

Bettye Quinn

David Crosby: Again this is David Crosby and I am at Belhaven University to interview Bettye Quinn about her connections with Wells Methodist Church as part of an oral history project. Bettye let me ask you once again, do I have your permission to conduct this interview?

Bettye Quinn: You do.

Crosby: Thank you. You have been a resident of Jackson since 1935.

Quinn: That's right.

Crosby: I was wondering in terms of religion did you grow up as a Methodist.

Quinn: My family was always Methodist. The first ten years of my life I went to a Presbyterian church because we lived next door to it.

Crosby: Ok.

Quinn: On South State Street but the Methodist church was the first church I joined.

Crosby: And how old were you when you joined?

Quinn: I was 12 when I joined Wells.

Crosby: Can you give us a year for that?

Quinn: Yes, 1947.

Crosby: 1947.

Quinn: I was 12. I went to Wells when I was 10 and wanted to join the church then but my Mother felt that children shouldn't join the church until they were 12 because that's how old Jesus was when he went to the temple. She thought that was the appropriate age for children to join the church.

Crosby: And did the rest of your family join the same church or was this an individual decision on your part?

Quinn: Well they all eventually joined Wells too. My parents had been members of a Methodist church in Simpson County you know before they came to Jackson but eventually everybody joined Wells.

Crosby: And was there anything in particular that attracted you to Wells?

Quinn: Well I was a little girl you know just 10 and one of my little friends invited me to come to her Sunday school and I went and I felt it was such a friendly church that I continued going there. My family was real happy because it was a Methodist church. They had traditionally been Methodist. We had just moved to that street you know when I was 10.

Crosby: And as you grew older were there other things about the church that began to appeal to you?

Quinn: Well we had a real great preacher in my youth growing up. His name was Bob Case and we had a real great youth group there. We had a youth choir and in those days everybody went to the same high school. You know so we were all together both at church and in school. That was really a good thing.

Crosby: Well now that you have mentioned high school, I wonder if you would mind telling me where you went to school, grade school, middle school, high school or whatever.

Quinn: I started school at Lee which was on South State Street at the time and then when I was 10 we moved to Bailey Avenue and I went to Galloway. I finished the elementary school at Galloway. Then I went to Bailey Jr. High which was one of two junior high schools in town at the time. Then I went to Central which was the only school for white children in the town. Lanier was the only school for black children in town. So there was just one high school for each group.

Crosby: So Bailey for middle school and then on to Central for high school?

Quinn: Yes.

Crosby: And at that time there was only one high school for whites.

Quinn: In our class of '54 is the largest class that's ever graduated from a high school I think in Mississippi because the year after we graduated they built Murrah

and Provine and Jim Hill and Brinkley. You know so they built two more white schools and two more black schools. So then the town had many high schools.

Crosby: I see and when you graduated from Central High did you go straight to college?

Quinn: I did.

Crosby: And was that at Belhaven?

Quinn: I came to Belhaven, yes.

Crosby: And that was in 1958 I'm thinking?

Quinn: '54 is when I came.

Crosby: '54.

Quinn: I graduated in '58. Right. I had been the valedictorian in my class at Central and was offered a scholarship to every major school in the state but I chose Belhaven because it was a small school and I had been in such a large high school and I thought I would like to come here and I was always glad.

Crosby: Well you are still here!

Quinn: Yeah. Well I came back to work here later, yes.

Crosby: That's terrific! I know you have been a teacher at many levels but I wonder what are some of your principal activities interests other than your work. Like are you a gardener?

Quinn: No I'm not a gardener. Many people in my family are. I've been real interested in all the professional groups in education. I participated and was a leader in a good many of those like you know the JEA and the MEA and the ADK and all of those groups. I was real interested in that. Also while I was going to college I worked at the Baptist Hospital and I have continued to work there ever since. This is my 59th year to work at the Baptist Hospital. I worked every weekend and every summer there. So that took a lot of my time and one of my big interest.

Crosby: What were your duties at Baptist?

Quinn: I was the room clerk on the weekend for 25 years. In the last years I have worked in the emergency room admitting and discharging people.

Crosby: Is that a professional occupation or volunteer work?

Quinn: No it's a job that I had as a college student and then I continued it but it's not my profession. I say my real job is teaching at Belhaven. My other great interests have been the church. I have taught Sunday school at my church since I was 15. I taught the five year olds for 25 years and then I've taught the couples class since then.

Crosby: What about mission work? Have you been involved in that?

Quinn: No except in helping get things ready for that and helping missionaries. I did go to Spain once to help our missionary there because he was getting married but that really wasn't mission work. My other great thing I loved was traveling since I taught about all these countries. I wanted to go see them and so for a long time I tried to go somewhere every summer that would be real interesting from the Holy Land to England to Ireland to all the states. That was of great interest to me, traveling.

Crosby: Tell me a little bit about your trip to the Holy Land.

Quinn: Well I just thought it was the greatest experience of my life. I wouldn't give anything for having gone there. I went in November of a year for two weeks and most of the people with us were Baptist ministers where their church had given them that trip so they could get ready for Christmas. Mr. Bryan himself directed our tour because the pastor from his church was going. He wanted to make sure he got to see everything just so! So I always thought we got more than our money's worth because he was giving us so much extra things. Seeing many of those places was just really great. I don't know if you want to hear this. You might want to cut some of this out but anyway, we went to this place where Jesus would have been led when they were crucifying him, when they were trying him and they had beaten him and they bring him out and they stand him on pilot's floor and that's the one thing that they are sure of that's where he was because that floor is still there. They built a church over it but pilot's floor is still there. They said to us Jesus stood right there. We know he was many places but we couldn't be sure he

was right there giving the Sermon on the Mount but you can be sure he was here! Somebody in the crowd said could you swear that Jesus was right here? Our guide said I couldn't swear he was right here then but he's right here now! That was just the most sacred moment I've ever had to feel that you know and him be there! One of the experiences I had was we rode everything. You know camels and donkeys and when I was in Nazareth this man came up and said don't you want to ride a donkey like Mary? I said no but he picked me up and put me on the donkey anyway. I was much younger and much smaller. I rode a whole mile down Nazareth on this donkey trying to get off. All my friends were walking and laughing at me. So one of my friends here when I came back was telling that. Said you know the Lord had a triumphal entry but Bettye had a triumphal exit! So at my funeral I want them to say that's my triumphal exit you know!

Crosby: Well maybe they can pull your casket in a donkey cart or something.

Quinn: Well I've had my triumphal exit.

Crosby: Oh my! Could you just review for me your teaching career in a kind of sketchy outline right now?

Quinn: I taught at Galloway for eight years. The first grade, fifth and the sixth grade. Then I was offered many jobs because I had won this award as the Outstanding Young Educator in America. So Belhaven offered me a job, as did Millsaps and MC and many other places. I decided to come to Belhaven because it had been my school and I have been here 49 years. My job here had mainly been to teach people who are going to be teachers. I was in charge of the student teachers for 25 years of that time that I've been here.

Crosby: So you have had quite an influence then on the Jackson schools through the girls that came through your program.

Quinn: Well I also taught for State and Ole Miss when they had the R&D Center. They would have classes there. I would teach for them and I also did workshops for **Madoogali Tale** on how to teach English. So I have had other jobs with other universities but all the time I have mainly been at Belhaven. This is my main job.

Crosby: Ok. Let's turn our attention now to the church.

Quinn: Oh good.

Crosby: You got there as a 12 year old through the Sunday school program and that was in '46.

Quinn: I really went there in '47. I was 10. So I was going two years before I joined. I joined in '47.

Crosby: Ok. In 1963 I believe it was a number of Methodist ministers signed a document about racial justice in Mississippi. Keith Tonkel who would become the minister at Wells had signed it before he came. I wonder how aware you were of that uproar in the Methodist church in the early '60's about racial justice issues.

Quinn: Well we were very much aware of all that was going on. At that time I was teaching at Galloway and Galloway was across the street from the church as you know.

Crosby: But it's not a church school.

Quinn: No.

Crosby: Maybe we should make that clear.

Quinn: It's one of the public schools.

Crosby: Right.

Quinn: But this was the great time of integration and the first school integrated in Mississippi in the public schools was Galloway. There was eight elementary schools in Jackson integrated in '64, '65 and I was at Galloway at the time. So I was at the school when we were integrating the school those first several years.

Crosby: That was under the Freedom of Choice operation.

Quinn: Right. The first two years you could choose to go wherever you wanted. Then in the third year they paired schools and told everybody where they would have to go. Because of that, that would have affected the neighborhood and that in a way affected our church. Our church at the time was very aware of what was going on downtown because people were trying to integrate First Baptist and Galloway but no one was trying to integrate a little church like our church. I don't

think it would have been a problem had they come. Once when Keith came he just said anybody who comes to our door and wants to worship they are coming in. Nobody ever disagreed with that. The leadership of the church in '63 was not pushing for it but they weren't pushing against it. In other words they were just waiting to see how things were going to go. Now prior to that in the '50's a group had left Wells that had been there because of the literature. So the people who probably would have objected had already gone because the ones who didn't like what they thought was the liberalization of the literature had left to form a congregational church. So by the time Keith came.

Crosby: What was the, excuse me, what was the liberalization that they objected to? I don't quite follow that.

Quinn: Well for a long time many of the Methodist churches could choose their literature and our church with a lot of others chose that printed by David C. Cook which was a real fundamentalist kind of regular literature. Then we got a new preacher who said he wanted us to use the literature printed in Nashville by the Methodist church. Some people felt that was not as fundamental as David Cook's literature had been and they objected to it for that reason.

Crosby: And this specified the forms of the prayers and things like that?

Quinn: Well they just felt that it wasn't deep enough in theology that it just couldn't. I was teaching the little children in Sunday school and there wasn't much difference for what we did. You know we were still teaching about David and Goliath and we were not doing heavy theology. I don't know what was in the adult Sunday school classes that they didn't like. It was just in general during that time when people were questioning the Bible and saying we needed different versions. The older people at that church in those days were probably like those people that said if the King James Version is good enough for Jesus its good enough for them. They didn't understand about that. Anyway that had caused some people to go so we. Keith came in '69. People that were there, well people who were loyal through the church and they were loyal to the minister whoever he was.

Crosby: I see. Well the church is a small church and at that time what was the neighborhood like?

Quinn: Well our church began in '26. The building was built in '27 and it was a totally neighborhood church. Bailey Avenue was a mile long and has three blocks around it. It was the third Methodist church in the city. First there was Galloway, Capitol Street, and then our church was formed in a home there and met in the school for a year and then they built the building. That's basically the same building that is there now. So it was just a neighborhood church. The trolley stopped at our church. Glendale Street was the end of the town and our church was named Glendale in '26 until '47 it was named Glendale Methodist Church.

Crosby: That's the street that is just on the north side of the church.

Quinn: Right and that was the end of town when they built it and so it was a little community church. Then in '32 Brother Wells came, Jim Wells came to be the preacher. He brought a real kind of evangelistic movement to the church so that more people began to joining it. But the church had a real hard time in the '30's because it was the depression and they were just frightened that they might lose it. I mean they were having a hard time paying their mortgages during the 30's and they felt it was just a real answer to prayer every month that they were able to keep that church until the war came and then the war changed the economy. Then after the war a lot of people moved into that area and the town moved north and so there more people who could come to the church. I think there were three or four hundred people going there in the 40's and that's when I first went there was in the 40's. There was a Baptist church down the street and a Church of God across the street. It was a very religious little community. Then in '47 Brother Wells, who had been there 15 years and was our longest running pastor until Keith, was killed in a car accident. The next year they voted to change the name to Wells Memorial in his honor because he had taken them through that real hard time and had kept the church alive. They thought his ministry and the Lord had kept that church alive during that time. Then our next preacher continued in this same style of preaching as Brother Wells for the next 8 or 9 years maybe.

Crosby: When you say evangelistic, could you describe what you mean by that.

Quinn: Well we would have revivals in those days. Many churches had revivals. We would have one in the spring and in the fall and they would last a week or two weeks. People would come every night and there would be big crowds, you know

would come. That continued into the '50's. There was this unusual revival they had in 1950 where these college students came down in January to tell their testimony you know. We had a revival every night for a month and people came from everywhere in the city like that's when Central was the only school, everybody from Central came and I run into people now all the time that tell me they became Christians in 1950 at that revival you know. There were about 15 people became preachers from that revival. We could name some of those for you. Then I guess that was the high point of the church then. Then as the community changed and people began to move out then that group who didn't think the church was having revivals enough. I guess they thought we were becoming liberal. They moved out so by the time Keith got there we were very small. Now sometimes he just says there were 15 people there when he came but that's not true. There were about 60 but it was a small crowd compared to what it had been. The ones who came were faithful but they just weren't a lot of them who came. There were no children only my family had some children there because the people who lived in the neighborhood had moved out and they are the ones who had the children. So we had this great high in the '50's and then it went down to when right before Keith came was our lowest point. You know when people were moving and they were just going to the churches in the places where they were. Because it had been a community church and now it wasn't.

Crosby: So the evangelistic movement was designed to add people to the church.

Quinn: And it did.

Crosby: To bring people without churches into the church or to convert people who are looking for something religious too.

Quinn: Right and under several of the preachers like Brother Case, Brother Wells you know that had happened you know. Then each of the preachers that came after that each had their own agendas and so that would make some people come and some people leave. I'm sure that happens in other churches too but most of the other churches on that street dissolved. You know Crestwood which had been a real huge Baptist church moved out. The Church of God moved out. The Four Square Gospel Church. So we were the only church left as a church that had been there for years you know.

Crosby: And that was because of the movement of the populations.

Quinn: Right, yes.

Crosby: Further north.

Quinn: Yeah the people were just moving and you know of course some of those churches were bought by other churches. Like the Mt. Sinai Baptist bought the Church of God which is across the street from us. And then Crestwood was empty for years and years and now the Baptists use it as a mission church. Then The Church of God of Prophecy was a part of that Church of God. You know that is a church on the other side of the school. In my childhood you know almost every block had a church on it and everybody went to church. As the community changed the inner city churches changed. I think our church and Calvary (Baptist) were the only two inner city churches that continued.

Crosby: Was there a lot of concern within the church community for the loss of memberships and was there discussions on perhaps moving as well?

Quinn: Our church never really discussed moving that I can remember but we had different preachers that felt that maybe it might be time to close it. You know we had one preacher right before Keith that thought there was no real hope for it ever being a community church again and they didn't know why people didn't want to come into the inner city. You know if there was no special program there because they had been preachers who had been a part of community churches. I guess the thought was that that would be the only time there would be you know to have a church that draws people from everywhere. Like our church does now draws people from 50 miles away and people come for the program not because it's a community church but it was in the beginning you know a little community church.

Crosby: When Keith Tonkel came to the church do you remember the impetus for that? Was it just kind of a normal movement of one preacher from somewhere to somewhere else or was there some special call that went out?

Quinn: Well we don't know how we got Keith to start with. We were very thankful because those of us who were there and who wanted to stay there and wanted to keep the church going were afraid that if we didn't have some real

young and vital person the church would go to naught you know. So we loved Keith's spirit that it didn't bother him that it was just a few people. He was going to work with what was there and he felt the Lord had sent him there for a special purpose and we did too. And the first several years he was there we kept thinking they were going to send him somewhere else because he was like 33 I think when he came and just a real vibrant preacher and in demand to preach at a lot of places. You know he would go do spiritual emphasis weeks, speak on college campuses and he had a radio program and TV program. We knew we just couldn't; we were too small for him. But we were just so thankful that he was willing to stay you know at a church that was small and not growing very much to start with. But because he had these other contacts in colleges and speaking in other places, people began to come over to hear what his ministry was and then some of them stayed and then the church began to grow. It took several years you know for that to go and as you know in the Methodist church they often move preachers every four years. So four years was not going to be enough for us to have a big turn around and we were so thankful that he was able to stay more years there until there could be this turn around.

Crosby: When he first came did he talk a lot about the vision that he had for the church or what his style of ministry might be?

Quinn: Well he always felt that we should go on. He wasn't like the preacher who said we are going to close it if we don't do this you know. He was always optimistic about things and willing to start new things and wanted somebody there for any kind of meeting we were going to have whether there were going to be 10 there or 100 he was going to be there. Everybody was welcomed however they wanted to dress or whoever they were. We always knew that you know. So I think it was his spirit more than what he said. But if you ever listened to him preach you know. He preaches not from the lectionary which is a book that tells preachers what would be good to preach this week so that you will eventually preach everything from the Bible. But Keith always preached about whatever was happening. You know whatever was going on in the town that would be a topic for the sermon. Something would happen or somebody would say something and he would say well that will preach! And then that would be a sermon based on that and he still does that. You know he still, his sermons will be based on events of the time and they will still be grounded in the scripture but they are really relevant.

I think that is what made a lot of the young people from the colleges start coming is that he was not the traditional preacher that was doing the work of Jesus but he was speaking to the problems of the times.

Crosby: When he came I understand there were already some outreach programs going on in the church where missionary work or one that gets mentioned in particular is the Operation Shoestring. Can you tell us a little bit about that?

Quinn: Right before Keith came our Minister Gilbert was very interested in helping the neighborhood and his wife had a little daycare for the black children in our basement and a lady named Nancy Gilbert who was not a relative, wanted to use our church as a basis to help the neighborhood people by showing them how they could get food stamps, how they could get help from the government and she needed a basis for that. And so our church was a basis. We gave her several rooms there and she worked with this. That was the beginning of Operation Shoestring.

Crosby: Was she a member of your church?

Quinn: She was not a member of our church. In fact her father was the head of the Baptist Convention Board. I think she did it as a rebellion against him but don't say that. Anyway, she was very interested and her husband was a lawyer and they were very interested in helping the black people get their legal rights and helping them find other things and the church was going to help. She was over there about a year before Keith came. So Keith became real interested in her ministry and said well if we are going to do that for them why don't we do something else for them, too. So every Thursday they organized and we had a clinic and we got different doctors to volunteer and come over. They would do blood pressures and all of that for the people and refer people who needed help. They would find a doctor for them to go to and help them with that. Then we started a tutorial program for the children to come over after school. Operation Shoestring worked out of our church for many years. I don't know the exact number but they do. Eventually it became its own organization of which our church was a member of their board but they are a separate group now. As you know, they are about four blocks down the street from us. For many years in the summer we would go down and do Bible schools for them and fix breakfast and do devotionals for Operation Shoestring. Then that

led us to also doing our Pantry where we would give out food every week to the neighborhood people that were in need. I think now we give out about 150 bags of groceries every week.

Crosby: So generally a program to meet the physical needs of people who are less affluent, looking for medical care, clothing, food and daycare I guess is that part of it?

Quinn: Not since 1970 but prior to that we did have some there. Because then Operation Shoestring took that over you know and they do have an afternoon school care and other programs. Other churches in town have also helped with Operation Shoestring which we think is a good thing but it was started in our church. Then we were always encouraging any of the neighborhood people who wanted to come to our church to come. And some come but some already had their churches around there and we didn't want to pull them away let's say from the church that was across the street but we always wanted them to feel welcomed in our church. There have been members there, I would say since 1970. We probably, other than The Voice of Calvary, would be the most diverse of the churches you know that had black and white people.

Crosby: So even before Keith came there was a recognition that.

Quinn: Of the need.

Crosby: Of the need that there was that if you are going to be a neighborhood church you are going to have to meet those needs.

Quinn: Right.

Crosby: Are there any one or two things about Keith's approach to ministry that struck you as special or important or individual?

Quinn: Well Keith always wanted to be called Keith. You know everybody we ever had before wanted to be called Brother so and so or Reverend or Doctor so and so. He was just one of us. He just wanted to be called Keith and he wanted to call everybody else their name. At first that was a shocking thing to us at some of the older members and a lot of them are real old when Keith came. He would call Mr. Akers, Carl and none of us would ever dare do that. Mr. Akers, you know was

the patriarch of our church. But they like it. I mean he called everybody by their name and nobody really ever had titles. I thought that was an interesting thing that he did. That made people love him. The young people especially liked that you know. He wanted to include as many people and this why he was willing to stay with us is that we didn't have a lot of members for him to take care of so he could do radio programs and he could do the TV. you know he has been on the Methodist Hour all these years. He could for I guess for two or three weeks every month for many years he would be somewhere doing a spiritual emphasis week or a three day revival. So we were sharing him you know with many groups of people but we never felt he neglected us in any when he would be out doing that. In fact that would often pull people in to our church. Then in '85 he decided that we really needed to do something to help the property because it had not had much done to it over the years so we completely renovated it but we kept the spirit of the church. We didn't change the stained glass windows or we didn't change any of the style of it. We just made it firm and better. Before he came I thought it was real interesting that the one wing that was put on our church was put on in the '40s and we had a kitchen. We were the second church in Mississippi to have a kitchen. Most churches had a fellowship hall but they didn't have a kitchen. Some people thought it was wrong to cook in the church. I always thought that was interesting because now every church I guess has a kitchen. I guess the little country churches don't but then when we remodeled we made our kitchen better. In the '40s they had a great argument; no I guess it was the '50s. They had a great argument in the '50s whether or not they should air condition the church because churches were not air conditioned. The only thing in the '50s that were air conditioned were the movies and the 10 cents stores. You know that was one of the reasons people during the civil rights region they only wanted to go to Woolworth's. It was the only place in town that was cool. You know they were integrating the counter. But none of the other churches were air conditioned either. We bought the old Woolworth's air conditioner and put it in our church and it stayed there 20 years maybe. I just couldn't believe there would be some people against air conditioning the church. They said if we air conditioned the church people would come just to get cool! I always thought that was so funny! Now I don't think people would think of building something that wasn't air conditioned. Just imagine that. See that was in the '50s when everything was hot and we were one of the first churches

to have air conditioning. I don't know what other churches had at that time but I know not many had it.

Crosby: Did anybody ask if they wanted to live without fans?

Quinn: Well you know our windows had to open like this and now they are sealed too. Now we had fans up there we just didn't have air conditioning. Somebody said well if we didn't air conditioned people would go to the movies on Sunday to get cool. So that's why they voted. They didn't want them going to the movies on Sunday so we voted to have air conditioning. When Keith got there we were air conditioned.

Crosby: There is a, Wells is talked about having a spirit of inclusiveness. Everybody is welcomed. Are there any aspects of that you would like to point out or call attention to?

Quinn: Well first we were a very traditional church you know. It was all family and people living in the community. Then after Keith came what was happening not only integration but the "hippie" movement was afoot and in the '70s; see I don't know if anybody else would remember this, you had to dress up to go to church. The hippies were wearing long hair and blue jeans and sandals or no shoes at all or whatever and a lot of churches in town were turning away the young people because they were dressing as the times was. We were one of the first churches, if not THE first, that would say you could come in your blue jeans. Now I'm sure many churches say you can go in your blue jeans now but they didn't in 1970. We were one of the first churches where people would come and they had their long hair and their blue jeans and their sandals and they would come from other churches in town where their families were members and they wanted to go to church but they also wanted to be their own people and wear their hippie clothes I guess. Anyway, although Keith himself was very formal. He always made all those people feel welcomed and you could come in with whatever clothing you had on as long as it is decent you know and we did get a lot of people that came to our church in the '70's because they were allowed to come in their ordinary clothes. If you come to our church now you will see some people dressed up and you are going to see some people look like they are going to work in the garden you know because however you want to come you are welcome. I guess that was the first

inclusiveness that made everybody welcomed. One time we had this little old lady in our church she was 90 something and was our oldest member and was a very prim and proper lady. She always wore her gloves and her hat. So I was in the balcony and I looked down and here was little Ms. White at communion and on each side of her was these twins dressed like hippies. They were hippies with their long hair. One was barefoot and the other one had on sandals and they were holding hands with little Ms. White down at the communion and I thought now that is the real Gospel you know. That's real inclusiveness where everybody is together there. It didn't bother her and I guess it didn't bother them. She was all dressed up but we were all there together you know. That was a real interesting time to me in the church. Then during that time we also had some people integrating the church but it was never a big issue. People came and they were welcomed. Some of the first to come were little children which we thought was proper you know. Our children were integrated there maybe before some of the upper groups were integrated. Some of the very first people to come as part of the integration were college students and that was of interest to me because see I taught here in a college and I knew a lot of my students would go there and they would feel welcomed. Whether they were black or white we knew we could invite them to come and they would be welcomed there. Which wasn't true in many churches in town you know.

Crosby: Well at the time you were teaching at Belhaven. Was Belhaven integrated then?

Quinn: Belhaven has never not been integrated. I like to tell this point. Belhaven's Charter said it was a school for young women. In 1954 they changed it to say it would be co-ed. It would be a school for men and women. Our Charter never said white. Ole Miss said white. Jackson State said you had to be black. Belhaven's just said you had to be a woman and then eventually said you had to be a woman or a man. You could be both. So anytime anybody applied to Belhaven they could come because we didn't have to change anything. See all the other schools had to change their Charter and say these people are welcome or these people are not welcome. Well when anybody applied to Belhaven they could come. So we were some of the very first to have integrated classes because if anybody applied there was no question that you couldn't come or you know. In the 1970's when many places were just getting started Belhaven had a black girl

from Hattiesburg as our Student Body President. I think it was maybe in '74 you know. And that's before most of the colleges really had much integration going on. Our President now is you know very proud of the fact that we have a higher percentage of our students are black. Well we have a lot of Orientals too. We are a real diverse campus.

Crosby: So the college really was ahead on a number of similar institutions in Mississippi.

Quinn: Well it never had to be an issue because you know, however, this is just a real odd and strange thing. Belhaven was Scottish, so the word clan (spells out) is very Scottish. So many of our themes were the Clan Call. See that is Scottish. And our basketball team was the Clans Men which is Scottish. But then when our President came in the '70s he said we can't have a team called the Clans Men. It sounds too much like the KLAN (spells out) you know. So we had to change our name even though it was there for a good reason. It was there for the Scottish heritage. We couldn't keep it so we are the Blazers now you know. We had to get rid of that. I mean it was strange to have a basketball team with black boys on it and it be called the Clans Men. I thought that was strange! Anyway that was probably our biggest concern changing our name. You know our newspaper was called the Clan Call and we changed it to something else -- The Blazon -- or something.

Crosby: Well to get back to.

Quinn: Wells.

Crosby: Keith Tonkel and Wells, how would you say he was able to bring so many of the members of the church on some of these initiatives? What was his leadership style? Did he involve a lot of people in making decisions or did he just announce what was going to happen?

Quinn: I don't know. He always involved people. Although, he always felt real sure you know what he was doing. What I found is he was really led of the Lord. Most of the people felt he was a very spiritual person and he was right there where the Lord put him and he wanted to do the Lord's work. I don't think we ever thought anything he did was to advance his career. In fact he had been extremely

humble about all of that and so if he did have things he wanted us to do we never felt it was in any way to advance him or his career. He always wanted to do what would be best for our people and what would be best in the Kingdom of the Lord and I don't think there would be very many people who would question his leadership because he was open to hear what you had to say although he felt very strong about certain things.

Crosby: It was more that they had a conviction of his moral rectitude, his religious vision that people wanted to participate in something they thought was right.

Quinn: Keith is a terribly hard worker. You know he is working every minute. He would be over there Sunday morning picking up the paper out in front of the church that somebody had thrown out or something. When he first came there we didn't have any real staff. He would be sweeping out the fellowship hall. He would be cleaning off the bathrooms. He was working hard all the time. How could you criticize anybody who is willing to work hard like that all the time? He was just an indefatigable person. So he would never ask us to do anything he wasn't already in there doing himself and I think that may be a part of his leadership. He is willing to work real hard and you wanted to work real hard too because you would see he was doing that and he would. We knew many times he would go to other churches and we expected him to go up and eventually have the biggest church in Mississippi. He could have done that. He turned it down. We always asked for him to come back. What was amazing, he would say he was willing to come back. He always felt there was still more to do or there was something else we could do or he wanted to continue the program we had and that's what to me was the amazing thing, not that we wanted to keep him, who wouldn't want to keep him but that he wanted to stay with us. Our programs grew and grew and grew you know. You are going to list in a while all the different programs we have and when you think about that little bitty church doing a whole variety of things I think it is really amazing how the Lord has led him and blessed that because most little churches would only have one or two of those projects and we just have a slew of them and people work at them.

Crosby: Tell me about one or two of those that you feel most important.

Quinn: Well you know we have done that Wells Fest and somebody else will speak to that. Every year it gets bigger and more people help. It takes more people to run it than we have members I think but people just volunteer their friends and their friends come and help and we have always given all the money away and I think that is the amazing thing. Many people have projects and they use it to improve their own church grounds or their own church program and except for that first time when we used it to finish our rebuilding our church. We have given every bit of it away. Every penny of it away and I think that is an amazing thing that a little church will give \$60,000 dollars to some other community service. Our church works so hard on that. People work on that like it was their main job. The people once they get started on running the Coffee House or selling the hamburgers or doing the children's work, they are just engaged in it like somebody is paying them a big salary to do it and they are not. I don't know how that spirit got started but it's there you know. I think that is amazing. Then when our people started going to Mexico that was a great thing too. We would have 10 to 12 people go down and help build that building in Mexico and they took, it was a medical mission; we took a lot of nurses and doctors went down there. Dentists went down there and helped with those people and until it just too dangerous in the last year or two to go down there. I think it was amazing how much they were able to help that little town of Thalamic and some of those people came up here and we got to see them. We got to know how our church really did affect them there.

Crosby: Do you know how that began, how it got started?

Quinn: There was a man in the Methodist Conference that was doing missions in Mexico. He came up to our church to see if anybody in our church would be interested. Keith could tell you his name because he went with them several times and he is a part of the conference that takes missions to different parts of the hemisphere. Dr. McIlwain was the doctor who first started going down there and then we had a lot of nurses volunteer to go because it was a medical mission at first and we took a lot of medicines down there you know ordinary medicines you could give for diabetics and things like that. Not hard drugs you know but just the kinds of medicines they needed for heart and blood pressure and all that. Then they helped build the clinic and several men in my Sunday school class went down. They were electricians and they wired it one year. They went down and wired that whole thing. Then other years people went down and painted it. So it was really

on the ground work that the people did in Thalamic but you should have some of those speak to that who; I know Keith Ferguson went a lot. Greg Campbell went down. Greg Campbell went down and took pictures of all the children and gave it to them and that's the picture most children ever had of themselves or their parents. That's a ministry our church does; we go across and Greg takes a picture of all the children at Galloway and puts them in little folders that say Merry Christmas. Each of those children have those pictures to give to their parents as a present because most of them have never had a formal picture taken. Greg has been doing that many years and the church helps pay for the material and Greg gives his time to do that. I think it might be really hard to think of all the little things that people do because they think of something to do and they get a little group and do it. Like a little group goes to the prisons and we had that ministry for a while. I went out to one of the prisons several years and taught these 6 men how to read who didn't know how to read. They came to our church first and did a Bible study and they asked how could we help them and they said we could teach them how to read. Now they have a program in prisons for the GED but there are people in prison who can't read on the third grade reading level and they needed somebody to help on the lower level. That's what we were doing for a while. I just can't remember all the things. Over the years as a need arises somebody would step in and do it you know. Some of them developed into long term projects and some of them were just short term projects.

Crosby: Were there any other things about Wells Church that you think are important that we could pass along to people in later times?

Quinn: Well I don't know; of course it's been my main church all my life. I've been there 69 years. I tell people I have been here 49, at the Baptist Hospital 59, and at my church 69, and on earth 79. Next year I am going to roll them all over I hope. Course I think it's a wonderful church. I've loved all the people I have known there. Some of the most wonderful people in the world have been members there and we have been privileged to know them and work with them many other places. I think for such a little church we have such a wide variety of people. I mean we have some of the most educated people in town. Doctors, lawyers and people who are janitors and everybody is the same to everybody there and I think that is such an interesting thing too.

Crosby: Let me ask you this, to many people outside of Mississippi, Mississippians are generally conceived to be racists and exclusionists. Is there a way you can account for the fact that this church exemplifies the opposite of that in so many ways? Is there something special about the people at this church or is there a misconception about the way Mississippians are in general? What would you say?

Quinn: Well I think that in the past some of our politicians have given us such a bad name because of how they have spoken and I think some of the church leaders in the beginning did not speak up. I think what our church has stood for is what the Gospel is. You know I mean I think we are not any different than any church ought to be because this is what Jesus said. He says the Gospel is for everybody, the Greek, the Roman and everybody, men and women and the educated and the uneducated. Our church just tried to make that be real. I do think every time I have traveled outside of Mississippi we have been asked questions like that you know because in the past we had too many people who spoke and they thought they were speaking for all of Mississippi; Mississippi has more churches per population than any other state. Mississippi is the poorest state in the Union and it gives more money to charity than any other state. That must say why; why do we give more to charity? It's because we are Christians but maybe it's because the Christians are not vocal enough you know. It is good if our church can have some voice and say this is really what Christianity is. Christianity is all inclusive. Christianity is giving, you know, loving and sharing as Keith likes to say. I don't think Keith is the only Methodist preacher that thinks that. I think many of them do but I think the fact that he has been at one church that long makes what he says have more power. It makes it more unusual. There have been other preachers who have been at churches 20 or 30 years but I don't think anybody has been at a church in a main denomination 45 years. That just has to be some kind of special record.

Crosby: Well Bettye we have spent over an hour now together and I think.

Quinn: Don't cut out any of this.

Crosby: I'd just like to thank you very much for your participation.

Quinn: Well cut out the part about me because I don't want to talk about me and just put in the part about the church because I have always been a great advocate for our church and I always said whoever the minister was I wanted to be there you know in my church. In those few years when we were having hard times I was glad that there were some other people who felt like I did and we were going to stick with it and we have been vindicated because it did come back and be a real great light house I think in the community maybe and in the world because we have sent people all out in the world.

Crosby: Well I think that is a good note to end on. Thank you very much.

Quinn: Thank You.