

Interview with Reverend Philip Blilie and Mrs. Stella Larson Carlson

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Interviewed by Calvin Gower and John LeDoux

Gower: This is an interview conducted by Calvin Gower and John Ledoux for the Central Minnesota Historical Center. Today is June twenty--

Ledoux: Eighth.

Gower: --eighth, 1978 and we're at the--

Blilie: Glendorado.

Gower: --Glendorado Lutheran Church?

Ledoux: That's the correct name.

Gower: That's the correct name?

Blilie: Yes.

Gower: And we're interviewing Reverend Philip, is it--?

Blilie: We say Blilie.

Gower: Blilie.

Blilie: It's a good Scandinavian name. There's a little significance if you pronounce it that way.

Gower: Oh. And it's B-L-I-L-I-E.

Blilie: Right.

Gower: Okay. Now, what we'd like to do is find out what we can about the history of this church and especially we'd like to find out about the ethnic part of the history of the church.

Ledoux: Should we start out first-of his personal background-and then go into the church?

Gower: Yeah. Sure. No. Yeah, that's what we should do probably. Why don't we, will you tell us a little about your own personal background, first where you were born and when you were born and how you went into the ministry and so forth?

Blilie: I was born in Fillmore County, Minnesota. My home town is Canton. People ask for directions I say, "Well, get over here on Highway 55," excuse me, "Highway 52 and follow it practically to the Iowa/Minnesota line and you'll go through my home town."

Gower: Did you say Canton?

Blilie: Canton.

Gower: C-A-N-T-O-N?

Blilie: Yes. It's about 20 miles from Decorah, Iowa. You may not have heard of it before but it's a college town.

Gower: Sure, Lutheran college.

Blilie: I grew up on the farm so I appreciate some of the problems of farmers. In my day, things of course were quite different. One of the things that is quite different is that people were able to make a living on 40 acres of land and they made a living.

Gower: But what year and day were you born?

Blilie: I was born in April 10, 1912.

Gower: April 10, 1912.

Blilie: My father was born in Norway and I suppose because he associated chiefly with people of that background he never spoke very good English. He could make himself understood. May be one of the interesting thing about Dad was that he never made up his mind to get married until he was 55.

Gower: What year did he come over to the United States?

Blilie: He was 13 and he had been born in 1854. That must have been about 1867 that he came on a sailboat with his parents, an older brother and a sister who may have been older or younger, I don't recall. But I know it was quite a journey because sailing that way, you know, you, they move with the wind.

Gower: Did they come to Minnesota directly?

Blilie: No, I think they came to Quebec, Canada and then somehow they got into Iowa. You see, many of the Scaninavians had located, that is Norwegians, had located in the Winneshiek County area of Iowa.

Gower: Is that the northeastern--?

Blilie: Northeast, right. And I don't know exactly how that happened Dad and his family got into Fillmore County but I think that he spent most of his time, most of his years there.

Gower: And he was a farmer?

Blilie: He was a farmer. His mother lived to be quite an old lady and I guess Dad and his mother continued together on the farm for quite a while, however, as she grew older there was some assistance from the outside and, ah, I mean, for housekeeping there were several people related to my dad, I guess.

Gower: Was that a factor, do you assume, in his not getting married until he was 55?

Blilie: Possibly, although I of course can't say that with any certainty. But I do know that Grandma died in 1902 and it was seven years later when Dad married the woman that became my mother. She was 21 years younger.

Gower: Twenty-one years younger.

Blilie: Mother had said to herself and to others that she was going to marry when she found a man who had a home she could stay put in one place. That's the way it turned out. It was a very ordinary, a very simple farm home. And as I said, I believe a small farm. But after she moved in there with Dad, that was 1909, she stayed until the day we carried her out to her resting place.

Gower: Was your mother from Iowa, also?

Blilie: Her parents came as newlyweds, or, well, perhaps not newlyweds but as a young, married couple from the same part of Norway as the, the same area from which my paternal grandparents came, namely Toten.

Gower: Toten, how is that spelled?

Blilie: T-O-T-E-N.

Gower: T-O-T-E-N.

Blilie: Her parents, her family, settled in the Decorah, Iowa area, in Winneshiek County. I think I have a chart that a long since departed uncle of mine made up back in 1902 in which he traces our family history back to pre-American Revolution days. I guess when it comes right down to it, my parents were very distantly, related. They weren't cousins or anything like that but you look back--

Gower: Oh, sure.

Blilie: --you'd see there's a common ancestry way back somewhere.

Gower: So you grew up there and you went to school--

Blilie: I went to school in Canton, Minnesota and after that I had a year in LaCrosse, Wisconsin in a business college. But then I came back to the farm and the couple years I guess it was, I went to work for an uncle of mine who was a master painter that is--

Gower: House painter?

Blilie: --house painting and that kind of thing. But then in '37 then my father died and Mother felt that since there were only two in her family, the two boys, two sons that we should continue with her on the farm and the fall after my father died Mother had the stroke which left her an invalid the rest of her day. So it was up to my brother and myself to take care of the little property, take care of her the rest of her days. Mother passed away in '43 in January and 11

months from the day of Mother's death we had my brother's funeral. He was a victim of a farm accident. You see, many of the farmers in that area were still farming with horses and my brother had the team that ran away and, I won't go into the details as to how it all happened but, anyway, he died as a result of this accident. Then I continued there for about three years I guess it was.

Gower: This was maybe 1947.

Blilie: Ah, '43 through '46 and then I decided I've had enough of this so I moved down to Decorah, Iowa and I had employment with the college, Lutheran, and mingling with students and teachers on the campus I got the hopes, crazy idea that I wanted to go to school.

Gower: Had you ever thought about going to school before that?

Blilie: That thought had entered my mind many years earlier but had always seemed an impossibility.

Gower: So you were about 34 years old?

Blilie: I was--

Gower: 35.

Blilie: Well, when I entered school then, that was the second semester of 1949, 1940..., let me see, 1948-1949 school year I entered I think at the beginning of the second semester that year. Knowing what I had in mind, the ministry--

Gower: 37 then?

Blilie: --and then I went on. Yeah, that's right. Not quite but I was 37, I was 37 in April and I began earlier in the winter.

Gower: December, I mean in January.

Blilie: January, February.

Ledoux: Was it there that you began thinking of going into the ministry then?

Blilie: I think that on the campus there mingling with a variety of people, students, teachers, faculty, you know. The Lord moves in mysterious ways his wonders to perform someone has said. I don't think that's a quote from the Bible but I really believe that. It seems like doors are opening for me to enter.

Gower: You had not thought about being a minister until maybe in the late 1940s?

Blilie: That's just about it, just about the truth.

Gower: Now, this is very interesting to me. What was the reaction of the other students towards you as an older student?

Blilie: Well, I was staying in a private home where they were renting rooms to some fellas. They all encouraged me. I remember going to the faculty to talk about this thing and I went to one who said, "You can serve God without being a minister." I went to another one whom I respect very highly, well, I respect the other one, too, for that matter. But I went to the college pastor and he gave me all kinds of encouragement. So then I went out to school and I continued during the regular school year, in the summer courses and fall in order to complete my studies there as early as possible, since I was already so old. And then I entered the seminary at St. Paul. In June of 1951 I went for a language course because Lutheran ministers are supposed to have Greek. So I went to take a summer course in Greek.

Gower: What is the seminary in St. Paul?

Blilie: Lutheran Theological, Como Avenue and--its next neighbor now to seminary of the LCA, which was called the Northwestern and presently they have one president serving both institutions. I just have an idea that I wanted--in time, there's going to be a wedding and they'll just be one seminary.

Gower: And so then you went through that seminary. When did you finish there?

Blilie: I finished there in '54. And it was while I was at the seminary that I met my wife. Do we dare to put this one in the interview? On a blind date.

Gower: That's fine. That's interesting. Was your wife a student at the--

Blilie: No. She was employed by General Mills. As a secretary.

Gower: Now, this, the Lutheran, is the Lutheran Church of America?

Blilie: No. The one I attended is what we call the American Lutheran Church.

Gower: Oh. The American Lutheran Church.

Blilie: Yeah. Ours is called The American Lutheran Church and the other one which is one of several Lutheran groups is called The Lutheran Church of America. You see what happened is, in the early days everyone had to have the gospel proclaimed in the language of their forbearers. To begin with you have the Norwegians and the Germans and the Swedes, etc. but later years of course this was no longer necessary, so, there were several mergers of churches, the particular group of which we belong merged three groups in 1917. All of them I believe of Norwegian background. And then in 1900, and, and then that group was called The Lutheran Church in America.

Gower: The Norwegian Lutheran Church in America.

Blilie: Because of the Norwegian background. And much of the preaching at that time continued to be in Norwegian. I remember in my home church, as far back as, it's like over 50 years ago, when we had mostly Norwegian services. I can still hear the honorable Pastor Rasmussen Announcing, “ _____ ”

(Spoke in Norwegian)

What that means in plain English is “God willing, we'll have services here in two weeks.”

Because see, this was still a horse and buggy days, pretty much and there were three congregations in the parish so he just couldn't make it every Sunday. Really it would be two Sundays.

LeDoux: And the Norwegian Lutheran Church then came into the fold in 1917. Is that correct?

Blilie: That was what the group of merge churches of 1917, became the Norwegian Lutheran Church. Well, then, in the middle 1940s I would say, Norwegian began to become a bad word because there were people who inter-marrying, they weren't always marrying Norwegians the way they used to. There were people who felt that that very word in our name was hindrance to the gospel because it was Norwegian and so there were people who lobbied to get rid of that word. So then after a while that was deleted and we were instead of the Norwegian Lutheran Church we were the Evangelical Lutheran Church.

Gower: Was the idea on this that if you changed the name you'd attract more people?

Blilie: Yes, I'm quite sure.

Gower: It wasn't that there was any feeling that there was some stigma because of Norwegian?

Blilie: No. I don't think any stigma but just a hindrance to the proclamation of the extension of gospel. Well, then in 1960 there was another merger and we of the Evangelical Lutheran Church and several other groups became what today we call the American Lutheran Church, including the old American Lutheran Church which was of German background. Some people in Princeton still call the Emmanuel Church the German Church because in the old days, the people there were predominantly German.

Gower: This is in Princeton?

Blilie: Princeton, in Mille Lacs, of course. So now for, since 1960, we have been a part of the American Lutheran Church and I don't know what'll happen next. There are those who would like to join the American Lutheran Church, The Lutheran Church of American and possibly The Missouri Synod and make us all one but I don't look for that in my lifetime. In fact, with things that are going on in the Missouri Synod, I doubt it will ever happen. Then of course we have little Lutheran groups just for example, well, because this is being recorded I'll try to be very cautious here as to what I say but there are those Lutheran groups who are aloof from the rest of us. They're just a little bit, maybe more conservative. They insist on agreement on every bit of doctrine, whereas in our synod we feel there is room for a little bit a variety in thinking on the less important stuff. Of course two things must be basic we believe: since we're all a sinful race we need Jesus Christ, a savior and in the second place that the scripture are the revealed word of God. On that there must be agreement but in some lesser things we feel there's room for a variety of thinking but there are several groups who say, "No, you've got to agree with us."

Gower: You've got to agree on all of the details?

Blilie: Uh, huh. All of the details.

LeDoux: What is the basic difference between, just briefly, between the LCA and ALC? Is it similar? Is it--theological differences it's based on?

Blilie: I really can't answer your question. I think that we're so much alike that, it's just that we're two groups. I guess--

Gower: This is the ALC and the LCA?

Blilie: Uh huh.

Gower: Now, you also mentioned the Missouri Synod.

Blilie: Yeah. The Missouri Synod is more conservative. They're groups which feels I guess--we do have closer fellowship with Lutheran Church Missouri Synod than we did. But it sort of, what's the term, fellowship in, I forgot the word. But there's several things they don't like about us. One if that we've decided that it's okay to ordain women, to the ministry. They say that the scripture forbids that.

LeDoux: Now, the Missouri Synod says this?

Gower: Could I ask a question on that? If the Bible is revealed, is that what you said?

Blilie: Yes.

Gower: Now, in their version of the Bible says that women cannot be ordained. Is that, how's that fit in with it being a matter of the revealed word?

Blilie: You see, the Lutheran principle of Bible interpretation is that, it took it scripture by scripture. In other words, don't do as certain of the sects do, take an obscure passage out of the new, Old Testament, whatever it might be and dwell on that as if there weren't another word in

whole book about it. And you know if you do that you can prove that when you die and you're buried you're just as dead as your pet dog. And that's all there's to it. And if you read one obscure passage I don't know how it crept into the scripture and I don't even know where it is now but--

Gower: Could we get something like that out of the Bible, though?

Blilie: Yeah. You pick it out of context, really, what it is. If you're going to interpret scripture correctly, we believe that you need to notice what comes before, what comes after. In other words, interpret it in context and also see what the rest of scripture has to say about it. Now, I don't know if I answered your question, sir?

Gower: Would the Missouri Synod people, their interpretation some way or another says women can't be ordained?

Blilie: Oh yes. Well, I think one of the passage we look to, perhaps more than the others is one that says something like this, that in Christ there is no male or female, we're all one. Whereas the Missouri probably looks at one woman shall not, I've forgotten the word but maybe exercise authority over the man. And of course, whether male or female, the pope is supposed to speak with authority. So they say this is on scripture on ordained women. Although I'm ALC I'm a little inclined in that direction myself. I really don't think we should have women preachers.

Gower: But your synod says that it's okay?

Blilie: Yes. And then there are some matters in regard to literal interpretation to scripture, too. I'm not a very good theologian, so I don't know that I want to go into this but I'm going to cite one example. In the book of Genesis, this is probably familiar to you, it says that God created

the, well, well, I insist on that in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. I just couldn't possibly believe that all the wonderful things that I see, both when I look up and I look down, had just happened. I believe that there's a mighty hand behind all this. But this scripture in Genesis I ... goes on to say that the first day God created and the second day God created and so forth. Well, to many of us day means, as it often times does in the scripture, a period of time. Not a 24 hour day necessarily. But, it seems the bishop, the head bishop of Lutheran Church Missouri Synod insists that this is a 24 hour day.

Gower: So that's--

Blilie: Uh huh.

Gower: Now you're American Lutheran Church. Do you think that it was still primarily people of Norwegian descent or not?

Blilie: Perhaps, primarily but we certainly have people of almost every other background, including a few black. I remember meeting in South Dakota, a man whose name is Nelson Trout. He's a black man, I think, who grew up as a Baptist and I don't know how it happened that he chose to become a Lutheran but he became a Lutheran pastor. I wonder if he isn't serving a specialize ministry of some sort right now, instead of a parish. I'm not positive about that. We have people sometimes with definitely Irish background. You can tell by some of the names. We probably primarily people of Scandinavian extraction but there's no doubt we have many, many others.

Gower: It's really changed drastically in that in the earlier Norwegian church.

Blilie: Yeah.

LeDoux: When the Norwegian was dropped from the title of the Lutheran church, it was in the 40s you say?

Blilie: Yes. That was in the late 1940s.

LeDoux: Was that, did that have anything to do with the concept among some immigrant peoples that you had to Americanize and play down the ethnic portion of the background? Is that an attempt to kind of play down and Americanize the church?

Blilie: That I can't say, John. But I can tell you this that there were people who were very unhappy because that word Norwegian was dropped. My father had a cousin who said if that's that they're going to do to us, said they're not going to get my support.

Gower: Did he drop out of the church?

Blilie: Well, he didn't drop out but I suppose that maybe some of his contributions might have dropped. That I don't know but I remember very definitely he was unhappy about this. We... I know there were people who felt that since they were now naturalized Americans, why bother with anything that's Norwegian. This is one of the mistakes that I feel many people did. Now I had what I consider an advantage. I mention that my father never spoke very good English and since my mother was of Norwegian extraction and came from family who probably spoke Norwegian all the time at home, I heard a lot of Norwegian. And as a consequence I learned it and I can still manage. I don't have much of a vocabulary because I never use it. But I have some Norwegian books here and I can sit down and read and know what it's all about. I feel that people who came here with the knowledge of the Norwegian or some other foreign language but who acquired a working knowledge of vernacular, that they should have continued speaking both and their children would have had the advantage of learning a language the natural way. We pay

big money to learn language out of a book and to attend language courses but the best way to just hear it spoken in everyday conversation. Our missionaries abroad come home and tell us how their kids picked it up mingling with the native children and the parents struggle the rest of their lives perhaps to acquire adequacy in Japanese or Spanish or whatever it might be. I remember being a little bit ashamed of my folks standing in a public place and talking Norwegian. But having grown up a little bit I think it's a wonderful thing.

Gower: Sure. No, that was a really bad mistake in our country.

Blilie: I think so. And it has been helpful to me occasionally. Not much recently. But I remember in the early days of my ministry now which go back into the '50s, ministering to some older folks who really appreciated having the scripture read to them in Norwegian. I remember a blind woman who lived in my first parish, who lived alone. I read the scriptures to her in Norwegian and the amazing thing about her was not only how she manage around her apartment as a blind woman but how when I read scripture in Norwegian she read it from rote, from memory, right along with me. She had learned a lot of scripture as youngster, very likely in Norway.

Gower: And much of that she could remember right as you went along.

Blilie: Yes. I'm still trying to hammer it into the minds and hearts of the kids I work with that it's important to memorize scripture but there isn't a lot of memorizing done now days.

Gower: It's sort of out of style.

Blilie: It's sort of out of style but I hope it returns. Like some of the other good old things, it's so important.

Gower: Now you finished the seminary in 1954.

Blilie: Right.

Gower: So you were ordained then.

Blilie: I was ordained and married all about the same time, in '54. Then we went, my wife and I went to Summit, South Dakota where we served a four-point parish.

Gower: Where is Summit, South Dakota?

Blilie: Do you know where Aberdeen is?

Gower: Yes.

Blilie: Well, you go out on Highway 12 and about 70 miles I think, from Aberdeen that is, in that direction.

Gower: Oh, east.

Blilie: East. There's a little town at the summit, as-- Do you know where Ortonville is?

Gower: Yes.

Blilie: Well, it's between Ortonville--let's see. Summit is about 40 miles I think, west of Ortonville. After you get to Milbank you kind of, very gradually keeping climbing to the summit. It's the high point.

Gower: And you have a four-point church. That's the expression that you used, four-point. That means you have four different churches?

Blilie: When I arrived there they were still having services every other Sunday in each of the churches. And I said to myself, "In this day and age." So, after a while we worked out a schedule

whereby we had three services every Sunday. But there was one year that I had four. But that was too much. And now days it seems like people don't like to go to church in the afternoon and of course, if we were to have four services you know one would have to be in the afternoon. We'd have the first one-- See, we lived in Summit and one of the congregations was in Summit, I would go one direction for an early service and then come back to Summit and then move on to the other one. Well, I guess it was just the opposite. I usually had the early service at the church in the east in a little place called Marvin and then I'd come back to Summit and then I'd go either to Leganon and Zion. Lebanon was out in the country and Zion was at Ortman which is also on Highway 12.

Gower: And all of these churches were in the American Lutheran.

Blilie: Right.

Gower: Synod.

Blilie: And I think we could say that they were all pretty much Scandinavian folks to begin with, although it doesn't take me long to think of people who were definitely of another background.

Gower: But in mid and late 1950s, many of them were still of Scandinavian descent.

Blilie: Uh huh. Oh, there were others.

Gower: How long did you stay at Summit?

LeDoux: Okay, I think when we left of you were--

Blilie: We'd just moved to Oldham.

LeDoux: You were telling us how many you were at Summit. Now, was it five and one-half years?

Blilie: Yes.

LeDoux: Okay.

Gower: Then you moved to Oldham, that's O-L-D-H-A-M.

Blilie: Once in a while we'd find somebody who want to spell it two words. But it's Oldham. How did I hear that pronounced? I think the really correct pronunciation is Oldham, but it seems everybody say Oldham. But, we came there in 1960 and then we were there for about ten and half years before being called here.

Gower: This is the public school?

Blilie: The public school.

LeDoux: At Oldham, what was the ethnic population there predominantly? Was that Norwegian also?

Blilie: Well, in Oldham Lutheran Church I think we were pretty much Scandinavians, Norwegians and Danes. Oh yeah. We had a Swede or two also. They actually came out of the I think they called it the Swedish Covenant Church but they married Lutheran girls so they became some of the fine members of the Lutheran Congregation. But they were chiefly Norwegians and Danes and some Swedes and of course Germans. We had for example, some people by the name of Schwartz, definitely German. I could still almost hear the gentleman rolling his r's. He had a rather heavy German accent.

Gower: You came over here in 1971.

Blilie: 1971.

Gower: 1971.

Blilie: Uh huh.

Gower: And this church is of Norwegian background and Danish? Somewhere we thought we read Norwegian Danish.

Blilie: Well, let me see what it says here. I seem to recall that chiefly Norwegian here.

Gower: I don't know where we fit that in.

LeDoux: It could have been Santiago.

Gower: Oh, that might be.

Blilie: In this history which was compiled, well, I don't know if it was compiled, I think the first part was compiled much earlier. But anyway, it was included in the centennial booklet and by the way you may have one of these because we have quantities of these left over. But this is what it says here. The first Scandinavian visitors in the vicinity are believed to be men who fled the Indian uprising in Iowa.

Gower: The Indian uprising in Iowa.

Blilie: Yes. In 1862 and '63 who returned soon after the uprising was quelled. "The first Scandinavian settlers however did not arrive before 1867. This was in the wilderness and on the very frontier of settlement. Other hardly pioneers joined the first and the settlement grew and

flourished.” And these are names I see mentioned which are definitely Scandinavian, they’re very likely Norwegian. Thompson, Solberg, Engebretson, Abrahamson, Erickson, Nielsen, Olesen, spelled O-L-E-S-E-N, Johnson, Lindem, Tellefson. Well, that seems to point to the fact that they were pretty much Norwegian.

Gower: What about your congregation now? Does it seem to be with names that are Scandinavian pretty much?

Blilie: Pretty much Scandinavian. Oh, we have some German. I can think of several German extraction.

Gower: Do you have any Polish people?

Blilie: No. I don’t believe there’s anyone here who’s Polish, except, I’ll have to tell you what experience yesterday or the day before at the St. Cloud Hospital. One of our good women from the other congregation in Mille Lacs County has been hospitalized and she needed blood transfusion and apparently she heard that this came from a Polish donor. So she was asking me if they’d let her back in church which is Norwegian and Swedish since she now has Polis blood in her veins. I said she’d be very welcome.

Gower: This church was founded in 1873? That’s what it says on there.

Blilie: 1873 was when the congregation was founded.

Gower: Now, before had they been meeting in Sunday school or something like that? That’s the pattern that we found in a number of these churches.

Blilie: Well, here’s another paragraph that might answer that. “Being accustomed as Lutherans to regular and frequent church services and religious instructions in Norway, the elder pioneers

gave early attention to the spiritual needs of themselves and their children. Indeed as early as 1870 definite and serious consideration was given to calling a pastor, forming a congregation and building a church. However, no pastor seems to have visited the settlement prior to 1872 and '73 when Rev. Vickre came and held two services at the home of Ole Johnson.” So the very first services were in homes.

Gower: Yeah, that sounds like the pattern.

Blilie: But the history of the congregation does not properly begin before the Rev. H.G Stub accepted to call to organize and serve the congregation. His first service was held at the home of Ole Engegretson in January 12, 1874. And it goes to say, “Although plans to build a church were made as early as 1870, actual construction was not begun until 1879.”

Gower: Oh, 1879.

Blilie: Yes.

Gower: They were meeting in homes all that time with the minister?

Blilie: But in 1880 then there was a new log church built and dedicated out here, I suppose probably toward the other end of the cemetery.

Gower: Oh, but right in the same area here.

Blilie: Uh huh. In fact I have seen pictures of the old log church. Let me see. We're rather limited here.

Gower: Do you have some pictures of the old log church or do some of the members of your congregation?

Blilie: I suppose members of the congregation have them.

Gower: That would be nice to get--

Blilie: There's no picture-- I don't believe that I have anything here in the study, of that sort.

Gower: That would be nice to--

Blilie: But I'm positive that, the lady whom you'll probably all be seeing shortly, I'm sure she might have some pictures.

Gower: This is the woman up in Princeton?

Blilie: No, she's the woman who lives over here about a mile or so away. And I called her yesterday and told her that you were--

Gower: Oh, fine. Did you say any particular time that we'd be here?

Blilie: Oh, I said maybe around 10:30 or something--

Gower: Oh, so we're not running, we're running okay here, then.

Blilie: She was going to be home all day today so. The elderly woman in Princeton, she's very likely home but I think you'd want to call her. Maybe, after you talk with Mrs. Carlson maybe you might get her opinion as you whether it would be worth your while to going to Princeton and see this memorable woman.

Gower: That's fine, sure. Okay, now this church was the, I'm sure then that the sermons were in Norwegian. Is that correct?

Blilie: Oh yeah, I'm very certain that they-- I'm absolutely sure of that because see when the instruction of the young was Norwegian--

Gower: So that's another reason why it's quite certain that the members of the congregation must have been Norwegian. Completely probably.

LeDoux: Now this log structure was first church that was begun in 1879?

Blilie: Yes. I believe that's what we read here, that it was--

LeDoux: When was this structure out here begun then?

Blilie: Well, now we're going to have to look further here to see if we can find something about that because I'm not very good at remembering some of these things. A new and larger, well, before we move on to that here this might be of some interest to you. This was not always called The Glendorado Lutheran Church. The name given to the new congregation was the Santiago Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Congregation. The word Santiago has reference to the nearest post office at that time.

Gower: I was going to say, was there a Glendorado even? There may not have been that community at that time. At least it didn't have a post office.

Blilie: They didn't have a post office and of course they never had a post office.

Gower: Oh, they never had a post office.

Blilie: Now, we're now on Princeton route.

Gower: Oh, I see. Sure, so that--

Blilie: But I can't tell you when Glendorado began, I mean the little village over here. I'm sure Mrs. Carlton could tell you that because her parents, you know, lived in the community a long, long time. I don't recall whether they were born here or not. They probably weren't but her mother lived to be about 96 or so, however the last years she wasn't able to function but I'm sure Stella could tell you a great deal about that. But in answer to your question here. Well, another word about this. The Santiago was chosen because of the post office there. In 1926 the name was changed to the Glendorado Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Congregation. The log church torn down many years ago served as a meeting place for about 15 years when it became too small for the growing congregation. A new and larger church was needed and plans for the present structure were adopted in 1893 and the corner stone was laid in June 19-- excuse me, 1893. Services were held in the uncompleted church during 1893-96. And then the church was dedicated in August of 1897. The church building cost, would you like to venture a guess?

Gower: \$5,000.

Blilie: No, sir. 3,500.

Gower: 3,500. Fantastic.

Blilie: About a third, oh, I don't dare say. I forgot what this building cost.

Gower: Now, was the church building, any part of your church building here that was that part over there?

Blilie: What they put up of 3,500 was everything on the other side of this new education building. I know there are churches where they build without a basement and added that later but the basement and everything, I'm quite positive were constructed at one time here.

Gower: Can I ask another question about those early years? Is it your impression that this was a church that stemmed from the Norwegian Lutheran Church over in Norway?

Blilie: Very likely because there's H.G. Stub whom, who's mentioned as the pastor who accepted to call to organize or to serve, was very definitely pastor from the Norwegian State Church in Norway.

Gower: Oh, I see, sure. So you wouldn't have a tie-in with this development of like say The American Lutheran until many years later.

Blilie: Many years later.

Gower: Sure, right. John, what did you want to--?

LeDoux: I wanted to clarify possibly the series of name changes. Now, what was the name of the church when it began here? Was it the same--?

Blilie: When it began here it was the Santiago, and incidentally, in regard to that word Santiago, you see when we were called here, I simply received a letter of call. No one came to see me or hear me or anything. And when we saw Glendorado Santiago in the correspondence, we at once began to say Glendorado and Santiago.

LeDoux: Uh hum. That's what I was going to say.

Blilie: I'm surprised that being Scandinavians here that they didn't say Glendorado and Santiago because in Norwegian a is a. The first letter of the alphabet is A and it's not anything else, ever. But, nevertheless, when we came here we realized we were mispronouncing and its Glendorado and Santiago. But the first official name was the Santiago Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran

Congregation and then in '26 it was changed to the Glendorado Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Congregation.

LeDoux: And after that what changes, in '40s you said--

Blilie: And then in the '40s I suppose along with what the synod did, very likely here they deleted Norwegian.

LeDoux: So it is Glendorado Evangelical Lutheran Church?

Blilie: Well, today we don't even-- I have a constitution here some place. Open my file and pull out something here. I don't think the word Evangelical is, on this material here so--

Gower: In the 1940s it still is called--

Blilie: No, ah, here is a copy of the current constitution, revised, and it simply says Constitution of Glendorado Lutheran Church.

LeDoux: I was wondering, in the '40s, until like the '60s, it was still called Evangelical, was that word even in there? I'm curious.

Blilie: Well, I can't answer your question. I don't know that the-- let's see. We'll turn a few pages and see if there's anything official.

Gower: Maybe it just gradually happened, they changed, dropped the Evangelical part.

Blilie: Yeah, just dropped along with the Norwegian, I don't know.

Gower: Was the, ah, how does the congregation, do you have any idea about the figures of the members of the congregation, how many people they had there throughout the years? Has it held its membership quite well throughout the years or has there been a decline or dramatic increase?

Blilie: There is a decline, there was a decline many, many years ago about which I believe Mrs. Carlson could tell you.

Gower: Fine. Fine.

Blilie: Something happened so that I understand it, a goodly portion of the congregation pulled out. Now, in the 1870s perhaps it was, there was a split in the Norwegian Lutheran Church in America, I think that's what it was called at that time, over doctrine. This is quite a subject but what the whole thing was all about was that were called predestination. In other words, there were some people who very definitely reading the scriptures came to the conclusion that God in his wisdom had decreed that certain people are after this life bound for heaven and others bound for that place we don't like to talk about. Which is terrible doctrine.

Gower: This is the Presbyterian thing. But it was also over here in the Lutheran church.

Blilie: Yeah, It certainly was. And this split congregation.

Gower: Was this a very widespread belief among many Lutherans?

Blilie: Yes. I think it was.

Gower: Now, is that a belief among present day Lutherans?

Blilie: I doubt it very much.

Gower: Yeah, I wouldn't-- I hadn't heard very much.

Blilie: But I don't think that was a factor in the division here. But as I say I think Mrs. Carlson could tell you more about that. But there was a good deal number that pulled out and I understand that many of them are members of the congregation which has a church just about straight south of here as the crow flies which is a member of another very small synod.

LeDoux: What town is it? What church is--?

Blilie: As to what year it is?

LeDoux: No, what church?

Blilie: Oh, what church.

LeDoux: What town?

Blilie: The church is Our Savior, it's called Our Savior Lutheran Church and it belongs to a very small synod called the Evangelical Lutheran Synod and about all I can tell you about them is that at the time of the merger of 1917 there were those people who disapproved of their merger. They were people who had been members of the former Norwegian Synod. They would not go along with the merger. And so they established their own synod and if I'm not altogether misinformed or may have forgotten, that is the beginning of what they call the Evangelical Lutheran Synod. Some people think that the church down here belongs to Missouri Synod which has about, I think about, I think about 50 congregations. It's a very small group anyways. But I don't think that was the factor that led to a good number of people pulling out of Glendorado.

Gower: What do you think the factor was?

Blilie: I'd rather that Mrs. Carlson would, if you'd talk to her.

Gower: Okay. Sure.

Blilie: Because, while I've heard several things I'd rather that she talks about it.

Gower: Okay, fine. So what was the size of this congregation from here and there do you think?

Blilie: I don't see anything mentioned--

Gower: Maybe Mrs. Carlson--

Blilie: --in the history about the--

Gower: What's the size of your congregation now?

Blilie: Well, right now I can tell you by looking in this book because again I say, I'm not much good at remembering figures. At the beginning of this year in Glendorado we had 277 baptized members. That's children and adults and everybody. And then we had 215 confirmed members. Then after confirmation we consider everybody 15 years and up as being adults, even have the right to vote at business meetings.

Gower: This is 215 who would be over 15, 15 and over?

Blilie: Yes. So we're not a growing congregation, numerically.

Gower: Has thus changed much since when you came here? Has it declined in numbers any?

Blilie: I think I would have to say that I believe that it has declined a little bit because it's a rare thing to be able to bring anybody in. Now, when we had T "73, that's a movement throughout all of Christendom I guess here in the state, we took a survey of membership of the non-membership of people all over the area here and we gained, I recall we gained one family as a

result of that. Every once in a while we have to transfer somebody out because people move out of the city so numerically we aren't growing. Now, nearby you see people are moving in from the city or, well, Princeton itself is growing. You go down to Zimmerman and you find there that the Lutheran Church which belongs to the same synod as we do, who recently built a new church, are in the midst of planning for expansion of their physical facilities because people are moving into Zimmerman. And the same thing in Elk River, a little bit closer to the city. Well, maybe you drive I don't know where, you probably take Interstate 94 when you go to Minneapolis, and St. Paul but coming from here we go down to interstate then to the city. Well, it's just like there's a new village or a new city over there south of Elk River. So they not only have a problem finding adequate, providing adequate, space for kids in school but I think it's probably getting to the point where the Lutheran Church there too is finding that their membership is growing. But out here we're sort of stuck where we are. Whenever I hear of new people coming, there are some that move in you know, naturally we go and visit them but invariably they're something else. They say they are. Some of them don't go to church.

Gower: Is your congregation, is pretty much from farms?

Blilie: Beg your pardon?

Gower: Pretty much farmers and wives and children.

Blilie: This one is--isn't. When I say that we have people here who are engaged in farming, in dairy but I look in that direction and I can think immediately of a farm where the wife does most of the farming, the husband has a job in St. Cloud. I can think of another fine family over in that direction, I guess who's farming mostly hobby is farming, although he raises a number of hogs. But he's a barber. I can think of somebody up in that direction. They don't do much farming but

they're a little out in the country there and they're clearing a little bit of land. He's on the police force in Minneapolis. Some others up on that end of the congregation are full time farmers. But as I look farther down the road I can think of a fine couple. She works in the welfare office of the courthouse in Foley. He until very recently worked for ah, can't think of who, down the line. I think something that involves animals the feed and so forth. The Trina people or something down the line. This on 95 out here, well out here there's a fulltime farmer. Full-time farmer and then there's folks are something else. And then there's a retired couple, somebody farms their land. Farther down the road somebody who, some who are members here. They have little land but I'm sure they don't work it, they both have jobs. She's a schoolteache and he's something else. And I can think of elsewhere. They live on a farm but they're both employed elsewhere I can think south of Glendorado, a farmer. Yeah, he's full time. Works a lot of land. Looking in another direction, dairy farmer. Well, there are people who aren't farmers and people who are farmers. There are people who live on a farm, have some land, somebody else works it but they work elsewhere. And then we have a number of retired people who live in Princeton. They come out here very regularly.

Gower: They were members of your church but they retired into Princeton, and they remain members of your church?

Blilie: Uh huh. The chairman of the congregation right now works at the hospital at Princeton. I think he's an electrician, handyman and everything else. Probably handyman. He's the chairman but lives in Princeton, works in Princeton. And we have several widows who grew up out here. Their heart is in Glendorado where their physical being lives in Princeton but when they have an opportunity they come up here including the elderly woman of whom I spoken. She still drives her own car. She comes out here for a while after he retired. They grew up in this

community. They farmed but they're retired and living in Princeton. Retired people or people who work in the city or in town, people who farm, people who do a little hobby farming.

LeDoux: You mention that this is predominantly and possibly an older people's congregation as far as age. Do you see that as a problem to-like-rural churches' survival for the future? It almost in some churches seems to depend on whether new settlers are coming in.

Blilie: I can't help but feel it's a problem the old must die and young may die and young people just aren't staying. Oh, there are very few exceptions. When I talk with the kids I find there are those that like the farm. Right now I can think of a young man who's had one year in college but he's doing a lot of farming for someone who isn't doing their farming any more. He's very likely working there this summer full time. I don't think he's going to school this summer. I haven't seen him for some time because he's one of those you don't see in the church very often. But I think that it's kind of a problem because the young folks just don't generally stay on the farm.

Gower: Do you think that you might have some expansion of the population, say from like St. Cloud out into this area eventually and then maybe your church membership would pick up? You know, people coming out here to live and then work in St. Cloud and so on.

Blilie: Well, I notice that people in St. Cloud are moving out. They seem to like that fresh air out in the country or the scenery or something. But as far as coming this far--

Gower: This is quite a way.

Blilie: --I kind of doubt it. I kind of doubt it because right now as far as members of the congregation are concerned it's only about four miles out here to Mossman's and Hoplan's and they're as far out as anyone lives on Highway 95 in that direction.

Gower: Now you've got the church in Princeton which is in the same synod?

Blilie: Yes.

Gower: And so if this church got real small then there might be some pressure to have people go into that church. I'm talking about some years hence.

Blilie: Well, that's possible. However, I'm sure this congregation will continue here long as it's here in the town.

Gower: Sure. It sounds as if it's doing quite well if it has 215 people over 15 years.

Blilie: My other congregation in Mille Lacs you see is smaller than this one. The baptized membership there is only 180, approximately, and the adult membership only 136. Not a hundred less than but there's quite a few left.

LeDoux: Now this is the church?

Blilie: That's called Good Shepherd. It's a merger of two...right on the curve there on the left.

Gower: Really, isn't it far then.

Blilie: No, it isn't. It's only 10 miles out.

Gower: I see.

LeDoux: So, just to make sure we have it on the tape then, its north of Long, and a town called Long Siding.

Blilie: Its west of Long, the Good Shepherd Church is west of Long Siding, about three miles I guess. Coming from this direction you would go to the junction of 95 and come and Mille Lacs

County 5 and go north to, something like three, four miles in that direction but the total is the 10 miles from here.

Gower: How would you compare this church with your churches at Summit and Oldham?

Would you think this is a stronger church?

Blilie: Well, that's a little bit difficult to answer, in some ways I would say Oldham was stronger but I would certainly qualify that. I think we have some strengths here.

Gower: Are they somewhat similar? Do you find similarities to them? Because of these Scandinavian people at least some are Scandinavian.

Blilie: Somewhat similar, yes. I think one of the similarities that we find whether it's Summit or Oldham or Glendorado or Good Shepherd or almost any other is that church attendance could do better. And also the tendency that you find often times among the younger folks to, well, how do we put this? To drop out to some extent.

Gower: Oh, when they are younger but they might return?

Blilie: That happens. Sometimes we find that when they marry and they have children and it's time for them to begin Sunday school. That does something.

Gower: What the, incidentally I find this is not an unusual situation in all churches. That sometimes the younger people will drop out, some of them will drop out. But what happens now? You said non-attendance of church. These people will go through. They'll be confirmed and so on but then they might not attend the church too much. Is that what you're saying? Oh, but they are members and are confirmed and so on.

Blilie: But I think, Cal, I believe you said that was your name--

Gower: Right, right.

Blilie: --that a lot of that depends on the home. You know I'll never forget when I lived in the one in the South Dakota town. There was a youngster, a very fine youngster and since we keep the newspaper from there we kind of followed what's been happening since. He's a college graduate and married and a father. I think he's a teacher. I remember after confirmation his mother told me that she wished for him to continue coming to church and to young peoples' Bible study group. And what Steve answered was, "Why should I go, Dad doesn't." So I think that a great deal of this depends on the home attitude. Where you have a family which is always in church, well, it doesn't guarantee that you're going to have the kids coming. Except maybe where they have a policy in one home and I won't say where, while you live under our roof you do what we do. In other words, we go to church regularly on Sunday- you go to church regularly on Sunday. Now, I don't know if that's a good or bad. I think that probably you can look at it both ways. But then I say again, I think a home influence makes so much difference.

Gower: John, you've got anything else here?

LeDoux: No, I haven't got any questions.

Gower: We really should be--

LeDoux: Do you have anything you wish to add that we haven't brought up?

Blilie: Well, maybe we could sum it up with I hope I can cite this correctly from the Scripture. You know, what we have said here indicates that we have a lot of faithful people. A lot of people who take their church membership seriously, who participate in every possible way and then you have some of the other kind. As I recall it, the scripture says that, "While we may be unfaithful,

God is always faithful.” This is real blessing to a pastor because you know there are those time when we ask ourselves, “Is anything being accomplished?” (Telephone rings) (Referring to upcoming interviews with Mrs. Carlson) I’m sure she’s not sitting there and worrying about- “Well, now they get here this minute?”

Gower: She just lives short distance.

Blilie: Yeah. Let me talk about how pastors, teachers could become a little discouraged sometimes. Wondering, is anything happening you know, like- I assume that, you’re married men both of you?

LeDoux: No, I’m not.

Blilie: You are?

Gower: Yes.

Blilie: Do you have children?

Gower: I have a stepson.

Blilie: You have a stepson. Well, regardless. You know, sometimes bringing up a family. You like to see the fruit of your ministry as parents immediately. But you don’t. Well, it’s the same way in the ministry. That’s why I say I’m glad there’s a promise in the book of Isaiah that from the Lord that says, “My word shall not return void but shall accomplish its purpose.” Now, maybe in my lifetime or my stay here, I don’t see it but something’s going to happen because we’re proclaiming gospel. So I kind of, I have this motto, “Keep on keeping on.”

Gower: “Keep on keeping on.” That’s good. Incidentally, you have some children?

Blilie: No, we don't have children. When we were married we knew that we would never have our own. We looked into adoption but maybe we should have looked into adoption immediately. Because you see at the time we were married I was 42 and my wife was, she's seven years younger. So when we stepped into an office to talk about this, you know, they gave us the impression, what are you old people doing here, talking about adoption. Well, I think the regulations have changed, a little bit for the good, although I can see good reason for being concerned about age. Because, as I mentioned, my father was 55 when he got married. When I was born he was almost 58. When I was 12 he was 70. He was very literally the old man in my life.

Gower: Sure, more like your grandfather.

Blilie: And while me, as I grow older, I respect him more and more, there was an age barrier. Now, I think there was any doubt about it. Some say that I don't do, maybe that other men do, probably because Dad was older, was more conservative and afraid to let kids try this and that and it's just the natural part of being older. So I can appreciate that policy that they had about older people adopting older children if they were available. Well, we did have a youngster in our home in Oldham for one summer but he was a child, a child with problems, some definite problems stemming from his background, the fact that he had been tossed around and this and that and other things. And I think probably we just didn't know how to handle that, you know, situation. So while he might, I'm not sure whether Pat would have been available for adoption later on or not, I think maybe he wouldn't have. We had him as a foster child and I think he would have had to continue as a foster child because I believe that one parent had not consented to his being adopted by anyone and I believe that proved part of that problem. But any way, he returned to that home where he was staying in Mitchell. But, gentlemen, if you have another

minute I'm going to have to tell you something interesting which probably ties in with "Keep on keeping on" and "my words shall not return void" and so forth. When we were in Oldham about a week ago I stopped in the bank to cash a cashier's or a traveler's check and the young lady who was at the desk during hours told me that at a bankers meeting I believe in Aberdeen, she met a certain young man who asked if, where certain people were still living, if they were still in Oldham because he spent a summer with them. And it possibly, cannot possibly be anyone but this young man. And something wonderful has happened that--since we knew him apparently he, well--I don't know but maybe he did find a foster home where they knew just how to handle him. Something marvelous has happened because it sounds as if he made his place in the world and he's still wondering about us. Maybe we did teach him something that helped him a little bit although we didn't feel that we did.

Gower: Yeah, okay.

Blilie: I told you that you may have one of these (referring to the church history booklet) and I mean it. In fact you can both have one if you like because we have quantities of them. You know, you celebrate a centennial of-prepare for, well, it's kind of like a wedding. You buy a lot of gifts and they don't all come. If you'd like one too, John.

LeDoux: Well, let me see. We have one at the Center now. And we might like an extra copy, so that makes two. That would be fine.

Blilie: Oh, that's true.

Gower: Another one. That would be fine. Sure.