



The United Church of Canada, British Columbia Conference

The Bob Stewart Archives

6000 Iona Drive, Vancouver, BC, Canada V6T 1L4

Making Room for Women Project

Interview with Eunice Williams

March 15 and 21, 2011

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Oral History Recording Summary

Interview with: Eunice Williams (EW)
Interviewer: Sharon Copeman (SC)
Date: March 15 and 21, 2011
Location: 4515 West 12th Ave., Vancouver, BC
Transcribed by: Jude McGann

Time Log (minutes)	Description of Content
00:01	Beginning of Interview; introduction, permission, information about early life
01:50	Early experiences of gender inequality
02:25	Vocational choices, role models
03:58	Leadership responsibilities in the church, involvement in WMS and UCW
09:10	Joys and challenges
10:10	Passions: work in various church courts
13:45	Formative years of UCW
16:30	Effect of class, race, and sexual orientation on church participation
17:30	Committee on the ordination of gays and lesbians
19:54	Leisure activities and studies
21:30	Thoughts on ordination and ministry
22:53	Thoughts on the future direction of the church
24:34	Work on Home Mission, Metropolitan Council, First United Church (Vancouver), MP&E
38:22	Experience of God / the Holy
43:04	Second interview, March 21, 2011; job as Personnel officer for BC Conference
54:22	Book study: <i>The Church and Communism</i>
58:48	More on the formative years of the UCW
1:04:52	National Division of MP&E; experience as a woman chair
1:08:55	Work with SCM, Transfer and Settlement, and other student-related work
1:13:07	Pioneering work as an elder

- SC: My name is Sharon Copeman and the date is March 15, 2011. I'm interviewing Eunice Williams as part of the "Making Room for Women" Program at the United Church of Canada Archives. 00:01
- Eunice, do I have your permission to proceed with this interview?
- EW: Yes.
- SC: Tell me a bit about your early life, your family life, your community, and your participation in the church.
- EW: My father was a United Church minister and very ably supported by my mother and I was literally raised in the church.
- SC: Aha, okay, a church kid! Didn't know that.
- EW: My parents – this was in Saskatchewan that I was born and raised for my first years – my parents were both very much involved in forwarding Church Union, and I learned to have a really very great respect for what became The United Church of Canada. Because of the family in which I was raised, and the church in which they were active.
- SC: And your Dad was the minister.
- EW: Yes, yes.
- SC: Can you remember an early defining moment that made you aware of gender inequality? 01:50
- EW: I think when I realized that my mother, who was a very competent person and could do most of the things my ordained father could do, could not have been a minister at that time. I realized that there was something wrong with the system.
- SC: What about your education. What contributed to your vocational choices? Who were your role models? 02:25
- EW: Well, I went through university and taught high school for six years before I married and I had no particular role model in that area. But all my growing up years, and even now, my mother remains my role model, because she was very competent and an extremely fine person.
- SC: So you worked as a teacher for pay, for six years. What led to your decisions about volunteer involvements?

- EW: Whenever I saw a need, where I thought maybe I could contribute, I was happy to do it.
- SC: So it was about need and matching your abilities.
- EW: And time and energy. As well as what I could do and still look after my family.
- SC: What leadership responsibilities have you carried in the church, in your congregation or in other church courts? (Just about everything, I think!) 03:58
- EW: Well, I first began at West Point Grey. When I was first able to attend anything at the church, I joined what had been originally a WMS group, and they were beginning to work with the Federation as they called it then.
- SC: What was the difference between WMS and the Federation?
- EW: The Woman's Association prior to UCW. And in no time at all, I found myself being asked to do leadership in both, at which point I went to the minister and said, "I cannot possibly do this. I think it's high time this church got on to looking at the Federation," which preceded UCW, and I was prepared to work on that. But not to try to work with two women's groups.
- SC: Did that feel like a conflict of interest for you? Just too time consuming?
- EW: Too time consuming; I couldn't possibly work in two different organizations in the church at that point. And I could see that the church needed one women's organization and I knew that it was being worked on nationally and provincially.
- SC: The Federation isn't... that's not a term that I'm familiar with.
- EW: Well, it applied to groups that were preparing for what became UCW.
- SC: So it was kind of an interim ...
- EW: ... an interim group.
- SC: And Woman's Missionary Society was WMS.
So then that was within the church and the courts of the church as a lay woman early on. What about ecumenical activities? Did that spread out? Did you have any connection there?
- Eunice In no time I was involved with the Presbytery aspect of the women's work

and then the Conference aspect of it, which came along about two years after we got a Federation going at West Point Grey.

And being involved in either the Conference or the Presbytery, you got put on Presbytery committees, Conference committees, and in no time you were asked to be all over the place.

SC: All within the United Church, though?

EW: All within the United Church.

The other thing I got heavily involved in was educational work. My children were in school, I was asked almost immediately to take on work with the...

SC: The Sunday school or ...?

EW: ... with the school, it had a membership of 250 parents

SC: Oh, PTA, Parent Teacher Association, yes.

EW: And it was very active in local educational matters and there was a city organization which I got involved with, and the provincial board. And they wanted me to keep on working with that until I chaired the provincial board. I eventually had to say I could not go on at that level and confined myself more to the church, the BC Conference of the United Church, and the Presbytery.

SC: So your first passion was connected with your faith, and the church.

EW: But I felt it was very important to be involved in a community organization as a person of faith

SC: What were the important issues, joys, and challenges in your life? Is there a project or work that you have done that you are especially proud of? 09:10

EW: I wouldn't say proud.

SC: That you take particular pleasure or joy in knowing ...

EW: Well, raising my family and what they've turned out to be. Two children of the ordinary variety and one adopted.

SC: ... and one child a minister, whom I'll be interviewing at some point.

So your particular joy and your particular challenges around your family, understandable.

EW: And what they are accomplishing.

SC: What have you been most passionate about in your adult life? 10:10

EW: Probably working in the church at various levels and trying to see what that work could do to, not promote the faith, but to provide places in which one could exercise one's faith for the world.

SC: Early on in the interview I said you've probably filled every position, lay, volunteer, position in the church but maybe we should just name some of those positions. You've done things at the local level, the Conference level, and the national level, haven't you? What are some of those committees and positions?

EW: I tried always when I became involved in the Presbytery and the Conference and the national work, always to remain active in the congregation – to do some work, because I always figured that if I couldn't contribute in the congregation, which I think is the most important aspect of the church, then it wasn't much use working at other levels. And I've always felt strongly about that. And always tried to keep involved in the congregation and to see what was going on there. And how we were doing as a congregation in the community.

SC: I know you, and we have served together at West Point Grey on a Discernment Committee. We've also served on a Joint Needs Assessment search at some point when there was a minister being sought and called, I remember. So those are two of the positions you've been involved with. You've had a position on the board at some point, of the council?

EW: I've chaired the board twice, and even when I was involved in these other aspects of the church, I usually did something on the board. Like I started the first committee that deals with the minister and the congregation.

SC: Ministry and Personnel?

EW: Yes. Having worked with it on the national committee, I had been asked to do workshops around the Presbyteries, so then I thought I'd better start trying this out in my own congregation and I did that for several years. And I just use that as an example, how I tried to relate national work to the congregation.

- SC: They're all connected and if they get disconnected it's a problem.
- EW: And if it doesn't work in the congregation, why waste all this time and energy, nationally.
- SC: Sounds wise to me. So now, at the national level, it was Ministry and Personnel type work that you were doing as well? 13:45
- EW: My first work nationally was when the United Church Women first started. They were very short of staff to go around to them. So I was asked, and did spend a month in Alberta, visiting the presbyteries who had started UCWs, but visiting each presbytery and working, having what they used to call a rally and then working with the executive of the Presbyterial, and then spending a little more time with individuals as needed. And I was asked again the next year to go and spend a month or I guess five weeks in Saskatchewan doing that.
- SC: And what was the rally? Can you describe a rally?
- EW: It was a gathering of United Church Women from all over that Presbytery.
- SC: At the Presbytery?
- EW: Yes. They'd have a day-long meeting and you would speak or whatever they asked you to do, where they asked for help. You would speak, you'd probably be asked to do a church service in the closest church. Partly representing the national church, but also trying to answer questions and be a help to them in their organization when they felt they needed help.
- SC: This was in the formative years of the UCW. Guidance in getting organized ...
- EW: Well yes, they were organized.
- SC: ... But moving forward?
- EW: Yes, moving forward. Particularly questions about the organization, which was the most remarkable organization I've come across in the United Church. But I realized right away that it was much too complicated to be maintained at that organizational level. So we were working on that.
- SC: What effect has your class, your race, your sexual orientation had on your life, your participation in the church? 16:30
- EW: I think I developed a strong objection to moving, having been moved around a great deal in my childhood.

SC: As a 'PK' [Preacher's Kid]

EW: The gender thing was not strong in my family because my mother always was able to maintain a role in the congregation that was almost equal to my father's, especially as my father's health deteriorated. She was able to, and did, preach very well. So that was strong. First time I really considered the whole gender business was when I was asked by the national church to go on the first committee organized out here to deal with ordination of gay and lesbians. 17:30

SC: So you served on that initial committee that was considering that. Tell me about the gathering of the group that was beginning to look at the issue of ordination of gays and lesbians. Because you were part of that process.

EW: I went on the committee with considerable trepidation because I knew it was going to be a 'smoking' issue for some time.

SC: Was your trepidation around the time it would take?

EW: Well, I asked that question and I was told probably three months and in the end I think we were close to two and a half years before we ...

SC: There was a group that used to gather out at VST ...

EW: And I did have, I think, a valuable connection for that committee because as it turned out, when we wanted to interview a group of United Church people who were very interested, were gays and lesbians interested in this, it turned out that I knew almost all of them, from previous connections.

SC: And were comfortable with them.

EW: Yes, indeed. Many of them were friends.

SC: So probably they felt safe with you being there; that was a valuable piece, I expect.

EW: Well, I think because they had known me for some time, partly from university connections.

SC: Do you feel like we've covered that as much as you'd like to? Yes? 19:54
On a whole different area, what leisure activities have enriched your life?

Eunice When filling out something from national – they were trying to put on the computer, peoples' records and information – I was asked on that: What do you do for fun time in the summer? I said that I take graduate courses at VST, in theology. I got an almost immediate response, would I

consider coming on the national division? At once?

SC: So some people would define leisure differently than you do!

Eunice Well, it was enjoyment. I could do the courses because they were in the summer.

SC: When all the committees you were serving on weren't meeting. And I guess those leisure activities in the summer were contributing to your being able to do the things you were doing in the winter, really. It was all related.

EW: It was something I enjoyed very much; it was study. I could do a short course in the graduate ...

SC: I'm thinking that in a different era, in my era, you might well have been ordained. 21:30

EW: I never thought of it!

SC: Did you not?

EW: Well, I was working almost full time in the church. It never occurred to me. I didn't see myself as doing that.

SC: Would you use the word ministry for what you've done in the church? Not ordained ministry, not that, but ...

EW: I certainly hoped it was ministry that I was doing on boards and commissions.

SC: I would think it was. I was just interested to know how you perceived that.

EW: It was certainly work that I thought was necessary for the church that somebody had to do.

SC: What is important to you about your life now?

EW: It's still being very much aware of what goes on in the world. And what the faith has to say to it. Something I think about very often. And I'm still very concerned with the United Church and the church in the world.

SC: That leads into the next question: what direction do you hope the church will take in the future? 22:53

EW: I'm not sure. I think like most people, I would hope it would become more

real and necessary to the average person, and I think it has been.

SC: In recent years? It's certainly been real in your life. It's been the central part of your life and that's not true anymore, is that what you're meaning when you're hoping ... ?

EW: Yes, and I've always been concerned about its place in the world. Not just as an institution on its own.

SC: And not just for individual people? In terms of relationships.

EW: Yes. What the church has to say to the world, we haven't always been good at doing.

SC: There was a time in the fifties when I was a child, and the Moderator spoke and government responded. In fact, government sought the word of the Moderator and other church leaders.

EW: When the Moderator was consulted in Ottawa about what the church should do. And the president of BC Conference was consulted in Victoria as to what the church might have to say.

SC: And that's not happening anymore. Is that a frustration?

EW: It's a loss, I think.

SC: A lack of wisdom that's there, available and not being sought.

EW: Yes, that's a good way to put it.

SC: Is there anything I've missed that you would like to tell me about?

EW: Would it be of any use to say where I did work in the church?

24:34

SC: Absolutely.

EW: At this point I have difficulty recovering where. I worked in the Presbytery, chaired it and did, I think, just about every committee in the Presbytery. In the Conference, a number of committees. One that I found very interesting and could contribute to was Home Missions, which led into our Metropolitan Council in the Conference for a number of years.

When it was having to fold because of natural reasons, I was told my job was First Church, so I went down there and chaired its Oversight for, I think, twelve years. And worked there for another dozen years.

SC: So that's First United Church in Vancouver.

- EW: Yes. And those were some committees that I worked on. I also really enjoyed and appreciated having two consecutive terms on the national Ministry Personnel & Education Committee. And from there was asked to go on the General Council, as acting chair of the division, when one person was able to chair the Division but couldn't possibly cover the aspect that belonged on the General Council Executive, so I did that.
- SC: How did that work? I don't have a clear picture of that.
- EW: Well, it was simply that they found that they could get a good person who would chair the actual division, but couldn't possibly take on, or wouldn't take on the General Council.
- SC: So was that a time commitment, you had to be able to attend ... ?
- EW: Yes, I had to attend absolutely every meeting of the division, which I had done for four years anyhow, but then had to attend the General Council Executive and represent the Division as acting chair.
- SC: So the Division was MP&E and all the meetings that involved with that directly, then the other piece of it was attending General Council Executive meetings and bringing that work to them.
- EW: As acting chair of the MP&E Division.
- SC: Others might have got that more clearly or more quickly than I did!
- EW: It was an unusual arrangement. But it solved a problem for the Division at that point in time, so I was glad to do it.
- SC: Anything else that you think of?
- EW: I think that I've not been totally involved in the church. It sounds as if I have, but I've tried to be involved in the community and what was going on there and in the neighbourhood
- SC: So the church hasn't consumed you. Your involvement has been all places. My hunch is that anyone who knows you in those other places is probably also aware that you are very involved in the church. Would that be true?
- EW: Oh yes, that certainly is true. In the neighbourhood people know that I am involved in the United Church. But they also know that I'm very interested in the neighbours; gather the neighbours once a year for a very simple little party, but getting to know, introducing newcomers, getting to know people.
- SC: And would that be something that you do out of your faith but not in an

attempt to put your faith on other people.

EW: Certainly it's out of my faith to be aware of my neighbours and what's going on with them. And I find now when, because of some illness I'm not able to do as much in the church, I find that the neighbours are the people who still come to my door.

SC: You've cast your bread upon the waters and now it's coming back toasted.

EW: They turn up with their problems, but also with gifts. Like my neighbour across the street who, because I was able to be available to her when she had emergencies in her family, turns up with fresh soup every week for me, just because she wants to do something. It's been a very rewarding experience to spend more time with my neighbours, though I can't do it in the church.

SC: Oh, lovely. So people are coming to you, coming back to you. That's lovely. Do you think we've covered as much as ...

EW: That's up to you! I can always come back.

SC: Absolutely. I'm impressed that we've accomplished what we have in not much more than an hour.

Eunice, off tape we've been talking about your involvement with the Metropolitan Council and the work at First United Church and I want to invite you to tell a little bit more about that than has been recorded so far.

EW: The Metropolitan Council was a Mission Council which attempted to serve the four lower mainland presbyteries. And to involve the presbyteries more in the wider church.

I was on the executive of the Metropolitan Council for its entire duration I think, and when our money was being taken over by BC Conference, we were no longer able to maintain Metro Council. But the work, of course, that we had been doing had to be given to various individuals to carry on. I had been working with Home Missions in Vancouver-Burrard, so I was just immediately told that the First Church downtown would be my next job.

I went down there, knowing that I was to set up and get going a board that would oversee the work of First Church. Our ongoing aim at First Church, I realized, was to get the whole church in the lower mainland accepting responsibility for First Church, which had up till then mainly been the work of one devoted individual. Obviously it needed a great deal more support than that. So after discussion, we simply said, "Alright, let's call this Oversight of First Church." We wanted to be very careful not to impinge on the aspects of the church that maintained the congregation, which was

already dwindling, but to support the one member of staff who was its minister, and to support its frail official board to keep the congregation, such as it was, functioning.

SC: So the work of the church was recognized as being ultimately important. Very, very important and much bigger than what was possible to be done, and should be done by such a small group of people.

EW: Exactly. So we had an Oversight Committee that met almost every week, Friday noon, and we endeavoured to get two members from each of the lower mainland presbyteries to function on it.

That work proved difficult sometimes. Some presbyteries, one or two, were more supportive than others. But I chaired that for, I think, twelve years and then we got a Conference committee to look at the whole thing and set up a slightly different sort of oversight, and I remained on that. I assumed I would not remain on it, but I kept being appointed back on it by Burrard Presbytery as one of their appointees, to work on the Personnel Committee particularly, or the Finance Committee, or something.

So I think I was there for over twenty years, actively involved at First Church. And certainly that was one of my most interesting, challenging, and in some ways difficult, work.

SC: And rewarding?

EW: Yes! Very rewarding. I met some wonderful people down there (staff, and in the community), and I retain my interest, though I don't go down there these days.

SC: You've just started to say your whole point in working with the church ...

EW: ... is to see its relation to the community, through the community, and inevitably to every other area of the church in which you come in contact.

SC: It's all related.

EW: So you find yourself interested and being involved in all sorts of places in the church besides where you started out to work. In the women's' group, or your local church.

SC: You've told some wonderful stories while the machine was turned off, of the involvement with Met Council and the money that had come from the sale of a project that had been happening. Can you talk just a little bit about that?

EW: The project: it was a big recycling and renovation depot in which they sold things they produced.

- SC: And they replenished or repaired?
- EW: They replenished, and the proceeds went to help support First Church. And that was being sold to the provincial government as a training project for other people.
- SC: Obviously the provincial government had recognized the value of what the church was doing ...
- EW: ... and had been putting people in to be trained there. About the time, soon after we returned to Vancouver, that project was sold and that money was guaranteed to be kept to support the work of First Church.
- And from then it was agreed, legally, that some of that money could be used to support a mission council in the city, which would look after First Church and all the other mission projects in the work of Metro Council. In other words the four Lower Mainland presbyteries.
- SC: A question that has been rolling in my mind as I've had the gift of listening to you talk this morning, is we haven't really ... I don't think you've talked about your sense of the Holy. Your sense of God involved in all of this and in your life. Is that a question that you can talk about a little bit? Or you might name it as Jesus' involvement. 38:22
- EW: Well yes ... from my beliefs that God is involved in the whole of life in the world, I am constantly thinking and working as to where God is involved in any particular piece of the world, and particularly involved in any piece of the work of the church.
- That has always been the question that I ask myself before I agree to go and get involved in some particular piece of the work of the church.
- SC: So, "Is God calling 'me' to this work?" – is that the kind of the question, or ... ?
- EW: Yes, I always consider that: does God really want me to go and see what I can do there?
- SC: So recognizing that the piece of work is important. It may or may not be me who is called to be a part of it.
- EW: Certainly. And some things I've said no to. I've thought, "No, I don't think that's where I'm being called." In other words, where I can make a really substantial contribution to the work of the church, by being involved there.
- SC: Thank you so much, I really appreciate the opportunity for this conversation

EW: My pleasure.

SC: You were just saying, what you've always found very interesting is ...

EW: The interrelationship of the various committees in the church, at any level that you get involved with and how one committee relates to something else. And if you're not careful, you get involved in it!

SC: And not just within the relationship of committees within a congregation, but how that relates to the Presbytery and how that relates to the Conference and the national ...

EW: Or national Conference committees relate, or national committees.

SC: I think you and I could go on for a while, but we'll stop for now.

When we had the machine turned off, you were talking about your arrival in Toronto for a meeting and you thought that Lois Wilson was going to be chairing it, and it turned out that you were chairing it. And that was just presented to you. The papers were put on the table and you wondered if you were to distribute them, and you were told, I guess by Howie or by the secretary ...

EW: I was just told by the secretary, "Oh you're chairing this morning." This was about ten to nine and the meeting was starting at nine. Lois Wilson didn't find it convenient to come in this morning, and she had just said, "Oh, Eunice will chair." So that was my preparation. But it was an interesting day and I found because it was all very well organized, it turned out to be quite a reasonable day.

SC: It was doable for you. You said that Howie was there and able and ready to support you.

As I've listened to you, not just in this, but this brought it to my mind, you were definitely a pioneer, as a woman and particularly as a lay woman, in offering leadership in roles in the church that had, up until that point, been largely served by men, and most likely ordained men.

EW:: Yes indeed, there weren't as many ordained women around then as are now.

SC: Eunice, you've had some time to think. It's now the twenty-first of March, a week after our first interview. The focus of your thoughts has been Transfer and Settlement, and personnel work that you did; a short-term paid position that you had with BC Conference; and a little bit about a book that you studied with some folks. Let's start with the Transfer and Settlement part of the memories and the work. 43:04

EW: This whole cluster of personnel work began when there was a vacancy in what had been a personnel job in the [BC] Conference office. The person left and they discovered that the office had not really been set up properly. The records were confused. They asked me if I would come in for I think, six months, and set it up and get records sorted out, and get it ready to be handed over to the incoming Executive Secretary who was going to do personnel with his job.

That job expanded because it happened that as I was named 'associate personnel secretary', people started coming to my office to discuss personnel matters. The incoming new Executive Secretary was very busy so it worked out well for him. I had some very heavy personnel matters, including the first one that concerned a minister and his gay activities.

SC: Gay partner? Okay.

EW: I worked through that. Then there were several other important ones.

One of the saddest and most interesting ones; a minister, newly ordained, middle-aged, came to work in the Prince Rupert Presbytery to have a specialty with Native people, which she had been specially trained for. She'd had less than a year, and it was going very well and she was enjoying herself very much. But, noon hour in one of the villages she was hit by an Indian driver, extremely badly injured, had to be flown down. There was no one else in the personnel office, so I had to take over the whole situation: arrange for her hospitalization and further work, contact her family, and get them out here, and worked with her. She was never able to return to work.

SC: Oh my goodness. As a result of this? The work you did with that...?

EW: Yes, an emergency that I had to deal with in the Conference, yes, the Settlement Committee was without a secretary, so the Executive Secretary begged me to take on this position. I had to work very hard to bone up for that and then did that for two years, and then it was just assumed that I would chair the Settlement Committee, which I then did for five years.

But during all this time, I kept getting personnel work to do, because people came to be interviewed and looked after. So, personnel work was given semi-official approval when the new Executive Secretary came in. The personnel work had been attached to his job and there was no way he could possibly do it, and he saw that I was functioning, so he simply asked me to carry on, on the principal that if the system ain't broke, don't fix it.

First person to quote that to me! I was left with the major portion of the personnel work of the Conference for a number of years.

SC: When we were talking before I turned on the machine, you spoke of a position at the conference office that was 'half-time', and actually would be full time for work. And it was the only paid position you ever had. Is that the position?

Tell us a little bit about that.

EW: The Conference officer insisted that I had to be paid for this half-time personnel work and I of course said I would be perfectly willing to do it without any money, but they assured me I would not have the respect of the other Conference officers unless I was paid, and I must be paid.

So then the problem was what to pay me, and they finally came down saying that because they had very little guidance on what to pay women in the church, they would pay me at the rate, half-time of course, of a diaconal person.

SC: So that seems like a very relevant statement to put into an interview of a women on the "Making Room for Women Project."

EW: It was the only pay I ever took for a church job.

SC: The only other project that you've named that you wanted to be sure we spoke of was the book study. And the Lay School of Theology.

EW: I was just being able to be active in the Conference. This would be in the early sixties, when an organization I'd never heard of called The Lay School of Theology had to fold. It had been run by the men's work in the conference. They were about to disband and the Conference very much wanted this lay school to continue.

So they approached Toronto and got permission for the money to remain with the Conference, provided they could get some women to run it. So the Conference approached me and asked me if I would take it on as chair. Their approach was they hadn't anybody else who could do it. So I did agree to, with help of Jack Shaver, who was a fairly newly appointed Conference Chaplain, and I was on his committee and knew him well.

So together we did the Lay School of Theology. We had to find people to produce the lectures. It was held out at Union College as it was then, and it was a very happy experience. We had a very solid group of people who attended regularly. The staff at both the United Church and Anglican College were very helpful, very willing to come and lecture, for I think it was \$25 per night. And we were able, of course, to bring other people in from the church. For instance, a psychiatrist who lectured on psychiatry and religion, and so on. That ran for two years, and from then, since VST was being formed I was asked to go on the committee for planning lay education at VST.

SC: So that work fed into what eventually became The Chalmers Institute at VST.

EW: Well eventually, sure. I was on that Chalmers Committee.

SC: The theme I've heard over and over as I've been listening to you, Eunice, is "I was asked to ..."; "I was asked to ..."; and it seems to me that you've been asked to do almost every job there is to do in the church, for a lay person at least.

And you've always been willing and you've done, obviously, a fine job. Because each job has led to another one. So I just want to pay tribute to you for that.

The next thing to talk about is the book study.

54:22

EW: After General Council in the early sixties, we discovered that the Conference had spent a great deal of time studying a book written by Donald Mather of Queens University, who had been asked by the church to write a book which was eventually called *The Church and Communism*.

General Council spent a lot of time on it and it was moved that the book be printed and circulated in the church because it was such an excellent piece of writing on this subject. The local Communist Party in BC, in Vancouver, got wind of this, read the book, and confidentially approached the Conference. They said they would be willing to do a study, a small group of them with an equal number of church people in the Conference, if the Conference would do it.

Now that caused some consternation because it was a difficult committee to set up. The next thing that happened was, they approached one woman to be on this small committee of, as I recall it, six people. So then BC Conference felt they had to find at least one woman to go on their committee. So I was asked if I would be that woman. It was hard to find a woman, etc. So I did that.

This study had to be, the whole enterprise had to be kept absolutely quiet, confidential, because nobody wanted to have the whole world know that we were studying with communists.

So I was given the job of setting up the committee, of finding a place where we could have dinner with them confidentially, and getting the committee under way.

Fortunately, I approached a UCW group, confidentially, and asked them if they would do a series of six or eight dinner meetings for me, and not tell anybody. They'd be very well paid, the Conference assured me. So the meetings took place, weekly, for probably two months. It was very interesting. The Communists group, I would say, was very respectful and

it turned out to be a very good experience, I think, for everybody. But we certainly worked hard. We had to prepare a whole section of the book each week and be prepared to present it personally and chair the discussion.

SC: So you took turns in leading and preparing.

EW: So that was very interesting, and nobody except my husband knew what I was doing on all those Tuesdays nights when I disappeared!

SC: You've had a very interesting life in the church Eunice!

EW: These individual experiences have been some of the most interesting.

Another very interesting piece of work. As the UCW was being formed nationally, I was involved at the Presbytery and Conference level. The Board of Women, in its last stages nationally, approached the Conference and asked if there was a woman they could recommend who could do field work, since nationally they were extremely short of women to do this work with the new United Church Women organizations in the Conference. So, about 1965 I think, I was asked if I would go, in the fall, to Alberta for a month or five weeks and visit in every Presbyterial for two or three days, as the schedule allowed.

58:48

With my family's urging, I did this. A staff member came with me and after the first round of meetings in the Presbyterial, she said, "This is foolish, two of us doing this." So we divided the work amongst us, and I got the northern Presbyteries and she did the southern. We were able to spend probably three days in each one. I met with the executive for a day, met with some individuals, and then met with what they called a rally—of the whole Presbyterial—for a day, and then was there to work with individuals. I found that I was almost always asked to speak at one of the local churches, which was good because I could talk about the new organization there.

Following that, I was asked the next year if I would do the same sort of thing in Saskatchewan. And I did, spending a little more time there; I think it was six weeks in Saskatchewan. At that time, I was given a new person who'd been hired nationally. She came with me so I could train her in the field work. She was a very fine, young, diaconal person who got to be a great friend, who I enjoyed very much. But we went to every Presbytery in Saskatchewan for that period of time and had similar meetings.

SC: I'm thinking that I, as a woman who is a bit younger than you, remember hearing the words Presbytery and Presbyterial as a lay person and not figuring out how to differentiate. So can you give a little explanation?

EW: Indeed, that was a fairly common problem in those days! The

Presbyterial – I think it was newly coined at that time – was the name given to the whole group of United Church Women’s organizations in the Presbytery area. There would be the local groups in each task group or congregation, and then the sum total of those would be called the Presbyterial.

- Shar And in my memory each congregation’s UCW had elected a representative to the Presbyterial, is that right? Or had named ...
- EW: The Presbyterial President automatically became a member of the Presbytery.
- SC: Yes, but within the congregation, the UCW would have somebody who was their representative to Presbyterial?
- EW: Yes, that’s correct. But they were very careful from the very beginning that the chair of what became a really important organization in the church, the chair of the Presbyterial, automatically became an officer of Presbytery.
- SC: Yes, so that made the women’s representation into the Presbytery official, and very important.
- EW: Very important! And it became quite a major part of the President’s position, of the job, work.
- SC: A little bit more about the work that you did for the national church. I guess that’s in the area of Transfer and Settlement, is it? 1:04:52
- EW: Yes. Certainly my time on the national Committee of Transfer and Settlement, I think it was five years. I know I was the longest sitting person on that committee.
- SC: Did you chair that committee at some point?
- EW: No, I didn’t. I did occasionally, but we always had a man, chair.
- SC: Interesting.
- EW: An ordained man, whether he knew much about it or not, was as the chair of the committee.
- SC: I wonder if we’ve grown beyond that now, I’m not aware of who’s doing it now, but anyway!
- EW: I think lay women can chair.
- SC: Yes, I think so.

EW: I was to begin with, one of the few lay people on it, never mind being a lay woman, but that led to some very interesting contact and very hard work.

SC: Other national work for the national church. 1:06:02

EW: I was originally appointed as a member-at-large to the Division of Ministry Personnel Education and served two terms, as a national representative, not a Conference representative, which had some different work attached to it. It became a major involvement and a very, very interesting one.

Then I had two terms as a national member on that. And then they had a situation, nationally, where they had found someone who would be a very good chair for the Division but he was not able, in fact said he could only do it if he did not take on responsibility for the involvement of the chair on the national General Council Executive. So his solution to his problem was to say he would chair the division if I would go on the General Council Executive as Acting Chair of the Division. So I did two years in that very interesting job. I had to attend absolutely every meeting, again, of the Division and all its committees, as well as every General Council Executive meeting because I was, as far as they were concerned, Acting Chair of the Division. I was always referred to as that.

SC: Which obviously meant you had to be in close contact with the person who actually was the Chair, to be totally up-to-date.

EW: I had to attend every meeting, and committee meeting... what I'd been doing before and a few more. And then all the General Council meetings, which was a great deal of time and work, but very interesting.

SC: So one more thing, the work with students. 1:08:55

EW: During most of the time I was working in the Presbytery, the Conference, or National, I seemed to have been working with students. I had an interest in the SCM and, when I was first able to work in the church, was put on the advisory committee of the local SCM at UBC.

SC: The SCM being Student Christian Movement.

EW: ... which the United Church has always supported, nationally. I immediately began to come in contact with students at UBC and some at VST. In Presbytery, one of my first tasks was chairing the Student Committee, and I was always on the Conference Committee for Students. Then, with Transfer and Settlement I had more contact with students, especially the students at VST. And because I was on the national Ministry Personnel Education, I immediately was given charge of students who were sent from all over Canada to work in BC for the summer. We had as many as fourteen or fifteen theological students, mostly, coming out in the summer.

SC: Doing summer internships?

EW: Yes, thank you. And so I would meet them and we'd have them in our home and keep in contact. So I got to know a number of them that way. And then twice the Division, in its wisdom, asked me to be the division representative on the all Canada meeting of theological students. So I got to know a great many, especially theological students, who are ministers in the church to this day.

SC: No wonder you've been asked to serve in so many places. All the ministers in the United Church of Canada have experienced you at some time or another.

Eunice I actually, during my time at First Church, would get to know the students who came there and finally asked to supervise a couple of them, officially. So it's always been a big interest of mine. At my own local church, West Point Grey, we've (over the years) had a good many students and I've almost always been asked to be on those committees, such as the one that I served on recently. And so again, it's been a very interesting place to work.

SC: I'm thinking we could probably continue the interview for hours and hours and hours, and at some point, when and if your boxes of goodies come out to the Archives and someone is going through them saying, "Wow this woman's done a lot. They'll say we missed a whole lot in the interview." But you know you have, at some point to say, enough. Thank you so much, I really appreciate it.

EW: [Laughter] You're welcome.

SC: One last story, Eunice. We have to hear this story! 1:13:07

EW: Pioneering has been my interest, with some of the positions that hadn't been filled by women. My husband had been asked to be an elder, as soon as we came back to Vancouver, but I wasn't really able to do much in the church for a number of years.

SC: Because you were raising your children.

EW: Because I had very young children and my husband was away a great deal, and was very busy in the church when he was back.

But a new minister came, and one of the first things he did was to observe that we had two women elders in the church but they were fairly elderly, very gracious, very fine women who'd done a lot of work in the church. When they became elders, they decided that their position would be their work at the communion service, would be to dress very nicely, and to come down when it was time to remove the cloth for communion. They

would fold the fair white communion cloth and then they would retire and sit very worshipfully and patiently during communion. But that was all they would do. So when I was asked to be an elder, I said to the minister, "I think you need to think about this again. Because if I were to be an elder, I would do everything that elders are supposed to do, as best I could. And it might cause some trouble, especially with the two gracious ladies you already have!" And he said, "That is precisely why I'm asking you to be an elder, because I think you would insist on being an elder." So I went ahead and became one.

SC: Thank you! You transformed the position into what it was meant to be.