

Interview with the Reverend William H. Wood III by Clark Groome,  
Episcopal Diocese of Pennsylvania Oral History Project, Radnor,  
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CLARK GROOME: So you're a Virginian?

WILLIAM WOOD: I am a Virginian, Charlottesville.

CG: Charlottesville, I've heard of that. There's a university down there,  
which I gather you later attended. Did you grow up as an  
Episcopalian?

WW: I did. Saint Paul's Memorial Church is the official name, at the  
university.

CG: Oh, okay. And you went to Episcopal High School, which is a—  
that's a boarding school?

WW: It is a boarding school, yeah. Now co-ed—it was all boys then.

CG: Yeah. I went to a similar place a long time ago. Pomfret was all  
boys, but now they're almost all co-ed. When you were at UVA, what  
was your major?

WW: Psychology and Pre-med.

CG: So you were heading to being a doctor?

WW: I was. I was chasing my pediatric father.

CG: Okay.

WW: A doctor, and I planned to go into medicine, go into pediatrics, set up  
practice with him, and marry a Charlottesville girl, and I haven't don't  
any of those things.

CG: Okay. When did you get really involved—were you a fairly active  
church kid when you were a teenager and before?

WW: I was. I was brought up in the church. Matter of fact, my parents'  
favorite line on Sunday morning was, "I don't want to go to Sunday

school.” “In this house we go to church. When you move out, you make your own decisions.” So yeah, I grew up in the church.

CG: And you enjoyed it? Well, except you didn’t want to go to Sunday school.

WW: I didn’t want to go to Sunday school on occasions, mainly because my wool suit was so scratchy. That was the main problem I had with religion in those days.

CG: [Laughs] So when did the ministry become—I mean, here you were, prepared to be a psychologist or a pediatrician, primarily a pediatrician. When did you begin to think about becoming a minister, becoming a priest?

WW: Probably when I first began to think about it, I probably was nine years old, when my mother’s older brother, and my father’s best friend—that’s how they met—committed suicide, and the new rector showed up at our church. It was the first time I remember seeing my parents in tears, both of them. And it was quite a visit, because it was repeated for the rest of their lives when mother’s great fear came out that her brother, Hunter Moss, would not go to heaven because he committed suicide. And Ted Evans, who was the new rector then, became a dear family friend, and he said that doesn’t make any sense to him at all, because Christ was in emotional/spiritual isolation and suffering as much as physical suffering, to make the point that people in emotional suffering are still in the company of God. So that point, that theology—it suddenly dawned on me as a little boy: that man has a real job. He’s changing lives. So I think that was my earliest recollection. Maybe before that, my grandmother, Presbyterian grandmother reading Bible stories to me.

CG: Okay, so after UVA, which you graduated from, if I read your biography right, in 1962, you went into the Navy?

WW: Went into the Navy. The draft was on.

CG: Sure, because it was just before Vietnam exploded.

WW: That's right; '62 was my graduation year, and I just lost my deferment because I gave up pre-med.

CG: Oh. You decided at that point not to become a doctor?

WW: Got to organic chemistry, the great gatekeeper of med school, and I said, "This is not for me."

CG: Did that push you closer to the ministry, or just away from medicine?

WW: Mainly then, away from medicine. But Bishop Gibson, in Virginia—I knew this; I don't know where I first learned it, but I knew he required at least a few years of something else after college, before being considered as a postulant.

CG: And the military was an acceptable example of that? Is that right?

WW: It was, and I had a growing interest in the Navy. I always loved the ocean, and so that's where I went. Actually, the interesting story, if you have time?

CG: Oh, yeah.

WW: Just how tangential life is—I just happened to be on the front porch of the KA house, after lunch, walking in—

CG: Kappa Alpha?

WW: Kappa Alpha. And I had my parents' car, which I usually didn't have. I didn't live at home, and I don't know why I had it. A fellow named Ted Hawkins, a fraternity brother, asked me if I could give him a ride over to the Navy recruiter. And I said sure. And he said, "Could you wait just a minute? They say this test takes 20 minutes. I said,

“Sure.” So the guy handed me a test, and I said, “No, I’m not interested.” And he said, “Well, you’ve got to wait anyway. Why don’t you take it?” So I took it.

CG: Good recruiter.

WW: Yeah, good recruiter! [Laughs] Ended up going to OCS, and Ted went to law school, so there you go, how tangential events are. They barely touch.

CG: Where did you serve in the military?

WW: I really lucked out. I ended up on the cruiser the *USS Newport News*, out of Norfolk, and that was the flagship of the Second Fleet, so we carried the vice admiral and his staff, and hit all the great ports of Europe because of that.

CG: Not a bad—and it was really before Vietnam got hot, wasn’t it?

WW: It was, but when I reported onboard the ship—I’ve got to be careful now, with the Brian Williams thing. I was not flown down to the Cuban missile blockade, which was underway. And Admiral Ward, the three-star admiral, the vice admiral—

CG: Oh, that’s right.

WW: —was in charge of it.

CG: The Bay of Pigs? Oh, no, the blockade?

WW: The blockade followed the Bay of Pigs.

CG: Yeah, when we almost had the nuclear war. I remember watching that on TV in college, and Kennedy’s speech to the nation, and all that—scary time.

WW: Scary time, and I just—when he gave that speech, it was the only time at OCS they called off the routine, so everybody could listen on the

radio. We didn't know what it was, but we knew the president was speaking about a crisis.

CG: And since it was a military crisis, they wanted you all to hear it.

WW: Yeah, and it was just before graduation. So I was flown down to Norfolk, and stayed at the B[achelors]O[fficers]Q[uarters] until the ship returned.

CG: So you did not actually go down and help blockade?

WW: I did not actually help blockade, nor was I on a helicopter that was shot down.

CG: Well, you don't look like Brian Williams. [Laughs]

WW: [Laughs]

CG: Well, that's another. That's off the subject.

WW: Good, good.

CG: All right, so you got out of the Navy. How long were you in the Navy?

WW: Four years, because I extended for a year.

CG: Okay, because it was a three-year requirement if you went to OCS, right?

WW: That's right, yeah.

CG: Okay, so you did four years. Did you know when you came out of the Navy—what rank were you when you came out?

WW: I was a full lieutenant when I came out.

CG: Full lieutenant.

WW: Yeah.

CG: Which is the Army equivalent of a captain?

WW: Exactly.

CG: Right, okay. Did you know at that point that you were headed to seminary?

WW: I did at that point know it, and matter of fact, my last fitness report from the commanding officer said, "Lieutenant Wood's decided to go in the ordained ministry, but so far his work has not suffered."

[Laughs] So I got his attitude about my choice!

CG: [Laughs] That's a great line!

WW: Isn't that a great line?

CG: And you went to VTS, Virginia Theological Seminary?

WW: I did.

CG: And you graduated in 1970.

WW: Yeah.

CG: You were ordained to the diaconate?

WW: In '70 at Saint Paul's Charlottesville, Bishop Smith.

CG: Right, in your church?

WW: Yeah, as it turned out?

CG: And how long before you were a priest?

WW: Six months. Bishop Marmion down in southwestern Virginia took the minimum time, he said.

CG: Yeah, well, because it was either a year or six months back in those days.

WW: Exactly.

CG: Pretty much now it's all six months, isn't it?

WW: That probably is true. I've not kept up with that.

CG: No, I don't know. But anyway, so tell me about your first assignments.

WW: Oh!

CG: And then how you got to Pennsylvania.

WW: That's an interesting story. I was two years at Saint John's Roanoke with Charlie Newbury, who was the rector there. Made great friends, because I was single, and I was everybody's son, or brother, so I was free to have dinner every night, and I capitalized on that.

CG: Nothing wrong with that.

WW: No. [Laughs] All my parish calls started at five o'clock, in time for cocktails in summer. Then one day I got a letter from a guy named Richard Hess at Saint David's Radnor, wherever that was in Pennsylvania.

CG: Who knew?

WW: Who knew? And when I was reading the letter, the secretary said, "You have a call from a Mr. Hess." So I said, "I'm just getting your letter in this morning mail, reading it." He said, "Well, I want to fly down and take you to lunch." And I said, "Well, Mr. Hess, don't do that. I've been here only two years, and I'm not a candidate to move."

CG: Was it a curacy in those days, what you were doing?

WW: Mm-hm, it was. It was. And so he said, "Would you refuse to have lunch if I fly down?" And I said, "Well, no, of course not. But don't do it; it's a waste of time." Thinking back, only, the moment at the Roanoke Airport, Dick Hess stepped off with a big smile. He was wearing a seersucker suit, black shirt—summer time. And he was joking with the stewardess, laughing at the top of the door of the plane. And I thought, "I could work with this guy, whoever it is."

CG: In the days when you walked down the stairs to get to the tarmac?

WW: That's right. And we had a great lunch, and he told me—he said, "What are you waiting for?" And I said, "Probably a rectorship of

some church in Virginia.” He said, “If you come to Saint David’s, you’ll have the freedom of a rector, because you can choose what you want to do.” And I thought, “Wow, this is a great offer.” So I finally accepted, after much debating with myself.

CG: And what did you do when you were here the first time?

WW: Adult education, and then the usual pastoral responsibilities.

CG: And who was the rector then?

WW: That was Dick Hess; he was rector.

CG: Oh, he was the rector?

WW: He was the rector here.

CG: Oh, okay. I didn’t know whether he was the rector, or whether he was the chairman, the warden of the vestry or something.

WW: No, he was the rector, and Nils Blatz had just left. He was very popular.

CG: Who was that?

WW: Nils Blatz. He went to Long Island.

CG: B-L-A-T-Z?

WW: B-L-A-T-Z, yeah.

CG: And you were at Saint David’s for how long?

WW: For six years, ’70 to ’76; met Kristine Carlson, who had just joined the choir, first year of teaching at Wayne Elementary. And we had a fast and great romance. Decided a month later that we wanted to get married!

CG: Wow.

WW: And we kept it quiet from our families for another month, because we thought they’d hoot us off the scene.

CG: Of course. And you couldn’t do that today, could you?

WW: Not so well.

CG: You couldn't be an assistant, and marry somebody who is a parishioner today without people—

WW: It would raise questions.

CG: It would raise questions.

WW: As a matter of fact—

CG: But a lot of that happened back than.

WW: A lot of that happened. Dick Hess cried the banns from the old Prayerbook to the congregation, that Kristine Carlson and Bill Wood are announcing their engagement. And then he threw the microphone, or passed it to me, and said, "Say something." And unfortunately I did, because it kept getting repeated. I said, "It just goes to show you, good things still happen in the choir stalls." And I thought that would be sort of a light-hearted comment, without thinking it through!

CG: [Laughs] It's a great line, though.

WW: Well, it haunted me.

CG: I'm sure! So you were here for six years, and then you went to be the rector at Trinity Solebury.

WW: Exactly.

CG: And you were there for thirteen years, I gather.

WW: That's right.

CG: And then from there, it was to Saint Christopher's Gladwyne, for 21?

WW: Twenty-one years.

CG: Right, following a rector who had been there for 25 years. It's a fairly stable place.

WW: [Laughs] A very comfortable place.

CG: Okay. Clearly, Saint David's, Trinity Solebury, and even though a young parish, Saint Christopher's, were major players in the diocese. At what point did you become involved? Because you mentioned to me on the phone that you were part of the search for both Allen Bartlett and for Charles Bennison. And we can take them in chronological order. When did you begin to get involved with the diocese, and in what capacities?

WW: It really was marked by my leaving Solebury. I loved the years there, but it was rural, it felt like to me, and far from the bishop's office, Church House.

CG: Right.

WW: So I really anchored my being in the colleagues and the congregation up there. But my name got put on, nominated to standing committee before I left Solebury, but I was elected after I got down here.

CG: To Saint Christopher's?

WW: To Saint Christopher's Gladwyne.

CG: And you served how long on the standing committee?

WW: Sixteen years, in a peculiar combination.

CG: All right; we'll talk about that in a minute. But okay, so you're involved with the diocese. You're on the standing committee. Is that why you were chosen to be on the search committee for the bishop when Lyman Ogilby retired?

WW: No. Lyman contacted me at the Hershey Hotel, the clergy conference. We sat down in the main lobby on the sofa, and he said, "I'd like to ask you to join the search committee," which was interesting, for his successor.

CG: He was the one that was setting up the search committee, not the standing committee?

WW: Apparently at that point, because he's the one contacted me. After telling me very honestly that I was not his first choice, but his first choice declined, so I was his second choice.

CG: Lyman could be blunt, could he not?

WW: He could. But he instilled trust in me, because he was blunt.

CG: Yeah, okay. So tell me about the process that ended up bringing Allen Bartlett here as Bishop.

WW: Yeah, I joined the search committee, excellently led by John Harrison. And that's where he became one of my heroes and inspirations.

CG: Who was the clergy leader?

WW: I don't remember a clergy leader, as a matter of fact. Isn't that interesting?

CG: Because in the second one, it was Jim Trimble.

WW: Yeah.

CG: I'm just curious. Okay.

WW: John was the chair, and I don't think he had a co-chair.

CG: Okay, maybe it was different then.

WW: I think it was different then. And he ran that with precision and great justice, I thought. I don't know if it's useful to talk about the time when all the candidates came down and gave their talk.

CG: Absolutely.

WW: Well, that was very dramatic in the sense that as I recall it, of the five, Allen was the last, and was the only one who said, "I have a short series of remarks, but I mainly want to spend my time answering your questions." And I turned to John Harrison at that moment; I said,

“He’s got it. That’s a brilliant move.” And John said, “Well, don’t decide that too soon.” And sure enough, he did have it.

CG: Yeah. What were the strengths that you thought that he brought? You obviously were part of the committee that chose all five of the candidates.

WW: Yeah.

CG: But looking back on it now with perspective, and knowing that he won, why do you think he was the candidate who won? Was it because he was open to taking questions?

WW: He was. And what he later told me was his introverted nature. He was the first one who didn’t come on with sort of a cocky bluster, in my impression. That’s my impression. He came onto the stage very humbly, but very sensibly, and just made that announcement. He had a few things to say, but mainly wanted to hear from us.

CG: There were a number of issues that were beginning to percolate, and/or were big time, in ’81, ’82.<sup>1</sup>

WW: Yeah, I don’t remember which.

CG: I can’t remember exactly, but we’ll get the right year for the final form. But, women in the priesthood, and the number of parishes that were grumpy about that. The gay issue was grazing, and he actually said—because I asked the question. He actually said in one of the dog and pony show meetings that he had with the convention people that he was opposed to doing anything about the ordination of openly gay men or women, which obviously he changed later, because he almost got himself into trouble.

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<sup>1</sup> Bartlett was elected bishop coadjutor in 1986 and became the diocesan in 1987

WW: Yes.

CG: There were a whole bunch of issues. The new prayer book was relatively new. How did you react to these changes personally, and how do you think the diocese handled them?

WW: First question, I reacted slowly, compared to some of my colleagues, like Mary Laney.

CG: Well, yeah.

WW: Most of us are a little bit behind Mary Laney's speed. But I became slowly convinced in all the cases the liberal position was the way to go, because it just seemed just.

CG: And when Allen came in as bishop, he allowed those parishes which didn't want him to come and do the Episcopal thing to have a flying bishop.

WW: That is true.

CG: Bishops Parsons, I believe it was.

WW: Yes.

CG: Do you think that was the right move?

WW: I think it was at the time, but I'm so glad that it was brought to an end later on.

CG: Okay.

WW: But I thought it was very ingenious at the time.

CG: What was his management style like? Because you were on the standing committee, so you were interacting with him.

WW: Very much so, and in contrast to his successor, he had a very, in my opinion, very open style. I remember when he decided against, for himself, the ordination issue, which then had to do with gays, I guess.

We were down in the undercroft of The Savior, then to later become the Cathedral Church of the Savior.

CG: Right.

WW: And he said to the standing committee—we were sitting in a circle around him. He gave us his decision, and then wanted our opinion. And to a person, we thought he was wrong. And he said, “Clearly, I need to go home and pray about this.”

CG: He told me that in his interview. It’s very interesting. And then he changed his mind.

WW: And then changed his mind, yeah. I was very impressed with that.

CG: And he ultimately, if somebody’s reading this and didn’t read his oral history, he ultimately, when he decided to ordain Jim Robertson to the diaconate, became the next on the runway for trial, if Walter Righter had not been found not guilty of whatever he was charged with. But Allen made a big, a huge change in his position, so he was somebody who was willing to grow, and change, and listen, wasn’t he?

WW: He really was. He really was.

CG: That’s my impression, anyway.

WW: Yeah, remarkably so, I think, just as a human being, not to mention bishop.

CG: Yeah. So he served for however long it was, until 1996 or ’95, when he called for the election of a coadjutor. And once again, you were on the search committee.

WW: Yeah. I was then the standing committee representative; that’s how I got on that one. And I was eager to do it, because I’d had such a rich experience those years before.

CG: Okay, so it's rare that somebody is on two different Episcopal search committees.

WW: Yeah.

CG: What was that process like, and how was Bennison—because that's part of the issue here, because he was elected—how was he selected, and how did all that work?

WW: I was on the committee of three or four. I remember Cliff Nesbitt was on there. I've forgotten some of the others right now. But we went to Cambridge to meet this man, who was an unlikely candidate because he was a faculty member, rather than a parish priest at that point.

CG: He'd been a parish priest in Atlanta, and that had been unsuccessful.

WW: That's right, but we did not know that. I did not know that at the time.

CG: Oh, you didn't? Okay.

WW: Did not. And that became, as undoubtedly others have said, a very significant issue, because we discovered that and then didn't really investigate it. We took his word for it at the Episcopal Academy, when he came to give his little talk to us, I guess to the whole diocese.

CG: Part of the dog and pony show?

WW: Yeah, it was part of it, but for some reason, just where my memory is fuzzy. It seemed to me that he was there alone. I don't remember the other candidates, for some reason.

CG: Of course, one of the candidates was a very popular person in the diocese, in John Midwood.

WW: Absolutely.

CG: And of course, Allen Bartlett, one of the candidates was Jim Trimble, who was another fairly popular priest in the diocese.

WW: You know, that's right. That is true.

CG: So it's interesting that the outsider in both cases won.

WW: It is interesting, and I think, moving on to why Bennison might have won, he was charming.

CG: Yeah, he is that.

WW: He is that, and I remember he just charmed us in Cambridge, and he even turned to me and he said, "Why isn't your name in?" That was the first time I'd been asked that by a candidate himself. And I said, "Well, I don't think it's my calling." I hadn't given it very serious thought. But that was the beginning of my captivation with Charles Bennison, and an honest friendship with him.

CG: You and he were very good friends, I know that.

WW: We were good friends.

CG: I'm curious, and we'll come back to the Bennison years in a minute. I'm curious about what the relationship in the Diocese of Pennsylvania is between the standing committee and the bishop. It differs in different dioceses based on the canons of the various dioceses, and have been told—whether it's true or not, I have been told that the standing committee in the Diocese of Pennsylvania has more authority or more power, or thinks it does, than in many other dioceses.

WW: Yes.

CG: So what is the relationship between the bishop and the standing committee in Pennsylvania?

WW: I think it's very close. It suffered during the Bennison years, but when I came on with Allen Bartlett, it was very close. Jim Trimble and then Lou Temme were presidents, and they are both very trusting individuals.

CG: Yeah. You can't do better than that.

WW: No.

CG: And Allen was willing to listen as well as to, if he wanted to make a decision, make a different decision?

WW: Absolutely, yeah. And I think we all respected his integrity and his freedom. I remember when he'd walk in, the mood was just elevated. It was good to see him, and we knew we were going to do some serious work.

CG: And after Charles Bennison was elected?

WW: Yeah.

CG: I'm told, again, that things began to sour with some people in the diocese fairly quickly.

WW: Mm-hm.

CG: What happened?

WW: I was slow, again, to sour, partly because of this friendship that started by accident one night when he didn't have any place to eat a meal, and Kristine said, "Bring the poor man out here." And so we did, and then that started the family friendship. Very interesting thing—Allen Bartlett had strengthened the mission strategy commission, and we used to meet at Saint Luke's in the nun's house, Saint Margaret's House, and spend the night—

CG: In Germantown.

WW: In Germantown, we'd have a conference, an overnight, and it was a great event, talk about everything in the diocese. And I forgot how I ended up on that committee, but I was on it—I guess by invitation, as opposed to election. And I remember Charles Bennison came in, and then asked me if I would make a motion at the first meeting that we

consider disbanding the mission strategy commission, because he had other ideas to streamline the diocese. I easily said, “Sure, I’ll do that.” And he even explained to me he couldn’t do it because it looked like he was grabbing power. And I said, “Oh, you don’t want it to look like that.” Well, that’s exactly what it turned out he was doing, and I played right into it. And the great mind and insight and honesty of Ginger Goodrich, intervened publicly in that meeting, and she said, “We have spent a number of years under the previous bishop building up the trust, so that the bishop gets the insight of other people.”

CG: Blessings on Ginger.

WW: Blessings on Ginger! And she and I have celebrated that moment since then.

CG: I would imagine.

WW: Oh, yeah. She stopped me in my tracks.

CG: Yeah. Some people have said that part of the reason that Charles was elected was that he was a more extroverted personality than Allen, and that John Midwood, as beloved as he is, and was, in the diocese at that point, was viewed as being more like Allen than not, in terms of his management style. Because I mean, he has a wicked sense of humor, as we all know, but he’s very low key. Do you think that fact that Bennison was this sort of dynamic personality was part of the reason why he was chosen, because it was in contrast to his predecessor, which is a perfectly natural and normal reaction?

WW: I think that’s absolutely right. His charm—it’s just hard to beat charming people. And John Midwood is a person that I put in the top echelon of integrity, and leadership, and friendship. I’m very fond of him. But I think your suggestion is exactly what happened. And

when he stood up at the Episcopal Academy, and somebody raised the question about Saint Luke's, Atlanta, his church—

CG: Bennison, now.

WW: Bennison, right. His response was, "I sinned." And we all kind of giggled, and then he went on to say that Tom Bowers, his predecessor down there—he tried to be Tom Bowers, and he said that was his sin, and that caused him not to be popular—explanation along that line. And we all accepted it. That was because he was so charming. But obviously, there was a great big hole there in logic that we should have followed up on.

CG: Yeah. And there was no knowledge that the committee had, from what I've been told by Jim Trimble, about the issues that happened in Los Angeles, with his brother?

WW: That is absolutely correct, yeah. That came out of the blue later on.

CG: And Jim said to me, and Jim is in my personal pantheon of saints, but Jim said to me that if he as chairman had known that, Bennison would have never made the cut.

WW: Yeah, mm-hm.

CG: Is that accurate, do you think?

WW: That is accurate, sure. Yeah.

CG: Not the Atlanta thing so much, because people have bad relationships with parishes, and they go somewhere else and they don't.

WW: Sure.

CG: How much—and I'm going to ask you to reach back into your psychological training at the university—"The University," as they say. How much do you think was, or is, Charles trying to live up to his father, who was also a bishop?

WW: Oh, yeah.

CG: Edward Lee has spoken about that.

WW: Good.

CG: Because he went out there and had to clean up that diocese in Western Michigan.

WW: That's right! That's right. I think that's absolutely on target. Charles and I talked about it just openly, in the course of the evening discussions. And I once asked him if he felt that was an advantage to him, and he said, "Yeah, as long as I don't assume it's the same church as it was in the previous generation."

CG: He had a very different management style, too, apparently.

WW: Than?

CG: The father, from what Edward Lee told me, was, "You'll do it my way, damn it, or you won't do it at all." Charles's was: listen to what he said, and then he went off and in a passive aggressive way did what he wanted to do anyhow.

WW: Sure. Charles once made the remark to me that because of his father's—I use the word dictatorial. I'm not sure I'll use that.

CG: I think that's the right word, from what I heard.

WW: Yeah. He said both boys were scarred, and he used the term "narcissism" before Lou Temme used that as an accusation against him. He said they're both narcissistic, and that his brother's came out in sexuality, and his came out in intellectualizing.

CG: Interesting.

WW: Yeah, it was. I thought it was very revealing.

CG: There are some people who would say that he, in dealing with them—and I'm talking about people both with collars and lay people—that

they always felt that he thought they were inferior intellectually to him. Is that part of what this narcissism—is that part of how that played out, from your point of view?

WW: I would bet so. I never felt that intimidation from him, but yeah, he certainly was a person—I'll tell you. A better example of that was his use of names. As Kristine told him in one honest exchange one evening, "Charles, you just know too many names too quickly for me to really trust what's going on here in this conversation."

CG: What do you mean by that?

WW: Well, when he called people by name, and then rattle off their names. I remember, for instance, he talked about getting the phone call from Bill Wood when the convention—and he announced this from the pulpit of the cathedral. He was a namedropper, not in the sense of someone above him, but just, it appeared he was striving for intimacy with too many people, all of a sudden.

CG: Yeah. And it's amazing, isn't it? And I experienced it, and I'm sure you did, too, how genuinely warm and genuinely caring he could be, one on one.

WW: Oh, yeah.

CG: But then when he put the mantle on of being the boss, that's when problems arose.

WW: Mm-hm.

CG: There's also, during the period of troubles, when he was—what were the specifics about—and this is what I'm unclear of—the initial concerns of the standing committee, and you resigned as president, but stayed on the standing committee. What motivated you to do that? And then I'll get back to my other question.

WW: Very simply, time. I was—

CG: It wasn't because of your relationship with Charles?

WW: No. It was not that, because we had already crossed that bridge, and the gulf had already appeared at that point. But Charles and I never quit talking. We still talked, and to this day if we have occasion, we'd have lunch together and reminisce about all this stuff. The last time we had lunch together we were looking at some of the issues, and I said, "Charles, we just didn't trust you. You would say one thing and do another." And he said, "Well, I understand that's your interpretation. Mine is I was doing the best I could for the welfare of the diocese." And I said, "Well, it didn't look that way, in terms of hidden financial arrangements."

CG: This was the use of funds that were designed for one thing, and he used for something else?

WW: He used for something else, with—

CG: Primarily Wapiti, I guess, the camp, which was one of the things that was his pet—I guess was his most pet project.

WW: Exactly. That was it. It was just disagreement. I mean, he can make that argument legitimately. It's a disagreement in judgment. And I said, "But the Gospel informs some of this. It seems to me that you don't take money that might keep parish families going for a while, and put it into a resort." That was the way I phrased it. And he said, "Well, you're overlooking what could go on at Wapiti."

CG: So his view on things was often the only one that was accurate, from his point of view?

WW: Yeah. There was a very telling time, that shocked me at the time, when he and I were very much together, and it was the first Under

One Roof conference that was held—I've forgotten where it was right now. I remember the inside of the building.

CG: Memorial Hall?

WW: Might have been. He had been here a year; he was brand new, so I went to his conference, which had to do with, as I recall, vestry/rector relationships. And I raised the question, "What do you do if vestry and you disagree on an issue, and you feel strongly about it?" And his answer surprised me. He said, "You listen to them, and you have them listen to you, but you never change your position." And I said, "Why do you never change your position?" And he said, "Because once you take a position, you don't change it." And I thought that was bizarre, but that was his answer. It later became very much a theme, it seemed to me, of his bishopric.

CG: When the national church and the presiding bishop found that there was no reason for him to be inhibited or tried because of the financial things, that there was no financial misbehavior involved, then the whole business about his brother's sexual misconduct when he was working for him out in the parish in California came up.

WW: Mm-hm.

CG: And that's when things began to get, a lot of people feel, where both sides began to get strident.

WW: Mm-hm.

CG: Charles by nature is not strident, but there were people on the standing committee who by nature, or who by circumstance, became strident.

WW: Sure.

CG: And there was sort of a feeling that there's plenty of blame to go around in this fight between the two bodies. Is that an accurate view?

Not that they wanted to have him resign, retire, but was there some truth in the fact that the standing committee, when you were on it, and when you were off it, may have been too strident in the way it approached the thing? How might it have worked out better?

WW: Mm. Yeah, we became, as a standing committee, strident, and certainly lost patience, I guess, in the reasoning. The history behind that was extensive, in that we had counselors come in—I remember two separate counselors, one from the Alban Institute—to come in and help the communication between the standing committee and the bishop. And Charles was very acquiescent, and went along with it, with his enthusiasm and whatnot. But each time, the speculation you just gave was pointed out, that both sides had hardened, and mistrusted each other. We did that two different times. Once was Alban Institute, and one was a private counselor, group therapy kind of thing. Then the complaints just kept rolling in, and I remember the night Charles was at Saint Thomas Whitmarsh. We were trying to figure out what to do. The complaints rolled in that he mistrusted people; they mistrusted him. He was against women; he didn't deal with women very well—all these things. And so I remember thinking, if we're going to vote to ask him to resign, which looked like it was coming up—

CG: And it happened.

WW: And it happened. I remember Earl Warren—I was then the president. I remember that story about Earl Warren before the Brown versus School Board, canvass each of his colleagues and talk with them personally, because he wanted a unanimous vote on something that important. So I started that openly, and I said, "As long as I'm sitting

here in the chair, let me try something. Let's don't take a vote. Let's just go around and make comments about where we go for this diocese." And to a person, there was no opposition, as they accurately said—there was no opposition to asking for his resignation or retirement.

CG: Yeah, this happened in February of 2006, because it was right before the General Convention, and I was out there as a reporter. And I always went to see the bishops; I went to four of them. I always went to see the bishops to find out what should I be paying attention to when I'm out there. And then when we were done with that, I spoke with Charles. And he said to me that—and it wasn't off the record. He said that he was doing okay, and all of that. And he said, "The saddest thing about this is that Bill Wood is my best friend."

WW: Oh, my gosh. Yeah.

CG: And he said the loss of that relationship is really unfortunate. Then you preached, and he installed Cliff Cutler at my parish, Saint Paul's in Chestnut Hill. And you would have never known in the professional sense that there was any rift at all, unless you knew.

WW: Yeah.

CG: And it was amazing how good he was at not being publicly negative about individuals—publicly.

WW: So true! I admired that.

CG: Whereas some members of the standing committee, including people that you and I both respect, could be rather nasty publicly.

WW: Yeah, could well be nasty publicly.

CG: Yeah, and that's where, I think, the stridency and the "there's blame on both sides" comes from. And my sense is that if he had—and I

want your view on this—if he had taken the diocese to General Convention in Columbus in 2006, where there was the election of a new presiding bishop, and dealing with the aftermath of the election of Gene Robinson as the first openly gay partnered bishop in the Episcopal Church, and the business from whatever it was in England that argued that that shouldn't have been done, and shouldn't be done in the future—those were important issues. If he had resigned after that, do you think the diocese would have rejoiced in his resignation, but treated his departure a little bit differently than it did later?

WW: Yeah, I think it would have. I also think the standing committee would have been crucified, because there was so much opposition to what the standing committee had done, I think at that point.

CG: Why do you think that was? Because there was opposition to what he was doing.

WW: True. I think the diocese was clearly divided, and the people that I just cited just thought nobody should go against the bishop; the bishop's a man of God. I'm overstating it, in fairness to him.

CG: No, no, that's okay.

WW: But I can only assume that's where that came from, with the conversations I had, about, "Who do you all think you are?" My answer was, "We are, among other things, advisors to the bishop, and our advice is for him to resign,

CG: Was it about power?

WW: Yeah, I think it was. Certainly the appearance of power. I think anybody who sat in the bishop's office—I remember President Kennedy said when he was in the House, he thought the power was in

the Senate, then he thought it was in the White House. Then he got to the White House, and then it was with the people.

CG: Yeah.

WW: And I think to see how little power, in fact, the standing committee or the bishop had in a conflict like this is revealing.

CG: Both Frank Griswold, who I've talked to about it, and Katharine Jefferts Schori, the two presiding bishops that were involved in this, both said, "Just resign, retire, and this will all go away, and you'll go out, and everybody will smile, and it will be over for you." Did Charles ever consider retiring until he was actually finally forced to, I think, in 2011?

WW: To my knowledge, no, just the opposite. He was the person who told me in that workshop, told the entire workshop, "A rector never changes his mind." I don't think he ever considered leaving.

CG: Do you think he had any concept of how much damage some people thought he was doing to the diocese?

WW: I'm not sure that he ever did, actually. Because I think he was just so honestly convinced he was right.

CG: Do you think that was ego, or did he really believe that?

WW: You know, that's a very good question, because I don't know. He and I had some very frank discussions, but I could never separate those two things.

CG: All right, so here we are; we're in 2007 or whatever it is. The new presiding bishop says, "You're inhibited because of what happened 30 years ago." And he steps aside; he has to. He has no choice. Were you on the standing committee at that point, when he was inhibited?

WW: Yes. As a matter of fact, that was a mystery until the last moment.

David Beers came down, and we thought it had to do with our charges, he wanted to talk to the standing committee. We found out that the reason was his brother's action, and his cooperation with that, or lack of taking action, which was news to us out of the blue. But obviously, as David Beers explained, they needed our willingness to step in as the ecclesiastical authority.

CG: Okay. So if you're the ecclesiastical authority, which some people say then President Glenn Matis seemed to revel in reminding everybody of at every possible time, every possible moment.

WW: Yeah. [Laughs]

CG: How did you come to calling Rodney Michel to be the assisting bishop, where he was basically there to perform episcopal functions, but not to be in charge?

WW: Yeah.

CG: How did that happen?

WW: He came before the standing committee, and we had a conversation with him. What I can't recall is how he was selected. I just can't recall why he was picked. But I remember he came—

CG: But he was available, and he was willing?

WW: I guess that was it.

CG: He lived in Ephrata [Pennsylvania].

WW: Yeah, that's right. And I remember asking about his prophetic nature. Well, I was thinking back on Bob DeWitt, even—here's an opportunity to move off of this navel-gazing period we went through.

CG: Right.

WW: And he said, “I’m not a prophet. I’m a pastor.” And I thought, well, I really like him. He’s so honest, as well as warm.

CG: Do you think—how do I phrase this? He was here for three years; he was hired for three years. That was his contract. But it didn’t take three years for Bishop Bennison to be tried, found guilty, and then have the conviction overturned because of the statute of limitations.

WW: Mm-hm.

CG: And then Bennison came back in August of whatever year it was. Do you think that things were beginning to improve while Bennison was inhibited, and then did it go back to being where it was before?

WW: Even worse, I think. Yeah, because I think we started to dare to have a close relationship with the bishop, the kind of thing we talked about with Allen Bartlett.

CG: Right.

WW: It was worse because in a sense, we’re back into the mess that developed, and we know it’s a mess. So there’s that feeling—we’ve stepped back.

CG: Yeah. One of the reasons, Bennison has said to me and the members of the history committee is that he wanted to come back and make sure that the book got published. And there were a lot of people on the standing committee that weren’t going to publish that book, because they thought it was his book. And it turned out, and I think everybody that’s read it now realizes, that it wasn’t, that his fingerprints are not anywhere on it, because all the authors were professional historians, and what not.

WW: Mm-hm.

CG: But if he'd come back and done that, and then retired again, would that have been a: oh, good, he gets it? But he didn't, and so they had to use this new canon, I gather—

WW: Yeah.

CG: —to threaten him with, and it's called the Bennison Canon.

WW: Bennison Canon.

CG: That's a hell of a legacy to leave with the House of Bishops, to have a canon about how to get rid of a bishop named for you. But he never did, really, see that he was doing anything that was harmful to the diocese?

WW: No, I don't think he did, but in retrospect he did, because at his departure, his sermon at the last service, he cited as a mistake that he had come back after being inhibited. He should have left then, he said. So he got—for some reason, he said that.

CG: It's also very interesting that we as a committee had decided, while the diocese is in the process of looking for a new bishop, that we will not interview him or Glenn Matis until this is done. And when I met with him for lunch, I told him that we were going to do this, but that there was some talk about—and I didn't say we had decided, because we hadn't. And he said, "I'm not going to sit for an interview until the new bishop is elected."

WW: This was Charles?

CG: This was Charles.

WW: Yeah, yeah.

CG: And my reaction to that was: there's a sensitivity to what's going on in the diocese that he didn't show when he was bishop!

WW: That's very good insight, unless you had suggested it, and then that's his political side, if you had suggested that he not sit.

CG: No, I didn't. I said, "These are the options. Some people want us to do it now, in case you get hit by a bus, and some people want to wait so that it's not a distraction for people going, or a scab-remover, people going forward." And he said, "No, I don't want to do this until after the new bishop is elected."

WW: I think he is sensitivity- or politically savvy, and I think those two things aren't separate.

CG: Aren't separate. Where do you think the diocese is now, Bill?

WW: Well, I think we're hopeful, and I think [Provisional Bishop] Dan Daniel has just been a Godsend. I just think he has been wonderful.

CG: Were you involved in his selection at all?

WW: No, I wish I had been. He and I were down at Camp Leach as young people together, not as campers, but East Carolina had this thing called Camp Leach, and I grew so fond of him down there.

CG: So you've known him for years?

WW: Known him, yeah.

CG: It's a relative small club. What do you think the issues are that the new bishop, when he comes in, is going to be facing? The navel-gazing—a lot of people are saying we've done enough of that now. Let's get beyond that. But there are a lot of people who still want to navel-gaze, which is part of the process of not interviewing him or Glenn until after, so that we don't allow people to go back and look at all that, and stir it all up.

WW: Mm-hm.

CG: What do you think the new bishop needs to do, and what qualities do you think he needs to bring to the Diocese of Pennsylvania, now?

WW: I think to continue, in his or her own way, the theme that Dan Daniel established, and that is to be in touch, to be with people, to spread the authority, to go back to Allen Bartlett's policy of a mission strategy commission. I think that's the main thing, just be in touch, and let us get to know the bishop.

CG: In looking back at your career on the standing committee, what's your biggest regret?

WW: I think this business with Charles Bennison, because I have enormous respect for his capabilities. And I love his sense of humor. I, to this day, would have fun with him—do have fun with him, if we could ever get together. We haven't for some time.

CG: Is he the Alex Rodriguez of bishops?

WW: [Laughs]

CG: I know you're a baseball fan, so that's a reference you would understand.

WW: [Laughs] Well, it is. A complex person, because I know him better than Alex Rodriguez.

CG: And he didn't do steroids, we don't think, anyway.

WW: I don't think so. He never needed to, he was so energized! There was an interesting incident that goes back to something you raised a minute ago, and I'd forgotten until you raised the question just now. It was the night that we asked, for the first time, for his resignation, or his retirement.

CG: In 2006?

WW: 2006. It was a stormy night, and we waited for him to come back from Whitemarsh, and told him, and he immediately went through, as anybody would, a series of various things. He threatened all of us, together, not just us, that this would be a black mark on the diocese. It was right after Joe Doss's business in New Jersey.

CG: In New Jersey, yeah.

WW: Yeah, and he said we were putting him in that category. It was bad. And then we all decided it was time to go home, probably eight or nine o'clock, and he asked if I would stay, since I was president. And I said sure. And what he said before the standing committee left, he said, "I want you all to know I'll give your request, or recommendation, prayerful consideration." Then they left, as he and I walked up the steps to his office on the second floor.

CG: Oh, this was done at Church House?

WW: At Church House. He closed the door, and he said, "I want you to know right away, I will never leave this position until retirement." And my reaction was to joke, and say, "That was a quick prayer you gave, the prayerful consideration." And then I realized we weren't in a joking mood, so I hope I apologized for that, and said, "All right, let's talk."

CG: The rector should never change his mind.

WW: Exactly. Exactly. That night the rain was coming down sideways, and so finally at midnight—I remember it was that late—we talked about all this stuff. I said, "I'm not in a position to ask you this, but can I borrow an umbrella to get home?" And he laughed, and he said yeah, and gave me one. But it was not a happy night. So yeah, that's my greatest regret.

CG: Over the course of your ministry, what are your fondest memories?

WW: Oh, gosh! I think with the congregation, just the relationships, the friendships.

CG: At all of them?

WW: Yeah. More so at Saint Christopher's, because it was a larger congregation, and it didn't quite have some of the old characters of Bucks County, who are interesting, but stifle a certain intimacy.

CG: Yeah. But Saint Christopher's was a really good experience?

WW: It was really good. I liked it.

CG: You were one of the people who, in response to some of the talk about the new prayer book, which is one of the things that changed on your watch, who allowed Morning Prayer to remain.

WW: Yes!

CG: And one of the few parishes in the diocese that didn't follow to the letter the facts that the Eucharist should be the principle service every Sunday.

WW: Exactly.

CG: How did you feel about that, ultimately? I mean, because you're a priest, and the Eucharist is central to who you are?

WW: Yeah.

CG: But you're the rector of a parish that has strong Morning Prayer feelings. What was that like?

WW: It was intensified, because Mary Laney joined the staff.

CG: And she was real Eucharistic, I would imagine?

WW: Very, yeah. And she kept saying, "You're building in problems for your successor." And I said, "Well, let's ask the congregation." I mean finally, my ultimate concern is not my successor; it's this group

of worshipping people. I took that position. And so every time we surveyed them, they said, “No, we love Morning Prayer. We love the variety.” We also had a number of Protestants from other denominations, and of course, they liked it—not of course, but they liked it. The choir very strongly liked it. They loved the canticles of Morning Prayer.

CG: Yeah, because you could sing Morning Prayer.

WW: Yeah. So each time, I said, “No, as long as we are offering both, we’re going to keep offering both.” And my relationship with both bishops, meaning Allen and Charles—they knew this, and it was sort of an open joke.

CG: And it was likely that your successor was going to come in and change it?

WW: It was likely, sure.

CG: And she has, I gather?

WW: And she has, very skillfully, with the worship committee, and very slowly. And Hillary and I got to be friends over here, when I joined here a year and a half ago. And she was my mentor as to the way Saint David’s does things in this generation. So we grew very close.

CG: What’s her last name?

WW: Raining, Hillary Raining, as in raining.

CG: Raining. What does it take—and I once asked Warren Davis, your predecessor at Saint Christopher’s, this, and I’m not sure what he said. But what does it take to stay alive, and active, and fresh, for 21 years in one parish?

WW: That’s a very good question. My initial feeling is the friendships, for me, but this would be highly individualistic, I guess. I love the

people, the sense of humor. It was just like a family to me. The other thing is continuing ed. I kept doing that, just been interested in that. Every year I'd do something.

CG: Yeah, and it must have been nice to walk into a parish where your predecessor had been able to do that for 25 years.

WW: Oh, Warren was an angel to follow, yeah. He loved the people; they loved him. He had his ups and downs at home.

CG: Yeah, pretty good piano player, too—jazz piano player.

WW: Yeah! Absolutely. So it was great. I remember calling him once. He received so many requests to come back and do funerals, and I said, “Warren, I'd love you to come back. It's always fun to be with you. I have no problems.” He said, “You may not, but I do! I retired!”

[Laughs]

CG: [Laughs] Then you came back to your first parish in Pennsylvania?

WW: Yeah.

CG: I mean, you're only here, what, one or two days a week, plus Sundays. How did that happen?

WW: Well, that was funny.

CG: You sort of swapped priests.

WW: We did. Musical churches.

CG: Yeah.

WW: Well, it was a funny sensation, because first time I celebrated [in] the Chapel, this great big space—it wasn't here when I was here.

CG: Yeah. The chapel is the big place, and the church is tiny.

WW: That's right. And Frank said, “Well, what are you nervous about? You're coming back to where you were.” And I said, “It was not this church when I was here. This is big!” So it was like going to a new

place, but there are the old guard that I know, so it's not like going to a new parish.

CG: And Frank is Frank Allen.

WW: And Frank is Frank Allen.

CG: Who is now the president of the standing committee, and he's involved in an Episcopal search.

WW: Yes! Very true. Very true.

CG: Anything else you want to add about the Bennison years, and the Bennison issues, which we can close with?

WW: Only that I have great respect for what he is good at. I've never lost that. It's never been a black or white issue with me.

CG: Tell me what the things are he's best at, because he's so often cited for the things he wasn't good at, or that were hurtful.

WW: He has very honest emotions. Through all of this, there have been several times when he has shed tears, and I, too, over what has happened, when we talk about it. We truly do love each other and care about each other. He has been very emotional, and I admire his ability to share his emotions. I also don't doubt that he really does believe his decisions were best for the diocese. He was influenced tremendously by Chandler Joyner.

CG: Who was the what—the financial officer, right?

WW: He was the financial officer, a Virginian, and I was very fond personally of Chandler, but I never could understand his financial—and he tried to explain it to me, but it always seemed like a circus act, a magic act that just didn't make sense to me. But I'm not a financial expert.

CG: Okay. What we'll do is when this has been transcribed, I will get it to you, and we'll look at it. And if there are any changes you want made for facts and details, we'll change those. If there's anything you want to add, or if there's more we want to talk about, we can do that later. It'll probably be two or three weeks before I get the thing.

WW: I would think so.

CG: But I've enjoyed this thoroughly.

WW: Well, I have, too, Clark. This is a great journey. I have not traveled this way for a while.

CG: Well, you've covered a lot of ground in a fairly prompt period of time, and it's a very important time in the diocese's history. The other thing about it is, and you know this as well as anybody, because you've read the history, and you know the history of the diocese—this isn't the first time that the diocese and a bishop have been at odds.

WW: Oh, I know.

CG: I mean, there are some people who are saying we still haven't recovered from Bishop DeWitt. I think we're beyond Onderdonk now, but that was 18-something-or-other, but I don't know whether we've gotten beyond DeWitt, even, in some places.

WW: I think that's right, and we've all heard how parochial this diocese is.

CG: Why do you think that is?

WW: You know, it goes back to—I've heard all kinds of interpretations: the Quaker spirit, the Friends; that's part of it, supposedly. I'm sure Bishop DeWitt, who I admire tremendously for his prophetic vision, intensified that.

CG: Well, the interesting thing to me about the Diocese of Pennsylvania, in reading the history, *This Far by Faith*, is that so many firsts

happened in this diocese. Of course, it was the first diocese in the Episcopal Church. It was the first diocese really in the Anglican Communion, because it was the first non-Church-of-England diocese to be in communion with the Church of England. We ordained the first black clergy person. We've sent off a number of presiding bishops, including one, just one bishop ago, who grew up in this part of the world. The first woman who became an Anglican bishop came out of this diocese.

WW: That's right.

CG: It really is a diocese that—it's Ying and Yang, isn't it?

WW: Yeah.

CG: I mean, because you say it's a very laid-back, conservative kind of place, and yet there are all these magnificent things that have happened.

WW: Well, I think it's probably—academically speaking; not emotionally speaking—it's the best of a democracy, in which everybody feels perfectly free to say exactly what they think. And even in disagreement. One person once expressed to me a great respect for hate radio, because as long as they're blowing off on the radio, they're not shooting up at the mall. Well, that may be true.

CG: They may be doing both.

WW: They may be doing both.

CG: But that's a good point.

WW: Mm-hm.

CG: All right, well let's move on, and I will get back to you as soon as I get the transcript.

WW: That will be great, Clark.

[End of Interview]