Mississippi Oral History Program

Hurricane Katrina Oral History Project

An Oral History

with

Reverend S.V. Adolph Jr. and Mrs. Virginia Adolph

Interviewer: James Pat Smith

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Reverend S.V. Adolph Jr. was born in Houston, Texas, on April 6, 1954, to Reverend S.F. Adolph Sr. (born January 29, 1930, in Melville, Louisiana) and Mrs. Barbara Jean Jackson Adolph (born March 10, 1935, in Houston, Texas). His father was a Baptist minister.

Reverend Adolph attended Texas Southern University, Union Baptist Bible College, Lamar University, and William Carey College. At the time of this interview he was finishing his master’s degree at the University of Mobile.

Reverend Adolph has been a pastor since he was twenty-four years old. His first pastorate was in Houston. He pastored two churches in Houston and later pastored New Hope Baptist Church in Port Arthur, Texas. Since 1990 to the time of this interview, he pastored First Missionary Baptist Church in Gulfport, Mississippi.

On March 28, 1998, he married his wife, Mrs. Virginia House Adolph. They have two daughters from Reverend Adolph’s prior marriage, Semora (born in 1978) and Samishia (born in 1982).

Mrs. Virginia H. Adolph was born October 2, 1956, in Chicago, Illinois, to Mr. Roger Alfred House (born December 30, 1909) and Mrs. Elnora Grant House (born November 2, 1911). Her father worked for the Veteran’s Administration in Chicago and in Gulfport, and her mother worked for the US Treasury in Chicago. The family moved to Gulfport when Mrs. Adolph was ten years old.

In Chicago, Mrs. Adolph attended a Jewish nursery school and a Catholic elementary school. In Mississippi, she was graduated from Gulfport East High School in 1974. She earned her undergraduate degree from Sophie Newcomb College of Tulane University and an MS in Social Work from Tulane University in 1979. She worked as the Gulf Coast Community Action Agency Social Services Director for eighteen months, for the Mississippi State Department of Health as the Regional Supervisor of Social Workers for twenty-five years, and at the time of this interview was a Harrison County Schools social worker since 2007 in the emotionally disturbed program. In 2008 she was awarded the Lifetime Achievement Award from the National Association of Social Workers.
AN ORAL HISTORY

with

S.V. ADOLPH and VIRGINIA ADOLPH

This is an interview for the Mississippi Oral History Program of The University of Southern Mississippi. The interview is with S.V. and Virginia Adolph and is taking place on June 12, 2008. The interviewer is James Pat Smith.

Smith: This is June the twelfth, 2008. This is an interview with Reverend S.V. Adolph, pastor of First Missionary Baptist Church in Gulfport, the Handsboro area of Gulfport, and Mrs. Virginia Adolph, his wife, who is also a social worker. First Missionary Baptist Church was one of those predominantly minority churches that experienced pretty heavy impact on its members with the storm and did a lot of work in the aftermath of the storm, of [Hurricane] Katrina, to provide unusual services in the community. The interview is conducted by James Pat Smith of USM [The University of Southern Mississippi] history faculty. It takes place in the pastor’s office at First Missionary Baptist Church on Pass Road in Gulfport. Let’s see. Reverend Adolph, can I get you to come a little closer there? Can I get you to just state your name, and the date, and the place, and your position just for the tape record? And then Ms. Adolph, I want you to do the same thing.

Reverend Adolph: My name is Seymour Vincent Adolph Jr. I’m pastor of First Missionary Baptist Church at 1100 East Pass Road, Gulfport, Mississippi, and I’m doing this interview on June the twelfth, 2008.

Mrs. Adolph: And I’m Virginia H. Adolph, and the wife of Pastor Adolph, here at the same location, and it is indeed 6-12-08 [June 12, 2008].

Smith: OK. And Reverend Adolph, this is not a sensitive issue for a man. It might be for a woman. You don’t have to answer any question I ask. What is your date of birth?

Reverend Adolph: My date of birth is 4-6-54 [April 6, 1954].

Smith: And what was your place of birth?

Reverend Adolph: I was born and raised in Houston, Texas.

Smith: And Mrs. Adolph, do you have a date of birth?

Mrs. Adolph: Yes.
Smith: You look about ten years old.

Mrs. Adolph: Oh, thank you, Dr. Smith, 10-2-56 [October 2, 1956], and I was born in Chicago, Illinois.

Smith: And what was the date and place that you were married? You may want to let her—(laughter)

Mrs. Adolph: I'm going to test him.

Smith: OK. (laughter) Some men actually decline that question. (laughter)


Smith: OK. Great. And Reverend Adolph, what occupations have you pursued in your lifetime, other churches that you may have pastored? Just kind of occupationally, careerwise, how did you wind up at First Missionary Baptist at the time of the storm?

Reverend Adolph: I was called to ministry at age twenty, became pastor of my first congregation at age twenty-four, that church in Houston.

Smith: Is that Houston, Texas?

Reverend Adolph: Yes. I went on to pastor one other church in Houston. In 1984, I went to pastor New Hope Baptist Church in Port Arthur, Texas, and in 1990, I came to pastor First Missionary.

Smith: Do you mind talking a little bit about your sense of calling to the ministry? I often get some interesting stories out of ministers who talk about how they became impressed that they should become ministers.

Reverend Adolph: Actually, what happened to me with reference to my calling, actually started when I was a child. When I first told my parents about it, I must have been nine years old, and they told me that I only wanted to preach because our church had just come out of a good revival, and any time a real Christian experiences real revival, they ought to feel like preaching. So they dismissed it at that. And besides that, the evangelist for our church that week had been a fourteen-year-old. And my mom declared that I just wanted to emulate or imitate the other little boy. However at age sixteen, the same experience and the same encounter with the Lord that I had at age nine occurred again. However by that time, as a teenager, I was not at all excited about preaching. As a matter of fact, I did not want to at all. When I finally was able to have a talk with my dad about it, because of his busy schedule, he told me just to try my best not to; if I could manage not to. Don't worry about it. I wasn't. And I tried to take his advice. I tried to get into anything and everything I thought I was big enough and bad enough to do, only to find out that I couldn't wash off the calling. I couldn't push it away. I tried to be so bad that God wouldn't want me. And His word
to me was that I wasn’t assigned to preach about my own goodness but about his. Finally with a couple of other things that happened in my life, I surrendered and entered the ministry at age twenty.

**Smith:** Mrs. Adolph, can you talk a little bit about your career background? You’re a social worker. Where had you come from before Katrina? What have you done in your life occupation, careerwise?

**Mrs. Adolph:** Well, I graduated from Tulane [University] with a master’s in social work in 1979 and came back to Gulfport and started to work with Gulf Coast Community Action Agency. And they had an open—well, I volunteered for three months and just thought that was a total waste, but being a new graduate, you humble down and hunker down, and then became social services director with Head Start for eighteen months; left there and went on to State Department of Health and served twenty-five years there as a regional supervisor for public health social work for the six coastal counties. Last April, April 2007, I was offered an opportunity with Harrison County Schools to serve as the social worker with the emotionally disturbed children with the behavioral treatment classes with Harrison County School System. I also work adjunct for University of Southern Mississippi in both the graduate and undergraduate schools of social work.

**Reverend Adolph:** She’s not telling you, but also in March she was given the Lifetime Achievement Award by the National Association of Social Workers.

**Smith:** That’s great. Can you talk about your educational background, Reverend Adolph, then Mrs. Adolph? Start with school as far back as you can remember and as most recent as you can remember.

**Reverend Adolph:** Our family has a real interesting story with reference to educational opportunities and achievements. My mother’s dad had earned a PhD from Houston Negro College; that’s Texas Southern before it became Texas Southern. My dad’s dad did not finish sixth grade. College was a dream for our family, but not many in our family had a chance to attend. However, upon graduating high school in 1972, I started Texas Southern; did not graduate. I actually during that time was wrestling with the call to ministry and ran into an atheist professor, and in my stupidity left Texas Southern to attend an unaccredited Bible college that was run by our state convention. I learned much as far as theology and religion was concerned at Union Baptist Bible College in Houston, but it wouldn’t be until after I had gone to pastor in Port Arthur that I resumed study in an accredited school; went on to Lamar University and before being able to graduate from Lamar, I moved to Gulfport where I went on to graduate from William Carey [College]. After I graduated from William Carey, I went on to the University of Mobile. Being what? Forty before getting even a first degree. So I wish I had my wife’s sparkling educational background; I do not.

**Smith:** Sounds like you’re equipped to do what you do.
Mrs. Adolph: And sound like he left out, too, he’s only a paper away from finishing his master’s.

Reverend Adolph: Have mercy.

Mrs. Adolph: At University of Mobile, so.

Smith: Great. And how about you, Mrs. Adolph?

Mrs. Adolph: Well, I was born in Chicago.

Smith: By the way, what was your maiden name?

Mrs. Adolph: House(?). And family on both sides was from this area. My dad’s family was from down on Cleveland Street, right here in Handsboro, and my mom’s family was in Magnolia Grove over by, there was an old dairy that used to be there. Family had property in this county since 1909 on my mom’s side. On my dad’s side, it was since around the 1850s. My dad worked for the VA [Veterans Administration] for forty years. He had transferred from here to Cook County, Illinois, and my mom went to work for the US Treasury in Illinois. And after my dad retired after forty years with the VA, they returned back here. Well, while in Chicago, we lived on the west side of Chicago.

Smith: Can you tell me your mother and dad’s names?

Mrs. Adolph: Yes. My mother’s name was Elnora Grant House(?), and my father was Rogers Alfred House(?).

Smith: Do you know their dates of birth? When they were born?

Mrs. Adolph: Yes. Mother’s date of birth was November the second, [1911]. My dad’s date of birth was December the thirtieth. Wait. He was 1909; she was 1911. Excuse me. Yeah, that was it.

Smith: OK. Well, go on talking about your educational background.

Mrs. Adolph: Anyway, in terms of, while in Chicago, having a very unique experience in that we lived two blocks from the riots of 1964, and remember at three years old, going to Jewish nursery school, the Marcy(?) Center, and everyday being walked past the home of, the home in Chicago on Lawndale(?) of Dr. Martin Luther King and seeing the young men that stood watch with him. So I have a real aversion to Martin Luther King celebrations with a lot of hoopla, because it wasn’t like that at all with him. So going to Jewish nursery school; going to a Polish Catholic school because my family was—after I was born, my father converted, in looking back at old records, so that I could go to Catholic school in Chicago, because you did not want your child going to inner-city, public schools. So he converted to Catholicism when I
was born so that that would ensure that I would be able to go to Catholic school. So till I was what? Ten. And then he retired after forty years, and they moved back here.

Smith: OK. Where did you go to high school?

Mrs. Adolph: Went to high school, Gulfport East High School. I graduated in 1974, and then through the efforts of an old English teacher here in Gulfport at the time, Mrs. Bradford; she had been a Price.

Smith: Oh, yes.

Mrs. Adolph: Yes. You know Mrs. Bradford, wig sideways. And I was in her honors English class, and my dad died when I was sixteen. So she decided I was going to her alma mater. She said, “You have what it takes. Now, go and show me proud. If not, you will face the consequences.” So needless to say, before I knew it, after my dad had died, I was going to Xavier in New Orleans, and they had not come through, as she had anticipated. And after he passed, he went to, had a triple bypass, and that didn’t work out. Dr. DeBakey had done his surgery in Houston, and so she decided I was going to Newcomb College, and of course, that is where I went to school, and then went on and stayed for my master’s.

Smith: Mrs. Bradford pushed you to Newcomb?

Mrs. Adolph: Oh, yes, she did. Frances Bradford.

Smith: Yes. Interesting. Reverend Adolph, I’m not sure that I got you to state your dad and mother’s name and date of birth. Could you state that?


Smith: Where was he born?

Reverend Adolph: In Melville, Louisiana.

Smith: OK. And your mother?


Smith: Did either one of you serve in the military?

Mrs. Adolph: No.

Reverend Adolph: No.
Smith: Do you have children that you could list their names and current ages or date of birth?

Reverend Adolph: I have two daughters, Seymour(?), Adolph, who lives in Houston. She was born February 25, 1978, and Semicia(?) Adolph who was born on January 3, 1982, and she also lives in Houston.

Smith: Do you have children?

Mrs. Adolph: No, I have no children.

Smith: OK. Well, let’s talk a little bit about Katrina, and maybe we could start with how you-all became aware that there was something serious about to happen, and what your storm preparation either in your family or here at the church was just before Katrina.

Reverend Adolph: I probably have one of the wildest stories about pre-Katrina than anybody I’ve heard so far. I lost my mother in the last of May in [20]05. We buried Mom just a few days before what would have been she and Dad’s fifty-second anniversary. We buried her on June 1, and their wedding anniversary would have been on June the fourth. My dad had always had this dream for one of his boys to play professional baseball. He wanted to, of course, become a Los Angeles Dodger, but he didn’t, and so he had that dream for his own sons. None of us played pro ball. As a matter of fact, I may have gone along the furthest to play in high school. But none of us played pro ball. However, my dad, who has pastored his current congregation for forty-five years and retires next month, actually had one of my little cousins that belonged to his church who plays for the Tampa Bay Devil Rays. So a young man that Dad influenced is playing pro baseball, so I thought that that would be a good way to sort of spend some time with my dad, for both of us to sort of reminisce about Mom, just to have some quality time with Dad. I decided to take him to Tampa to spend the week watching the Tampa Bay Rays play the Cleveland Indians, a whole four-game series. We landed in Tampa Monday night, went straight to the ballgame. When we got to our hotel room after the game, we found out that we were about to get hit by a hurricane. Well, at this point I don’t know the hurricane’s name, but I’m thinking, “What are we going to do here in Tampa about to get hit by a hurricane?”

Smith: By the way, what’s your cousin’s name that plays for Tampa Bay?

Reverend Adolph: Number thirteen, Carl Crawford(?), Allstar. (laughter)

Smith: Great. OK.

Reverend Adolph: And well, as it turns out, Tampa doesn’t get hit by the hurricane. As a matter of fact, we go on to watch the full series of games, not really paying attention to whatever happened to the hurricane—still didn’t know its name—only to fly home, land in New Orleans because Dad was coming back that weekend to preach
here for me. We land in New Orleans to drive over to Gulfport only to find that, “Hey, traffic is awfully bad here. What’s going on?” Find out that they’re evacuating because of Hurricane—now, I know the name—Katrina.

Smith: And what day of the week was this?

Reverend Adolph: This was that Friday.

Smith: Friday.

Reverend Adolph: Um-hm. That would have been Friday the twenty-sixth. That Saturday morning we get word that Gulfport’s going to have to evacuate, too. Sometime that [Saturday] we get the word that Gulfport has to evacuate, too. I’m not sure whether that was Saturday morning or Friday evening, but Gulfport’s evacuating. The real bad news about that, however, is my dad was actually coming to preach an anniversary service for me, celebrating my being in Gulfport for fifteen years. And he’d done this almost every year except for the year he had his bypass surgery, and never did his church bother to come with him. But this year, while everybody else is getting out of Dodge, while New Orleans is headed west, we have these people coming from Houston, here, to be with Dad.

Smith: Members of?

Reverend Adolph: His congregation.

Smith: What was the name of his church?

Reverend Adolph: His church is New Hope Baptist Church in Fifth Ward in Houston.

Smith: How many people came from that congregation?

Reverend Adolph: Oh, about fifty. And so with that many people coming from that direction, rather than us totally cancelling services that day—which is what we really would have done—since they had come from that distance, we did do one service at seven o’clock that Sunday morning, and then advised everybody to get out of Dodge. Well—

Smith: Do you normally do a seven o’clock service?

Reverend Adolph: We normally do a 7:45 and an eleven o’clock, but we did just one early service that Sunday and dismissed, of course, for the day. However we always know that everybody doesn’t leave. Everybody doesn’t evacuate, and what they would have to face with that storm would have been interesting anyway. It took my dad and the people that had come from Houston eighteen hours to get back home. In the meantime, Virginia and I did not leave. We, well, at the time she was working for
the state department of health, and that would not have allowed her to leave. And I
couldn’t convince her that I was going to Jackson for a loaf of bread. Just kidding.
(laughter) But at the same time, our church has this age-old tradition of opening its
doors and having some of its members ride out storms in the church. That’s—

Smith: This is a pretty substantial building? How old is the building?

Reverend Adolph: The main part of the building was built in 1962. That’s after a
sanctuary burned, and there are some really interesting stories that I probably wouldn’t
even be the best person to tell because I wasn’t here then, but some real interesting
stories about the burning of the church in 1958, rebuilt in 1962.

Smith: So this is a substantial, modern structure, built very well.

Reverend Adolph: The front was built in [19]62; an addition was added in the front
in [19]98, and then the part of the building where we now sit, our educational
building, was built in 2004. The piece built in [19]62 did withstand Camille, and with
very little damage. And all of the other storms that we’ve gone through since, our
building really has held well. Again, we’re not a certified shelter, by any agency;
however, nevertheless, our church members throughout the years have come here as
their place of refuge from storms.

Mrs. Adolph: Because they started calling that after—well, when we were leaving
service. “What are you-all going to do? What are you-all going to do?” Well, they
knew I worked for the health department. So we get called back on right after the
storm.

Smith: Yeah. Health workers generally, hospitals, nursing homes, they, by law, have
to stay in the emergency situations.

Mrs. Adolph: Pretty much, right. Now, public health does not have that edict, but
when you are at district level, and then you have a whole fleet working with you, then
you are accountable for each one of them. So—

Smith: So as a management person—

Mrs. Adolph: Right, as a manager. So in consultance to the state team, then. And
the people started calling, and they wanted to know what we were going to do. Well, I
asked Sonny, I said, you know, “What we going to do?” You couldn’t get out of town
anyway. The roads were just ridiculous. We knew what his dad and congregation
were going to face, leaving, in terms of timewise. And where were we going? And
what was going to happen to the people here? Well, we knew they had access, and
there is a wonderful, wonderful—we have a wonderful, wonderful deacon board, and
we have trustees. But they wanted to know where the pastor and, “Where you going,
and where y’all going?” So we decided to stay here. So the magic time of the day for
that, for any time we have people coming to the church is, like, six o’clock in the afternoon, prior to. So they came. And what? We had 125, about.

**Reverend Adolph:** A hundred and twenty-five to start with.

**Mrs. Adolph:** Yeah. Oh, yeah, till the next day.

**Reverend Adolph:** And we began—we opened our doors as a makeshift shelter at six p.m. on that Sunday evening.

**Mrs. Adolph:** Now, we had asked to be considered for a Red Cross shelter, too. Didn’t [we]?

**Reverend Adolph:** No, we never actually applied. We looked into it, but we never actually applied for it, and that’s an interesting story all by—I need to tell that story. And so in case I forget it, make me go back to the Red Cross.

**Smith:** I’m making notes.

**Reverend Adolph:** We opened our doors at six, and by nine, there was 125 of us.

**Smith:** Why would people not evacuate? I think that’s a question that a lot of folks from outside the area frequently ask. If you’ve been told to evacuate, [if told] it’s bad, the people that stayed, what was their rationale for staying in the area?

**Reverend Adolph:** I think that the expense that’s involved in evacuation is always to be considered, especially when you’re talking about people with lower incomes. The notion of spending five hundred to a thousand dollars, only to have your area missed by the storm, some people just would rather take the risk of staying, just out of the—with reference to the economics. And that’s not even to mention those who couldn’t afford to go anywhere, period. I mean, it’s not a matter of juggling that five hundred to a thousand. They just didn’t have the money, for some people. Then I think there is also the issue of, “We rode out the biggest and the baddest in Camille, and it couldn’t be anything worse than that. And we made it then; we going to make it now.” I think that that also comes into play. And that crosses the board with reference to economics. “If we could handle Camille, we can handle whatever.” I’m awfully afraid, too, that that same thing could influence people in the future if they did not have terrible experiences with Katrina, that, “We went through the biggest and baddest, and so nature can throw at us what it will. We can handle it.” I think that this area had plenty of people who evidently felt they thought they fared well during Camille, and that influenced them not to leave for Katrina.

**Mrs. Adolph:** And there are three other pieces to that. I’ve been raised in this community since I was ten and have never left, don’t even know what it’s like to leave. I think my first, my biggest storm was Katrina, when the cemeteries rolled up at Pass Christian, but there’s another thing of getting back in, and in terms of the
potential for vandalism of one's home by other people, walking neighborhoods and what have you. There is a responsibility then that innately surfaces in terms of responsibility for community. If you're here, you're looking out for somebody else, whether it's watching their property. "What you doing over there?" Or, "Can I lend you a hand?" That's the other piece with that. And there was another thing; getting back in, looking out for other people, and I can't think of the other one.

Reverend Adolph: While she thinks of it, I, too, born on the Gulf Coast, and never in my life has my family, as a child nor as an adult, have ever run from a storm either. And I do know that with my family, as a child, economics could have played a role in that. But as an adult, I guess I've never really given much thought to why it is I have not evacuated. Port Arthur, Texas, sitting right on the water, my house was ten blocks from the Gulf of Mexico, and I didn't evacuate living in Port Arthur, either. That church did not have the age-old tradition of gathering at the church. The storms I rode out in Port Arthur, I rode them out at home; however, that's not the case here in Gulfport. Here in Gulfport with the church having the tradition of staying, if they're going to be here, I'm going to be here.

Smith: OK. So you had about 125 at six p.m. on Sunday evening. That's—

Reverend Adolph: By nine we have—

Smith: By nine. So that's, I guess most people felt that they knew they were in a storm by six o'clock the next morning. It was a slow-moving storm.

Reverend Adolph: Oh, Lord.

Smith: What do you do? What does a congregation do from six p.m. to six a.m. while the storm is—

Mrs. Adolph: That's remarkable.

Smith: —brewing up? What happens at church?

Mrs. Adolph: That's remarkable.

Reverend Adolph: I want to paint a little picture of First Missionary from my perspective. Ginny made mention of the deacons and trustees and the quality of those groups. And I guess I would have to let it be known that I have fashioned First Missionary as a dream pastorate because of my relationship with my boards and with the men and women that serve there. I fashioned my time at First Missionary as an eighteen-year honeymoon. We've not had a quote, unquote, "fight" in eighteen years. (laughter)

Smith: And this is a Baptist Church?
Reverend Adolph: It is a Baptist Church.

Smith: OK. So I’m just checking, to make sure. (laughter)

Reverend Adolph: We haven’t had a fight in eighteen years. But any rate, though—

Mrs. Adolph: We have discussions.

Reverend Adolph: You know, but nothing that had us unable to speak to each other. So the fellowship is tremendous, a warm, rich fellowship all the time. Well, even the threat of a major disaster like Katrina, the atmosphere that night was really, in a lot of ways, typical First Baptist, people enjoying each other’s company, radios here and there, board games. I mean, they were enjoying each other’s company. Now, it didn’t really turn super-religious, and the prayers didn’t start until the winds really whipped up. (laughter) Then folks started singing and praying.

Mrs. Adolph: Mm-mm, when the lights went off.

Reverend Adolph: When the lights went off. (laughter)

Smith: So that would have been Monday morning.

Mrs. Adolph: No. That was eleven o’clock.

Smith: Eleven o’clock in the evening.

Reverend Adolph: The lights went off that early?

Mrs. Adolph: At eleven.

Reverend Adolph: I don’t remember them going out that early.

Mrs. Adolph: The emergency lights came on at eleven o’clock.

Reverend Adolph: You’re sure right; you’re right.

Mrs. Adolph: But even when we’ve had threats of hurricanes before—let’s see, when Dennis that didn’t touch us, and then we had what? Georges, we came. When we were here, the old sisters, they never sleep. You can’t get them to go lay down. You don’t get them to move from the table, and they will sit for up to forty-eight hours; they did with Katrina, some of them. And they just sit, and they reflect, and they’ll get quiet a while, and they’ll pray. Now, they, “Go get me something to eat.” And then they’ll stay right—but they never leave a watchful post the entire time. It’s—

Smith: So they’re watching and praying?
Mrs. Adolph: They’re watching and praying. They talking, you know, about other storms and this kind of stuff. And they’ll kid at somebody and say, “You eating all that mess; you going to be fat.” Or whatever, but they never, they don’t change.

Reverend Adolph: And the eating all that stuff needs to be—

Mrs. Adolph: Oh, yeah, they bring everything. God.

Reverend Adolph: The church doesn’t stock (laughter) the kitchen especially for seasons like this because we don’t have to. People bring; I almost wonder, “Are those leftover?” I’m just kidding. (laughter) But they bring tons of food with them.

Mrs. Adolph: Gumbo, hams.

Reverend Adolph: And it’s like, to a certain extent, it’s like pot-luck dinner or something.

Mrs. Adolph: The last supper. (laughter)

Reverend Adolph: I mean, folks pass around some of everything, so food is plentiful. They bring things like water; they bring extra batteries. And even this past time, they got pretty sophisticated, some of the equipment they brought.

Mrs. Adolph: Oh, they had everything.

Reverend Adolph: One fellow had a generator, a small generator that he literally could plug in when we needed electric lights for something; I mean, portable. They got really sophisticated this time.

Mrs. Adolph: They did.

Reverend Adolph: But nevertheless, yeah, it really starts to take on a—you could tell we were at church, the songs, the prayers. But again, like Ginny says, that only starts when the storm’s action starts.

Smith: What did they sing? Do you remember particular hymns or spirituals?

Reverend Adolph: Just a medley of “Jesus, Keep Me Near the Cross,” “At the Cross,” just good, old—

Mrs. Adolph: “Amazing Grace.”

Reverend Adolph: Yeah, good, old church hymns.

Mrs. Adolph: And it’s quiet. I mean, there’s talking; there’s everything going on, but this core, and everybody know, “You don’t cross that line. Y’all better leave them
alone. Leave them alone. (Inaudible) are praying.” You know. “Leave them alone.” And everybody kind of goes around. You check on them, but you don’t—you can’t hardly make them go to the bathroom.

Smith: You talking about the older ladies?

Mrs. Adolph: The older ladies, that’s the inner circle. You just, you, it’s—

Reverend Adolph: Now, even if they are on pallets, or whatever they brought to recline or to sleep on, they don’t sleep. They’ll be awake. If you want to know what happened at certain, certain time. If they had an ability to see it, their watch—

Mrs. Adolph: Oh, they can tell you.

Reverend Adolph: —they can tell you exactly what time stuff happened. They’re awake.

Smith: So you would have, when the winds kicked up or the lights went off, the winds kicked up, you would have singing and praying. Was that organized or spontaneous?

Reverend Adolph: It was spontaneous.

Mrs. Adolph: It’s very [spontaneous].

Smith: It’s spontaneous. So somebody says, “Let’s sing ‘Jesus Keep Me Near the Cross.’”

Reverend Adolph: Yeah, um-hm, or just start singing it, and everybody joins in with them.

Smith: Praying’s spontaneous?

Reverend Adolph: Um-hm.

Smith: So you didn’t have, like, a—

Reverend Adolph: —an organized—

Smith: —a sort of directed meditation or anything like that?

Mrs. Adolph: Mm-mm.

Reverend Adolph: Mm-mm.
**Smith:** So it’s basically the group feeling what they wanted to express in song or in prayers. Was there any sense of fear that you could see? People are singing. They’re disturbed. You said they weren’t really singing and praying all that much until the lights went out and the storm kicked up.

**Mrs. Adolph:** But they weren’t afraid.

**Reverend Adolph:** I don’t know if I would use the term disturbed. I suppose disturbed could apply, but it’s more like, “We know this is serious, and as we would with anything that would be serious, Lord, we’re coming to you. You’re our help; you’re our hope.” And that’s not as if, though, they didn’t feel that way when they were having fun. (laughter) But it’s certainly as if, though, during, as things began to get worse, it was certainly understood, he was the center of attention.

**Mrs. Adolph:** And I think that was the underlying thing to them even coming; that is the recognition of, you know, “Hey, Lord, we putting this on you.” I mean, we had a full trailer park over here with trailers that could have been totally ripped apart.

**Reverend Adolph:** With people that stayed—

**Mrs. Adolph:** —stayed in them.

**Reverend Adolph:** —in those trailers.

**Smith:** During the storm?

**Mrs. Adolph:** During the storm.

**Reverend Adolph:** And we invited them. “Hey, look. Get out of there.” Again, we are probably talking about people who couldn’t afford—

**Mrs. Adolph:** —to go anywhere.

**Reverend Adolph:** —to go anywhere. But to stay in a trailer—

**Smith:** So you had people in the neighborhood of the church, staying in trailers?

**Mrs. Adolph:** Right here.

**Reverend Adolph:** At the time, the church operated a trailer park.

**Mrs. Adolph:** Full trailer park right next door.

**Reverend Adolph:** It wasn’t until after Katrina that we did away with that. We had several of ours that were heavily damaged, and just weren’t worth repairing and certainly were not livable.
Smith: Did people from the trailer park come on into the church?

Mrs. Adolph: Mm-mm.

Reverend Adolph: No.

Smith: So a lot of people just stayed.

Reverend Adolph: They stayed in those trailers. That could be a documentary all in itself. I am one who has, I’ve given attention to the notions of liberation theology, and I certainly understand that not only do individuals sin, but groups sin, that there certainly can be sinful public policies. I understand that; however, out of all of my look at liberation theology, what I can never erase is an individual’s personal responsibility. And I know that, for example, our church tried all we could with home ownership programs, with just teaching basic family economics, just, we’ve done all kinds of things to try to help the poor, be poor no more. (laughter) But you can lead the horse to water, but you can’t make him drink, and we couldn’t. That’s the best we could do with—and I, to a certain extent, if there is—out of all the things I am in as a pastor, I’m rather proud of some of the stuff First Missionary has accomplished, but out of the things I think we’ve done poorest at—and I don’t know if that’s all our fault—it would be to reach some people. I put it this way, man, to me, what we had to offer was what they needed, and they were next door and wouldn’t come to get it. Now, I hope that—I don’t know how that plays in the future when someone hears this, but that is certainly this pastor’s frustration, to have people that need what you’re offering and refuse it, even to the safety of a shelter from a trailer. They would not come in.

Mrs. Adolph: But even afterward, though, it was really remarkable because the skirts of trailers came off, some of them. You have all these trailers over here, but the people knew the church was there.

Reverend Adolph: And knew the doors were open.

Mrs. Adolph: Knew the doors were open. Now, we did have some people come in out of the night.

Reverend Adolph: Well, no, they didn’t just come in out the night.

Mrs. Adolph: Where did (laughter)—oh, you had them—

Reverend Adolph: They did not just come in out of the night.

Mrs. Adolph: Where did they come from?

Reverend Adolph: As Back Bay flooded, this whole housing area back to our left—
Mrs. Adolph: No, no, no. I’m talking about before that. The people that came in, in the middle of the night.

Reverend Adolph: I’m unaware of people that came in, in the night.

Mrs. Adolph: Oh, you—yeah.

Reverend Adolph: Only ones I know that came in were the ones the [fire] department brought us.

Mrs. Adolph: No, no, no, no, no. We had some other ones came in because—

Reverend Adolph: See, I didn’t know that.

Mrs. Adolph: Yeah, because Miss Verlene(?), some of the elders, they said, “We going to watch that boy over there.”

Reverend Adolph: OK. (laughter)

Mrs. Adolph: “They something wrong with that boy over there. Boy, you want something to eat? Um-hm. Y’all just stay right there (inaudible).” I mean, but they would look out for people, but I mean, like three o’clock in the morning, the doors came open, and these people appeared, and they asked could they stay.

Reverend Adolph: Now, I’m not the only one responsible for these forms, but for insurance purposes, the church prepared release forms for nonmembers, where we clearly explained to them in the form that we are not a certified shelter, that we’re here because this is where we choose to come, not necessarily being guaranteed that this is safe. (laughter)

Smith: Or that they’re preprovisioned to the next day.

Reverend Adolph: Right, right, right, right. We’re not an official shelter of any kind; we’re here—then we have people sign. That’s why I don’t recall issuing one of those forms, but I’m not the only one that did that.

Mrs. Adolph: We got them. The fire department knew we were here.

Reverend Adolph: And I actually felt a little mistreated by them.

Smith: OK. Talk about that.

Reverend Adolph: We had the housing section here behind us under water. You could literally—
Smith: What’s the social/racial composition of the area back here that flooded, to your north?

Reverend Adolph: What, fifty/fifty?

Mrs. Adolph: Fifty/fifty what?

Smith: White/black.

Reverend Adolph: Black and white.

Mrs. Adolph: Yeah, yeah, then, yeah.

Smith: How about the trailer park? Would it have been—

Reverend Adolph: It was predominantly black.

Mrs. Adolph: It was predominantly black, 75 percent. But you can literally see out there. You can raise those blinds. The house that has the roof down there? Water was up to that, above that window.

Smith: On Monday. So you could see the water from back of the church.

Reverend Adolph: Yes.

Mrs. Adolph: Um-hm, we stood on this landing.

Smith: To your north, coming out of the Back Bay of Biloxi or the Gulfport Lake, whatever they’re calling it.

Mrs. Adolph: Yeah, that’s Back Bay.

Reverend Adolph: Water was up.

Mrs. Adolph: The bayou.

Reverend Adolph: All those people were rescued by the fire department, and they brought them here. No problem. The problem with what they brought here, or the problem with them bringing them here was that we feel like they brought them here because they couldn’t take them to the shelter, and the reason they couldn’t take them to the shelter, to Gulfport High, the official Red Cross shelter, the reason they couldn’t take them there was because some of them refused to leave without their animals. If their animals couldn’t go, they weren’t going, even though they were sitting on their roofs, or rescued out of their attics, they would not leave. They would not go to the shelter because of their animals. So the fire department brought them to us, and we sort of felt like, “Hey, that sort of was”—it put is in a—because we had people who
couldn’t, for the same reason the shelter won’t let you bring animals, we had people with conditions that wouldn’t allow them to be with animals, either. However, the way we were able to fix that was, by that time, which would have been what? Roughly six o’clock in the morning. By that time, the sanctuary had actually lost some shingles, and it began leaking; so we brought everybody out of the sanctuary, and basically everybody was in this building.

Smith: It’s your educational annex, and you have a kind of a hall, a large fellowship hall.

Reverend Adolph: Um-hm. And classrooms upstairs. And so what we ended up doing was, since the sanctuary was vacated, since the back was packed, or lots of people were back here, we actually asked that the people who insisted on bringing their animals would go to the vestibule on the front end of the sanctuary. No carpet, ceramic tile, a distance away from other people, so that—so we ended up being able to accommodate them, but I still didn’t like having to be put on the spot like that with the fire department. Nevertheless, I’m glad to know that apparently Red Cross or somebody has provided now that there will be shelters that will allow people to have animals.

Smith: OK. So this is a storm that kicked up seriously enough the fire department, by six a.m., is doing its sort of last round before they have to get off.

Reverend Adolph: That’s right.

Mrs. Adolph: They’re right next door.

Smith: So they’re coming back, maybe, into other low-lying areas, probably doing the same thing to just see what can happen before it gets too violent, or responding to 911 calls. OK. So that’s six a.m. That storm sort of hovered in place for—

Reverend Adolph: Five p.m.

Smith: —the next ten or twelve hours.

Mrs. Adolph: Right.

Smith: What all is going on in the church as you weather the worst of this, and you can watch from the north end of the church, the water coming up? Did you ever have a fear that the water might rise—

Mrs. Adolph: They left. Where did y’all go?

Reverend Adolph: No, during the storm, we did not leave. There were several of us that did stand outside on the porch, and particularly try to see how the trailers were faring, whether we needed to send someone over to knock on doors or something.
And of course, we did see large stuff flying around. (laughter) However, I got to tell you, to watch Katrina—(brief interruption)—really, having grown up with hurricanes, it did not appear to be all that bad. It just lasted so long, and of course there was flooding where we’d never seen it. But other than that, just to see the storm, itself, it just wasn’t—I would have never thought that we were getting wrecked the way we did by what we saw from the porch and from the window. Water? Yeah, but to think that there was enough of it coming up on the beach to wash it away, no idea.

**Smith:** To wash all the fancy houses on the—how far—

**Reverend Adolph:** No idea.

**Smith:** How far from the front beach, the south beach, is the church?

**Reverend Adolph:** The church is approx[ximately]—I’m guessing and saying approximately ten blocks from the beach.

**Smith:** OK. And from Back Bay you might be?

**Reverend Adolph:** Four blocks.

**Smith:** Four blocks. OK. So you went through that day, and at some point, people ventured out. You said that your elderly ladies’ prayer group you think stayed up and prayed and did their thing for forty-eight hours straight. When you ventured out, when did you become aware of the enormity of the destruction?

**Reverend Adolph:** Mayor Warr and his father passed by about five fifteenish.

**Smith:** P.m.?

**Mrs. Adolph:** Monday evening.

**Reverend Adolph:** Monday evening. And the look on their faces and all Brett did was just simply shook his head, from side-to-side, and he and his dad, his dad looking just, I mean, like he’d seen a ghost. I mean, like, I’ll never forget the look on Mr. Warr’s face. They drove on. The chairman of my deacon board and I decided we’d venture out to look around a bit, to go see about his house. He lives out in Rolling Meadows?

**Mrs. Adolph:** Rolling Meadows, yeah.

**Reverend Adolph:** And so—

**Smith:** That’s sort of North Gulfport area?

**Reverend Adolph:** Right.
Mrs. Adolph: Right.

Reverend Adolph: So we actually find that, oh, there are lots of trees down, and of course we needed to be careful with power lines, but we finally snake our way around to get to his house. In the meantime, the flooding behind us from Back Bay was much worse than we thought. We knew what we saw behind us, but we had no idea that water would be up on the fence in the Handsboro Place community over here on Mill Road, nor we could look towards where the Mill Creek Apartments are and couldn't even see the stop sign, and the street was under water.

Smith: So this is about five, six in the afternoon?

Reverend Adolph: It was about 5:30 in the afternoon.

Smith: So the water still had not receded in those places.

Reverend Adolph: As a matter of fact, we made the mistake of, dummies that we were, we thinking it's normal time, so we actually turned on Mill to go through Washington, and snake our way around—

Smith: Crossing the bridge.

Reverend Adolph: —to get to North Gulfport. And we get down there, and this guy's yelling and screaming for someone to help him because his wife had started trying to swim back to the apartments back there. And he lost sight of her. And man, I'm saying, “You don't know what's in that water.” (laughter) “You don't, everyone out there, trying to—oh! Come on, man.” But what became of that lady, I don't know. In the meantime, my deacon and I did snake our way around the other way to get to his house, left his house, went to go see our house, and my goodness. My house is [the house number has not been transcribed in order to protect the privacy of the interviewee] Reservation Drive, about two miles north of I-10, but it got hit by a tornado. So it was wrecked. We were much better off being there at the church. (laughter) If we'd have stayed home, oh, Lord, have mercy. I might have had to commit both the wife and the dog. Just kidding. But—

Smith: What was the visual nature of what you saw at your own house?

Reverend Adolph: One of the gables had been blown in, and consequently you could just literally stand on one side and see straight through to the other. It even had dormers on top that got blown off.

Smith: So your house would have flooded from the top.

Reverend Adolph: Right.
Smith: So did your ceilings fall?

Reverend Adolph: Yes.

Mrs. Adolph: Yes.

Smith: Your ceiling’s collapsed; your furniture was—

Reverend Adolph: Yes.

Mrs. Adolph: Yes.

Smith: —ruined. Your carpets—

Reverend Adolph: Fireplace—

Mrs. Adolph: —blew out.

Reverend Adolph: A brick fireplace that went up to the ceiling crashed in. I mean—

Mrs. Adolph: Blew off.

Reverend Adolph: It was a wreck. So you know—

Smith: So you had very severe damage. Did you have an insurance agent evaluate the financial—

Reverend Adolph: Yeah.

Smith: How much loss? Do you mind saying? This is just for helping us understand what you’re going to go through with your home disturbed and working with the congregation.

Mrs. Adolph: Well, there’s two phase, because the first little fellow was from Canada. Well, they pulled him in—

Smith: Your adjuster was from Canada?

Mrs. Adolph: Yes.

Smith: You know what the company is?

Mrs. Adolph: Yes, State Farm. And he measured, but he didn’t measure height. He just measured (laughter) regular eight foot; he never went above that. So anything above the eight-foot mark where you had gables, he didn’t account for that. So since
Sonny was working more so with the church at that time, and I was on the chase with State Farm.

**Reverend Adolph:** Without necessarily giving you specific dollar figures of what the insurance check was, can I put it this way? It was 25 percent more than we paid for the house.

**Smith:** OK. So your house, you might say you would have considered it financially a total loss, based on that figure.

**Mrs. Adolph:** Yes. We couldn’t go home.

**Smith:** So you couldn’t go home. How long were you out of your house, having to live somewhere else or in a trailer?

**Mrs. Adolph:** Well, being as I am, I wanted to go home. We had piece of house left, but we still had a piece and still of the old school where people go in and take where somebody isn’t present. So we stayed with one of the ministers here at the church and his family for a week.

**Reverend Adolph:** A week and then we went home.

**Mrs. Adolph:** And he was working; he still works for Home Depot. And they went around the neighborhood, collecting up all the little siding, and made it look like the haunted house and kind of nailed it back together so nothing was flying in.

**Reverend Adolph:** So critters couldn’t—

**Mrs. Adolph:** Couldn’t come in. But then, we went back home and closed off half the house. And we went home, and we were both working the whole time. So he was here, and I had gone back to public health. And in the meantime with the insurance thing, then I was chasing the insurance guys, basically. And we were cleaning out the house, trying to get things out at the same time.

**Smith:** OK. What about damage to the church building? You said you lost some shingles. Was it a major issue there?

**Mrs. Adolph:** No.

**Reverend Adolph:** No. We lost shingles. As a matter of fact, we actually worshipped in the sanctuary the Sunday following the storm with the lights on. We lost a couple of windowpanes inside of offices. What was my old office lost a windowpane. And on the opposite side of the building, its twin room on the other side of the building also lost an old-fashioned windowpane. Our faceted glass needed no protection; didn’t leak. Really impressed with it. I was trying to tie all this back in to an incident that happened to us relative to the Red Cross. We spent the night here
Monday night. Oh, I guess I got to tell you about the fact that I came back and took Virginia to see the house. Of course, she was a mess and a wreck after she saw the house.

**Mrs. Adolph:** In the dark.

**Reverend Adolph:** And then coming back, Gulfport PD [police department] wasn’t going to let us come south of I-10. And I kept trying to tell them, “Hey, my house is wrecked, and my bed for the night (laughter) is back at the church.” And this fellow wasn’t hearing it. And they came in, reports of looters on Pass Road. And I said, “I sure hope that’s none of those teenage boys I left at the church.” (laughter) They escorted me back to the church. (laughter)

**Mrs. Adolph:** That’s the only way we got in.

**Reverend Adolph:** “I sure hope that’s none of those teenage boys I left at that church.” (laughter) They brought me in. (laughter) So the same crew that spent the night here Sunday night was here Monday night. And everybody announced that we were going wherever we could go on Tuesday. Tuesday morning comes; everybody’s leaving except the lady who lived in the house right there.

**Mrs. Adolph:** On this side.

**Reverend Adolph:** On this side, yeah. She didn’t have anywhere to go. So my thing was, “Hey, since we’re all leaving, then let me take you to the official Red Cross shelter that’s at Gulfport High.” So I took the lady to Gulfport High, thinking I’m doing a wonderful thing.

**Mrs. Adolph:** She and her daughter and grandchildren.

**Reverend Adolph:** And only a couple of weeks later after we have power and JZD 94.5, Rip Daniels(?) is back on the air, and he’s talking to various people about their storm experiences, and this lady comes on the station, blasting me and the church out for mistreating her. The thing we had done to her was we took her to the high school and didn’t come back to see about her, and she was there for several days—so she says—without food or water at the official Red Cross shelter. And so that among some other things that we encountered with reference to the Red Cross was not good. In the meantime—

**Smith:** Did you follow up that to see what actually was going on over there? Whether they actually had food or water?

**Reverend Adolph:** Actually, I didn’t.

**Mrs. Adolph:** They didn’t, though. They didn’t—
Smith: So the shelter was in lack of supply.

Mrs. Adolph: Yeah. Yeah, that was confirmed.

Reverend Adolph: Now, in the meantime, what we’re trying to do now relative to the Red Cross, however, is we’re actually trying to make sure that we get as many members as we possibly can to become volunteers. We noticed that one of the weaknesses, for example, with outsiders that came in to help us was that they didn’t know the lay of the land and tons of other stuff they didn’t know. With local help, I certainly thought it could have enhanced their ability to serve. So we’re trying to actually influence more of our members to become Red Cross volunteers so that, without just us criticizing the agency, with us trying to do something to help them do what they do.

Smith: Did you have any—and I ask this question because it became a major issue after Camille with a lot of charities that practiced racial discrimination, back of the line based on color. Did you have any, ever have reason to believe that there was either total misunderstanding or overt discrimination?

Reverend Adolph: Yeah. But then, you know Pat, we live in South Mississippi. So to say that that was actually the work of the agency as much as it could have been some of the locals who were participating with the agency—I would rather blame that on them. That’s another reason why we want to make sure that we have more people who become volunteers, too. So that if, you know, hoping to put some balance to that, anyway.

Smith: What about you, Mrs. Adolph? You nodded your head when I asked that question. What did you see? You’re a social worker, and you’ve got state responsibilities. What did you see?

Mrs. Adolph: Well, we were doing the liaison work for public health out of Jackson, with the establishing systems for medicines and pharmaceuticals. And we were charged with putting together, say, a two-million-dollar pharmacy, straight off the bat, because they had a group that was working with Shackley(?) Corporation. It’s a pharmaceutical network out of Michigan, and they wanted to put drugs on the ground here, and they didn’t have a contact. Well, they called, and they said, “Hey, they’re going to land at Bel-Air(?) Baptist Church. Virginia, can you handle it?” I said, “OK. We have no choice.” Because our office, I was working on Community Road at the public health office. And I said, “Well, that’s real close to me. That’s not a problem.”

Smith: So Bel-Air is a—

Mrs. Adolph: A Baptist Church on Dedeeaux Road.

Smith: On Dedeeaux Road, a little north of Community.
Mrs. Adolph: Which is north, north of Community. You can take the cut through on Wilson, straight up.

Smith: North of Interstate 10.

Mrs. Adolph: Right. And so we worked with them; got the pharmacy established and were trying to get supplies on the ground to health department participants. Say, mamas and babies, because when you work public health, you work birth to the grave. Every time we would be—American Red Cross would come in and say, “We’ve got these cases that we want you to work.” They were going through the command center, through Colonel Spraggins, going through Dr. Robert Travenachek(?) was our health officer. And he swears that public health can do anything. So he said, “Oh, they got it. Punkin(?) and them got it.” So we would get these referrals. Well, we had our own caseload to see about, plus we were still looking for public health employees. We were still looking for some in the Bay St. Louis area, that couldn’t be found. We thought they were dead. So everybody had gone out to look for them, and then when all else fails, they dump it in the social workers’ laps. So the team said, “What do you want done?” I said, “Don’t come back until you find them.” Well, what happened, we had a couple of people that were trapped in their homes. They had gone everywhere looking for them in community, but they had not gone to their homes to look for them because they didn’t think in Bay St. Louis that they would have stayed in their homes. But they did. So we found them there. We’re trying to put together pharmaceuticals; we’re addressing referrals on individual need. You have the Red Cross come in, and these high-up types from DC would come in, these young men that had sought position or gained favor within the organization. And they’ll come in, and they would threaten you with, “I’ll have your job. I’ll call the governor.” And being a old-school, seasoned, public health person, and being a black woman, my thing is, “You call the governor. You want the number?” And it got to be a question of professional integrity that was on the line, but you knew the lay of the land. They would be headed to Pass Christian, and they start out toward Mobile. Say, “Come back. You going the wrong way. You don’t know where you’re going.” And the problem was, just as Sonny had alluded to, was the fact that even in all these strategic plantings, nationwide, if anything gets conveyed, it’s that the value of the folks on the ground, from the location where the disaster occurs, is more important than you coming in with your assistance, whatever you have to offer, the resources, because you slow down the system up to 60 percent, because you have to wander around, you know everything; nobody can tell you anything, and you’ve got folks that have lived here all their lives. And they know, and they still have credentials just as well as you would from Washington, DC, or from Boston area. So of course, then, the knowledge base of Southern folks, and especially minority Southern folks, get devalued even more. So it tended to be a thing where we would ask the Red Cross for assistance in public health; then they’d disappear on you. First they were at Northwood Christian Center; then they moved the base. We went there to speak to officials there, and this is all public health at the time, went there; then they moved again. And then next thing we knew, they were in Woolmarket at the Joppa Temple as their base of operations. And on those occasions when officials from those entities were working
with public health, it was a constant challenge in terms of working together, because the knowledge base of the locals was such that, “This was our opinion of how assistance should be rendered and how culturally the nuances of the area impacted how resources should be delivered to the community and how they would be accepted.” Just because you bring them does not mean that somebody is going to take what you have. There is a way to do it, and it is not that people have to just be grateful, because you are here to provide the service. And all these things were not being counted into the formula at all. It was there because you—it was being conveyed that, “Hey, I’m doing you a great service.” So the volunteers were not trained in terms of cultural diversity and how to work in community. It was very, very hard having Red Cross vans and volunteers in the area that would just bypass culturally diverse areas. It was extremely hard to work with those (inaudible).

**Reverend Adolph:** So without a doubt—do you remember the incident in New Orleans when a black fellow was coming from a grocery store with a loaf of bread, he’s looting. When a white boy was coming from a store, he’s finding food for his family. (laughter) I mean, that’s our country. I mean, that’s—by the way, too, when I said, like, that I don’t mean—as a preacher that’s another burden I have, not just to deal with poverty, but in our country, prejudice, and from the Christian ministry standpoint. Not only would I have to have a heart for helping the poor, but in our country, also knowing that we’ve got to deal with prejudiced people, too.

**Mrs. Adolph:** Um-hm, and the poor in spirit, yeah.

**Smith:** Let’s think about the church situation. You had on an average Sunday, pre-Katrina, how many people might turn up for services here. You say you had two services each Sunday.

**Reverend Adolph:** Right at six hundred.

**Smith:** Six hundred. You told me that right after the storm, the Sunday after the storm, you had services in your sanctuary. Did you have two services that Sunday?

**Reverend Adolph:** No.

**Smith:** You had one service. How many people showed up for that service?

**Reverend Adolph:** The service the Sunday after Katrina, we had about seventy-five if I remember correctly. As a matter of fact, there was several articles that ended up in national news about our gathering that morning. Matter of fact I was misquoted in a couple of those.

**Smith:** Well, talk about that a little bit. Straighten the quote out.

**Reverend Adolph:** Well, in the first place, it was said that we lost our house, and we didn’t totally lose it. I mean, it was—
Smith: It was severe.

Reverend Adolph: Yeah, it was severe.

Mrs. Adolph: Well, they had us dead, too.

Reverend Adolph: Yeah, if I’m not mistaken, somebody across the country literally thought we were killed because of what they—

Smith: The house was so heavily—

Reverend Adolph: Yeah. Post-Katrina, we went to a ten o’clock service rather than doing 7:45 and eleven. We did ten o’clock for what? Until probably January.

Smith: What was that first service like? Tell me what you saw, what you saw with your people, what you did with the service.

Reverend Adolph: Shock. “Would somebody please wake me up? I have to be dreaming.” Our text for that Sunday, if I remember correctly, should have been “Handling Tough Times,” Isaiah 40: 28 through 31, declaring that we literally had left on record a how-to manual on handling tough times. This newly-freed people who had been in captivity in Babylon would have to cross a desert to get home, and in order for them to be able to handle that, apparently the text offer some things that they had to know. Our three simple things was that [we] need to know that our God’s awesome, that we’re weak, and that he’ll help us.

Smith: Do you remember songs that were sung? How they were selected?

Reverend Adolph: I don’t.

Smith: How was that sermon received, do you think?

Reverend Adolph: Yeah. You received it, so you answer.

Mrs. Adolph: It was, I think, the greatest. I think the thing that impacted me most was that we had so many media people in the congregation that Sunday, and his position was, “We’re going to have church today. And then should you want to have interviews, or do whatever, you do it subsequent to church, but we having service here.” And it was really a multidenominational service that day because we had people from all over that Sunday because they had nowhere to go, and they knew First Baptist was having service. Did we even have air-conditioning that Sunday?

Reverend Adolph: We had power.

Mrs. Adolph: I knew we did, but I couldn’t remember.
Smith: You’re right on Pass Road, so that would be a main artery that the power company would be working on.

Mrs. Adolph: Right. And I think it was only two functioning sanctuaries—

Reverend Adolph: In the black community, for sure.

Mrs. Adolph: —at that time in the black community. And so we had people from everywhere. And I’ll never forget Lucy Marion Roberts(?) came and sat in the back of the church, and after he finished preaching she just, tears started running down her face. And—

Smith: And this is Robin Roberts’ mother, the ABC [American Broadcasting Company] News commentator.

Mrs. Adolph: Yes. And we’ve known her for years, and she felt so guilty because her best friends had stayed, and she had lost her best—the Maxies(?) had been lost—

Smith: They were killed.

Mrs. Adolph: —in the storm. And she said if she had said she was leaving, then they—

Reverend Adolph: Maybe they—

Mrs. Adolph: —maybe they wouldn’t have perished because they would have gone, Hornetha(?) and Dr. Maxie, since Dr. Maxie wasn’t doing well. They would have gone, but she said she did receive the message, and she said she was just struggling. Well, it wasn’t long after that even, she has become a true friend to the church, even though we’ve known her over the years in terms of what goes on, and then being willing to donate of her own self to the ministry in terms of what is going on, even though she is of another faith community.

Smith: She’s a Presbyterian.

Mrs. Adolph: Um-hm.

Reverend Adolph: Um-hm.

Mrs. Adolph: Um-hm. And so she really has. And she’ll pop up from time to time, just whenever.

Reverend Adolph: We went through something that I certainly want logged in this, as well, and that is a young lady from our congregation that had been emergency
manager for the City of New Orleans was in competition with Colonel Spraggins for the job of emergency manager for our—

Smith: Harrison County Emergency Manager?

Reverend Adolph: Um-hm. She was in competition with him for the job. We certainly thought her credentials in emergency management outshined his, but of course, he got the job.

Smith: You mind saying her name?

Reverend Adolph: Lillian Jenkins(?). And again, with her credentials and the fact that she does have emergency management, I mean, for New Orleans, nevertheless.

Smith: Colonel Spraggins had just retired from the Air National Guard and been on the job, maybe, a week before Katrina.

Reverend Adolph: No. Katrina was his first day on the job; the twenty-ninth of August was his first day on the job, if I’m not mistaken.

Smith: OK. That’s fine. That’s right. He was new to the job.

Reverend Adolph: Brand-new. That Monday was his first official day on the job. Now, what he’d done prior to that I don’t know, but that Monday was his first official day on the job. And we actually ended up thinking that it probably would have been a blessing in disguise, because that certainly wasn’t going to be an easy job for anybody to get hit by the nation’s worst natural disaster on your first day on the job. Nevertheless, it was Lillian that we tapped into to become our disaster services director. And—

Mrs. Adolph: Tell where we—that’s where we lived.

Reverend Adolph: That’s where we actually, we actually lived with them that week we were out of the house.

Smith: Let’s think about how you came to that conclusion that you were going to have to have some help here at the church with its outreach in the community. You said that you knew a number of people had lost their place to live. How did you come to know that? What did you do that made you know how many people were in trouble in your congregation?

Reverend Adolph: Well, actually I didn’t know numbers. It was actually Lillian. Right off the bat, I didn’t know that. It was actually Lillian that organized our efforts with the disaster center that gave me those numbers. She, and of course deacons working to find out where people are, how are people faring, and with the two, with her service as well as the deacons looking for people, ended up giving us the numbers
that we’d lost forty families to other areas. We had thirty families that lost everything. And by the way—

Smith: When you say you lost forty families, that means they—

Reverend Adolph: Moved.

Smith: —relocate out of the neighborhood of the church.

Reverend Adolph: Unh-uh, not just out of the neighborhood of the church; away from the area.

Smith: Away from the area.

Reverend Adolph: Dallas, Atlanta, Houston, Birmingham, Montgomery, but other places, away. Forty families that did that; thirty families that had lost everything, and by the way, we didn’t count ourselves as having lost everything. But at any rate, thirty families that lost everything, and only two of those families that lost everything were among the forty that left. We had a young lady whose house was washed away in Pass Christian who moved to Dallas. I’m trying to think of who the other family was that lost everything that moved away.

Mrs. Adolph: Well, I was concentrating on the ones that were staying.

Reverend Adolph: I’ve forgotten. Right now I can’t think of who the other family was, but nevertheless.

Smith: So you have people out of the area, but then you’ve got something that has to be done here. What did you decide that was? How did you come to the conclusion that you had to have help?

Mrs. Adolph: Because we had them trucks. (laughter) Remember? Remember people wanting to give us stuff? Oh, God.

Reverend Adolph: It wasn’t just trucks.

Mrs. Adolph: Coordination of people wanting to know what to do.

Smith: Trucks, you had a lot of charitable donations sent to this church?

Reverend Adolph: Well, yeah, and for a season our fellowship hall was a general store. Of course, we weren’t selling anything; it was free. But it was a distribution point. Yeah. And of course, Lillian did a super job organizing those kinds of things. Since we did have electricity and computers, she organized FEMA registration online; those kinds of things were being offered. We ended up being a point that groups like
the NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People] promised it would offer for help.

Mrs. Adolph: Assistance.

Reverend Adolph: Assistance that I'm not aware of ever came, but it had people, I know—

Mrs. Adolph: That was awful.

Reverend Adolph: I know it was a circus one day. We actually ultimately served over eight hundred people, got applications from over eight hundred people. It was a fiasco out of this world. I never will forget, too, some of the attitudes of people we served, in particular with reference to the NAACP. Some people were making demands on people, and I'm saying, "Hold up! And wait a minute. Be patient; here are the rules. Here's how this works." People want to hear that? No. "I'm calling the NAACP!" Like Ginny, "Hey, here's the number and the phone. Go ahead and call them."

Mrs. Adolph: "Call them."

Reverend Adolph: "We don't work for them." (laughter) But nevertheless, and trying to remind people, "Hey, the person you are currently dealing with is a volunteer." Because not only did we have Miss Jenkins, we also had other people that came in to volunteer to help her. But super organization. We actually ended up with, on file, about twelve hundred households that we were keeping track of, how they were faring. Our church doesn't even have twelve hundred households, so that was more than just our church's membership.

Smith: So this was the area of sort of East Gulfport?

Reverend Adolph: Right.

Smith: Were you assisting people regardless of race?

Reverend Adolph: Yes.

Smith: Did this church become a place from which volunteers coming in from the outside were directed to work?

Mrs. Adolph: (Inaudible) (laughter)

Reverend Adolph: Yeah. Perhaps the most significant group was Virginia Tech Camp Gang(?). As a matter of fact, they actually counted us as their church home away from home.
Smith: Is this a racially diverse group of volunteers?

Mrs. Adolph: Oh, yes.

Reverend Adolph: Um-hm.

Mrs. Adolph: This is a school of engineering; it’s their engineering fraternity, Tau Beta Pi.

Reverend Adolph: That’s why when they had the shooting, we had the service.

Mrs. Adolph: Here. And the guy that instructs the astronauts how to work the Hubble Telescope, he is their—

Reverend Adolph: Yeah. That was an interesting bunch, man. (laughter)

Mrs. Adolph: That was interesting. His wife showed up one night, and we were here, and I saw him with a lariat around his neck that said NASA [National Aeronautic and Space Administration]. And I say, “I know we’re working with a bunch of engineering students. Now, what do you do, and where do you do it, and who do you do it for?” And little Jewish fellow, his wife, she say, “Oh. I didn’t know you-all had such good food.” I mean, because it’s amazing. This is the food. You ever just get hungry passing, come on. But he said he was the regional advisor for the southern states to Tau Beta Pi, and he worked for NASA. And he say, “Are you interested in science?” I say, “Well, I kind of try to keep up. I mean, that’s not where I live, but OK.” He say, “The Hubble Telescope, I teach the astronauts how to use it.” I almost fell off in the floor right that night. So he talked to the young people, some interested in, from the church, in science and talked to them. So we felt that—and they’ve been here what? Six, seven times.

Reverend Adolph: Oh, yeah.

Mrs. Adolph: Anytime it’s a weekend, they might pop up at church.

Reverend Adolph: We also entertained Kent State University.

Mrs. Adolph: Yeah, Kent State came. And then William Carey moved in. (laughter)

Reverend Adolph: Yeah, William Carey moved in.

Smith: I was going to ask you about that. (laughter)

Reverend Adolph: Now, by the way, now, I’ve got to tell you—

Smith: They lost their campus on the beach. All the buildings were washed through.
Reverend Adolph: Now, out of all of the—hey, man, I’m born the same year—

Smith: This is your alma mater, William Carey?

Reverend Adolph: Yeah. I’m born the same year that you’ve got Brown v. Board of Education passed. I mean, I’m civil-rights-era kid.

Smith: And this is a predominantly white school; it’s pretty well integrated, but it’s predominantly white.

Reverend Adolph: It comes to, that takes up residence for a year—

Mrs. Adolph: How did that come about?

Reverend Adolph: —in our house.

Smith: Your church buildings.

Reverend Adolph: And I’ve got to tell you, for a civil-rights-era black kid, that was special. And the way it happened was I ran into Jerry Bracey(?) at Memorial Hospital, trying to find medicine. Medicines had run out. Rite-Aid was washed away. (laughter) So I was told I could get medicine at Memorial Hospital, and I ran into Jerry Bracey. Jerry and I, well, something interesting—

Smith: Who was then the dean of the Coast operation of William Carey.

Reverend Adolph: Right. And actually Jerry was really responsible for my attending Carey. I had gone over to Carey and looked into going back to school, and decided I couldn’t afford to go. And my phone rings, and who is it but Jerry Bracey, asking me, “When you going to school? Don’t you want to go to school?” And I tell him, “Yeah. I can’t afford to go to school.” “Boy, get in here. We’ll get you some money.” And lo and behold, I’d have to credit Jerry with being responsible for my going back to school, or at least certainly to Carey. And so I run into Jerry at Memorial, and of course all of us are in the aftermath of all this stuff, man. And everybody has this look on their faces. But nevertheless I asked Jerry, “What’s the school going to do?” He says, “We, man, don’t know.” I say, “Hey, if you need us for anything, we’re available. If you need our house, y’all come on.” And he say, “You serious?” And I say, “Yeah.” And he called me about a week later to ask was I still serious, and that they wanted to use it for a year. And—

Smith: So they used your education annex to carry on the college.

Reverend Adolph: Uh-huh. Gulfport High, our church, and I’ve forgotten—I think there was another church involved, too. But we housed nursing, psychology, and business and education.
Smith: OK. So there’s a new world of racial diversity in Gulfport related to the storm, at least in the immediate aftermath of the storm?

Reverend Adolph: Right.

Smith: Do you think that the experiences of the storm have had any sort of a lasting impact on race relations along the Coast?

Reverend Adolph: It would certainly seem so. It would have appeared to me pre-Katrina that one of the stunts often pulled by political strategists would have been to make sure racial issues appeared at just the right time to cause poor people who may band together, black and white, with reference to some issues to make sure that race made its way to the forefront to keep them divided. And I’m not so sure that we’ve seen that strategy, nor that that strategy will work as simply or as easily as it did before. I think that perhaps not just relevant to race, but even to some extent socioeconomic status might have taken a pretty—might be a shakeup there, too, because I think we had people who lived in certain sections who may have thought that they were quote, unquote, “rich,” that find that in many ways they’ve not been treated too much differently from people who were a lot less, had a lot less economically than they did. And they’re basically in the same boat, or treated as if they are in the same boat.

Mrs. Adolph: But I think right now there is a push, though, the remnants of the economics have converted, and there is a change, and there is a push for a difference according to class. I think that is being played right now with the absence of majority economics right now, that it’s still situation normal, and there’s a push to maintain a class system versus to make up for the economics.

Reverend Adolph: I didn’t ever think—I know Ginny is going to say, “Don’t you say that. Don’t say that.” But I’m going to say it anyway—(brief interruption)—I’m a civil-rights-era kid, black and born in the South. I always heard my grandfather say that when he went to the poll he was pulling the big lever. And of course I wanted to know what he meant. It meant that he was voting a straight Democratic ticket. He’s voting for everything Democrat. So I wanted to know, “Why you do that?” And his explanation was that he actually thought that poor people had a better chance with the Democrats in office. So I grew up with this mentality that poor people fare better when Democrats are in office. Then of course, life takes me to Mississippi, and I get to Mississippi, having been told that it’s a poor place. “You don’t want to go to Mississippi. You live in Texas, boy. You don’t want to go to Mississippi. Mississippi is poor.” Well, I get to Mississippi, and I find that black folk fare like black folk everywhere else I’ve been. Some of us have; some of us don’t. Some of us don’t want anything. (laughter) That’s the same everywhere. But I actually thought that what I had seen was a larger segment of poor white people than I’d ever seen before. And yet Mississippi votes Republican? Man, it messed up my whole notion about poor people and voting for Democrats. So I had to start doing research, and I end up discovering that all of that was probably actually due to the 1968 Nixon
strategy to divide the South along racial lines, and of course, give birth to the separation of the Dixiecrats, who had been Democrat, over to the Republican Party. And so with that went the whole shift racially with reference to politics in the South.

Smith: So you think that there may be some convergence in the wake of the storm where race is not as telling an issue in the community as it might have been a little earlier. Is that an accurate way of saying it?

Reverend Adolph: I think there’s a window of opportunity to build some bridges with that.

Smith: We had a lot of volunteers from outside the community. Do you have any idea how many volunteers have come through this church, received their direction for work through your relief center? Anybody do any counting of the—

Reverend Adolph: They did. I don’t—

Mrs. Adolph: They did, but we just don’t know right off.

Smith: Is it in the thousands?

Reverend Adolph: I would definitely say so.

Smith: Thousands of people have come through the operations that you set up here to be directed to rebuild houses, stuff like that?

Reverend Adolph: The bank of twelve hundred that they have, I know all of them would have been helped, but I wouldn’t think that that’s all. It would probably be more than that.

Mrs. Adolph: Because they didn’t even count Virginia Tech as each member, and they were carrying sixty-five to a hundred per team, and not counting the ones just sneaked down here on the weekends to work and go back after service. And they’ve come five, six times. I mean, they just show up.

Smith: So there’ve been hundreds coming from just Virginia Tech alone.

Mrs. Adolph: Yeah.

Smith: And these are mostly white kids?

Reverend Adolph: Mostly.

Smith: Coming in from the outside. Have you seen anything that—I interviewed a lady who was talking about the Mennonites rebuilding her house. She had a grant, but the grant could buy materials but couldn’t pay the cost of rebuilding a house. And she
reflected and said, “I hope, but I’m afraid. I hope that our community would respond to somebody else the way I’ve seen so many people of good heart respond.” What do you think is happening in our community? Do you think there’s any hope for increased volunteerism in response to being the recipients of all this blessing of people’s labor?

Reverend Adolph: I would certainly hope so. I thought—because you didn’t go with that question where I thought you were going.

Smith: Well, go ahead. You take it where it needs to go. (laughter)

Reverend Adolph: I thought you may have gone along the lines that there seems to have been far more [white] volunteers than black ones. And by the way, we’ve taken notice that it can look like that.

Smith: Well, I would say the country’s 87 percent white. So you’re going to have more—

Reverend Adolph: Right. And so you would have—to me, that would be that what we saw probably is along the same lines as the racial makeup of the country, but not just that. There is this notion still, too, that whites in our country fare better economically and can afford to do stuff like that. But nevertheless, with a congregation like ours where we do have a pretty good mix of some folk that, they’re faring nicely financially, and we can go help some—

Smith: Get some teachers, and people like that.

Reverend Adolph: Right. We can go help other folk. Now, to get our area, not just black folk from our area, but folk from our area across racial lines to understand that when others in our country are in need of help, that we do need to go and to help them. The only example so far I have seen of that was just a couple of weeks, maybe exactly a month, in a matter of weeks after we got hit by Katrina, the Beaumont/Port Arthur area got hit by [Hurricane] Rita. And one of our local churches sent a group of men to help that group, and I thought that was good. As a matter of fact, the moderator of our district association, Union Baptist Church, took a group of men from his church and other churches from our district association to go over to help in the aftermath of Rita.

Smith: So we’re still struggling with this, but you have some hope that—the community’s still struggling with the storm. You have some hope that maybe volunteerism, the caring level might be increased?

Reverend Adolph: Especially as a result of what we received, I would certainly hope so.

Smith: Can you talk a little bit about the way the clergy ministers responded to this? And even across racial lines, did you see anything any different in the cooperation
between black and white clergy? You mentioned William Carey, but going beyond
that, how’s the relationship between churches across racial lines, do you think?

Reverend Adolph: Pastor Broadus at Cedar Lake Assembly had been the leading
pastor with reference to leading the Christian community of the Gulf Coast to put
down differences of both denomination and race. Of course Pastor Broadus retired,
and we do understand his Gulf Coast home over in Back Bay, Biloxi, totally wiped
out, and I’m not sure he’s even still in the area. But we’ve really not had a figure that
we could really, that anyone’s rallied behind as the quote, unquote, “leader” of such an
effort. And outside of that, I don’t think I necessarily see any new camaraderie or any
organized efforts that point towards healing the racial breach along—maybe I’m too
cynical, or maybe it’s me. I don’t think I see that on the horizon. Do you think I’m
wrong? Pat, what do you see?

Smith: Well, I’m trying to inquire. I’m always full of hope, so I’m trying to see if
those (inaudible) are there.

Reverend Adolph: I want to be hopeful, too, because I think we have a window of
opportunity, because maybe you’re aware of something I’m not, and maybe I need to
go be a part of something that I’m not. And I don’t know.

Smith: I’m just, I’m asking. I’m trying to get inside of where you—

Mrs. Adolph: You’re messing him up right now. He’ll tell you (inaudible).

Smith: Let me ask you a question. I interviewed the pastor of First Baptist Church in
Gulfport down on the beach, the big, white, predominantly white congregation.

Reverend Adolph: Right.

Smith: And he told me that his whole concept of ministry changed as a result of the
storm. Can you reflect? Has the storm affected your notion of ministry? Your church
certainly did some things, has been involved in some things after the storm that—I
do know—maybe you would never have dreamed of your church serving as a base
for thousands of volunteers helping thousands of people.

Reverend Adolph: I certainly grew up watching my grandfather, my dad, with their
involvement with, how they were involved with influencing their followers to be
politically involved and certainly to have some view as to the effect of public policy.
Early on in ministry, I was pretty well engaged in that same arena. When pastoring in
Port Arthur, Texas, I had an old sister that called me inside—and I hope you don’t
mind—of course, on the transcript it won’t be able to pick up my mimicking this
sister. But she said, “Preacher, you sure like some politics, don’t you? (laughter)”
And I said, “Well, ma’am, I’m just trying to do anything I can do to help our people.”
She said, “Well, you really want to help out people, you need to do more campaigning
for Jesus.” (laughter) So shortly thereafter I was called to Gulfport, and even then
would have no more political involvement, no more besides—back in Port Arthur, any
time there was a racially charged issue, I found myself with a microphone in my face
and a TV camera along with it to get my point of view on some issue. I always had to
tell them, “I don’t speak for the black community, but this is what I think about this.”
But nevertheless, so I come to Gulfport with a determination not to be involved on that
level. As a matter of fact, for the longest time, you’d have to remind me of who the
mayor was, I mean, because I caught myself shutting out public policy, shutting out
polities, shutting all that out. Well, along comes Katrina, and Katrina definitely took
me out of my pattern of ministry that was just merely to build an individual’s
spirituality, to make that individual the best Christian that individual could be. And it
made me have to look at our church as an army of believers with bigger wars to fight.
And some of those fights did need to take on the notion of public policy. Some of
them did need to delve into the realm of politics. It expanded my whole notion of—
and actually, I guess, got me out of a comfort zone, too, because I was real
comfortable doing what I was doing. (laughter) I hope I’m answering the question.

Smith: That’s interesting. Can you talk to me a little bit about how your church has
fared, attendancewise, budgetwise. I’ve talked to preachers that have their stories,
particularly ones that have lost buildings and then had congregations disperse. When
did your attendance come back, or has it come back to prestorm levels?

Reverend Adolph: We’re about there now; however, we actually saw a spike that has
actually had us notice, actually right now a decline, right now. Let me explain. We
lost forty families. A year later, September [20]06, we had taken in 120 families.
Even in [20]05, pre-Katrina, we were headed towards a 30 percent jump in income.
We ended up with a 35 percent jump.

Smith: Just here in the last year or post-Katrina?


Smith: In [20]05, OK.

Reverend Adolph: We just knew it was going—“Where are the people?” (laughter)
“They gone.” But nevertheless, in [20]05 as of the end of June, we were on track for a
30 percent jump. We ended up with a 35 percent jump in spite of Katrina. Then a
year later, we had taken in 120 families. Now, what’s happening to us right now, I
don’t know, but we are not quite at the place where we were two years ago. I don’t
know if the aftermath of Katrina had folk taking God very seriously, (laughter) and
now they’re a bit back to something that they’ve labeled a new normal. And I don’t
know what that is. But as of right now, we’ve not witnessed that same kind of growth;
numerically and financially we’ve leveled off. And we’re not seeing the spike we
saw.
Smith: Can you talk a little bit about what you see in your congregation? Have you seen any evidences of increased emotional distress, depression, things like that in the people that you serve since Katrina? Especially when a lot of people were in trailers.

Reverend Adolph: Oh, but of course. We participated with the psychology department at USM in a survey—I can’t wait to see the details of that—to try to give some definition to the church’s role in how people fared with their mental health in the aftermath of Katrina.

Smith: Did you see any increase in the number of people passing away, the number of deaths in your congregation? Did that impress you as something out of the ordinary, post-Katrina?

Reverend Adolph: I guess we did seem to have a group of our elderly members. Now, let me tell you why that’s foggy. Because we were only, what? One of two churches with a sanctuary. For almost that same year, we had William Carey. We were the funeral chapel. And so even though I didn’t have to do all of those funerals, we had a season when there was a funeral at First Baptist every day. And so my thing is, “Yeah, we took a bunch of”—(laughter)—but no, I don’t mean to make fun of it.

Smith: As far as your own congregation?

Reverend Adolph: But as far as our own congregation, probably no more than any normal year.

Smith: OK. Have you seen anything that would let you believe that there has been any increase in domestic disputes, domestic violence, child abuse, anything like that that as a minister you’ve become aware of that might have been spiking up since Katrina?

Reverend Adolph: Yeah, without a doubt. I think that certainly the cramped living quarters of a FEMA trailer, the stress of having to cope with a new and different post-Katrina world, especially within that first year, without a doubt. Probably some incidence with reference to abuses that I probably wouldn’t have even been made aware of pre-Katrina that I was called upon to deal with post-Katrina. So I would definitely have to say that the stress level of Katrina caused that.

Smith: Have you observed any increased occurrence of divorces, things like that, that you think, pre- and post-Katrina?

Reverend Adolph: That I’m aware of, I’m only aware of one. And so—

Smith: How about—

Reverend Adolph: Am I wrong?
Smith: —teen pregnancy, drug—

Reverend Adolph: Because—

Mrs. Adolph: (Inaudible)

Smith: —abuse? You’ve seen? I know there’s been in the community here recently a community-wide effort on teen pregnancy. Do you personally see any greater occurrence of that problem post-Katrina than pre-Katrina?

Reverend Adolph: Yeah, but I don’t know if I would blame Katrina for that, because we got so much else in the country that helps that problem to grow. So I don’t know if our post-Katrina stress levels have affected that as much as I think some other things in the country.

Smith: You had here a recovery center that was very important to people in the community, the organized relief. Has the ministries of the church, of this church changed in any other way since Katrina? Do you have any programs that are there that you might not have had in place before Katrina or that changed their direction or their focus or their energy level?

Reverend Adolph: I guess I have to say, yeah, but of course, I’m a pastor that’s never satisfied with where those levels are. What I mean by that is I think that whenever a pastor gets satisfied where his church is, it ain’t going to grow no more. (laughter) So my notion is is that, yeah, I think that there has been an effort and a progression towards perhaps being a little more aggressive with the types of things our church could do. Summer day camp. We had the wherewithal to do that all along. Did we do it? No. I think that to see what the, the kinds of things the disaster center did awakened, I think, a new spark towards our church trying to help with things not just spiritual, but as well things that are social.

Smith: What has been the—and I’m going to get you to think just generally. If you were looking back on this, what’s the worst thing, the worst memory you have about this storm or its aftermath? Did any members of your congregation actually die in the storm itself?

Reverend Adolph: No. One of our deacons’ mother was drowned in Biloxi. I don’t know, man. That’s an ocean full of stuff. (laughter) I guess personally, having to deal with her when she first saw the house. Personally, that would be the worst. And then of course, right behind that would be Dexter’s losing his mom. We lost, our congregation lost no one else. We had people in the community again—like I said, we became a funeral chapel.

Smith: In thinking about the—
Reverend Adolph: In my role as pastor, a "professional," excuse me. Mayor Warr called and asked me to walk with he and Vice President Cheney down Second Street.

Smith: And Second Street is kind of an elite area in Gulfport, prestorm.

Reverend Adolph: And I suppose for me, I guess feeling—by the way, this feeling of helplessness is not one that was isolated for just this particular thing or this particular event I’m about to tell you about, because that feeling flooded my existence. But at any rate, though, I felt so helpless and so badly about the fact that we were on Second Street and that even though we walked about eight blocks down Second Street, we did not bother to venture two blocks north of there, to cross the tracks.

Smith: Across the tracks would have been Soria City, a minority, a black area.

Reverend Adolph: Two blocks away. We walked eight blocks. Two blocks that way. I made mention of that, of course. “This route’s already been mapped out. This route has already been secured, and of course, for that reason, we can’t go across the tracks.” And yet we have a heckler that hollers out at the vice president, conveniently so while television cameras are in his face and a microphone’s blasting. We hear this guy shout out, “You, Mr. Vice President.” Obviously, man, this area has been so secured that you know this guy has to be a plant. They knew everything in that block; they knew what was there. That’s why we supposedly couldn’t go across the tracks. But then I also felt badly about the fact that across the tracks wasn’t a part of the plan. As a matter of fact, it actually gave me the feeling at the time that all of it was just staged; all of it was just to make it appear as if though there was genuine caring for these little people. But in all—I think that what made me feel the worst about that whole thing was to know that pre-Katrina that street would have been considered the place where some elite people, the elite of our community live over there, and the poor folk are across the track. But only on that day did I really observe that the fact that the folk on both side of the track that day were poor folk, that the folk on this side of the track wasn’t going to get treated no better than the folk on this side the track.

Smith: Did you have any personal conversation with Vice President Cheney?

Reverend Adolph: No, not really. I, that day, tried to watch and observe, and by the way, I have to say I was very impressed by something I saw Cheney do. Now, I know this is on the record. (laughter) But I saw Cheney look as if though he wasn’t really paying attention to people. And then in front of the television camera, regurgitated everything he’d heard people say to him, walking down those eight blocks. I was impressed with. Either all that stuff was recorded, (laughter) and he has a bug in his ear, replaying back some of the things he’s heard, the highlights of stuff, because I mean, I wouldn’t have thought a human being, especially given how he seemed to address people, how this man could spit back most of the stuff he’s heard, walking for eight blocks because that’s all he did on that television camera. He literally spit back stuff he’d heard people say along the way, including something that the First Baptist pastor had told him. The First Baptist pastor had given him what was supposed to be a
good idea about how we could help with recovery. Cheney spit that out like it was his idea. (laughter) But again, I saw him do that with little snippets of things he heard all along the way, (inaudible), “Whoa.”

Smith: If you were to put yourself in the frame of mind and think about hurricanes the way you thought about them pre-Katrina, if you think about the disaster response and the recovery effort over the last two and a half years, what’s the most surprising thing? What would have surprised you, good or bad, that you’ve gone through that you wouldn’t have thought of? What’s the most surprising element of that?

Reverend Adolph: I hope this qualifies. The biggest surprise was the way people from our own country came to help us, to me. And along with that, even the notion that in spite of how I’ve grown to perceive my country as a place where prejudice and racism is greeted, and grows and lives, to see that it didn’t matter. White people were helping black people; black people were helping white people. It didn’t matter. That whole aspect to me was, I would think—and of course, along with Carey coming to First Baptist, all that, I would have to say would have to be in what I would think was the biggest surprise. I just would not have ever dreamed of people coming to help the way they did.

Smith: Among the twelve hundred families that your church helped, more than twelve hundred that your church helped, were there white families in there?

Reverend Adolph: Yes.

Smith: Would you have thought of the irony of a black church being the vehicle for ministry to these white people who were destitute? Would that have been surprising to you? That your church would have wound up playing that role?

Reverend Adolph: No. I don’t know how to—

Smith: Well, that’s all right. What’s the thing that your—

Reverend Adolph: But my answer is no.

Smith: OK. What’s the thing that you’re most proud of about either the community recovery or about your church’s situation post-Katrina? You’re looking back at the community now. What’s the thing that’s your proudest accomplishment?

Reverend Adolph: I guess I would have to say the work in general of the disaster center. By the way, we still operate the disaster center. We no longer have Lillian Jenkins as its director, but I am proud of that effort. And I might tell you how that was given birth to. I told our deacons and trustees that in the first place, “There’s no sense in us using the word normal because we going to have to find a (laughter) new one of them, because what was normal for us ain’t going to never be—we not going back there. So we’ve got to discover what’s the new normal going to be. We’ve got to
head in that direction.” In the meantime if they were going to look to me for good, sound preaching and teaching, then somebody else was going to have to do the storm stuff, because I couldn’t do it. If I’m going to do storm stuff, I’m going to do storm stuff, and you’ll have to eat leftovers on Sunday morning. (laughter) And they agreed, and it was with that—(brief interruption)—no. So the issue became they understood and allotted monies from the budget to take care of the director for the disaster center. Ultimately the disaster center since then has become, has its own 501, the whole deal, so it’s a separate entity.

Smith: So this is, like, an ongoing ministry of the church, and you’ve got your foundation there that could be maybe useful for other purposes, too.

Reverend Adolph: Um-hm.

Smith: Let me ask you to reflect for just a minute on the—we asked about the impact of the stress that you could see in your congregation in different ways. What about the impact on yourself as a minister, other ministers, the stress? Again, I had a pastor that told me that he’d read a study of the clergy in South Florida, Protestant clergy particularly, in South Florida after Hurricane Andrew and their fate, which was not very pleasant. Can you talk a little bit about the way ministers handle this, the way what you saw either in yourself or others with the demands that were made after the storm? How did preachers handle that stress?

Reverend Adolph: Well, unlike denominations whose pastors rotate, and I was told by Pastor Moses(?) that was at St. Paul Biloxi Methodist Church—

Smith: United Methodist Church.

Reverend Adolph: And he’s since gone to Holly Springs, I think it is. Several others are gone. Zack Beasley(?) chooses to stay, from St. Martin United Methodist. But these guys are being rotated out, and they say that their denomination rotates them out because of the stress level. Hey, I’m Baptist; I’m black. We have a tendency to stay places a long time. (laughter) Ain’t no rotating out. And it has—we’ve had several incidences where Ginny and I have talked to people about our storm experience that, hey, we’d either have to get up and leave or sit there and cry because it weighs heavily. And I think that any pastor who truly loves his people and loves the folk he serves is bound to feel the pain. As a matter of fact, even gave birth to a message that ends up having a bunch of little spinoffs from Jeremiah 9 and 10, that my head will water, my eyes are fountains of tears. I might weep day and night for the slaying of the daughter of my people. It was a sermon entitled “The Preacher’s Pain.” And so I suppose even that kind of stuff has helped me cope. But to speak to how my other brothers do it, I’m not certain. I know as far as recreation goes, I think it’s certainly helped me talk the wife into a little golf every now and then. (laughter) But yeah, it’s been a weight, without a doubt.
**Smith:** Reverend Adams at Little Rock told me that he had been hospitalized for a while. Did you fill in for him at Little Rock for a time?

**Reverend Adolph:** No.

**Smith:** In any case, he had told me that he had had some stress-related issues. OK. Let me ask you to give your advice. This is sort of the last thing I like people to do. Give your advice. If you could change anything with the way you’ve seen government work, could be the way FEMA works, the way the Mississippi Development Authority works with the homeowners’ grants, anything that you’ve seen. If you could recommend changes, what would they be? From what you’ve been through and what you’ve seen, now you’re a disaster expert. What needs to change in the way we approach these things? And you, too, Ms. Adolph. You’ve got a lot of stuff you’ve seen.

**Reverend Adolph:** I suppose she would actually be able to give better advice than I can. My only hot-button item with reference to this would be to include the poorest of the poor. What was made available this last time, especially with monies that have been in the government’s hands, renters were not included at all in some fashion, to me, especially with reference to the governor’s programs in particular. They’re taxpayers. I could understand them not being included if the monies that were being distributed to others had come from property taxes that they didn’t pay. I could sort of understand, “Leave them out. They didn’t put anything in this pot, so don’t give them anything out of it.”

**Smith:** Except they pay it through their rent.

**Reverend Adolph:** That would be true, too. That would be true, too. But in this case, though, we’re not talking about property tax. We talking about taxes everybody has to pay that accumulate—

**Smith:** Federal money channeled through the state.

**Reverend Adolph:** That accumulated into that pot, which means everybody should have benefited, and the poorest of the poor. And by the way, I’m not trying to say that all renters are poor, but certainly I think among them, you can find the poorest of our poor left out, and something, to me, needs to be done in that area. I don’t know if I’m scratching where our community itches on that one or not, but that’s certainly something that weighs on me.

**Smith:** What about you Ms. Adolph? What needs to change? If you could recommend and Congress could implement today, what would it be?

**Mrs. Adolph:** You had asked Sonny a question. I think what was most surprising to him.
Mrs. Adolph: To me what’s most surprising, in spite of all of the millions and millions of dollars that have gone into disaster preparedness, preparedness planning, that nothing has really changed at all. If we had another Katrina—God forbid—tomorrow, we just about in bad as shape. We still on our own just like we were then. There are a bunch of plans, but in terms of just like you come and ask about culture and how it plays into preparedness, those questions have not been posed.

Smith: What advice would you have about that, culture and preparedness? What step would you think needs to be taken?

Mrs. Adolph: In terms of people that work with the pulse of culture, members from the discipline of psychology, members from the discipline of social work, there are national partnerships already established among organizations that if you go into those communities where those professionals are and let them sit at the table or on a back tier of an ad hoc committee to give advisement in terms of the cultural nuances that play in different communities, not just race, not just economics, but in terms of history, what has been the pattern of a community? What are their practices? That those things play into preparedness. Are they going to leave? Things about the different pieces about the black church and them participating in evacuation. Who’s going to ride the CTA bus? Nobody. They’re not going to ride the CTA. What about the deaf community? What about the Hispanic or Latin American community? How are they going to access services? These are types of questions that need to be addressed from bottom up versus top down, because otherwise we’ll be in the same position we were in before. And with people coming in, the worst nightmare, and how hopelessness was, it would just eat upon you that you would know how something was going to work, how it could be of benefit, and you couldn’t make a difference during Katrina. A case in point was a woman—and I’ll never forget her—from Hancock County, and she had called the emergency center in Hancock County. She had talked to Wallace Bradley(?) who was old director of DHS. And then she had talked to head of their command center and happened, she ended up just with a bunch of numbers, and she just started calling on her cell phone. And they gave it to me in the district office; I don’t even know how she got public health. And she said, “Lady, I been calling people night and day for the last three or four nights.” She say, “You don’t want to hear this, do you?” I say, “Yes, ma’am, I do.” She say, “You from here?” I say, “Yes, ma’am, I am. I’m from Gulfport.” And she say, “I finally found all my children and my grandchildren. I found them.” I say, “Where were they?” She say, “We didn’t know. We thought they had been washed away in Waveland.” And she lives near Coleman Avenue. And she say, “I finally found my whole family.” And she say, “I got grandchildren.” And I’m assuming she was a Caucasian lady, and that didn’t make a difference. She say, “Can you help me?” She say, “I got my children, and we have to walk a mile in the gnats and the mosquitoes down here in Waveland.” And I say, “Lord, I know how they are.” She say, “We got a tent. We OK.” She say, “But all I want is a Porta-Potty.” I say, “A what?” She say, “Can you help me get a Porta-Potty so my grandchildren and the children that are in the—we
made a little camp [in] the neighborhood—so we don’t have to walk a mile in the middle of the night to the Porta-Potty at Coleman Avenue.” Well, nobody could understand that this woman simply needed access, because she had transportation to pick up the Porta-Potty. And that’s what I’m saying in terms of understanding what the people need rather than what is supposed to be available or given to them, and they’re supposed to readily accept. She didn’t need clothes. She didn’t need a house because she didn’t have it then; nobody else did, either. But a simple Porta-Potty, and she had gone through pages and pages of phone numbers to get somebody to understand a simple thing of a Porta-Potty. And the list goes on from Porta-Potty—

Smith: She’d been referenced and referenced and referenced on.

Mrs. Adolph: Oh, referenced, and she had sons with trucks. And she say, “I can go get it. Just help me get it.” I say, “Before I leave this day, you will get a Porta-Potty. You will get one.” And she did; she got a Porta-Potty, and it wasn’t long ago when I left public health, I had put her number in a box. About two months ago, I pulled that number out, and I picked up the phone, and I called, and I asked to speak to the lady, and she answered. I say, “Don’t hang up.” I say, “I don’t know if you remember me, but I worked public health, and you had wanted a Porta-Potty.” She say, “You the Porta-Potty lady!” And I said, “All I needed to know for some closure was are you all right?” She said, “We got rebuilt.” I say, “I often wondered about you, just to know you and your family are OK. Out of all the people,” I say, “yours was the one phone number that I kept.”

Smith: Can you share her name? Do you remember her name?

Mrs. Adolph: Her last name was Katz(?).

Smith: Katz.

Mrs. Adolph: Um-hm, in Hancock County, so. But those are the types of things, in terms of linking people with services and making sure they have appropriate—the conveyance of those services to people in the right way so that people are able to receive them is just going to be tremendous in whatever planning that is done here on the Gulf Coast or anywhere else. It can’t be from the top down. It has to be from the bottom up.

Reverend Adolph: But our bureaucracies are always established so they operate top down. That’s the fashion of our day.

Mrs. Adolph: I understand that is the fashion of the day, but in terms of how it actually works, how it will work, you have to have where the locals have a voice in the definite provision of services, not just at the top level, but the ones, the middle managers in the trenches have to, because it’s just like the psychiatrist coming from New York. When they came from New York, they wore they lab coats out to Pass Christian. Well, you know how many folks in De Lisle and Pass Christian, if you say
you were a shrink from New York, they’re not going to talk to you. I say, “Just go on down there and have a cup, drink a little wine. Be careful, though. They might have buried that (inaudible) down there.” But you can’t—you have to go—how you going to be received? You can’t just go there that, “I’m a doctor, and I’m here to help you.” Yeah, right.

Reverend Adolph: If FEMA’s director is fired because of what happened in New Orleans, a month later with what happened in Houston, so should Homeland Security’s director be fired. You just saw what happened in New Orleans, and there’s no legitimate plan for Houston at all? Or any major city for that matter. And Homeland Security, by that time, you been working since 2002 at least, four years, and there isn’t even a decent plan for evacuation? Heads should have rolled. (laughter) I mean, to me that’s just as bad as—I mean, Houston’s tragedy ended up, it ended up not resulting in the loss of life, but that’s just as big a fiasco as what happened in New Orleans. To me, Houston ended up showing that OK, the federal agency that’s responsible for seeing to this is just not happening. It didn’t happen.

Smith: Is there anything else that we should have talked about that fifty years from now, people will want to know about this community, this church, this storm, this response, or the department of public health?

Mrs. Adolph: No, a bunch of good folks.

Reverend Adolph: Did you get what you were looking for? Is there something else you [need]?

Smith: We covered my questions; we covered my questions.

Mrs. Adolph: I hope they get what you have contributed to this community over the years, not just for Katrina.

Smith: Well, thank you, and thank you for your time. I appreciate it very much.

(end of interview)