

MEMORIES OF NEW BERN

REV. C. EDWARD SHARP

INTERVIEW 1014

This is Dr. Joseph Patterson representing the Memories of New Bern Committee. My number is 1000. The date is October 6, 1992. I am interviewing the Rev. C. Edward Sharp who resides at 3526 Canterbury Road in New Bern. This interview is being conducted at my home at 604 East Front Street in New Bern. The number of the interview is 1014.

Dr. Patterson: Ed, it's nice to see you and have this chance to talk to you. I just want to chat with you and find out some things that you remember about New Bern. First of all I'd like to just talk about you and get some information about you. What's your full name, Ed?

Rev. Sharp: Charles Edward Sharp.

JP: Where were you born?

Rev. Sharp: I was born just outside of a little town OF Harrellsville in Hertford County, north of here.

JP: What year was that?

Rev. Sharp: 1924, July 10.

JP: That's makes you 68. You're a young fella. (laughter)

Rev. Sharp: I want to add a few more years to that.

JP: Where did you go to school?

Rev. Sharp: I graduated from the local high school there in 1941 and went to Carolina in September of '41. As you know, Pearl Harbor occurred in the fall of that year, December 7. I completed two years at Carolina before I went in the Army as a draftee. I went in the Army in '43 as A Private in the infantry. I had sixteen weeks basic

training. Those were bad times during the war for us in '43. I went overseas and landed at Casablanca. I went on a cattle train from Casablanca to Oran and boarded a ship there for Naples. The Cassino campaign battle was just taking place in Italy.

JP: What battle was that?

Rev. Sharp: That was the Benedictine Abbey at Cassino in Italy. It was the bloodiest battle of the Italian campaign. There was an ancient Benedictine monastery up on a hill. I was not there but I joined a division which had been there and it had the you know what shot out of it, and they had to have hundreds and hundreds of replacements following that campaign. They had pulled back and had been sent up to Anzio where the beachhead had been established. I went as a replacement in that Division in Anzio.

JP: As a PFC?

Rev. Sharp: Well, I finally made PFC. I was carrying then a Browning Automatic Rifle, a BAR which was quite a weapon in World War II, and I went in Anzio as a replacement. The beachhead had already been established and I was there on the push to Rome. This was before the invasion across the English channel, the Normandy Invasion. I was wounded on the push to Rome from Anzio. Anzio was a ticklish spot.

There was just sea behind us and we faced mountains. We were encircled by mountains and the Germans occupied that space up there looking down on us. The push was successful, but I was wounded before we got to Rome.

JP: What was your wound?

Rev. Sharp: It was a shrapnel wound. I was hit by the greatest weapon in Europe in World War II and that was the 88mm cannon that the Germans had. It was anti-aircraft, anti-tank, anti-personnel. It could do anything. I was wounded with shrapnel in my wrist. I still carry the scar there. I was sent back to Naples for surgery and then was shipped home. I was no more good for infantry and was shipped back home and was in an Army hospital for a year up in West Virginia.

JP: With repeated operations?

Rev. Sharp: One more. Those were the days, as you well know, when neuro-surgery was just beginning and they knew little about it. It was nerve and tendon injury there. My nerve was severed. They didn't know too much about neuro-surgery in those days. A lot of things happened in medicine and surgery during World War II. They would not release me until they found out how my hand was going to be, and so I spent a year there. Most of that time was on convalescent leave; ninety day furloughs, thirty day furloughs.

JP: You deserved it.

Rev. Sharp: My time at the front was brief. All I wanted.

JP: Did you get a good result?

Rev. Sharp: Yes, I got a pretty good result. There's still some numbness, not quite right in the left part of the hand where that nerve controls feeling, can't straighten out my fingers, the tendons are tied, scar tissue, that sort of thing. Nothing greatly disabling. If I'd been a concert pianist, I'd been in trouble.

JP: Yes. Did you get out of the Army?

Rev. Sharp: I was discharged from the Army hospital in Martinsburg, West Virginia. During that time while I was overseas and then came back home, I began to think a lot of the ministry, but not really eager about that. When I went to Carolina, I was thinking about journalism as a career, as a vocation. I was not really settled in but thinking about that. I like to write. I enjoy writing. Then while I was overseas, I began to think about the ministry as what I regard as a nudging by the Holy Spirit and He wouldn't let me go cause I really didn't want this. My family doesn't produce clergy.

We've never had one that anybody ever recalls. They were church people but not professional types. Anyway, I decided I would go in the ministry. The idea kept haunting me and wouldn't let me go, so I said, "okay, that's what I'll do." I was a Baptist in those days and was advised that I really needed to go to Wake Forest. I really didn't like that idea either because I started out in Carolina and liked it.

But Baptists have to get their union card. They did in those days. To belong to the union you need to go to Baptist schools. So, I went to Wake Forest somewhat reluctantly. I had two years at old Wake Forest and they were two good years. It was while I was at Wake Forest that the Reynolds offer was accepted by the Baptist State Convention for the move of the college to Winston-Salem. That was an interesting time. After I graduated at Wake Forest, I had some negative feelings about some religious attitudes on campus there and I had decided I was not going to a Baptist seminary, union card or no union card.

So, I was accepted at Yale, the University Divinity School, and went there. After my first year at Yale, I had no intention of changing churches when I went, but after my first year at Yale, I had given a lot of thought to making a change and changed to the Episcopal Church.

It was the only option that I saw that I was interested in. After my first year of the three years at Yale, I became an Episcopalian and graduated there. Then I went to the Virginia Theological Seminary, an Episcopal Seminary, in Alexandria and spent a year there and then was ordained. Then I went into ministry in East Carolina, back home you might say.

JP: In your hometown?

Rev. Sharp: Not in my hometown but in the part of the state where I was reared. I went to Hyde County. I had never been to Hyde County in my life. I'd heard of Hyde County as on the frontier. The Bishop assigned me to Hyde County and I had five little mission churches.

That was an interesting experience. I was not married. I was single.

I lived in a rectory in the open country in a little place that didn't even have a village, Lake Landing. Lake Landing has always been in Hyde County. I lived in an old four bedroom rectory next door to a beautiful little country church and operated out of that all over Hyde County. Those were two wonderful years. They were great, great people.

I knew some of your relatives there, by the way.

JP: The Gibbs family.

Rev. Sharp: They were in St. George's. Gibbs are buried in the cemetery and many of your ancestors are there. They are a wonderful,

wonderful family. A lot of memories of that place. They were good to me, a green, young fellow right out of seminary and they were very forbearing. It was tough leaving there because they were very accepting people. They accepted me as a part of them in their homes and their families, and I'll never forget those years. Then from Hyde, I went to Greenville and served as a college chaplain on the staff of the local parish church, St. Paul's. I was college curate. I served there one year and that was a happy time. I met Virginia, my wife, there.

I did not date her or anything, just met her. We lived within a few hundred yards of each other really. She was in school at the time.

I served there a year when I got a call to St. Paul's in Beaufort, and I went there. After my first summer there, I met Virginia again at a wedding. A friend of her's at St. Mary's in Raleigh was getting married who was a member of St. Paul's, and I was officiating at the wedding. We were doing a lot of cutting up. She, of course, was single and unattached as most of the girls were in the wedding. I was unattached and single. She caught the bride's bouquet, and I started kidding her. I said, "Well, let's elope." Little did we know that anything would come of all of this. After that wedding, we started dating. By that time, she had taught for a year in New Bern. This was the summer time and she had just completed a year here in teaching with Mr. MacDonald. The Trent Park School had opened and she was one of the teachers in that school. Then she accepted a job at Virginia Beach near Langley Field. It was exciting to her that there were so many attractive young aviators up there. She thought that would be

an interesting place to be. And darn it, I met her that summer before she went up, and we did our dating from Beaufort to Virginia Beach, and that was painful. It was a lot of distance. So, we either had to get married or quit. (laughter) We got married the next May. We had dated actually a little less than a year. She went to Beaufort as my bride. I had been there two years. She was very apprehensive about that. She never thought she'd ever marry a clergyman anymore than I had thought that I would be a clergyman. But anyway, that was a happy experience for us. The people there were just absolutely fantastic to us. Our first child was born there. We call him our Beaufort boy. Then after my ministry there of seven years, the vestry here in New Bern of Christ Church called me as Rector upon Mr. Williams retirement. He'd been here twenty-eight years.

JP: Ed, let me interrupt just a minute and backtrack and ask you about your father and mother. What as your father's name?

Rev. Sharp: My father's name was Starkey Sharp. No middle name. Males in my family for eight or nine generations have borne that name, Starkey. Our first American ancestor, William Sharp, in the early eighteenth century married a Miss Starkey from Onslow County. There were Starkey's, John Starkey and Edward Starkey, in the colonial legislature. The same family. There was a creek in Onslow, Starkey Creek. It's a strange name. People wonder, where did that come from?

It was interesting that I would come to Craven County, to New Bern and one of my great-great-great-great-grandmother's way back there was born and reared in Onslow. So, that's my father, Starkey Sharp.



His father was Starkey, my brother is Starkey, I have two nephews by that name, etc. My mother was Eutha. It's an interesting name.

I've only encountered it one other time. My mother, Eutha Liverman, was from Murfreesboro in Hertford County. My grandfather, her father, was a great reader of novels. Some heroine in a novel that he read was named Eutha and he liked it and for some reason they named her that. I had a parishioner here, he's still living here, who is one of the retirees that came to New Bern from the Washington, D.C. area.

He brought his mother here to live in a nursing home. She was quite an old lady, and her name was Eutha. I encountered that name in the hospital and thought, "I can't believe this!"

JP: You have brothers and sisters?

Rev. Sharp: There were four boys in my family and one girl. My two oldest brothers have died; the oldest one, Starkey, and the second one, Hunter. Another family name from one of my grandmother's who was a Hunter, Nancy Hunter. There are several Hunters still in the family. It's another name that continues to appear and reappear in our family. Anyway, he was a career Army man and retired as a Colonel when he was just under fifty years old, after thirty years. So, those two died, and I have one brother left, Jack who lives in Martin County, Robersonville. He married a Robersonville girl. I have a sister whose name is Eutha. She is named for my mother. She lives in Charlotte and is married to a medical man, Jack Hopson an internist. So, that's my family.

JP: How many children do you have, Ed?

Rev. Sharp: I have three. Charles Edward, Jr. was born in Beaufort. Then about seven or eight months after we came to New Bern, our second son was born, Reid Perkins. He was named for his grandfather, Virginia's father. Then a daughter much later, Virginia, who is still in college. She was named for her mother. And that's it.

JP: Well, we've gotten you to New Bern and you came to relieve Mr. Williams.

Rev. Sharp: Yes, in 1962.

JP: You've been here since '62 and you've seen a lot of things happen and have seen a lot of changes and have lived through a lot of things. I want to search your memory now for some of these things.

I'd like to talk to you about civil rights and race relations. I know you've been active in this area and you naturally would be interested in this area. So, I'm going to ask you some questions about civil rights that you suggested that I ask people about. In the civil rights movement of the fifties, sixties, when all the changes occurred, when you look back, what has been the greatest impact on your life from the civil rights period?

Rev. Sharp: Soon after I came; this is a personal thing and I also tried to make it more than personal, I established a relationship with St. Cyprian's Episcopal Church here in town, a black congregation.

I established a personal relationship with many people there, the Rector at the time and many people in the congregation. I established some friendships that have endured for these thirty years. They are very, very important to me, and I hope to some of them. One of my

goals then was that that church and Christ Church should be more aware of each other and of the needs of the other. We as a larger congregation, Christ Church, were much larger than St. Cyprian's which was a small congregation. It had a great past with especially one of it's Rector's, Dr. R. I. Johnson. He was well known and much loved and respected in the community of both black and white. So, one of the things I tried to do was just try to establish some kind of continuing relationship between the two congregations so that we might be more aware of each other and know that we have some of the same goals and same interest and share the same faith. I don't know that I was altogether successful with that. There were one or two joint things that we did that were exciting; for example, the youth groups. They had at St. Cyprian's eight or ten very outstanding teenagers at that particular time and we had an outstanding group of teenagers. We established a joint group. It was called Christ Church/St. Cyprian's Episcopal Young Churchmen, and they did some interesting things together and good things together and got to know each other, which is a beginning point. I was reared in the country on a farm with black tenant families. I grew up with black young boys my age. I thought I knew black people, but I didn't, and I still don't. There are many things that I don't understand yet. But this was a beginning to establish a new kind of relationship with black people on the same footing with them.

JP: Did that endeavor prosper?

Rev. Sharp: Yes it did for a while. For two or three years it

did until some of these youngsters graduated from high school and it finally diminished as the interest was no longer there.

JP: Ed, I've suddenly thrown you into the midst of a turmoil time, but let's continue with this.

Rev. Sharp: Well, you know, soon after I came here, we entered into difficult times in our social relationships, etc. in New Bern, the state of North Carolina, and the south.

JP: You were one of the original members of the Race Relations Commission?

Rev. Sharp: It was called the Good Neighbor Council. This was the beginning. I don't know whether Governor Sanford was the Governor at the time. I remember Mr. Coltrain was the coordinator of the Good Neighbor Council.

JP: He was in the state-Raleigh hierarchy?

Rev. Sharp: Right. I was asked by Livingston Stallings who was then the chairman of the Craven County Commissioners to serve as chairman of the Good Neighbor Council. I was just overwhelmed that I would have that kind of responsibility.

JP: Was that in the early sixties?

Rev. Sharp: Probably the middle sixties. It was not as soon as I arrived in '62. The middle sixties or the latter half of that decade. I told Livingston, I said, "Livingston, I'll be glad to serve if you get somebody to serve with me so we can share the leadership together." I saw the council as being a key to good relationships or maintaining good relationships during a rather turbulent time.

He agreed. Al Fisher who was minister at Centenary Methodist Church here in New Bern was asked to serve with me, and the two of us served together. They were good times and it was a fairly representative group from the county.

JP: Who all was on that?

Rev. Sharp: I remember a Mr. Sparrow.

JP: A black man.

Rev. Sharp: A black man and an extraordinary man. He has been dead now for many years, but he was an outstanding person on that commission. Sidney French who is on the Board of County Commissioners now was on that commission. This was long before his days as a county commissioner. A black clergyman who was a presiding elder at the AME Zion Church, I think that was the name of it, Dr. Babbington-Johnson, served on the commission. He originated in Africa in one of the colonies of Great Britain, and he spoke with a decided English accent. He was a big, handsome man with white hair. He drove a big car. I think it was a Cadillac. He was a presiding elder and he looked like a presiding elder or bishop! He was quite a man and quite a character.

Janet Latham came on the commission. She may have been one of the original members, or she may have come on a little bit later and later chaired the Human Relations Council. The name was changed in later years.

JP: Jim Gavin?

Rev. Sharp: I believe Jim Gavin was on it, and that was my first encounter with Jim. I was, and still am, tremendously impressed by

that man. He's quite a guy. There were some women.

JP: Genevieve Dunn?

Rev. Sharp: I don't recall that Genevieve was on it at that time. She might have been. I'm fuzzy about some of the other people. There were about a dozen of us, maybe a few more.

JP: What was your goal? What were you trying to do?

Rev. Sharp: I think our primary goal, as I remember, was communication between races. One of the things that Mr. Coltrain kept telling us was that if people talk together, they will begin to understand each other and the needs and the feelings, and as long as we keep open the channel of communication, we can attend to the grievances and that sort of thing; but when people are not talking and they're hurting, that's when we have trouble and it boils over. So, our primary thing really was communication.

JP: How effective were you?

Rev. Sharp: I really don't know. All I can say is this; that many times, and I don't know that the Good Neighbor Council accomplished this, I know it didn't by itself, but many towns in eastern Carolina had some awful, awful times with rioting and bitter demonstrations and accusations. New Bern by comparison was relatively quiet. We were able not only to keep the lid on, but to talk. And to that extent, I think we were successful because New Bern had a much less difficult time than Plymouth, Williamston, and a lot of other places.

JP: During the difficult times that did occur in New Bern, was your group active? Could you tell me about some of these times?

Rev. Sharp: One of the incidence that we all remember was the assassination of Martin Luther King. I don't know where we were with the Good Neighbor Council. I don't remember the date. I know it was on a Palm Sunday or around Palm Sunday. The year of his death, I don't remember. I know that we were extremely apprehensive about the reaction of the black community because I think all of us were distressed and horrified that this happened. We could understand that the black community, not only in our own town but throughout the south, would just be very, very angry. I remember there were a lot of hurried meetings and I think there were some marches; but there again, no violence. In those days, that was a plus not to have violence.

JP: How long did this group stay together?

Rev. Sharp: I really don't remember.

JP: It's not in effect now?

Rev. Sharp: No. What was in effect afterwards was Human Relations which succeeded the Good Neighbor Council. I think the term Good Neighbor was not one that would continue. We became more interested in with not just being good neighbors but the broader area of human relations.

JP: This new group which Janet Latham chaired, is that still active?

Rev. Sharp: I really don't know. It was until recent times and it may still be.

JP: Ed, do you have any memories of school integration and how it was handled here in New Bern?

Rev. Sharp: Yes, I remember. I remember the apprehension, especially, on the part of whites wondering what this would do to the quality of education and with blacks who were less prepared for sociological and historical changes and a lot of other reasons. There was a lot of apprehension and anxiety. I remember all these academies that were started by whites to avoid integration. I remember that very, very well.

JP: In New Bern?

Rev. Sharp: One in New Bern, Trent Academy, which became a very good school. Some of the founding fathers of this would deny this. There were people from the community; not just Episcopalians, but Presbyterians, Methodists, and Baptists, who were interested in securing superior education, came to me and talked to me and to our vestry about the possibility of Christ Church starting a parochial day school. They were very much in earnest about this, and our vestry received it earnestly and seriously. So, the vestry made a study of basically what it would take to operate a day school. Members of the vestry visited Episcopal day schools, parish day schools in North Carolina, South Carolina, and Virginia to see how they operated. Finally, as a result of that study, the vestry went back to these people and said, "We will sponsor a parish day school, but these are the things that have to happen; 1,2,3,4,5,6,7." I don't remember them all. I just remember a few. There had to be enough students to fill so many consecutive grades; like, kindergarten and grades 1, 2, and 3, or something like that, to justify hiring teachers and how much the tuition



would cost. One of the stipulations was this one; and I was extremely proud of the vestry for this, I would have washed my hands of it had it not been done; that any student regardless of race who was qualified for admission would be acceptable and it could not be a "segregated" school. The vestry was unanimous on this. I think the Bishop would have had a duck conniption fit if we had done otherwise! We also knew at the same time that it would probably be a de facto segregated school because very few black families in New Bern would be able to afford the tuition. We knew that ninety-nine percent of the black community would be eliminated because of that. Anyway, the vestry requirements were not met for the establishment of a school; and so therefore, we did not proceed with it. A little bit later, most of the very same people were instrumental in opening Trent Academy.

JP: What do you remember about Trent Academy?

Rev. Sharp: I remember it as a good school and good teachers. One or perhaps two of our children went to Trent for a couple of years.

JP: Where was it located?

Rev. Sharp: They started on Tryon Palace Drive in an old house. The house had a name and it later burned.

JP: It was Charles Manor.

Rev. Sharp: I remember the Manor when it was operating when we first came her. They had wonderful meals there. Anyway, that burned while the Academy was operating there. Then they built a school out at River Bend. It was a nice building. They were very successful for a while.

JP: Was it segregated?

Rev. Sharp: I think it was initially. They may have ultimately had a few black students. I don't know whether they ever did or not. I think if a black student had made application, the black student would have been admitted and perhaps was.

JP: About how many years was that in operation?

Rev. Sharp: I have no idea. I would say fifteen years or maybe longer. They finally evolved into a high school; kindergarten through high. Our older son was out there in his freshman or sophomore years, and he was happy there. It was small, and like most small schools, most of the students were from the same socio-economic level in the community and they knew each other and did not have much exposure to others, and we felt that it was rather narrow. Before Ed went off to college, he needed to have a broader experience in education, maybe not as intense educationally, but socially he needed it. We had no regrets about that. So, he went back to New Bern High School where he graduated.

JP: Why did that school close?

Rev. Sharp: Cost, I think, was one of the primary reasons, the tuition cost. Many of the students, although not all, were sons and daughters of professional people; doctors and lawyers and very successful business people. It just drew on New Bern and maybe some from Jones County and Pamlico, but not many; whereas, Parrott Academy in Kinston had many, many students who come from New Bern and outlying areas. They probably wouldn't have been as successful if they did

not draw from a wider area.

JP: Ed, during the time of integration, how did the New Bern churches respond to this challenge?

Rev. Sharp: They were not in the forefront. The church is always slow, unfortunately, and we often betray the Gospel. Sometimes the church has to be dragged into action. I wish it might have been different. My congregation was very supportive of my work in the Good Neighbor Council. Our Bishop encouraged participation in programs like that in the local churches in local communities. When I accepted that responsibility from Livingston Stallings, I got in touch with the Bishop and told him what I was doing and I said, " I want to know that I have your complete support." He said, "You do." He said he would encourage the vestry to give me the same support. I informed the vestry of twelve people of my acceptance of that responsibility and asked them for their support. I received it unanimously. That was encouraging because in those days, well thought of people could have said, "No, I don't want you involved with blacks at all. I don't want you to become involved in anything controversial. Let's stay clear of controversy." If there was any dissent from my participation in that in the congregation, I never heard it. I'm sure there were people who would rather that I was not involved.

JP: Were the doors of the Episcopal Church opened to black people? Did they come?

Rev. Sharp: No, they didn't come. In those days, there were blacks who would go to churches to see if they would be admitted.

It was a testing time. We never had that to happen at Christ Church because there was a black Episcopal church here. There were no local black Episcopalians who were interested in going to Christ Church because they had their own church. We talked about it in the vestry; if this happens here, no matter who comes to these doors, they have to be admitted and had to be shown a seat. They had to be treated cordially and in the Christian attitude and spirit. We were never tested. The bad times of the sixties and the seventies had passed.

I had a black woman who started attending Christ Church with her two small children. She was the wife of a local black surgeon who was a nominal Episcopalian, nominally a member of St. Cyprian's. When she started attending Christ Church, I warmly welcomed her and I think I called on her at home or met with her. I said, "You know you have to be one of the bravest people I know to start attending a service that is lily white and you are the only black people there." She said, "I've been made to feel welcome." She had a pretty voice and the people in the choir invited her to join the choir and she joined. She said, "The reason I'm here is that I want what Christ Church has to offer in Christian education for my children."

JP: What did the other churches in New Bern do about this? Did they accept blacks? Did they meet the challenge?

Rev. Sharp: Joe Pat, my memory is very dim. I don't remember enough to make any commentary on what the other churches did. I know that none of us stood out as leading a charge for integration. I had one white clergyman in downtown New Bern tell me, (I won't name his

denomination) he said, "Ed, I envy you. You can get up in the pulpit and you can address this issue and your job is secure." And it was because the vestry could not fire me. He said, "But if I got up and said some of the things that you have said from your pulpit, I would be fired that night." I know that's where some of the clergy were. They had to think about their family security.

JP: Ed, as you look back at all of this, can you recall certain individuals in New Bern who stand out as real leaders in coping with this problem, showing leadership to the town, blacks or white?

Rev. Sharp: Al Fisher, the Methodist clergyman who was co-chairman of Good Neighbor Council, was very effective. Jim Gavin was effective. He was black. One of the things about New Bern and the black community during this time, Joe Pat, was that the black community was divided. There were two or three or more people who were seeking personal power in leadership, and these two or three people had their own following. The black community was not united behind a few black leaders. They were going in opposite directions, unfortunately for them. I think more good things might have happened if the black community had been together with good responsible leadership. When I say good responsible leadership, I don't mean people who will just say, "Yes sir" to the whites. Buckshot Nixon, who still gets attention in the papers and is always protesting something, was one of the irresponsible black leaders who was always seeking personal power and still does.

JP: Do you recall any members of the white community?

Rev. Sharp: I can't say enough about Livingston Stallings. He was a politician from the word go. But he was so creative, he was so responsible, he could see the broader picture in race relations. He contributed more than any single individual in this town, I am confident, of keeping communication open and helping people to try to resolve the issues that lay before us. His contribution is inestimable.

JP: Ed, how do you think it's going? Do you think that all of this turmoil, this integration, this civil rights movement has made things better for the races in New Bern?

Rev. Sharp: Much better than before the beginnings, the '54 Supreme Court decision, etc. Much better than that, but we still have a long way to go. I can see us slipping back some now, and I'm concerned about that. It will take, I'm confident, many generations. When I say this, I'm not saying it as a conservative who says, "just take it easy now." Nothing creative or good out of our racial relationships will happen unless we work hard, blacks and whites, to make it happen.

Just to say, "We've come a long way and this as far as we go" isn't working. There are a lot of people with that attitude. There are a lot of whites who feel that the blacks have been handed everything on a silver tray and they are irresponsible. There are blacks whom we have observed to be somewhat irresponsible and want to pull back.

Instead of integration, they want to have there own segregated facilities and yet make many demands and claims for right. I'm really disturbed about both attitudes.

JP: Ed, let's change directions just a little bit. The church is involved in all of these things, but let's talk about churches now. You've been in New Bern for thirty years and involved up to your ears in church life and the religious aspects of the community. How important to New Bern is religion in all of the churches? How important was it when you came and what has happened over the years? Is this a religious town?

Rev. Sharp: The churches are important to the community, Joe Pat. One thing, they've always been here. They are continuing institutions. They represent some continuity in the life of our town, an important segment of that life. I do not think, however, that the churches have as much influence that they might have had at one time.

I would say that fifty percent, and I just pull this figure out of the top of my head, fifty percent of the people in New Bern have little or no identification with any church and the churches are not important to them. We used to think of this part of the world as the "Bible Belt", a lot of identity with religion and Christian religion and church. It's not that way as much as it once was. On the other hand, I see that the church is having an influence that they've never had before in certain areas; such as social needs. I think one of the most exciting things that has happened in my years in New Bern and in my years as Rector of Christ Church are the cooperative things that the churches have done together and are doing together; primarily through one instrument, Religious Community Services. People may say, well, that's welfare and social service ought to be taking care of

that. But I believe that we're getting back to where the early church was, the primitive church, and to an emphasis of our Lord's own teaching about the poor and the needy and the deprived and those who are being treated unjustly. The church is giving more real attention to that.

By that I mean, not just writing a check. That's what the church has often done in the past, writing a check without any personal involvement. Many of our people are very involved in Religious Community Services. I know churches that are involved in that broad ministry that were not involved cooperatively with any church before.

That is exciting to see people from the various churches working together in the emergency center, in the RCS, in the soup kitchen, in the shelter, and all these activities.

JP: How many churches are involved in this?

Rev. Sharp: I've lost count. It's in the twenties or the low thirties, almost all of the churches in New Bern. We had difficulty getting blacks on board initially. The black church that was most involved with us from the very beginning was Ebenezer Presbyterian Church and finally more and more of the other blacks came in and are participating in that ministry.

JP: Who was involved in getting this going?

Rev. Sharp: The Ministerial Association was where RCS started, the New Bern Ministerial Association which is a white group, not by design, that's the way it works out. The Association dreamed this up under the leadership of Rich Boyd, your pastor. But the Association was behind this and gave it life in the beginning. One of the things



that triggered this was the soup kitchen. Many soup kitchens were opening in many towns all around us in East Carolina and in other places, and we had some people in Christ Church who were very interested in starting a soup kitchen. A committee was formed and they went around visiting soup kitchens that were operated by churches in Kinston, Goldsboro, Durham, and other places. Then when we started talking about actually getting off the ground, this was going to be an Episcopal church thing, it was my suggestion that we ought to make contact with at least the downtown churches to see if they were interested in going in this with us to make it a joint venture. It would be much stronger in the community rather than a one church venture. And that's what we did. The other churches were interested. So, it that got off the ground that way, and that's one of the important programs of Religious Community Services.

JP: Do you think that RCS is perhaps the greatest effort to unify the churches in New Bern?

Rev. Sharp: I don't think there's any question about that.

JP: It's the greatest accomplishment of a group effort?

Rev. Sharp: Right, involving a large number of churches in the community. It's also a continuing ministry. It is not just a one shot thing we do, some exciting thing together for one time or one year, but a continuing program.

JP: You mentioned the Ministerial Association. Has this been an effective organization?

Rev. Sharp: Not very, to be perfectly frank. I've always belonged

to the Ministerial Association. The membership fluctuates, but there have been approximately a dozen clergy who are pretty regular. Sometimes we may have sixteen or eighteen at a meeting. The Ministerial Association did sponsor initially RCS and some joint services like an Easter Sunrise Service and a Thanksgiving service and that sort of thing, but not a whole lot beyond that. It's been very interested and did promote, and was interested for many, many years but got nowhere with it, the chaplaincy at the hospital. They finally spearheaded that and we had a lot of support from the communities throughout the county, not just New Bern. If it hadn't been for the Ministerial Association, there wouldn't have been a chaplaincy at the hospital as we know it now. So, it has done some good things.

JP: Have blacks ever participated?

Rev. Sharp: We've had one or two blacks who would come from time to time. We had some joint meetings with the black ministerial group that's called the New Bern Ministerial Alliance, and we met several times together. It was somewhat frustrating for them and for us. They meet at night. They do this because many of the black clergy have full time jobs and they cannot meet during the day and must meet in the evening. Many of their clergy are unlettered and do not have the educational background of most white clergy active in the Ministerial Association, but we share the same Christian faith. I guess this is a judgment on us the whites, and on them. But it's true, there was no real meshing in our meetings, and I think primarily because of the educational and cultural differences.

JP: The two organizations still exist?

Rev. Sharp: They still exist.

JP: And each goes it's own way?

Rev. Sharp: Right.

JP: Ed, in the time of trouble in New Bern; and I don't mean racial troubles now, I'm thinking of emergencies and disasters like hurricanes and ice storms and such; has the church in your experience, I include the church all over New Bern, has the church been active in it's response?

Rev. Sharp: Oh yes, I would say so. During natural disasters and emergency situations, I think all of the churches were responsive to the needs of those times. I know that after hurricane, Hugo, there was much activity in the New Bern churches, and the churches were giving assistance in their own way. I don't recall that they did anything together but all of the churches were participating in hurricane relief. The same with the more recent, hurricane, Andrew, down in Florida and Louisiana.

JP: You weren't here in the fifties when there were so many bad hurricanes.

Rev. Sharp: I was in the middle of those in Beaufort.

JP: You were in the worst spot.

Rev. Sharp: Not necessarily.

JP: You have pointed out how the RCS gets involved in some social issues in New Bern. Do the churches in New Bern get involved, do you think, in other social issues; politics for example?

Rev. Sharp: I'm not aware of any great involvement in politics. New Bern, in spite of the many changes that have taken place in our time over the last thirty years, is still a relatively conservative community. I know the people in my congregation would have been very unhappy if I had been politically active in party politics.

JP: How about environmental issues?

Rev. Sharp: I think probably all of the churches have some involvement in their denominational programs because the church is becoming very much aware of environmental issues and of our stewardship responsibilities. There is good theology behind all of this; our stewardship of natural resources which God has left us and that we are to leave to others unimpaired. So, many of us feel that this is a Christian calling. We may differ on environmental programs. I don't know that we've done any of this ecumenically, you know, with many local churches involved.

JP: Ed, you've been here thirty years now. As you look back, have you been happy in your church work in New Bern?

Rev. Sharp: Oh yes. I've been very, very happy. I have not been at all unhappy with my life in the church here or in the community here. They have been very fulfilling years. A lot of the things that I would have liked to see done in Christ Church were not done, but many things have happened and have been done that I'm very pleased with. I'm very pleased with a lot of things that have happened in our town. I'd like to see some other things happen. Sometimes we get impatient because things don't change fast enough. Things need

to be done that we're not doing and ought to do. We're all fallible human beings. I try sometimes to look at my time as the way God looks at it. It's only the blink of an eye. Everything doesn't have to happen today on Ed's timetable. But so long as we're set in the right direction and moving toward important goals, that's the important thing.

JP: You're glad you came to New Bern?

Rev. Sharp: Yes.

JP: Let's look at New Bern for just a little bit now and let me ask you how you remember the town thirty years ago. What was that like?

Rev. Sharp: Quiet, conservative, easy going pace of life here. It was a quiet pace, and still not rambunctious. It was very unlike "some of the progressive towns around us", like Greenville and Kinston. But even at the time, I felt that New Bern had a quality in its lifestyle that was admirable and admirably different and good. I saw then not so much competition of people keeping up with somebody else socially or economically. Things have changed in the last decade or so. There's a lot more greed, wanting more and showing more, which disturbs me. This has not only happened in New Bern, it's happened nationally. People have become very self-centered and want "everything for me." That bothers me. I liked that pace then. New Bern was conservative and didn't want to change. Some changes needed to be, and they have taken place. I think one of the good things that has happened to our town, this is controversial because some old New Bernians don't agree

with this, was the second invasion. We had an invasion in the 1860's when New Bern fell to the Yankees in the Civil War or the War of Northern Aggression. We had another invasion in the eighties, retirees from the north and lots of other places. Not just from the north but from the east and midwest. This has been good for our town. They have brought a lot of changes. They are different people with different attitudes and different needs, and I think they have made us aware; THEY have made US, because I'm a Tarheel, not a native New Bernian; that things can be better or different for a better life for all of us. They have been a part of the yeast, not all of it, but a part of the yeast which has leavened the bread of New Bern, and I think in a wholesome way.

JP: Do you think generally that the older New Bern people feel good about this invasion?

Rev. Sharp: Some of them do and some of them don't. They have made a lot of difference in the churches as well as the town. They've made a lot of difference in Christ Church as in every other church. They brought new vitality and new life. There are many old timers who remember the church when it was staid and satisfied with the way things were who are excited about the new life, the new vigor. The others don't want any changes, you know, "What was good enough for my grandma, was good enough for me." We have those too. If somehow we can just accept each other and say your needs are different from mine and mine from yours, but we're all part of the same family of the community of New Bern or the community of the church. We're

different, but we're together.

JP: Do you feel that New Bern is a more vital town now?

Rev. Sharp: I don't think there's any doubt about it. The deterioration of downtown with the coming of the mall and all of that was frightening. There's the revitalization of downtown with the work of Swiss Bear and other people and the Committee of 100 and what they have done. I have not been involved in their work and know little about it, but I know they have had a lot to do with bringing in new business, new interest, and new industry. Those things have been very exciting.

JP: Do you feel good about the future?

Rev. Sharp: I feel good about the future. New Bern is not going to be the same as it was. In some ways, it's a lot better. We may have lost some things, but I feel good about New Bern. Let me tell you what one retiree who came in here from Chicago with his wife, delightful people, told me several years ago. He had been here a few years and he was dead earnest when he told me this, he said, "Ed, you know, we like New Bern and that's why we came here. All these new people coming here, I'm afraid they're gonna want to change this town."

Then he looked at me realizing what he said and he laughed and he said, "Ed, I'm one of those folks." (laughter) He said, "But I don't want to see it radically changed." You know, the pace of life and that sort of thing.

JP: Looking at things from a little different perspective, what have you and Virginia done in these thirty years to have fun in New

Bern?

Rev. Sharp: My family life has been a very quiet one, Joe Pat. I guess summer time, the beach. Virginia's folks own one of the old cottages, the old Blades cottages which you remember from your younger days, at Atlantic Beach. They've had that ever since we've been here. Our children in the summer time were practically raised at Atlantic Beach and they love that place. That was very important to our family and continues to be important to them. I don't play golf. I'm not a sportsman. I don't fish. I'm not a boater. I've been accused of being a workaholic and I cannot deny justification of that accusation. We have not taken big long trips because of the expense, you know, rearing a family and all of that. In later years, I have been involved in the education of children. One of the highlights of our social life has been three cruises that we have been on in the Caribbean. I love that kind of holiday. We had a trip to England. The church gave us a trip to England and one of the Caribbean cruises. The other two Caribbean cruises I served as Anglican chaplain on a Cunard ship and that was gratis, and that was great. Our family life has been rather quiet.

JP: That's fine. Ed, as a physician, of course I'm interested in the medical life of a community, of our community. Would you care to comment on medical care then and now and patient/doctor relationships then and now, or has there been any difference?

Rev. Sharp: There really hasn't been any difference for me. You have a personal banker, a personal physician, everything is



personal these days. My personal physician came to town about the same time I did and he has taken care of me through all of the years including a coronary accident some years ago. As far as my family and I are concerned, our medical care continues to be as good. It was excellent in the beginning. Needless to say, the medical community has tripled or more than tripled in the thirty years I've been here.

The hospital has been built since I've been here. Our second boy was born one week to the day after the hospital opened and he was born in the new hospital. We were afraid he was going to have to be born in St. Luke's and we weren't real excited about that, so it worked out all right. The medical groups have greatly expanded in numbers.

Some people complain that relationships in medicine, patient/doctor, are much more impersonal than they used to be. Because our own particular situation, I cannot say that is true.

JP: In your visits to other patients in the hospitals?

Rev. Sharp: I know one thing. We have so many more specialists in town than we did when I came. Most anything you need can be found here. I have great admiration for our medical community and for the hospital. I don't think there is another town of comparable size in North Carolina or perhaps in many states or any state, that offers the medical facilities and care that are to be found in New Bern.

JP: Well, I will buy that too. Ed, we haven't really talked a lot about your personal ministry in New Bern. I would just like to ask you if there are any aspects of that that you would like to speak to that we haven't addressed.

Rev. Sharp: The only thing I think I can say about my personal ministry is in my ministry when dealing with people. Of course that's what ministry is about. Immensely satisfying and gratifying are the people in my congregation. I'm sure they are not different from the people in every other congregation in town. They all come from the same community. They are very warm, responsive people and very accepting. Always, from day one, I have felt that I was an important person because of the position that I occupied in the lives of people.

I was allowed entry into relationships, and family relationships, that are denied anybody else in the community except perhaps physicians. They had a willingness to allow me to share in that. I cannot begin to describe how personally fulfilling and satisfying that that kind of acceptance is.

JP: Are there any particular achievements you recall?

Rev. Sharp: One of the things that I found about people in Christ Church, and I'm sure this could be said of every other New Bern congregation, in the church, we have had controversies on national levels and issues. The church's involvement in social issues, for example, we had some programs in the Episcopal church that were far ahead of most other national denominations. We made some grievous mistakes! Many of our people were very unhappy with this, and I was unhappy with some of it. Never once did our congregation or church as a body or the vestry pull back from the national church or from the diocese and say, "We're cutting our giving." There was a recognition of disagreement. Those folks up there; we always like

to talk about the people out there like Congress or what have you, who make mistakes, but it's our church and we hang in. They have had a willingness to do that. There were some other issues like ordination of women in our church. Never before in the kind of ministry we have has this happened, in Christendom, a priest, a woman being ordained to the priesthood was traumatic. There was a radical revision of the prayer book. The prayer book for Episcopalians is their identity.

We have no John Calvin, we have no Martin Luther, we have no John Wesley in the Episcopal church. We have no single person who kind of formulated a system of doctrine of faith. Our identity is that Book of Common Prayer. It contains our faith in a worship setting.

That was traumatic and painful! Episcopalians tend to be rather conservative and traditional and that was very painful. But we got through those times. We went through in Christ Church a lot of experimentation liturgically with the prayer book as it was in the process of revision. I found out that when you sit down with our people and explain what you're doing and why, this is the way things are going now, let's take a look at it and let's see how it goes, they'll do it. They'll do it as long as you're not driving them and beating them or throwing something at them and saying okay folks, this is what we gotta do now. If you explain what is happening, if you want to take a new path on some social issue or some program that is a little bit different, let's try it for a while, they are reasonable people and will follow; if, they are told, why and what and how. It's absolutely amazing. Our church is the leading parish in our whole diocese. This

did not happen overnight. But it was that kind of leadership in our church, the willingness to do some things that we had not done before, let's try it and see how it goes. A sense of loyalty to the church has made our particular parish stand out, and it's support of the national church and of the diocese, and our going out far beyond ourselves.

JP: Ed, can you think of any other things that we you would like to talk about?

Rev. Sharp: I can't think of anything else. I continue to be excited about New Bern and very grateful that I have lived almost half my life here. I would never have dreamed that I would live in any place so long as a clergyman. I never dreamed that I would be here this long. It's just one of those things that happened, and I'm very grateful that this is where I've been for these thirty years and that we raised our family here. Two of the children were born here and we had our oldest who was four and a half when we came. So, this is really the only home he's known. I have no regrets about my coming here.

JP: From my standpoint as a New Bernian who talks to a lot of other New Bernians and really knows pretty much what's going on, the community has been really happy that you've been here, you and your family. You are one of the most highly thought of people in this town and I know that. It's just great that we've been able to have this talk this morning and the Memories group appreciates this. It will help our story a great deal.

Rev. Sharp: I hope I've given you something. I know one thing, I have received as much as I've given.

JP: This has been a fine interview and it's given us a real insight into a lot of aspects of New Bern like we have not looked at before.

I thank you, and I want to tell you personally, it's meant a lot to me to talk to you.

Rev. Sharp: It's been a pleasure for me, Joe Pat.

END OF INTERVIEW