doing a lot of things that Pam Rosen, [the] co-founder, couldn't do, because she had a full-time job. And I think that partly what happened was there just wasn't somebody to do that. But they formed a board. They made it go as long as they could, until the money dried up. And that was then, from a spiritual standpoint, for me, kind of doing something for God. Everything that I did—I didn't know how to create a group home, so what I would do is pray about it, and then doors would open, and things would happen. That's how we developed a group home.

WC: Did you seek out other people who knew something about how to create a group home?

CR: Yup. We tried to talk to as many people as we could. We certainly were involved with Montgomery County, with the legal system.

WC: Where was Phoenix House?

CR: Phoenix House was at Bryn Mawr Presbyterian Church.

WC: Okay, it was in Bryn Mawr.

CR: So it was in Bryn Mawr. So the girls that we got came from the Montgomery County legal system. They were the girls that were allowed to go in there. And they would go there for several years, and there were, you know, dentists who would come and help them, and gynecologists, and whatever they needed these girls were given, to help them to become productive citizens, instead of just incarcerated. So it was a great idea, I think, and it was—we had fun doing it, and there were just lots and lots of people that wanted to be part of it.

WC: For you, it was more than just something to occupy your time? It was a very spiritual kind of thing?

CR: It was very spiritual, yeah. It was very much—it was part of that business of continually praying about something, and you know, “Lord, help me. I don’t know how to do this, but I want to do it, and I want to do it for you. How do you do this?” and all those kinds of questions. And as I say, I must have been on the right track, because the Lord responded. I mean, there were things that would happen, that you’d say, “Oh, my! Isn’t that a good idea!” So it was up and running by 1974, but my marriage—and actually I received an award; Pam and I both received an award from the governor at that time, for our work. So it got to be a pretty widely-known project. But my marriage was falling apart at that point, so in 1974, I left with my two daughters, and I moved to New Jersey. I ended up in Pennington, New Jersey, and bought a house there, and stayed there and raised my children for the next sixteen years, or so.

WC: You went back to school, though, as well?

CR: And then at that point, yes. I developed a friendship with a Roman Catholic monsignor, and he said to me, “You must go back to school and finish.” So I did; I went to Mercer County Community College, and finished there, and at the same time went to Trenton State College and started—I could do two courses a semester, and raise the children, because the children were five and one when I left, so they were very young.

So it took me six years to complete my undergraduate degree, and then I was able to go to Rutgers School of Social Work full-time, because both kids were in school full-time. So I would do that during

the day. So my children grew up always having a tee-shirt from wherever [laughs] I went to school! During vacation times, when they would be [home]—I would have to take them to class. And the deal was, if they would sit quietly in the classroom while I took notes, we would go to the cafeteria and they could have whatever they wanted to eat. So that was a big deal, to go to college with mom. So neither of my children thought they would never go to college. They knew they were going to go to college; there was no question in their little minds! [Laughs] So that was a good thing. And I don't think it was bad for them to see me studying. I mean, it really was—

WC: Were you going to church during all that?

CR: I was going to the Roman Catholic Church during that time, because I had this friend who was—and I became a Roman Catholic. And I was a Roman Catholic, and I thought I would die a Roman Catholic. . . . And it just seemed like he came into my life right at the right time.

WC: The monsignor?

CR: The monsignor. Monsignor Theodore Opdenaker, O-P-D-E-N-A-K-E-R.

WC: O-P-D-E-N-A-K—?

CR: A-K-E-R, uh-huh. And my father actually introduced me to him, because when I was talking about getting divorced, my father was very concerned for the grandchildren, and how they would be viewed, and so forth and so on. So.

WC: It must have been hard for your father, because as a practicing Roman Catholic—

CR: You didn't divorce, right. Right. And my mother, too. I mean, my mother—you know, nobody wanted to see it. And they thought very

highly of Baird, because he was an MD. So they were sure it was my fault. [Laughs] So, things happen the way they happen. But the monsignor was supportive of me, and that was an enormous help. So as I said, I kept going to church as a Roman Catholic, and then when I finished and got my MSW in Social Work, he was the head, he was the director at Catholic Charities, and he saw to it that I got a job. So I immediately had a job coming out of that.

WC: At Catholic Charities?

CR: At Catholic Charities, and I stayed there for about six and a half years, I think, became a clinical director within two years time. I went in as a psychotherapist, and after a couple of years I was promoted to a clinical director, and actually ended up with three programs that I was responsible for. One was a school program, where they would put social workers in the parochial schools, and I directed them. And one was an outpatient program, psychotherapy. And the third one was drugs and addiction. So I was responsible for those programs. And I don't know; I had a whole bunch of people working for me. I had like 25 or 30 people that I was responsible for, and I thought that that would be my life.

And then one Advent—again, this sense that I had to go and be with God. And I went to my friend Ted, and I said, “I have to go be with God.” [Laughs] And he said okay, and he sent me to a Carmelite monastery, and there I had a very unitive experience of being, you know, picked up and hugged, and loved, and put down. And so I said to the Lord, “Well, whatever you want me to do. There must be more. I'll do it.” And so I set out, for about a year and a half, just trying to figure it out, and figure it out. And I went up to Princeton Theological

Seminary, and went to a conference there, and at the end of the conference the guy said that he was an Episcopal priest. And I said, “Oh,” to myself. “Oh! I used to be Episcopalian.” So I thought, well, I will go to an Episcopal Church, and see what’s going on with the Episcopalians. There was a 5:30 service at Trinity Church, Princeton, so I went across to that one Wednesday, and who should walk out but a woman priest.

WC: This would have been some time in the eighties?

CR: This would have been in the eighties, yup. Sort of the middle eighties, and I was in my forties. I was about 45, 46, something.

WC: Yes.

CR: And so when this woman priest walked out, I was overwhelmed and terrified, and I just knew that that—I needed to do that.

WC: To be up there, like you remembered?

CR: From age seven, or whatever, you know. I just was overwhelmed, and terrified! And I thought [laughs], how do I get out of this church? But I didn’t; I stayed through the service. Well, I mean, I was boxed in. That was the other thing—I was boxed in with all these chairs and so forth, so it was quite a big group that was there.

WC: Did you talk to this woman?

CR: No, no. [Laughs] Too terrified to do that! So I remember after the service just going out, and sitting in my car, and thinking, oh my God, what just happened? This was just beyond me! And I thought, well, I guess I need to—eventually I thought, well, I guess I need to try and see where we’re going to go with this. So it took me quite a while, but I eventually—I started to go to the Roman Catholic service, and also go to the Episcopal service. And finally at Trinity . . . I got up

the nerve to talk to somebody. It was a deacon, I was speaking to, and she said, “You have to go see the priest.” So the priest was a woman by the name of Jean Smith, the Reverend Jean Smith. And I went to see her, and I said—well, I called her, and I said to her, “I’ve always wanted to be a priest.” Where the heck did that come from? So she said, “Well, come on in. Let’s talk.” I told her I was going to both services and stuff, and she said, “Well, that’s all right. You can sit on the fence forever if you want to.” I sort of looked at her, like, you know.

So I decided that I would just come to the Episcopal Church, which hurt my friend Ted a lot, and he was very upset about the fact that I was headed in that direction. And I said, “Well, I think I need to become a priest.” And he said, “Don’t do it.” He said, “Just don’t do it.” And I said, “I just think I have to.” So that was sort of a separating of the two of us, although we stayed sort of friends. So eventually I became an Episcopalian, and then I realized that, or I felt, that they would not accept me; they would see me as just jumping ship to become a priest.

WC: They, being—?

CR: The Episcopalians. There was this kind of feeling, that, oh, we have so many people! Because they had a lot of people coming from Princeton Seminary to become priests, and people just jumping the fence. And I went and talked to [the Reverend] Johnny Crocker, who was the rector.

WC: Where?

CR: At Trinity Church. Jean was the associate. And I went and talked with him, and he said, “Oh, we have a lot of little girls just jumping

over the fence to come, and they want to be priests so they come to us.” And he said, “We’ve got more than we can handle.” So it was kind of like—

WC: He was speaking then about the Church as a whole: “We’ve got more than we can handle?”

CR: He was talking about his own church, and the diocese, you know.

WC: Of New Jersey?

CR: Of New Jersey. And he was saying—he wasn’t offering a whole lot of hope.

WC: Essentially, he was questioning the genuineness of your call?

CR: Uh-huh. And so I really felt that they would not accept me if they didn’t really see me as Episcopalian; so I quit my job at Catholic Charities and went to work for Trinity Counseling Service. Trinity Counseling Service, the building, was right near the church, so I was an independent contractor there, and I would do my work there, and then I would walk across and do volunteer work at the church. And I was in the choir, and I was a lay Eucharistic minister, and, you know, just whatever I could, I would do when I was there. I worked with a group of unemployed jobseekers, and started a group for the spouses of the unemployed, because they needed help, and so forth. And so I was there for about four or five years before Johnny Crocker retired, and—what was his name? Smith? Hm. I can’t think of his first name; his last name was Smith that came in.

WC: Came in as—?

CR: The rector.

WC: Of this church, Trinity?

CR: Of Trinity Episcopal Church, yeah, in Princeton. And when he came in—Reverend Smith. I'll think of his name. But when he came in, he said he thought that I was certainly ready to go forward, and he would clear the path for me. Trinity Church was the cardinal church of the Diocese of New Jersey, and had a lot of influence.

WC: In a rich community like Princeton.

CR: In a very rich community.

WC: [Unclear]

CR: Right. And there were two of us that were being put forward, and [the Reverend] Jean Smith was—Leslie Smith. That was his name, Leslie. And Jean Smith was very much for this other woman, and she was sitting on the vestry, and all that kind of thing.

WC: She also wanted to go into the priesthood?

CR: This other woman wanted to go into the priesthood, and she was taking courses at Princeton University in Theology, and all this kind of thing. And I thought, I have no chance here. But when we got to the point when we went before the Committee on Ministry which was going to put us forward or not, they didn't accept her, and they did accept me. I kept thinking, I'm just going to keep going until this doesn't happen, you know?

WC: This was a committee of the diocese?

CR: A committee of the diocese that I had to go before, yeah, the Commission on Ministry, whatever. So then they had me do a ministry study year, and I worked with a priest at Saint Matthews Episcopal Church in Hamilton, New Jersey, and I was there for a year. I led groups, and I was up on the altar with him as kind of a sub-deacon, and all that kind of thing. And then I was told that I would be

going to General Seminary, and I said I didn't know if I wanted to go to General Seminary, and I was told I would be going to General Seminary. And one of the things that I was trained in was that when your bishop said something, you minded your bishop. You listened to your bishop.

WC: Who was the bishop at that time?

CR: Belshaw, Mellick Belshaw.

WC: Can you spell that?

CR: Mellick is M-E-L-L-I-C-K, and Belshaw is B-E-L-S-H-A-W.

WC: Okay.

CR: Can I take a bathroom break?

WC: Absolutely!

[End of Part 1/Begin Part 2]

CR: Okay.

WC: We were talking about your going on up to General Theological Seminary.

CR: And that was in 1993 that I finally was allowed to do that.

WC: What was going on at General in those days? Were there other women there?

CR: There were other women there. I would say the class was almost fifty percent women. I was one of the older ones there. I was in my—I was about 51, maybe, at that time. It was a wonderful experience. I loved being there. And I graduated in 1996, and I went to see the bishop, who was Joe Dos, at that point. He was having trouble in the Diocese of New Jersey; they were trying to get rid of him. And so when I went to see him, it had been customary in the Diocese of New Jersey for them to find a placement for somebody newly graduating.

And he said to me, “I have nothing to offer you. They won’t let me offer you anything.”

WC: They being—?

CR: I would imagine the Standing Committee that was trying to get rid of him. He didn’t clarify, but I imagined it was this body. And so he said, “I release you. You can go wherever you want to, and good luck.”

WC: Did they pay for your education?

CR: They did; they paid for some of my education, which was very, very helpful. And of course, Mellick Belshaw was the head of the board at General, which was why he wanted me to go there.

WC: The women who were there at the time—did they create a bond among themselves, or was it every woman for herself?

CR: It was always kind of every woman for herself. We were friendly, but again, I was somewhat older, and there was one other woman who was somewhat younger than I, I would say four or five years younger than I, and she and I became friends. And then I was friendly with a woman who was quite young; she was in her twenties. She was very bright. So, I mean, I was just friendly with as many people as I could be friendly with.

A lot of people were angry. They were angry at the system. They were angry at the process. Some people were put out of the process because their bishops were against them going to General. Some were put out, just didn’t make it. I mean, various things would happen to people, so the class would just become smaller, you know, so maybe we started with like fifteen or so, and it got down to maybe twelve, thirteen, somewhere in there—lost a few. I decided I was not

going to become an angry person. That was not going to be what I wanted to do. I made that decision for all of my ministry. I just decided that that was what I was going to do; I wasn't going to be part of that.

So, as I say, in 1996 I graduated, and was told to go and find myself a job. I began looking around, and in talking with Jill Mathis. She said, "Well, the Reverend Frank Heron is looking for an assistant. He's at Saint Peters in the Great Valley, and he's about to choose somebody, but you might want to give him a try." So I called him, called him directly, and he saw me and looked at my resume, and liked the fact that I had created Phoenix House, and hired me.

WC: This was Saint Peters?

CR: Saint Peters in the Great Valley, mm-hm. So that would have been in, like, 1997. Before that, I was at Grace Church in Pemberton, really without pay, but just to be there, just to have a place to be. And that was a wonderful experience. And then finally when she was able, the rector, the Reverend Joan Watson, was able to get money for me, then they allowed me to be ordained. So there was—I had to wait for a job that was paid in order to be ordained.

WC: Were you ordained in the Diocese of New Jersey?

CR: I was. I was ordained at Grace Church in the Diocese of New Jersey, mm-hm.

WC: They required that you have a place to go afterwards in order to let you be ordained to begin with?

CR: Right.

WC: Oh.

CR: And I don't think that that was male-female. I don't think that was gender-related. I think it was the way things were at the time. I think the fact that they were trying to get rid of this Bishop Dos had created turmoil, and so I think things were in a shambles, you know.

WC: What was the issue with Bishop Dos?

CR: He had come from New Orleans, and when he came, the first thing that he did was to get rid of all the people that were at the Diocesan House. And so he erased all the corporate memory, and then he wanted things done his way. And so he and the Standing Committee just didn't see eye to eye right from the beginning.

WC: Liberal or conservative?

CR: I think he was probably more liberal. New Jersey is rather more conservative than the Diocese of Pennsylvania, and I was raised as a priest in that atmosphere. I mean, again, this business of when your bishop says something to you, then that is gospel. So I came into the Diocese of Pennsylvania with that thought in my mind. So I went to work—Frank Heron called me just before I was to come to Saint Peters, and he said, “You know, I want you to know that I have been talking to people at the National Cathedral, and if they offer me a job, I'm going to take it. Do you still want to come?” And I said, “Yes, I do!”

So he was there for six weeks after I went to Saint Peters, and then he left, which left me, as a new priest, doing all the pastoral work, and celebrating, and funerals and weddings, and whatever. And the vestry was busy trying to find an interim. So they found an interim. His name was xxxxx. What was his last name? I can't remember his last name. But anyway, he was looking for a wife, and

he found one down in Washington DC, so he was not there a lot of the time. They became engaged pretty quickly.

And so he was down there most of the time, with her, and he would come back just in time for the services, like on Sunday. So the people got to know me, and related to me, and we would plan things, and do things, and so forth. And the vestry—I guess he would be dealing with the vestry, and so forth. But at one point I think he realized that I was becoming more popular, so he went to Bishop Bennison and he said that I was trying to take over. And Bishop Bennison had just had an experience with someone at Saint Paul's, [with] a woman who really was trying to take over.

WC: Saint Paul's—?

CR: In Chestnut Hill.

WC: There are several.

CR: Yeah, right. Right. Her name was xxxxx. Bishop Bennison was very angry with her because of what she was doing, and I think rightfully so. But that spilled over onto me, and so he let me know, Bishop Bennison let me know that he wanted me out of there well before the new rector came in. He didn't want me to in any way be a stumbling block for the new rector, such as this xxxxx had been for the new rector at Saint Paul's. So I said, "Fine, I will leave, and I hope that you'll help me to find a new placement." And then he said, "Well, I don't know where to send you. You might go down and take a look at Our Savior. They probably need somebody."

WC: In Jenkintown, the Church of Our Savior?

CR: The Church of Our Savior.

WC: Not the Cathedral?

CR: Not the Cathedral, no. The Church of Our Savior in Jenkintown. So I came down and was interviewed, and he said, "Fine," and I said, "Fine," and we started. And I think I was there for about four and a half years, and I think it was a good experience, a good learning experience, for me. Developing the rectory, and providing an income stream was a good idea, I think, and just trying to get the church out of its lethargic state. I don't know if you remember, but there was a lot of pulling up of carpets—

WC: I do.

CR: And looking under, and going underneath, into the bowels of the church, to find out what all was going on, and installing a new heating system, and all of that kind of thing that was part of what we needed to do, and then trying to develop some kind of programming. And then after about four and a half years, I realized that the Church of Our Savior was going to go like this for quite a while, because it was going to be—kind of stay at a low level of functioning, and stagnation, in some ways, and some of it had to do with the fact that there was this alcoholic tendency that had been there for a number of years, which had really crippled the church, really hurt the church. And my mother died, so that was after four and a half years, with her death, I decided to resign. And I resigned, and I didn't work for about six months. I just stayed at home, and I just didn't work. And then--|

WC: You were close with your mother all this time?

CR: Mm-hm. I was close with my mother. My mother was 90 when she died. I knew I didn't want to leave the Diocese of Pennsylvania, although I had other opportunities, and could have, because I had -- my two daughters are here, and they were beginning to have children.

They were married and beginning to have children. And my mother was here; my mother was still in her house in Yardley, so. I didn't want to leave my family.

WC: You were at COOS for four and a half years, and for the record, it should be stated that I have been a parishioner at COOS for a long time, so I'm not exactly without opinions about that church. What would you say your greatest achievement was there? And likewise, your greatest frustration?

CR: My greatest achievement was rehabbing the rectory, and putting in—giving the church an income stream.

WC: Turning the old rectory into the office building that it is now.

CR: Right, right. Exactly. And my greatest frustration was that I couldn't get—I couldn't get people to want to go deeper in God, maybe as fast as I wanted them to, or something. Maybe it was that. It wasn't that people weren't faithful, because they were, about coming to church, but they didn't see the need to do anything more, as a bigger group. There were exceptions. Your wife Penny and you, and Judy—

WC: O'Neill.

CR: —O'Neill began to be involved with the wider diocese, and that was one of the things that I saw as important, and so there were steps that were being taken in that direction. I think another thing that we started that was a good thing was the whole business of being affiliated with Guatemala. I will always be incredibly grateful to Judy O'Neill for her work as the senior warden at that time. She really stayed close to me, and she gave me very good, practical advice. She was an excellent person. And she still is. And you know, the people there, a lot of the people were wonderful, but it was—I think my time

there was a process of cleaning up a lot of mess that had been left behind by so many in this church, just—this church that had once been so wonderful just going slowly down, down, down. And that's why I'm so grateful to God, and pleased to see it starting to move in a positive direction, because it's—

WC: I remember once you said, I think it was to the congregation as a whole, or maybe to a part of it, that it particularly frustrated you when someone came up to you and said, “Well, I won't be in church on Sunday,” as if somehow they were taunting you with that. Remember that?

CR: I don't, but I'm sure—that is how I feel. And maybe they would say that because they felt they should tell the rector that they wouldn't be in church, you know, and maybe that was much more of a compliment than not, but I'm sure it upset me to hear that.

WC: Yes.

CR: Because I was like—I mean, if you look at my background, and look at this profound love of God, and this attachment [laughs], you know, I finally get to a point where I'm in a church, and I'm a rector, and we're going along, and then somebody just says, “Well, I'm just not just going to be around.” And that was hard for me to hear; that was really hard. It's so hard for me to hear it.

WC: Now, when you were at Church of Our Savior, did you have an association with other women who were operating in the same capacity as you, elsewhere in the diocese? In other words, was there any kind of—

CR: Support group?

WC: Yes.

CR: Yes. I belonged to a group of priests that met at Trinity Church, Ambler, and they were both men and women, and I had a good friend, [the Reverend] Beth Hixon. I had another good friend, [the Reverend] Janet Tarbox, but she moved away. She was struggling with her placement at Saint Thomas's, and she moved away. Beth and I, for I would say thirteen years, had breakfast every Wednesday morning.

WC: She was at Saint Thomas Whitemarsh?

CR: No, Beth was at—she was with [the Reverend] David Robinson, who is at Saint Matthews. Saint Matthews, and I can't tell you exactly where he is. And then she moved on, and she went to Saint Martin's in-the-Field.

WC: In Chestnut Hill?

CR: In Chestnut Hill, and she was there for a number of years, until [the Reverend] Bob Tate retired. So during all that time, she and I had breakfast every Wednesday morning, and that was a big help. There were some other women, but it was—priesthood is something of a solitary journey, and a lonely journey.

WC: You're the rector of a parish, and that's the focus of your attention most of the time.

CR: Right, and that's your—that's your life. That is your life. I think that what was helpful was the fact that I did have family around, and I did have grandchildren and so forth, and I certainly enjoyed them, and still do. But I think that it's almost like when God calls you, you are called—just you are called. And even if you're married, there's always—even that takes like second place to this call. The call is first. And so I think that is just the way that it is.

WC: There's a paradox there, though, because in the Episcopal Church particularly, we talk about creating Christian community, all the time! So that places a heavy burden on the rector to create one. And without a support group of people doing the same thing, it must be very hard.

CR: Yeah, it is very hard. It is very hard. [Pause] I have learned over the years to be alone, and to do a lot of—and pray, and to—I mean, I'm still on that journey. I'm still on that journey with God in a big way. That's not going to go away. And I think what I heard in the church, "You will have children and no husband," is probably the way it's going to be.

WC: So you regard that as prophetic, then?

CR: Well, it turned out to be. I mean, it came as a surprise to me that it turned out to be, because I thought when I got married to Baird, I thought that we would be together forever. I mean, I had no idea that that marriage would break up. And one of the things that Baird has said about me—Baird and I are friends at this point, and one of the things that he has said about me is that he's always felt that I was rather naïve. And I probably still am, you know. I mean, I still have these thoughts about how things should be, or could be, with God, and life, and so forth, and the reality is that things are quite different, often.

WC: Now, Charles Bennison was the Diocesan when you came into the diocese, basically, and went to work.

CR: I went once to see Bishop Bartlett, and then he resigned. He retired.

WC: He retired, in 1998.

CR: Okay, so that was when, and I went once to see him, and then from then on, Charles Bennison was the Diocesan.

WC: And were you, while you were at COOS, paying any attention to what was going on at the diocese?

CR: Yes, I was. I went to the Liturgy Committee at one point, and everybody resigned, so I ended up as the head of the liturgy committee.

WC: You became a member of the Liturgy Committee?

CR: I became a member of the Liturgy Committee for the diocese, and because people were becoming dissatisfied with Charles, everyone resigned. And so with the few of us that were left, I became the head of the Liturgy Committee, so that was one thing I was doing. I was also on the committee for the Cathedral, which was called—?

WC: Penny was on that as well. It's basically the vestry of the Cathedral, and it has a special name.

CR: Right, right. So I was on that committee for about three or four years.

WC: The Chapter.

CR: Chapter, Cathedral Chapter. Thank you. So I did those two things for three or four years. I got along with Charles Bennison. I admired him in many ways. And he knew that, and he liked me. He was very—his opinions about connecting, - building the structure that would connect the Cathedral with the offices, I think, was brilliant.

WC: You're talking about the diocesan offices?

CR: The diocesan offices.

WC: Which, of course, is now happening.

CR: That is now happening. I think his understanding that the diocese could not continue to sustain all of the churches, that some would

have to close [was right], and he became very much in favor, as he went along, of closing down churches and just having just a few that would really be viable, especially in the city and so forth. And reading *This Far by Faith*, your book, you can see where people had left the cities, and so there just were not the people to sustain the churches.

WC: Did you talk to other people in the diocese about this problem of declining membership, especially in inner city parishes?

CR: Well, I think that we all talked about declining membership and what could be done about that, and certainly when I was at the Church of Our Savior, I was very concerned about declining membership, and how we were going to continue to go forward as a church, whether the church would be viable, and . . . and how to make it viable. And I think that that was one of the things, one of the reasons why I was feeling frustrated with some of the folks in the congregation, was because they didn't see the need to move it, move it, move it, which I could see that if we didn't get on it right quick, quick, the church was going to fail! And I was trying to figure out some way to use the upstairs of the church, of the parish house, and that whole big auditorium. I was trying to figure out, you know, what were the opportunities there? I mean, it's gratifying to me to see that Homestead Hall is still being used a lot, and that sometimes . . . that you're talking to people about the auditorium. And I know we did some plays when we were there.

WC: We're going to have a resident theater company!

CR: Isn't that wonderful! I mean, that's wonderful. And then you've got—I mean, the building, the parish house in my view, at this point,

is constructed for a different time in history. I mean, it's constructed for the forties and fifties. Now, it's a difficult structure for the church. But I mean, something needs to be done with that upstairs, to make that a viable—I wanted to put in a school, and that was not something that was—the borough wouldn't allow it at that time.

WC: The renovations that would be required in order to be able to satisfy code, especially for something like a school, created, I think, an impossible situation, because we didn't have the money to renovate the building that much.

CR: Right, right.

WC: So, you're in the diocese at the time that Charles's leadership is beginning to be questioned by a lot of people.

CR: Right. I thought he was brilliant with taking on the seven churches that had asked for flying bishops only to come in, and I thought the fact that he was willing to stand up to them, and say, "You cannot do this. I am your bishop. You must acknowledge me as your bishop." Bartlett had allowed flying bishops, and he hadn't stood up to the parishes, and Bennison wouldn't have it. And I have to say, I think Bishop Bennison was correct.

I think when he bought the land, when he found the money and maneuvered and bought the land at Wapiti was when the Standing Committee finally just completely flipped, because—and [they] just said, "This can't go on. He's just draining all the money out of our coffers." But I think he was such a visionary that he was just—he was just moving ahead at top speed in his mind. And I think he didn't know how to—I don't think he had the skills to do the work to get people to come together with him as he was going forward. He was

too quick to be doing all of the things that he was doing. And I think it was frightening to them. I think it was really—I think they found him to be a very scary person! [Laughs]

WC: And some of his most vociferous opponents were the vicars at the aided parishes, the so-called DCMM parishes.

CR: Right.

WC: Who felt that he was not sufficiently tuned in to their needs, and the importance of these inner city congregations

CR: Right.

WC: Did you talk to people about their thoughts along those lines?

CR: Not at that time. That came later. That came later.

WC: That came later. When? When you were—?

CR: When I was the vicar at Saint Mary's on Bainbridge Street.

WC: Well, we'll get to that story. That's an important part of, I think, the story of your career. But you spent some time in the diocesan office.

CR: Yeah! Well, after I left Our Savior, Jenkintown, as I say, I took off about six months. I didn't work. And then I was at Trinity Church in Solebury, as their interim for eighteen months. And there, I mean, that was a church of about 900, and I was the only rector, I mean, the only interim rector. And that was a lot of work, but I really got to see a healthy, thriving—

WC: Suburban parish.

CR: —suburban parish, that was just full of life, and they couldn't move—they just couldn't do enough things. Their music was wonderful, and it was very Low Church, but it was—people were just energetic, bright, and capable. So that was a lot of fun; I mean, that was fun for me. And when I left there, there was a time where, I mean—

WC: Why were you the interim there? Did you apply for the permanent job?

CR: No. And as the interim, I would not have been allowed to apply for the permanent job.

WC: Yes. You would have had to have left, and then—

CR: Right, right. I mean, I was—well, you know Pam Nesbit, and I was with Cliff and Pam on a trip to England with [the Reverend] James Shannon, that James Shannon was running. And Cliff and I had some conversations, and I told him, I said, “Yeah, I’m looking for a job.” So he then came home and said to the powers that be, the search committee that was looking for an interim, “I’ve got somebody for you to interview.”

WC: That’s where the Nesbit’s were worshipping at that time, Trinity Solebury?

CR: That’s where Cliff was worshipping, not Pam. She was at Saint Andrews in Yardley, as the deacon down there. And that’s how I got that job, was just by going on this trip. So, and that was a lot of fun. So then there was a time of—you know, each time I left somewhere, I was also—I would grieve for where I had been. You just don’t hop from place to place to place, as it would seem as if priests do. I don’t, anyway. I mean, I am emotionally involved. If I’m there, I’m really involved!

And so there was some time, then, after I was at Trinity Solebury, that I certainly needed some rest and time. And then I called the diocese, because I had an idea. I wanted to start a retreat center. I had wanted to do that at Our Savior, and the bishop had told me, “No, you couldn’t make any money.” So, I still wanted to start a

retreat center, so I called the diocese and I said I wondered—I had an idea, and I wanted to come in and talk to the guy in charge of property. And he said to me, “Well, let’s get through Christmas, and then call me again.” So I called him again, and I said, “I still have that idea.” And he said, “Would you like to become the property manager?”

WC: Who is the person that you’re talking about?

CR: I do not remember his name.

WC: But he was in the diocesan office?

CR: He was in the diocesan office, yes. So I went in to be interviewed. I said, “I don’t know if I want the job. I’ll come down and talk to you.” I went down, and Bishop Bennison came in and held out his hand to me, and said, “Welcome aboard.” [Laughs] So I thought, okay! And the interesting thing to me was there was no structure to the job. There was nothing. The guy that had been in the job two times, just before the one that talked to me, had one day gotten so angry that he had taken all the keys from all the parishes and just dumped them on the desk, and left! So the job of the man just before me was to sort out which one of those keys went where.

WC: Oh!

CR: And he did that, and I guess he was discouraged, and so when I got there, we knew where the keys belonged, who the keys belonged to, but there was no organization and no structure.

WC: Now, these were churches that had closed? Churches that were struggling?

CR: Well, you had everything. You had churches that had closed. You had churches that were in danger of closing. You had churches that

Bishop Bennison was going to close and was preparing to close. You had churches that just needed furniture, or needed some sort of help. Churches were a mess, and had to be cleaned out. It was not a very pretty job, in some ways.

WC: And the keys to all of the different buildings were in the diocesan office?

CR: At the diocesan office.

WC: The job that you held was—?

CR: I was called Property Manager, and it was my job to—anything that pertained to property was my job. So what I did was I developed a real estate department. I hired a lawyer. I hired an appraiser. I hired a real estate company, and proceeded to work with them to sell the properties. And then in between, I—

WC: These would have been the abandoned properties?

CR: These would have been the properties that were ready to be sold, right. And then it was our job to clean them out, and get them ready to be sold. And I worked very closely with this real estate group to get them to—and [I] had every property appraised, and I would have to go then before the Standing Committee. Because what happened is, almost as soon as I arrived at Church House was when Charles was inhibited.

WC: Right.

CR: So, and then Bishop Bartlett came in briefly, and I worked with him for a short while—six months, a year, something like that—and then Bishop Michel came in. The atmosphere at the diocese was horrendous! Everyone stayed in their office and was quiet. People were not friendly; people were stressed, fearful, angry. The Standing

Committee—at that point it was [The Very Reverend] Glenn Matis was the head of the Standing Committee, and there was an attitude of, I don't know, superiority.

WC: By the Standing Committee?

CR: By the Standing Committee. The Standing Committee was, sort of—whatever qualities they had seen in Charles that were so negative seemed to be there in the Standing Committee. So it was really kind of an awful time. I was doing my best to try to get along with the people that were at the diocese, but they honestly—there was a lot of upset at the diocese at that point.

WC: Among the employees?

CR: The employees were not particularly—and I always wore my collar, and for a long time I was the only one with a collar in Church House, with the bishops coming and going.

WC: Did you work with Rodney Michel?

CR: I worked—yes. I mean, I worked under him. I found that whole situation to be very strange. I mean, strange things were going on. He had hired someone whose name I forget, but [he] was a very, very angry man.

WC: To do what?

Paragraphs to remain closed until the death of Reverend Ritter

There were things that Bishop Michel was willing to have done, and we brought up the big conference table and all the chairs from Wapiti, because Wapiti—the Standing Committee closed down Wapiti, so we

brought those up to Diocesan House. Part of my job was to continue to see that Wapiti was maintained, even though no one was there.

So, then one day—Bishop Michel didn't come to me personally, but I was told that I would be leaving my office. And I had set up my office in such a way—I'd been there about three years or so, and I'd set up my office in such a way that when these people would come in to talk about real estate or whatever, I had a table, and then I had my desk, and so forth. And I had all my files and everything, and I had things sort of—I had a structure around me! [Laughs] And I was told I was leaving my office, and that I would be going down to a tiny little office on the first floor. And I said, "Well, why? What has happened? What have I done, or what have I not done?" No explanation was given to me at all. I had no reason—no understanding. And I was angry at that point. I was like, this is a terrible way to treat somebody who's brought in over two million dollars!

WC: Through sales?

CR: Through the sales of properties. So at that point, Bishop Michel had let it be known—and I can't even remember; maybe it was through Jill, or somebody, but I didn't get it directly from him—that he thought that I wasn't really happy at Church House. Did I want to go over to Saint Mary's on Bainbridge Street? And I thought, well, this man's trying to get rid of me! And he may have been; I mean, I don't know. I had gone over there to fill in as a supply, and the people had talked to me about xxxxx, saying that he was stealing, and they talked to me for three hours about that.

WC: He had been at that church before?

CR: He had been at that church for years, like fifteen or twenty years. And they were saying that he was continually stealing. So I, of course—it was my responsibility to take that back to Bishop Michel, and I did, and xxxxx lost his job. He was put out of there. But anyhow, so then Bishop Michel asked me if I would go back and fill in for three months while they were looking for somebody else to take over, and to do that on Sundays. So then that was when he began to say, well, he thought that I would be happier in parish life, that I seemed to be unhappy at Church House. And I was unhappy, and I was stressed, but I was doing my job. I don't see how you could be anything but unhappy and stressed, with all this that was going on around you . . .

Paragraphs to remain closed until the death of Reverend Ritter

WC: So you went down to Saint Mary's.

CR: So I went to Saint Mary's. He told me he was going to put my office—he was going to put me down in this little tiny office, which I could not very well have functioned out of. And I was upset at that point, and I was starting—I think at that point I was starting to get [physically] sick. [Laughs] “Excuse her.”

WC: We've been joined by a cat, for the record.

CR: [Laughs] So I just said, “Well, rather than make two moves, one downstairs and then over to Saint Mary's, I'm just going to go to Saint Mary's and be their vicar.” And the bishop said that that was okay. And Rob [Rogers] immediately had somebody who was a friend of his that he brought in, and put in that position of property. So there was a lot of funny business going on there that I was not privy to, and

still don't know what it was all about. I think looking back, because Bishop Michel took over that office that had been mine, and I think Bishop Michel knew that Charles Bennison was coming back. So as soon as I left, Charles Bennison came back, and then Bishop Michel became sort of an assistant to him. I began at Saint Mary's sort of in the same way that I had at Our Savior: what can we do to clean this place up? What can we do to try to get it going? And I didn't mind being a vicar; I thought that was fine. And I worked with this woman called xxxxx. Her name was xxxxx, and I can't remember her last name, but she—

WC: At Saint Mary's?

CR: At Saint Mary's. And she was the person that I was closest to, because she had been there since she was four years old.

WC: She was a parishioner?

CR: She was a parishioner, and she was in charge of everything in the office, and the soup kitchen, which was the big draw.

WC: Saint Mary's is a minority congregation?

CR: It was almost all African American. So I was the—

WC: So she was, too?

CR: She was African American, yeah, but she had been there since she was age four, and she was my age, so she was 70—69, 70, at that time. She kept the books; she ran the office. And after I had been there a few years—we did some wonderful things. I mean, we renovated the rectory. Here we go again! We renovated the rectory to the point where we could rent it out, and a group from Australia, students, came in and spent the summer there. And they were actors, and we fixed up the upstairs room above the offices, and there was a

woman that came to us and rented that, and she was the instructor for these students. So they had like a theater company upstairs, and they asked if they could take part of—you could push the chairs up in the sanctuary, and they asked if they could put their plays on there. And so they did, and they did wonderful—we had wonderful plays there.

So I was trying to minister to the people, but one of the things that was happening, and I didn't know it for quite a long time, was the extent to which xxxxx was talking behind my back, and demeaning me. Part of it was a racial thing as well as almost anything else. She just, I guess, was having a hard time with white people. But she would be very nice to me to my face, and she would be—she was very nice, and helpful, and we did a lot of things together. But at the vestry meetings, I kept asking her for financial statements, and she kept saying, “Well, I don't have it this month.” And she was a woman that had rheumatoid arthritis, and she was fragile, and I thought, well. So I let this go on.

It went on for several months, and finally it came towards the end of the year, and she produced a statement. And when I looked at it, I realized that she was way overpaying her son, and there seemed to be something wrong with the books. So that was about the time that Bishop Bennison asked me if I would go to lunch with him, and I did, and he advised me that he was going to shut down Saint Mary's. And I told him—I protested, and he said, “Well, I can't see why you're upset. Wouldn't you rather know ahead of time what I'm going to do?” And I said, “I don't think you should do it. I think the church needs a chance.” And well, he wasn't going to have the church stay open. So I told him about xxxxx, and that I suspected that there might

be some stealing, and he sent an auditor in, and they discovered that she had been taking money, and quite a lot, because the next year when she was no longer there in that position, as far as finances was concerned, they were able to save \$20,000.

WC: Wow.

CR: So she really had been—and I told her that I knew that she was talking against me behind my back, and so forth. The first year that Bishop Bennison was back, with the people, we went before the Council and asked to have Saint Mary's kept in the budget, because as you say, it was a DCOMM church. So I really fought the bishop at that point.

WC: You were being paid, then, as the vicar, by the diocese?

CR: I was being paid, right, right. And that was the only way to keep it going, was to continue to have that money. And we won, so that we were able to keep the church open for another year, but he was intent on having that church close down. And the second year, when I discovered about the finances and so forth, the vestry then—they were all African American, and they were very, very angry with me.

WC: Because?

CR: Because I had told on xxxxx, and she was their friend, really, and their leader. So they were totally against me. And I was sick! I mean, I had gotten diverticulitis at that point. I just was getting sicker and sicker! [Laughs] I mean, I had been under a lot of stress, and a lot of stress, and I just—so I just resigned and retired. I was 71, so I only had another year anyway, but still, it was something that I felt I had to do. So that was the story. The whole time that I was at the diocese, the whole time that I was at Saint Mary's, I was also going up to Holy Cross Monastery and receiving spiritual direction up there.

WC: Operated by—is that Roman Catholic?

CR: No, that's Episcopalian, yeah. It's in West Park, New York. And so I was going up there once a month, and spending some time, and being guided by—that was part of my support system, was to go there. And my spiritual director, this Brother James Dowd, he said to me, "I think you need to leave. You can't continue. God doesn't want that for you. That isn't a positive thing. You really are in a very bad, bad situation." So [by] then I had crossed my bishop; so I was now in the second year, [and] I was not willing—because of the vestry being so against me, I was not willing to again go against the bishop. So I left.

WC: Charles was still in charge?

CR: He was still in charge when I left.

WC: While you were at Saint Mary's, did you ever talk to any of the other DCMM vicars?

CR: Yeah.

WC: About aided parishes?

CR: I did. I did. I have to go to the bathroom again.

WC: Not a problem.

CR: [Laughs]

[End of Part 2/Begin Part 3]

CR: The cat likes you.

WC: He or she?

CR: She.

WC: She likes me. Well, we had cats for quite a while.

CR: Well, you have a new friend. She's a funny cat.

WC: So, you talked to people like [The Reverend] Ike Miller or [The Reverend] Don Graff?

CR: Yup, yup.

WC: What did you talk about? Because my sense is that you had a different feeling for the bishop than they did. Ike is someone who was very unhappy about the way the [Church of the] Advocate was treated by the diocesan powers.

CR: We would talk about things pertaining to the congregations. There were things that the bishop did that I couldn't defend, and I would acknowledge those to people, and I kept kind of quiet about my own support of him. Sometimes I would see him on the street.

WC: See—?

CR: Bishop Bennison, and he would be, like, coming out of the parking lot, and I'd be coming out of the parking lot where I had my car. I know one time I said to him, "I'm sorry, Bishop, but I couldn't save Wapiti." Because I tried at one point to save Wapiti, to get it to be able to function. And I said, "They're going to sell it." The Standing Committee had decided to sell it. And he looked at me with this little twinkle in his eye, and he said, "Well, maybe it won't sell."

WC: And it's still in the diocese?

CR: And it still—it still is.

WC: There was a small group who would like that not to change. I saw some emails just before Diocesan Convention from people who were going to introduce a resolution to keep Wapiti. As far as I know, that resolution was never introduced at Diocesan Convention.

CR: Right.

WC: But there is a clique of people who are now suggesting that the diocese rethink its attitude towards Wapiti.

CR: Yes. I mean, I think that—again, I think that Bishop Bennison was too quick to make that move before he had his ducks all in a row. He never got in touch with the bishop of the diocese in which Wapiti resides. What is it, Maryland?

WC: Yeah, I think it is Maryland.

CR: And he never talked to that bishop to say, “Hey, I’m going to buy property in your diocese,” which would have been the politically correct thing to do.

WC: Not just politically correct—also collegial.

CR: Also collegial. He did not get the backing of the Standing Committee and bring them on board. He did not get the backing of the Council, and the whole diocese. I mean, he probably would not have—they probably would have said no to him. He probably would not have been able to go forward with that, but he moved. He had—what was his name? Chandler Joyner? He was in charge of finances under Charles, and Chandler was a magician, as far as finding money and saying that it could be spent, because there were all these pockets!

And Charles would take the money and [it seemed to me] not really let the Standing Committee in on a lot of what he was doing. After the fact, or something like that, he would let them know. And then he would go ahead and do what he wanted to do! Well, hello! That’s the way to make friends! And I know personally, he wanted to sell Saint Mary’s. If I had stayed, he was going to sell Saint Mary’s right out from under me! I mean, I wasn’t going to have a job. And he’d go, “Oh!” I mean, he wouldn’t—so there are pieces and parts of him that are incredibly difficult to like! But there was also a brilliance

about him, and a visionary piece to him that I thought was quite wonderful. [Laughs]

WC: You're not the first person to say that Charles would hear what you had to say, he would perhaps gather information about a particular topic or problem, and then do what he wanted to do.

CR: Exactly! Exactly. I mean, a friend of mine said to me that he had worked with him, when he was going to be installed as the new bishop, on the liturgy.

Sentences to remain closed until the death of Reverend Ritter

WC: What particular liturgy were you talking about?

CR: We're talking about the liturgy to install him as a bishop.

WC: Ah.

CR: Specifically, yeah.

WC: When he came in '98.

CR: Yeah, yeah. So I mean, he was brand new. He hadn't even started, but he was so intent on what he was doing! He would get kind of focused on something, and then he would be like—he would be like a little rat terrier. I mean, he would not give it up! And that's the way he was, I'm sure, with those seven churches that he saw to it that the rectors were defrocked, and he began again to make them Episcopal Churches, Saint John's being one of them.

WC: Right, the conservative congregations that were uncomfortable with—

CR: Women, and gays, and all of that.

WC: Right. [The Reverend] David Moyer and that whole—

CR: Right, right. And I mean, he wasn't afraid to go to court. He would go to court repeatedly, and he won. He knew in the end that they wouldn't be able to not have him continue to be seated as Bishop of the Diocese of Pennsylvania. He said right up front, statute of limitations. "Say what you want to about me, and what I've done or haven't done, but statute of limitations." And he was right.

WC: You were in the diocesan office while the trial was ongoing? Is that right?

CR: Yes.

WC: What was it like to be in the diocesan office while all of that was going on?

CR: Well, it was part of the stress and the pressure. People were afraid to talk to each other in any kind of open, collegial way. There was one person that came to me, and I won't mention the person's name, but they came to me and said, "I have to have this job, and I can't afford—I have to be very careful what I say and what I do. I can't afford to not have this job." Our pays were all frozen at that point. I think that was kind of a national thing. I think pays pretty much across the board were frozen. But you had to be very careful who you spoke to, and what you spoke about.

Sentences to remain closed until the death of Reverend Ritter

I tried to work with these various factions that were difficult to work with.

WC: What did you think about the charges that were leveled against him, that he was a collaborator with his brother in the sexual abuse of a teenager?

CR: I believe he did that. I believe that—I believe that he was guilty of that.

WC: Did you believe at the time that that was sufficient reason to ask him to leave?

CR: Yes, but the statute of limitations wasn't going to allow for that, and he wasn't going to—he was going to go by the law. They weren't going to get him out that way.

WC: Apparently at the end, the National Church said, “We're going to take the job away from you.”

CR: Well, at their National Convention they passed a special ruling that allowed for a diocese that had had a very difficult bishop over an extended period of time . . . that the National Church could step in and take the job away. And it passed a special resolution for him.

Sentences to remain closed until the death of Reverend Ritter

WC: I guess at the end, Charles sat through a lot of abuse at diocesan conventions, too.

CR: He sat through a lot of abuse.

WC: Was he defiant about it?

CR: He sat through a lot of abuse with the seven churches. I went a few times when the churches had brought in a flying bishop, and he had said, “No, don't do it.” And they would do it to have their people confirmed. I went to a couple of those services.

WC: Didn't he have support, wide support from the diocese, for standing up to them? In other words, this was not one of the reasons why people came and said, "You've got to go."

CR: I honestly don't know how much support he had. I just felt that he was incredibly courageous to go and stand there, all dressed in his purple. And he would look at the people as they went by. He would just look at them. I think I went to the church in Rosemont with a friend.

WC: David Moyer's church?

CR: Yeah, and watched that in action. To me it was incredibly painful to see him standing there, because he was not a real big man—I mean, kind of a thin—

WC: Wiry.

CR: Yeah, and he just would stand there, and he would just look at them. And he wouldn't look at them with hate; he would just look at them as if to say, "I'm your bishop. What are you doing?" So he defended the position of the bishop right to the end.

WC: In addition, he was defending, implicitly, some of the liberal reforms, by standing up to those who found these reforms to be unacceptable. No?

CR: Yes, he was. He was.

Sentences to remain closed until the death of Reverend Ritter

WC: Certainly there were multiple forces at work in this situation.

CR: Mm-hm.

WC: We've covered a lot. Have we neglected anything that you think we should talk about?

CR: I'll just say briefly that since—in the last three years since I've been retired, I've been doing this—I've been getting my certification in spiritual direction at Haden Institute, which is down in Henderson[ville], North Carolina. And I don't know as I sit here now what I will do with that. I have three people that I see in spiritual direction.

WC: You're talking about clients, now?

CR: Mm-hm, three clients that I see. I also have sat with a couple of groups, one Jewish and one Roman Catholic, around the issue of dream work, which I have found to be very interesting. I don't know whether God is finished with me or not, in terms of my work as a priest. If somebody asked me would I do it again, despite all that happened, both good and bad—and there was both; I mean, tremendous times of joy, tremendous times of angst—I would do it all over again. I'm not one that's sorry I became a priest . . . You and talked about the fact that I'm probably in that second wave.

WC: Yeah. Why don't you describe that second wave?

CR: Well, when I was in the Diocese of New Jersey, there were still people that would not come to me for communion . . . that would actively move over to another line. And so I felt it was important to be strong, and to stand there and take that abuse, in a way, as a woman, because that's what it was about; it was about my femininity, my very essence, you know?

WC: Do you think that others in that second wave of women priests reacted to that in the same way that you did?

CR: Yeah. I think we've all had to be strong, and tough, and say our prayers, and to be able to just—to take any kind of abuse that came along. I mean, I realized I was being abused while I was at Church House. I realized I was being abused at Saint Mary's. I mean, I was not unaware of those things.

WC: Do you think that the abuse you took when you were property manager had something to do with the fact that you were a woman?

CR: Oh, absolutely! Absolutely! I mean, I couldn't become one of the good old boys, could I? There was no way for me to be one of the good old boys. I had many conversations with many different men, and there was one man who drove down with me to Wapiti, and he was clearly on the side of closing it and selling the property. And he knew that I was clearly on the other side. And we talked on the way down, and he eventually—he resigned. He was a lay man, but he was on the finance committee, and I was on the finance committee at one point, too. So I wrote to him and I said goodbye, and I said, "I will miss having you around, and I am sorry that we were on different sides of the fence in some cases." And he wrote back and he said something about, "It was delightful to work with you, and I don't remember us having any difficulties." So you would get that kind of very—

WC: Patronizing?

CR: Well, I didn't feel it was patronizing. I thought he was sincerely saying, "I'm not letting this stand between us, and we could still be friends."

WC: That was nice of him to do.

CR: It was a nice thing. But I mean, really nice things, some really very kind, and sweet, and nice things were done. I mean, I know that I did a good job in the various things that I did. I know that I worked, and I worked hard at everything. To bring in two million dollars for the property? They had to create a new fund because they didn't know what to do with all the money! [Laughs] I thought that was funny. I found that to be very amusing.

WC: Something to be proud of.

CR: And I was very proud of myself for having been able to do that. I did have one man on the Standing Committee who was an interesting guy, and he would say—he said to me, “You know, I don't want you to stop doing what you're doing, but how are you doing it?” I mean, he had no idea what it would take to achieve the sale of properties. So I mean, those kinds of things. But I mean, I was under pressure. Even at Trinity Solebury there were those that were against me that I had to—and some were women! In a couple of instances, they were women. I threatened them by being a priest. There was one woman; I think she must have wanted to be a priest, and had been told no, although she never said that. So she would take me on every chance she got. As soon as you stand up and you say, “I'm the leader,” then there are those that have to fight that.

WC: Resist a little bit? Push back.

CR: Or a lot!

WC: Yeah.

CR: I had a wonderful conversation with Audrey Scott when I came to visit at Our Savior. I may have said this to you. I said to her, “Audrey.” She said to me—because she was in charge of the kitchen,

and she wouldn't give that up. The kitchen was her kitchen, and I was determined that she was going to share that kitchen. So I said something about putting in a new floor, and we did put in a new linoleum floor, or whatever material. And she said to me the other day, pushing her walker—she said, “I fought you about this floor, but you were right!” So I said, “Well, yeah. I only waited fifteen years for that!” [Laughs] I said, “Thank you, Audrey.”

WC: Audrey's a good soul.

CR: She's a great lady! I walked over to her. I said, “I could not leave here without coming and humbly saying hello to you.” [Laughs] As the maitre'd.

WC: Yes, the matron of honor.

CR: The matron of honor, for sure. For sure. So there you are!

[End of Interview]