Interview with Reverend Isaac Miller by William Cutler, Episcopal Diocese of Pennsylvania Oral History Project, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, January 15, 2015.

WILLIAM CUTLER: So I am here with you today, Ike, to talk about your career as a priest in the Diocese of Pennsylvania, and how you got to that career from your family origins in the south. And so the first thing I'd like to ask you to talk about is where you were born, and when you were born, a little bit about your family, your parents?

ISAAC MILLER: Mm-hm. I was born in Raleigh, North Carolina, in 1943, February—1943, February 23rd, which I think is the same birthday for W.E.B. Du Bois, obviously a few years earlier. My father would have been on the faculty at Shaw University in Raleigh. My mother would have been a housewife. An older sister at the time, a younger sister to be born later. After Raleigh and Shaw, my father went to Hampton, Virginia. I think he served as Assistant Dean of men at Hampton.

WC: Hampton Institute.

IM: Hampton Institute. And then went to Dillard in New Orleans, where as I recall he was assistant to the president there. We would have been in New Orleans for about seven years, I believe, and then moved to a small town in middle Georgia, rural Georgia, Fort Valley, Georgia, which is where my father's grandfather and father were born in slavery. His father, James Isaac Miller, was really a remarkably successful farmer, having come out of slavery, and had managed to purchase a considerable amount of land in that part of the state. And I think my father's wish, ambition, etcetera, was to go back and to work that land that his father had bought.

It's a fascinating story. There were three brothers who at emancipation established a limited corporation, and the corporation would be dissolved when each of them had purchased a specific parcel of land. And then once, you know, pooling funds, etcetera, they had each acquired land, then the corporation was automatically dissolved. And I guess my grandfather went on after that to really be a remarkably successful farmer.

My mother's—let me put it like this, my father's—my great grandfather, it appears, would have been a favorite, probably a bastard child of a major plantation owner in Georgia. So when he and my great grandmother married, there was a pledge or a commitment made that that family would not be broken up, and likewise in the case of my—I really don't know my grandfather's age when emancipation came. Probably pretty much a grown man, and apparently the same kind of commitment was made when he married my grandmother.

My mother's family is probably a little bit harder to talk about - more cloudy. My suspicion is that a lot of that was probably because of embarrassment at the fact that there probably was the kind of typical instance of women held in slavery being used sexually, and so that kind of history for her side of the family really doesn't exist. My younger sister tells me that my mother was born in an orphanage in Atlanta that pretty much was set up by well-to-do whites for the raising of children born out of wedlock. I'm not sure that's true, but on the other hand I wouldn't doubt it. My mother's home was Atlanta.

My father went to Morehouse probably in the late '20s; I want to say finished in '31. My mother went to Spelman in Atlanta for two

years, and then I guess was chosen to finish up her undergraduate work at Mt. Holyoke in Massachusetts. She really was a gifted person. She's probably still among the best read people I've ever known; I mean, just phenomenally good. I take it from what my father has said, was that the plan for her was that she would return to Atlanta and become a philologist at Spelman, the women's school that's the sister school to Morehouse. And I take it at that time that faculty at Spelman were all unmarried, so when she and my father got married that kind of blew that one out of the water.

How can I put it? We moved to Fort Valley, it's a small town, very important from the point of view of my father and his family, no question at all about it. I would have been, I think, somewhere around the neighborhood of eleven years old. So I kind of thought it was exciting, and can remember thinking that I'd meet Indians. My mama and my older sister were decidedly less enthusiastic about a move from New Orleans to rural Georgia. I guess my older sister, five years older than I was, was beginning to develop an interest in boys, etcetera, and you know, for her it didn't work. My mother, who just had all sorts of cultural stuff in her background life probably felt like this was, just as well be moving to Siberia or something.

WC: So you moved here because?

IM: My father wanted to be back—

WC: Back home.

IM: —on that land that his father had bought following emancipation. There's no question about it. And he wanted to become a "gentleman farmer." Actually, his job, when we moved back to—when we moved to Fort Valley, his job was as registrar and director of admissions at

Fort Valley State College, which grew in part out of an Episcopal-supported school that way. That relationship had long since been dissolved. His father, who I suspect didn't have much more than about a third grade education, was one of the founders of that school, and there is a building on the campus named for him. And I mean, he was known. He was a name. I don't think I realized it, but he was a name that would have been recognized by older folks in the community by the time we moved back there, for sure. I didn't have much of an idea about him at all.

But his idea was that he would work the farm, and the truth of the matter is, I suspect—I was probably driving a tractor pretty much almost the first planting season we were there. These were the tractors that looked like lawn tractors nowadays, and certainly didn't have the kind of, you know, enclosed benefit of air conditioning. That was totally out of the question. What's the word I'm thinking of? We lived in a house that my father and his brother had built, as in effect a twin for their two families. His older brother died, so a portion of the house was not completed. We lived there, and the "old family house" was kind of next door. Probably once we stayed in Atlanta for a short period of time while work was finished on the house, probably a large portion of which was work that my father did. And then we moved to 80-something miles south.

WC: You moved where?

IM: Moved from Atlanta to Fort Valley. It was 80 miles south.

WC: Okay, 80 miles south.

IM: Probably from the very first season, I sold peaches beside the highway. It would have been—this was before the interstates, and it

would have been the main route from western Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, to Florida. And you get up early as the dickens in the morning and picked peaches, and sell them next to the highway. Actually it was a great—it was a great time. We had an electric light out, so I could be out selling peaches after dark, until whatever hour made sense. I never will forget, I had a radio, and somehow heard the account of the Marines in Lebanon and Beirut, I think, going back to 1958.

I also never will forget—you're going out there, you're sitting in this little shed . . . structure, and deciding, "Well, I guess I'll take a book." And my parents always had this, a good healthy library. And so I'm looking through these books. I spot this book, the name of which was *The Brothers Karamazov*, and decided, "Well, you know, this looks like a good book to read." I don't have the slightest idea of what the heck it's about, but it's an interesting name. And that's probably the first piece of great literature that I read in my life. It might be close to the first book of any length I read, and thoroughly loved it. Couldn't understand a whole bunch of the vocabulary. I never will forget the words "orgy" and "debauchery." I said, "What the heck is this?"

WC: So, were books and education emphasized in your family?

IM: Yeah, yeah. Probably both of my sisters were avid readers way before I was. My mother's probably—I would probably still think she's among the best read people I've known, no question about it. My father was not a slouch. He had done, I guess, graduate work both at Chicago and Columbia. I guess his master's is from Columbia; also

had done work at Union. I know he had talked to me about having taken classes with Reinhold Niebuhr, maybe audited—

WC: At Union Theological Seminary?

IM: Mm-hm, mm-hm. Both he and my mother were very much influenced by Howard Thurman, who in the fifties at least was considered one of the ten best preachers in the country. He was on Morehouse's faculty when they were undergraduates, then went on to Boston University to—I can't remember that much about—Thurman may have gone [on] to be dean of the Chapel at Howard, and then at Boston University, and then to All Soul's Church in San Francisco. But at any rate, I think he had a real influence on both of my parents, as a matter of fact married them.

I think, going back to the days of real YMCA influence on campuses, I think that's what my father had in mind, and then if I'm not mistaken, as the first black president at Morehouse told him, "Look, the area that's going to open up is Student Affairs, and so if that's what you're interested in, that's really what you want to do graduate work in." So that's how he ended up, the way things got started for him.

It was interesting; moving from New Orleans and living on a college campus in New Orleans to the rural South, I think it became clear to me, the kind of class differences in the black community. In a place like New Orleans, which has probably always had a fairly significant black middle class, and so forth, you could in a sense—again, growing up on a college campus—you could in a sense live your life out pretty much in a kind of cocoon, and not be aware of the

fact there were folks that were literally catching a whole lot more hell than you can envision. In rural Georgia, you couldn't. And for me—

WC: You couldn't overlook that?

IM: No. There just wasn't enough of a population, especially in my cohort. There weren't enough kids of faculty members and things like that for you to form your own clique, so to speak. My older sister might have been in a different situation, but for me what it meant was that you hung out with everybody.

I never will forget when I got to The Advocate, Frank Turner had come up for a visitation, and he was suggesting, "Let's go out and grab a cup of coffee," or something like that, and so we walked to one of the little neighborhood stores. And there's a guy standing there as we go in, and I say, "Hey, how are you doing?" You know, "All right, how are you doing?" It's just regular shooting the breeze with somebody. And so Frank and I get whatever it is that we're getting, and we're walking back around the corner, and he says, "You know, Ike, there are not that many people—there are not that many priests that we have that can talk to people." I was saying, "What the hell is he talking about?"

I mean, and then it dawned upon me—I had the—let me say this like this: kids that were in school with me, when I finished elementary school and that, were basically on the tail end of the sharecropping system. No question at all about it. And so, the class stuff that for me would have been as real as this coffee table, if I had grown up in New Orleans, or Atlanta, or D.C., I escaped that stuff, which meant that, yeah, of course you talk to people. You go, "Hey

man, what's happening? Blah-blah-blah, blah-blah-blah." I have always been incredibly grateful for that.

I think I didn't realize how grateful, or how important that was for me until I got to The Advocate, to be honest with you, where—and yeah, I'm pretty much a middle-class black person, but that wasn't the culture or the developmental milieu in which I grew up, thank God! The Montgomery Bus Boycott probably would have started when I was twelve years old, and I thought it was the greatest thing in the world. A few years later, I was assistant editor for the little high school newspaper, and it said, "I wish we had, I wish the town in which we lived was large enough to have had a bus company so that we could have boycotted it."

Interestingly enough, the publisher of the little local paper, which ran a little black-bordered banner, "Civil rights born in" whenever the hell it was, in 1976, 1876, 1776, whenever the hell it happened, "died May something 1954." And so he used to print the little school paper, and so he goes to the principal and says, "We ought not [to] run this. This is not good, or whatever." And so thank goodness Mr. Bryant had the wherewithal to say, "That's an argument you need to take up with the editor and assistant editor of the paper." He was the principal of the high school. And you know, in a segregated system, that's—how can I put it? That's a politically sensitive role. Irma Harris, who was the editor, and I met with whatever his name was, and Irma—who should have been the class valedictorian—and I both agreed, "No, we think this ought to be published," and to some extent I've got to give Mr. Bryant credit for some nerve, and have got to give the publisher of the paper some

credit. I mean, he talked with the two of us. The two of us were clear, "No we think this ought to be published," and it was published.

WC: Tell me a bit about your education.

IM: Went to high school in Fort Valley. The truth of the matter is, it's probably pretty much a second-rate education, segregated system; I mean just no ifs, ands or buts about it. The teachers were dedicated, and all of this kind of business. There's no question about the fact that we had second-hand books that got passed on to us. I never will forget; I guess it was homecoming, and a group of us went over to the white high school to dismantle bleachers, to bring them over to the black high school's football field. My homeroom teacher would have been one of the coaches.

But at any rate, either he or his buddy says to me—oh, yeah, and I had a little school jacket that a boy had given my older sister, and I was wearing it. So, and it was the school colors of the white school. And so we were over dismantling these bleachers, and it was either Coach Lumpkin or Coach Clark says, "You know, Ike, if you were to take your hat off, you could go into that school and start classes that day." And I knew exactly what he was getting at, and probably inside was mad as hell. I think I've always been sensitive to my lighter complexion. I've always reacted negatively to the kind of, what do you call it, privilege that light skin has given black folks at a certain time, and probably always. And again, I attribute that to the fact that I grew up where if you were going to have friends, your friends couldn't come from some kind of limited strata; your friends had to be friends. I'm extremely grateful for that.

Went to Morehouse in 1960. That would have been six months or so after the sit-in movement began in Greensboro. I think probably one of the first things I did was to write home and say I wanted to get arrested. My parents wrote back and said, "You're in school to study. Let's see how your grades are." After the first semester, I think I had the third highest average in my class. It's unfortunate for parents, so they had kind of closed the door on their counter-argument with me. I often say I think my parents thought I was as dumb as I looked.

WC: So did you get arrested?

IM: Oh yeah, sure. That was two weeks before my 18th birthday. The idea was that you stay in jail until charges are dropped, and so that's what you did. You just stayed in jail until the jails were filled up and they had to drop charges.

WC: It was a protest against segregation?

IM: This was during the sit-in movement.

WC: Okay, right.

IM: Which was, well, I guess throughout the South. The sit-ins were student-led, etcetera, especially in Atlanta, where you had, again, a fairly sizeable black middle class that really basically had made a decision: "We're not going to rock the boat, because in effect we're doing," at least for that segment, the black community in Atlanta, "We're doing pretty well coming out of this system." And so the movement in Atlanta was clearly student-led. Martin Luther King never led a demonstration in Atlanta. The truth of the matter is, for the mass meetings that we would have as students, none of the "big, established" churches would invite us.

And I don't recall—I recall going to a little, I think it was a UCC church not too far from the Atlanta University group of colleges and so forth, a church probably—it probably was nowhere as big as the first floor of this house, and be packed with kids. And the great music. The Episcopal chaplaincy was probably unknown to the Bishop of Atlanta at that time. I am sure unknown to him. It was probably the, what is this, sub-rosa headquarters of the student movement. Warren Scott, who came to Atlanta from St. Phillip's in Harlem, in New York, was probably close to certainly all of the student leaders of the movement. I know he was close to Vincent Harding.

As a matter of fact, when I was back in Atlanta as Chaplain at Canterbury Center, Howard Zinn and his wife came by, and it's just really touching, his saying that, "This place was really important to me" during his time on the faculty at Spelman. . . . One, I think I loved Morehouse. It was my father's undergraduate alma mater also. But I just loved it. I loved—I just thought it was absolutely great. Probably what was more important to me as an undergraduate was what was going on in the movement at that time. Hands down, no question at all about it. I think it was very significant to me that the Episcopal chaplaincy played such a role in that movement. Interestingly enough—

WC: Were you aware of that at the time?

IM: That the chaplain—that, oh, yeah, sure. I mean, it was clear as a bell. I mean, we would go—this was not all of the students that were involved, but literally, you would go to classes in the morning, you

would grab lunch, you would go downtown and you would picket at one of the major stores, you would come back.

WC: In Atlanta?

IM: In Atlanta. Come back to campus, grab your books, go over to Canterbury, study where there was coffee around all the time and so forth, and also if you're lucky, one or two girls. I mean, that was just part of the routine. I never will forget in jail, Warren coming by to bring communion.

WC: Scott?

IM: Warren Scott, who was the chaplain there in my—

WC: He was Episcopalian?

IM: Episcopal chaplain, yeah, and native Philadelphian. Started off in the Methodist Church; somehow ended up doing his theological study, a portion of it, at Edinburgh, Edinburgh.

WC: In Scotland?

IM: In Scotland, where he apparently won the Greek Prize, and another black student won the Hebrew Prize. And then I think he came here and went to Drew, and then became Episcopalian. Was at Saint Phillips in Harlem—

WC: Was he an African American?

IM: Mm-hm, mm-hm.

WC: He was.

IM: Was at Saint Phillips in Harlem when Saint Phillips was probably the largest Episcopal congregation in the western hemisphere, or at least that's what I've heard about it, and then came to Atlanta to be chaplain. I don't know exactly what year; I don't recall. What's the word I'm thinking of? A lot of my time at Morehouse, probably—I

probably also very much appreciated this whole business of being in a black educational setting in which, for lack of a better word, kind of like subliminally, you've got to deal with the issues that confront black people. You know, that's not saying that everybody else in the world isn't important. That's saying that there is a history and a culture that needs to be wrestled with, that has some innate value to it, etcetera, etcetera, that's worthy of spending some real time in.

Yeah, I know what I was going to say. Hamilton Holmes, who along with Charlene Hunter were the first black students to go to University of Georgia, was at Morehouse my freshman year, while all of the court stuff was being worked through for him and Charlene to be admitted at Athens. As an Episcopalian, Hamp would join us at these conferences that would include students and chaplains from all over the state, and in a couple of instances from throughout the South. And you know, these were supposedly big deals. They certainly were places where there was great camaraderie with people.

So Hamp gets admitted to Georgia, and I guess I see him after his first year. I says, "Hamp, how's it going?" And he says, "You know, it is all right, except nobody says anything to you, no other students." I said, "Well how about some of those kids from [the] University of Georgia that we would meet up at these conferences? Don't they come and sit down and have lunch with you, or something?" And he gives me this look, which might have been a commentary on naiveté of my part, but he just said, "No." And I said, "Ah. Something's happening here."

I got offered a trial fellowship to Episcopal Theological School my senior year. I didn't have the slightest idea what I was going to do when I—

WC: In Cambridge?

IM: In Cambridge, yeah. I didn't have the slightest idea of what I was going to do when I finished college, but had enjoyed, in my undergraduate time, enjoyed—I can recall *Cost of Discipleship*, something by Paul Tillich, just a lot of rich discussion. If I'm not mistaken, Emma Lou Benignus was a featured person at one of these conferences, Emma Myers, you know, all of that kind of rich stuff. So yeah, sure, I'll give this seminary stuff a shot, and definitely enjoyed seminary at ETS.

The truth of the matter is, I guess there were four black students during my first year, and I think it was clear to all four of us that we were there because of what was going on in the rest of the world, in the rest of this country, that prior to that time at ETS, for all of its liberal credentials and so forth, you didn't have that many black students in a class. I think the next year there were two more students. It was kind of, you know, wow, amazing.

WC: This would have been in the mid-sixties?

IM: That was in '64, yeah. But [I] enjoyed it. I enjoyed it a great deal.

WC: After you got out of ETS, what happened? What did you do next?

IM: I took a year out. John Coburn was the dean. I took a year out and frankly, I thought John Coburn—I think we all thought that Coburn was too slick, and I just told him I wanted to take a year out. And he asked me why, and I had three levels of truth. I figured, if he bothers to interrogate me, I'll tell him the truth. If he doesn't, I'll stop. I

basically ended up telling him, "Look, I'm black. I've got real reservations about being ordained in a predominantly white church. I need to get out of here to think about it, and I would prefer to be in a culture that is different from the culture that's here in this country."

God bless him; he says, "I've got a friend coming here who heads up a school in Beirut, Lebanon. He'll be in town next week. I'll have my secretary set up an appointment for you to meet with him." So I ended up teaching in Beirut the '66–'67 school year, absolutely fascinating time. Didn't do a bit of good in terms of figuring out about ordination, but [an] absolutely mind-blowing opportunity for which I think the Episcopal Church deserves some credit. I could have said that to any number of people, and they would have said, "Good luck," or something to that effect.

I really had thought about going back to the Middle East, specifically to Iran; figured I'd finish my degree at ETS, I'll go back to school in some other area, and I'll go back over there and work, because I felt like it was completely different, in terms of the baloney that this culture represents when it comes to issues of race. Not that they didn't have problems, but they weren't problems that had to do with race. And I was—I never will forget . . . I think it was coming into Kennedy Airport, I got on the bus to the Port Authority, and somebody gets on the bus, probably the dispatcher, and he says something to the bus driver. And I cannot remember what the heck he said, but it became clear as a bell to me: you can't leave this country. You can go someplace to visit, but you're stuck here. I mean, this is where—

WC: Was this bus driver an African American?

IM: You know, I cannot remember; probably so.

WC: But the message was, "You're an African American."

IM: No, the message was, "This is the culture in which you and your people have caught the crap that you have caught. You just can't walk the hell out on it." I mean, it was as clear as a bell! I never will forget; I have a sister of my father's [who] lived in Harlem, and I usually would stay with her, and I just decided, well, this night I'm going to go to the Y, and just process this whole bunch of stuff, and then I'll give Irene a call and see if I can spend the night at her place. Went back to seminary. That was the year King was killed.

WC: 1968.

IM: Yeah. As a matter of fact, [I] was in Atlanta when he was assassinated. Friends of mine and I had driven down from Boston together, and they were asking me, did I want to stay in Atlanta for the funeral, or get back up to school. And I said, "You know, I would really like to get back up to school. I mean, that's the community that I know." And all of a sudden going back, I never will forget. I guess it was my last year, I had to turn in two papers, and then I think went back to Atlanta for vacation.

And then there was a big anti-war demonstration. Oh God, all of this stuff comes back to you with clarity! Big anti-war demonstration at which Harvey Guthrie and George Patterson were there, and they were probably the two best teachers, the teachers that I liked most. For Harvey it was a course on Jeremiah; for Patterson I can't remember what it was. But I turned in these papers and left town. I didn't have any idea how well I had done on the papers, and so when I saw them, I said, "Oh, my God." I was in some church or

something. I said, "Oh, my God, I hope I didn't blow the papers," and went over to say hello to them. And they were fine, good grades on both papers.

At some point in that business, I guess I went to an anti-war demonstration with probably three or four classmates who were planning on turning in their draft cards. I was not a postulant any place. I was still—I may have had that time in Beirut to think about stuff, but I still wasn't sure whether I wanted to get ordained in the church or not, so I wasn't—

WC: This was after you left ETS, right?

IM: No, this was my senior year.

WC: Senior year.

IM: So I go to this demonstration with them. They turn in their draft cards, and I said to myself, "Well what the hell? I know this war is wrong. I'm going to turn in my draft card too." I never will forget; Bill Coffin was there. So I guess it was like two or three days later, the FBI shows up on campus to interview the four or five of us. Harvey Guthrie, who was acting dean at the time, arranges for us to meet with a lawyer in Boston. He's a guy who looked like a Boston lawyer. I mean, he—and so, he interviews us all. He says, "I'm going to give my feedback to Dean Guthrie, and you should meet with him." So we go over to Harvey's house, and he's greeting us, says, "Come in" and asks, "Would you like coffee or beer?" I said, "Yeah, I'll take coffee." So then he announces that the lawyer has said, "Everybody is in good shape, because all of you have theological [deferments], except for Ike. He doesn't have a deferment and he's

the one who's the most jeopardy." I said, "Damn!" I said, "You know, I think I'll take you up on the beer."

WC: [Laughs]

IM: I went back to Atlanta. I can't remember exactly when this would have been. And though I wasn't a postulant, I'd meet with the bishop; Curtis, they called him. And so I get into Bishop Claiborne's office, and he says something to me like, in this southern accent that you could cut with a—, "Well I guess those Yankee's brainwashed you, huh?" Shit, there is no way in hell I'm going to get ordained under this S.O.B., period! I mean, it was: no way! You combine that with the inability of younger folks in the church to struggle meaningfully with somebody like Hamp, during his time at the University of Georgia. I said, "No way in hell I'm going to get ordained in this." It was just—

WC: In this diocese? Or in this church?

IM: In the church. To hell with the diocese! I probably, at some point, I thought about, I think I met with—oh God, I can't remember the guy's name now. I think I met with at least one bishop, you know, talking about—I wasn't convinced of it.

WC: Was the Union of Black Episcopalians around at that point?

IM: Well, UBE was founded in—if I'm not mistaken, in '68.

WC: You connected to that?

IM: Technically I'm a founding member of UBE.

WC: So did that figure into this story that you're telling me about how you didn't think that you either could or even wanted to be ordained in the Episcopal Church?

IM: You know, I think that it was very important to see folks who were definitely on a progressive track, struggling with the kind of stuff the Union was struggling with. I probably looked at it as being pretty much a minor key movement within the church as a whole. To be very honest with you, I thought it was important, but I wasn't convinced that it would carry the day by any stretch of the imagination. What happened is I got offered a job at Yale, and took it, and I still wasn't—

WC: Doing what?

IM: Yale ran a program called the Yale Summer High School, which was a forerunner of Upward Bound nationally, and a classmate of mine from seminary was close to that. He knew the guy who was the director of the program who was looking for an associate director. And I got offered the job and decided, "Gee whiz." I think I had another job I was—actually there was a job I was looking at here in Philadelphia that didn't come through. There was another job I was waiting on in Atlanta. I think I had ten bucks in my pocket, and realized that, gee whiz, if I'm offered a job I need to take it. And so worked for Yale for a year.

After that, worked for a group of—with a group of black students in architecture and urban design who had put together something called the Black Workshop, really to write a new curriculum for architecture and urban design in black communities. And I mean, they had raised pure hell [laughs] with the university. I'll tell you a quick story. This friend of mine from seminary—how did this work? This friend of mine from seminary, there had been a

meeting and I guess it was—it was all of the hell-raisers in New Haven, black and Latino, with the provost at Yale.

Just the arrogance of the white institute! I mean, you've got fire-breathing people. This dude is meeting with them alone in the Yale Corporation Building, what is it, Woodbridge Hall. And of course, I mean, people are laying this dude out! I know something about cursing. These folks were cursing this dude out, I mean, poetically. I mean, they're just cursing the hell out of this guy! At some point, he's sitting behind a desk smaller than this coffee table. Somebody walks up to the desk—he's got his little papers on it—snatches up all his papers and throws them out the damn window. At another point, one of the students that I knew best, jumps up in the middle, and all of this background and all of this—this friend of mine, Ed Rodman.

WC: Ed?

IM: Rodman. Had an adjunct teaching position at the School of Art and Architecture. So he goes—

WC: At Yale?

IM: At Yale. So he goes to the dean and says, "You really ought to have more black students." And the dean says, "You find me black students that are qualified, and I'll admit them." Ed had gone to Hampton, and his roommate was an architecture major at Hampton. So he says to him, "Look Harry. Get your boys; apply to Yale. You guys will get in." And apparently there were commitments made about major financial support, and all of this kind of business. Now of course, I mean, hell, if I'm not mistaken, must have been a dozen, if not fifteen, black students admitted to Yale at the same time. And

of course, none of—the university doesn't come up with any of the kind of financial assistance commitment. These guys have got enough sense to work, and struggle to work with people in the community, so when they arranged to have a meeting, they're not just meeting by themselves; they're bringing in all of these folks from the neighborhood who, I mean, totally are pissed off.

I think I'm just walking around campus, and Ed asks me, "Ike, do you want to go to a meeting over at Woodbridge Hall?" "Oh, sure, yeah. I'll be glad to." Get in there, this guy, Puerto Rican brother, is totally ticked off with—I'm pretty sure the provost was Washburne—totally ticked. Jumps up, goes to his briefcase, [and] snatches his briefcase up. And I'm saying to myself, "Goll darn it. You're going to pull out a gun and shoot this dude, and I'm going to jail for the next twenty years, at least." And so I'm standing up trying to say, "Harry, hold it."

And then I realized that Ed Rodman, probably one of the coolest guys I've ever known in my life, is standing up making the same gesture. So I thought, "Oh shit, we really are in trouble." And it turns out he's just pulling more papers, you know, to make his point with the provost. So finally we get it to a point where we're saying, "Look, we ought to get this guy the hell out of here. I mean, he could be hurt."

WC: You're talking about the provost?

IM: The provost. He could be hurt. I mean, dumb enough to be in a meeting with these people that have probably been pissed off with Yale as an institution for most of their doggone lives? Let's just get him out of here. So we get him out. There's this little dude about five

feet tall and about five feet wide that's at the door, and one of these would say, "Man, just get the hell out of the way. Let's—." Ed calls Paul Moore. "Paul, I just want to tell you, these people are going to burn your school down. You need to do something." And so Paul apparently tells Ed—I didn't find out this story from Ed until well after Paul's death. Paul calls him back and he says, "Watch the news tonight on TV." On the news, the Vietnam peace talks are suspended for X amount of time.

The next week, whatever day of the week it was, the Yale Corporation met, and Cyrus Vance was there, and they cut a deal to put together something called the Black Workshop for students, really literally to begin a process of rewriting the curriculum for Architecture and Urban Design. I got offered a job as office manager with them, and they probably hired one of the top two or three black architects to be the director of the office, you know, great crazy time. For all sorts of reasons, that didn't work out. I then went to work for the City of New Haven. You know, I'm not a native of New Haven.

WC: Hardly.

IM: Hm?

WC: For sure.

IM: No, no. And this was in the Model Cities Program. My boss was one of these guys who probably has got some of the best street political smarts I have seen in my life. And I am sure that part of the business with Vernon was—now you know, he had got this guy, who is clearly coming out of all of this middle class baloney, and here Vernon is, I mean, a brilliant guy, but very much a product of street and so forth. I can't remember what happened. I never will forget going into

Vernon's office, saying, "Vernon, I like working here, but I'm going to tell you the truth. If you can't trust me, I'm ready to quit right now." And he looks at me, and gives this look like, "What the hell is going on with you?" And then he says, "Okay, I hear what you're saying."

WC: This is Vernon?

IM: Moore.

WC: Moore.

IM: Vernon—

WC: No relation to Paul?

IM: No relation to Paul Moore, a black guy from North Carolina. Vernon gets into—everybody knew I had a theological degree at this time. Vernon gets into an awful bar fight with the guy in the black community in New Haven, who is probably the—what do you call it? The Vidal Sassoon of doing work on black women's hair—gets in a fight with this dude in the bar, awful fight! Clearly he's not going to survive it in the job he has had, and so he comes—

WC: Politically knocked out? Political fight?

IM: No, I'm talking about broken beer bottle, guy gets cut, I mean! Vernon and I used to drink together a little bit, and I'm just grateful that I wasn't involved in that, and so forth. So he comes to me and he says, "Ike, I'm going to recommend you," to take the job that he had as head of what was called the Office of Human Services. And by that time, Rose and I were married. Our daughter would have been born. We had bought a house in Wooster Square in, not far from Saint Paul's.

WC: This is in New Haven?

IM: In New Haven. And I think it basically became clear to me. You know, look, given the kind of things that I'm drawn to as a person, the church might possibly be a better vehicle, or more honest vehicle, than that kind of Democratic machine political system that New Haven, Connecticut was very much a part of at that time; no ifs, ands or buts. So I decided finally that it was time for me to go on and get the heck ordained. The truth of the matter is, I had planned to continue to work for the city. Even though I wasn't ordained, I get invited to preach at various places, and was on the vestry, and the calling committee that called Arthur Walmsley as rector at Saint Paul's.

When I put in my application for the vestry to approve my application for postulancy, on the vestry agenda was: what do we do with the apartment in which the assistant traditionally lived? There was a possibility of renting it out to gain some income for this church. Somebody made the observation, "Well, maybe there is a solution here. Ike, would you mind stepping out of the room for a minute?" And so I step out. And of course, what they come up with is, "We'd like to offer you a position as assistant to the rector. You'd be a lay assistant until you go through the hoops for ordination, and then you'd be ordained and be ordained assistant to Arthur."

WC: This would be at Saint Paul's?

IM: At Saint Paul's in New Haven.

WC: Wooster Square.

IM: Wooster Square in New Haven, right. And Saint Paul's was kind of like on one extreme of the square. The house that we had bought was diagonally across. And so it made sense; the church could rent it out.

Our daughter would have been a toddler at the time. You know how it is with little kids in church, everybody's crazy about them. Rose and I had gotten married there, so I figured, "What the heck? Why don't I get ordained?

I was there for three years, and then the guy that had been my chaplain when I was in college was killed in an automobile accident. What do you call it—the first oil shock had hit the country, and the fact of the matter is Saint Paul's probably couldn't afford to keep an assistant, and pay a rector's salary. I went down for Warren Scott's funeral, and I think it was Charles Willis and David Collins, could have been [snaps fingers] Paul Lawrence's—Charles Lawrence. But at any rate, the two of them, both Charles Lawrence and Charles Willis, Morehouse graduates, had been presidents of the House of Deputies, knew I had gone to Morehouse, knew I was there when—

WC: Are they lay Episcopalian?

IM: Yup, yup. And both of them had been president of the House of Deputies. Both of them probably have sociology degrees; did their undergraduate work at Moorehouse and—

WC: They're African Americans?

IM: Mm-hm, mm-hm. And then David Collins, who was then president of the House of Deputies, had been chaplain at Sewanee during my undergraduate years, and so I knew him from there. So at least two of them, as former and present presidents of the House of Deputies, went to Bennett Sims, the bishop, and somehow or another said, "You need to get Ike Miller in here to be chaplain."

WC: He was the bishop of the diocese?

IM: He was Bishop of Atlanta.

WC: Of Atlanta.

IM: My suspicion is that Bennett Sims probably had plans to close the chaplaincy to the AU Center, and probably was under the kind of political pressure on one side—you know, how can you—I mean, the dean of his cathedral, blah, blah, blah. So he offers me the job. I have to give Rose credit. She was saying, "You know, you ought not take it. I don't trust this guy."

WC: This was the job at Atlanta University?

IM: Yeah.

WC: As chaplain?

IM: As chaplain. And I think Rose's reservations were well founded, but in the end—I really had loved my time as an undergraduate, and, blah, blah, blah, and so I took the position. And I guess it took Bishop Sims four years to come up with the bright idea that he wanted to move me to a racially mixed suburban parish that I barely had heard of. And I didn't come down here to hang out at some suburban church. And if—

WC: That would have been Saint Timothy?

IM: Saint Timothy's.

WC: In Decatur?

IM: Yup. And if my mother had not died pretty much at that time, I would have gotten the hell out of Atlanta, you know, like that.

WC: What did your mother's death have to do with this?

IM: She died just as Bishop Sims had said to me, "I'm going to move you from Atlanta University Center to Saint Timothy's, Decatur."

WC: Would it be more freedom, or less?

IM: Oh, in my opinion, it's that bullshit of thinking, "Here we've got a mixed congregation. Here I've got a black priest. Let me put this black priest in this mixed congregation," and everything, without asking me, "What the hell do you think about it?" If he had asked me, I would have told him, "I think it's a bunch of bullshit." I mean, I wouldn't have used that language with him, but it was laid out to me as a damn fiat.

My theory about this business is: you never let white folks see—you never let them see you sweat. I don't care what the hell you do to me; you'll never have the luxury of knowing that you hurt my ass. I mean, that's what really has run more black men crazy than any damn thing else that I can think of, and so forth. But you know, that was my thing on this, immediately. And then my mother died, and I decided, I can't leave while my father's struggling with this grief. And then at some point, I guess about three years, it was clear to me my father was in a good place. We had come up here to visit a relative of Rose's. I think I wrote Paul, Bob Du Bose—

WC: Paul Washington?

IM: Uh-huh. And said, "Look, do you guys know of a job up there?" And Bob Du Bose offered me a position at Saint Thomas as assistant.

WC: What role did Bob Du Bose play?

IM: I knew Bob from the little segregated camp that we went to in rural Georgia. You know, the truth of the matter is, on one hand it was a lovely. It was a great little experience, and you get all of these teenagers hanging out together. On the other hand, what I discovered—

WC: He was at Saint Thomas?

IM: Bob would have been at the church in [snaps fingers]—he would have been at the Episcopal Church either in Montgomery or in Tuskegee, and if I'm not—

WC: A priest?

IM: Yep, Bob Du Bose was a priest, was rector of Saint Thomas.

WC: Saint Thomas.

IM: Right after Jesse Anderson, Senior, died, Bob Du Bose became rector at St. Thomas. And I knew Bob to write him because of going back to my teenage years. And so I wrote him, Paul, Frank—he got back to me, saying, "I can offer you a position as assistant."

WC: Who, Bob Du Bose?

IM: Bob Du Bose.

WC: And you wrote to Paul Washington and—?

IM: Yep, and Frank Turner also. I mean, it was clear by the time my father was in decent shape after my mother's death, it was time to get the heck out of Atlanta. And Philadelphia looked good. I think the city felt like a city that made sense. It's the kind of place that's got—I think it's produced the kind of quality of black clergy and lay leadership that is impressive as heck, and it's got the kind of history of ministry in the black community that I thought was important. And so, what the heck? Give it a shot.

Plus, Rose, who hated Atlanta, liked Philadelphia. Our daughter probably didn't care much one way or the other, but you know, she wasn't raising sand [?] about it. But I think Rose was—Rose was probably ready to leave Atlanta from the time we got there, and by the time things fell through for me in relationship to the bishop, I was—if my mother had not died, I would have gone. I

mean, I know I would have gotten the hell out. And then after it was probably three years at Saint Thomas, or maybe after two years, Paul retired. Then after three years, the trustees, the vestry, and Allen extended an invitation to serve as rector/vicar at The Advocate.

WC: This was in 1989?

IM: Yup, yup. '89, '89, yeah.

WC: Now you were at the African Episcopal [Church] of Saint Thomas for three years?

IM: Right.

WC: Was Du Bose a rector there at the time?

IM: Mm-hm, mm-hm.

WC: Jesse Anderson was—?

IM: Jesse was Bob's successor.

WC: Jesse Anderson, Junior.

IM: Yeah. Jesse would have—Jesse probably got to Saint Thomas about a year after I got to The Advocate, maybe a little bit longer than year. It was not much longer after I left Saint Thomas that Bob Du Bose retired.

WC: What are your memories of Paul Washington?

IM: Oh, great, great.

WC: He was your predecessor, of course?

IM: Mm-hm.

WC: And you had written to him asking about the possibility of work there, and then when he retired, how did that happen that you moved over to Advocate?

IM: I think there are two things. One is, just [to] be very honest, that's where I wanted to go when I first left Atlanta. There's no question

about it, yeah, there's no question about it. You know, in terms of what the exact dynamics were, I really don't know. I mean, all I know is that—I mean, I guess it's that kind of business where you don't politic for jobs in the church. I just knew I wanted it; I wanted to be there.

WC: Why? What was it about that church that—?

IM: Oh, I think it's without a doubt that kind of legacy that Paul left for the place; no question about it. I think it's—

WC: So you wanted to be there because of Paul and his leadership?

IM: No question, no question. You know, I think there's some kind of way in which my understanding of the importance of, the value of the church, is hand-in-glove related to my understanding of the post-World War II black liberation movement in this country. I mean, they just are linked like that. I think, interestingly enough, I think that both Canterbury, and Atlanta University Center, and The Advocate represented two kinds of models in different areas of ministry, of struggling with what that post-World War II movement was about.

And having had that time at Atlanta, I probably pretty much just looked around and said, "Well, the next place I want to be is Church of the Advocate. If I want to be there, I need to make a move to Philly." Rose very much was taken with Philadelphia as a city. I think as a city, I've always liked Philadelphia. It's just something—it's not as big and complex as New York, but it's a real, live city. It's not a Southern city, with all of the baloney that is implicit in that. It's got its problems galore. At least from my point of view, a place like The Advocate indicates that willingness to try to figure out: okay, what do we struggle to do about these problems? And given the urban

nature of this diocese, the diocese, in a sense, can't act; can't say, "Oh that stuff doesn't exist." You know, whether you like it or not, and whether it's easy to handle or not, it does exist, and we're stuck with it. So I thought Philly would be a great place, and there was no question in my mind about the fact that The Advocate was where I wanted to be.

WC: Now, Advocate, of course, was a parish that was supported by the diocese.

IM: Yeah.

WC: As opposed to St. Thomas, which was a fully independent parish.

IM: Yeah, yeah.

WC: And so, the priest there was rector, not vicar.

IM: Yeah.

WC: Did that figure into your thinking at all?

IM: I never thought—I never paid any attention to that stuff. During my time at The Advocate, the title usually was rector, and I think it's because of that arcane stuff that the articles under which The Advocate is incorporated, and the trustees work with, carry the designation, rector. But, [I could] care less about that kind of stuff, from my point of view. I think given the fiscal—let me see if I can prepare this. Given the fiscal realities, especially involving how in the heck do you—what do you do with those tons upon tons of stone that The Advocate represents? That's another story altogether. The truth of the matter is Advocate fooled around during my time, and raised four million dollars for physical rehabilitation.

WC: Rehabilitation.

IM: And renovation. It probably could have raised another four, but that was one heck of a lot of money! It was also probably a Guinness Book of World Records-long capital campaign. I think it probably went on darn near forever.

WC: That was while you were rector or vicar there?

IM: Mm-hm, mm-hm. Let me say a couple of things. The Advocate, probably when I was there, probably got more press than the diocese did.

WC: While you were there, in fact shortly after you arrived, the first celebration to recall the events of July 1974, took place while you were there [unclear].

IM: Yeah, yeah. I'd better hit the little room here.

[End of Part 1/Begin Part 2]

WC: Okay, we're back.

IM: I think in terms of the difference in my time at Saint Thomas as assistant to the rector, and at The Advocate as vicar has to do with, I think, the really remarkable strategy that [The Right Reverend] Allen Bartlett and John Midwood came up with, in terms of DCMM, and especially the designation of certain congregations as diocesan mission congregations, i.e. places that minister in parts of the diocese that are essential for the witness of all of us. That freed, in the Advocate's case, that freed us up, freed my time up to begin to struggle with issues like how in the world do you raise the money for a building that had had how many decades of deferred maintenance gone through with it? How do you begin to take up the kind of ministry in behalf of social justice that Paul Washington's time there represented? How do you take it up in a way that's a little bit

different from the way in which Paul did it? How in the world do you—how do you continue the kinds of efforts to serve a community that at that time was desperately in need? How do you begin to do more innovative things? I think if—I mean the reality for The Advocate, and I don't think it's just The Advocate, a bunch of places—that strategy just made all of the blasted sense in the world.

WC: What strategy?

IM: The DCMM, diocese mission congregation strategy just made all of the sense in the world. You know, I think the reality of it is that for places like The Advocate, let's admit it. I'm not sure, unless the transformation of that community goes a whole lot further than it has gone now, and that is a changed community now, but it's still got—I'm not sure you can continue to think realistically about a real ministering presence in an area like that. You darn sure would be hard pressed to figure out: how in the world do you continue that kind of ministry out of a physical plant that is as massive, and as expensive to maintain, as that monster is, gorgeous though it is?

Our architect used to have a Christmas gathering every year up in his firm's offices and so . . . . I'm wandering around, and you're looking, and architects always have these great pictures in their work spaces. So I'm walking past, say, "God, that's just a beautiful kind of diffused light picture, and there's a rose window and a series of arches, and the light is soft," and you go closer and you look at it, those are—damn, that's The Advocate! It's just at an angle, shot from an angle that you don't usually focus on.

WC: So was the building something that occupied a lot of your time when you were there, or did you focus on other things?

IM: The building occupied a lot of time. I think I probably focused on more stuff than the building, but the building occupied a lot of time. I think the work with Philadelphia Innovate Action is an absolutely key and crucial piece of work. My gut tells me that there are not many places where you're going to see the kind of community organizing stuff done that we were able to do through PIA. My sense of it is that—and that was work that involved kind of like just multiple amounts of stuff. I think in relationship to a place like The Advocate, there is real work, hard work that has to be done just in terms of maintaining a relationship to a community that in so many ways gets written off by so many people and so many institutions. How in the heck do you maintain something that says that we are all human beings, and children of God made in the image and likeness of God? I think that was done in a number of ways. Thank goodness it didn't require inordinate amounts of my time.

WC: What didn't?

IM: Our sanctuary.

WC: Okay.

IM: But I think that was a very important part of what the character of that place was. It used to amaze me. I'd be driving up and have WHYY on the radio, and they would come out saying, "Such and such, and such and such," and I said, "Dang, that sounds pretty interesting," "will be this evening at Church of the Advocate." I had the luxury that I didn't have to be on top of all of the scheduling things and so forth. Was on the board, and struggled to do this, that, and the other to support it, but that was just an absolutely important part of what the place was about, in so many ways. And frankly, I guess when we

were looking at fundraising stuff, I had sent in some draft case statement: and we will establish a performance arts program to celebrate the contributions of people from communities like this—you know, some kind of highfalutin' language that I didn't have the slightest idea what the heck it was, and certainly would not have been able to figure out, now, how do you make that kind of thing real? And God bless Lorraine, and her kind of crazy energy.

WC: Lorraine?

IM: Cary.

WC: What role did she play?

IM: She was a member of The Advocate, probably joined not long after I got there, she and her husband Bob Smith. If I'm not mistaken, Lorraine was probably pushing one of her books, or going on tour for a book called *Price of a Child*, I think. And she had come back, saying, "I am tired of doing this in downtown bookstores or university communities. We ought to have a venue in a community like this, where this kind of stuff in the arts can be lifted up and celebrated." And I had just written this baloney about some kind of black arts performance—I mean, like I say, the abstract idea made a hell of a lot of sense—with no idea of what those specifics were. I just think it was a very important part of what happened around there.

WC: What did happen? Did you have a program for the arts?

IM: Oh, oh, yeah. Oh, yeah.

WC: Why don't you tell us about it?

IM: Let me see. Gosh, would it have been '91? Possibly as early as '91, Lorraine had come up with the idea of Art Sanctuary; had done the groundwork in terms of raising money for it. We'd begun work.

Thank God for money that was raised through the capital campaign to replace the heating system in the church, and a God-awful amount of money. I mean, if we hadn't raised money, we would not have been able to do anything with it. And luckily the donor, in this instance Episcopal Community Services, said, "We'd be willing to see that money used to replace the heating system."

The heating contractor was supposed to have the heat for the church on by the Christmas Eve service. That didn't work. The next big date was Art Sanctuary's opening gala, which included, was scheduled to include, Sonja Sanchez; a woman named Blanche Burton Lyle, I think her last name was, who if I'm not mistaken was associated with Marion Anderson Center in south Philadelphia; the hip hop group The Roots; what do you call these guys? One of the step groups called the North Philadelphia Foot Stompers. That event was scheduled for, I think, January 31st, and the blasted heating system still was not working.

And this had to be done in the church. I mean, you couldn't divert it. The heating contractor brought in two 1500-gallon propane tank containers, and two of these construction heating—they look like jet engines or something; they sound like jet engines. And so for three days prior to the Art Sanctuary event, we just ran the darn things in the church day and night, with these long tanks sitting out in the area where the Paul and Christine Washington Center is, simply to get the stones warm enough to keep the place warm during the event.

And I would imagine that for that event, there were probably more Temple[University] students in that space than I have ever seen since, and that's because of the fact that these kids were very much

into the hip hop stuff that The Roots represented as a group. That was not my cup of tea musically, but I have to admit those guys were incredibly good. Art Sanctuary probably did an event a month, or every six weeks. There was a Cuban dance group, and I couldn't recall the name of it. And I guess for some reason a group of us were at the William Penn Foundation asking them for money for something, and we make our pitch, and as I'm walking out I just happen to pick up this brochure, which is well done, good looking kind of post card-looking thing, and it's the Cuban—announcing the Cuban dance group that will be at The Advocate in the next week or so, and so forth.

The writer, John Edgar Wideman, a group of art students at Temple who, for I guess about three or four years, would work with kids in the after-school program, and then with a bunch of teenagers that Art Sanctuary put together for an arts program. And they put on, in early May, a kind of season wrap-up event. I look at those things; I never could figure out, by the way, what the hell were these kids up to? I mean, other than the fact that the kids around the church looked like they were having a good time, and the college students looked like they were having a good time, I still couldn't figure out: what the heck is this going on here? I mean, why are they doing this, and why are they doing that?

As long as everybody looks like they're having a good time, I'm not going to bother with it. Even in the ones that I had a speaking part in, I still couldn't figure out—and then they pull this stuff off, maybe two or three performances on a weekend. And you say to yourself, "These guys ought to be on Broadway!" These kids—I am

convinced that what that did for those teenagers was, one, I mean, they work the heck out of them. I mean, those kids worked! Two, they got that chance to get that amazing reaction from an audience that I would guess would probably have averaged 300, 325, maybe even 350 people. And of course, people love to see kids from a community like that when they are incredibly good at something that's got some honesty and authenticity to it.

Never will forget, for one of those performances, one of these kids, a 13-year-old kid, wrote a poem, the title of which was, *Hurt People Hurt People*. And I'm sitting there saying to myself, "No? A 13-year-old kid figured that out? And here I am, how many times that child's age, and I probably only got that one figured out in my life just a few years ago. Just the kind of absolutely great, great stuff!

WC: And this child was a resident of the community?

IM: Yeah, yup, yup. Her grandmother, actually I'm pretty sure it was her great grandmother, was—still is—director of a little program that had its offices at the church, called Grans as Parents. And as she put it to me, "We are raising our children's children because our children are missing in action in the war on drugs," and the idea for putting together this teenage arts program came from Eileen, going to Lorraine and saying, "If you're going to do something in the arts, I need you to do something that will, in a sense, engage and occupy these kids that I'm struggling with as a grandmother." And the truth of the matter is—

WC: Eileen being?

IM: Eileen Brown, who was director of a program called Grans as Parents.

WC: At The Advocate?

IM: At The Advocate.

WC: Was she an employee, or a parishioner?

IM: You know, I guess in some respects she's a parishioner, and Advocate is a crazy place. She and those kids certainly would show up at church together on occasion, and then on occasion you wouldn't—let me see if I can tell it like this: part of the struggle at a place like The Advocate, it's probably a struggle that most churches, I guess most black churches—you've got folks who "fit the profile" of what an Episcopalian ought to be and ought to look like, and then you've got folks who don't fit that profile. And the question always has been, or the struggle it seems to me always is: how do you tear up the one profile, and write something that's more inclusive, etcetera? Those kinds of aspirations and class divisions in the black community are not the easiest things in a long, by a long shot, to be overcome. Some people would say Eileen and those kids were members. Others would say they're not members; they're something else, but they're not members.

WC: Did she live in the neighborhood?

IM: Yeah. Yes she did, two, maybe three, blocks from the church.

WC: So in that sense she was certainly of the community?

IM: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah, very much, very much.

WC: When I talked to Ann Robb Smith last summer, one of the things that she remembered was sometimes difficult problems as a white woman priest, being taken seriously by some of the employees and some of the neighborhood people in the parish.

IM: Yeah, yup.

WC: Would you agree with that?

IM: Well, to some extent yes, to a large extent no. I think that—let me see if I can put it like this: I think that [pause]—I think that at a place like The Advocate, there has to be—I mean there's a struggle for whatever status or role that you enjoy. There's very little that's automatically conceded and given. I think there probably is one person in particular that I think of, in relationship to whom Ann had some real issues. I think that she was a person that created problems and issues for any number of people, and not just for Ann. I think Ann's dedication to the place, and in a sense, her ability to relate to folks as a human being in relation to other human beings, was such that I think Ann probably overcame a whole bunch of those issues maybe even more easily than she realized. But she did have some—you know, it's just the reality.

WC: Let's talk about Philadelphia Interfaith Alliance, PIA. Describe what it meant to you.

IM: I think basically it meant to me an opportunity to pick up and to begin to do some of the work that it seemed to me was important in my teenage years in college, to pick it up in the different context that existed at that time, at this time. After nationally, for whatever good it's done, and it has done some good, after nationally you've had things like the '64 Civil Rights Act, and the Voting Rights Act passed, after you have been able to, in effect, implement the kind of stuff that was supposedly implemented following the Civil War during Reconstruction. I just think that it allows an opportunity to take care of that "unfinished business," not just for black folks. I think that business is unfinished across the board. So it gave you that chance to grab some of that stuff by the throat, and on a very realistic and pragmatic basis do something about it.

WC: Such as?

IM: Built the largest low and moderate-income homeowner development in the city of Philadelphia since Yorktown was built following the Second World War—I think fundamentally changed the way in which policing is done in this city. May not be done perfectly, but I think it changed it from a perspective to allow a real possibility for community policing. Over the objection of Anna Verna, who was president of city council at the time, we got a $985 million bond issue passed through city hall.

WC: To build those houses?

IM: You know, it was what was called a Neighborhood Improvement Initiative. Basically, it was to take city land and use it, prepare it, to develop for housing in the city. Some folk would argue—I don't know if I can go along, but some folk would argue that the upsurge in the city's population over these last few years is due to the fact that NTI put land on the market, in the hands of developers, that would not have been developed otherwise. I know, I can point to in my head, at least two or three projects of which I know that's true. I know that's true.

WC: NTI refers to?

IM: Neighborhood Transformation Initiative. I think I'm right about the amount of money, $985 million. This is not a "dramatic event." We had a campaign in terms of abandoned houses. Now, a lot of the work was in relationship to housing, to what they called clean and seal abandoned buildings, so that they couldn't be used as shooting galleries, so that they wouldn't be in danger of fires, and things like that. You know, there may have been a dollar amount that we beat

out of City Council for that. But at any rate, we announced it at The Advocate, that big space, all this kind of thing.

At that announcement, I look up, and there are bunches of cops and firemen standing in the back of the church. What are these guys? So you go back and you ask them, "Hey guys, what you want? You know, what's got you guys here? You're welcome back here." And these cops and firemen looking me dead in the eye, saying, "Look. Every time we go into these buildings, we're risking our lives. If you all are able to get the money to have them seriously sealed like that, it means that we stand a better chance of going back home." And the relationship of The Advocate to police in Philadelphia isn't the best one in the world at all!

There was a machinist training program up in West Oak Lane that had a 61-week training program for folks to become machinists, and part of what they did was to pay people who were involved in the program. For X amount of time, you got $1,000 a month simply for going through the program, and then for the last period of time you got $1,500 a month. The idea was that if you could train the people, jobs would be available that would pay, as I recall, somewhere in the neighborhood of 15 or 17 bucks an hour. I think initially we met with the chairman—no, we met with the Republican Speaker of the House in Harrisburg, and one of the high officials in the Republican party, that, "We want to back you guys on this. What do we need to do? We want to see it happen." And I think—I could be wrong—I think we got maybe $3 million out of the legislature.

WC: Did [Representative] Curt Thomas play a role in that?

IM: Curtis probably was important in it. Curtis has been a darn serious supporter of The Advocate. This is Jon Perzel, who was Speaker of the House, and might be in jail right now, to tell you the truth, and a guy with a place called Crown Caulk and Seal whose name I cannot remember now to save my—

WC: An important business.

IM: Crown Caulk and Seal was serious business. The next year, we went back to the legislature saying that we wanted more money for this, because of the fact if you develop those jobs, the work will come to a trainer. And [Governor] Tom Ridge's people said no, what you got last year. We organized, met with all of these people in the state legislature in Harrisburg, and got an additional $4 million out of the legislature, when Tom Ridge's people had said—I think the language they used in those papers was, "Over our dead bodies." Just worked them up. It was not successful, but it was absolute fun. When Gore was running for the presidency—

WC: 2000.

IM: —we took a house, based on the housing that had been done here in Philadelphia, in Brooklyn, and in Baltimore, the organizing network, took a house to Al Gore's campaign headquarters in New York. You've got folks from little congregations like The Advocate. If The Advocate sees 50 people, it's like, wow, this is absolutely great! Folks up there at Al Gore's headquarters, "We're going to have an impact on this doggone presidential campaign." And it didn't work out, but just the fact that regular people decide, "Damn it, we can do this. We can make a difference on this, and have a ball in the effort."

It would have been nice if it had worked out, but just the fact that people give it a shot is just—

WC: Now these housing initiatives and the jobs programs, this was all PIA work?

IM: Yeah, yeah, in conjunction with people like—oh God, I can't remember the guy's name—the guy at Crown Caulk and Seal, in conjunction with Dwight Evans, state representative.

WC: From Oak Lane?

IM: Yup. I'll tell you another set of allies that we had that were very important—people at the Reinvestment Fund. When we built the houses at in West Philly, at 46th and Market, we had to have the financial management kind of expertise, all of that kind of business. The Reinvestment Fund, when Jeremy Nowak was there as President, was just absolutely solid in terms of getting that stuff done. They probably got better PR out of that Nehemiah project than PIA did, but you know, who cares?

WC: What does Nehemiah stand for?

IM: It's from the biblical character Nehemiah, who was responsible for rebuilding Jerusalem after they came back from the exile.

WC: That was a PIA project?

IM: Yeah! It grew out of work that was done initially in Brooklyn, in a group called East Brooklyn Congregations, which was a sister organization. It was done to some extent in Baltimore by the organization down there called Build. We were getting that off of the ground during Ed Rendell's first run for mayor. And I have to give Rendell credit; he had enough sense to call up and say, "Look, I'd like to talk to you about what this Nehemiah business is about." I

And basically I said to him, "Uh. Uh. We're not going to do that. We'll talk to you, but not until after the election." And Rendell was there at that opening, that founding event, and we had this meeting set up where we would meet with him afterwards. So Ed Rendell shows up! No, so we get there to City Hall for the meeting, and Rendell is not there. All of his top people are around the table, in housing—

WC: This was before or after he was elected?

IM: This was after he's elected. And Rendell—oh, and the housing guy, I think it's called OACD—but at any rate, he said, "Well, we should start the meeting and we'll brief the mayor when he comes in." We said, "No, no no. This meeting was set up with the mayor. We're not going to start this meeting until the mayor gets here." I can't remember how late he was, certainly twenty minutes late.

So he gets into the meeting, and he just goes off. "What do you mean? You all are in here; you've got some of the most important people in the city, and some of the best-paid people in the city, and you're just sitting here and you're not going to meet with me?" I mean, he's going bananas, little balls of spit begin to—I'm supposed to be chairing the meeting. This dude was going crazy! I hope somebody's got a phone number for an ambulance or something, because he could have a heart attack or a stroke. And he's just going on.

WC: He was unhappy that you were not sufficiently respectful?

IM: He probably still doesn't understand this, truthfully. Our work is not with these guys. Our work is to hold your behind accountable. You hold your staff accountable. We're on your ass, you know? He never—I mean, it took him a while to get it, but anyway, he's just

going bananas. So this guy, he's really one of these great guys, he gets up and says, "Mr. Mayor, I'm not going to take this. I'm leaving."

WC: This was a PIA person?

IM: Yeah. And I'm looking over, and I'm supposed to be chairing the meeting. I said, "Oh, my God, Rudy's walking out of here; the mayor's going crazy." And as soon as Rudy said that, Rendell sat down and shut up.

WC: Rudy?

IM: Rudy Robinson, Saint Paul's—is it Saint Paul's Community Baptist Church? [Laughs] God, I mean this was all PIA stuff. We're sitting in a meeting with the mayor. I think part of Rendell's tactic was, "You guys are not walking in here with briefcases that contain check books on which significant checks can be written, so I'm going to try to intimidate you." We're sitting in, God, we're going into some meeting with him, and we were pushing! I mean, we were pushing. Rendell is throwing damn chairs, you know, in the office and so forth! And you know, we just sit there, like, "If you want to be a fool, go on and be a fool. We're not going to respond to this baloney on your part."

And so finally—I can't remember—we're sitting there in one of these meetings, and it's always a question of tightening the screws, of tightening the doggone screws. And he's sitting there; he's got a pencil in his hand, and he's just [taps] hitting the pencil, just hitting the pencil. And finally he leans over to me, and he looks me dead in the eye and he says, "You guys are good."

WC: [Laughs]

IM: "You all are good." And the pencil just breaks in his hand. And how can I put it? You know, at some point we were in a gathering; I guess it was outside of City Hall, and this was one of these things where the press was present. After a while you get to know the press people. And [John] Street had just been elected, and a group of us had been in a conversation with Street. And so I just decided, let me go over and chat with these guys in the press. We're chatting, and finally one of them says, "Tell me, Reverend, when do you think we're going to get a sane mayor?" [Laughs]

And you know, I think that—my wife, daughter and I saw the movie *Selma* last week. I think that what PIA did, and what PIA allowed folks to do—and again, I think it's regular people; I mean, it's just regular folks in these church pews—allowed folks to have that sense that, "That damn it, we can do something. We are doing something, and we can do it together," and have that pride of—of the ability to exercise some power in this world. I mean, it's just that simple.

I also think it's theologically profound, beyond imagining. And that's the same kind of thing that touched me as a kid, the same—it's the same thing. It's probably the same kind of thing that made me feel like, darn it, this business of ordination is bigger than what is occasionally the baloney of the Episcopal Church. I mean, this is about something that's got much more breadth and depth that just that [unclear] up.

WC: Well, you've had your differences with the Episcopal Church over the years, not the least when [The Right Reverend] Charles Bennison was the diocesan.

IM: Yeah.

WC: In that reflection on your career that you sent to the diocese in transition team, you had quite a bit to say about that, and in particular about Charles's rethinking of DCMM.

IM: Mm-hm.

WC: Tell me about your relationship with Bishop Bennison, and about his approach to the DCMM parishes.

IM: First of all, there was a lot about Charles Bennison that I genuinely liked and respected. I never will forget, during his trial, I ran into him in the course of his trial, and he immediately asked me, "Ike are you familiar with such and such a book The Advocate is referred to frequently in?" And I said, "No, I'm not." And he must have said something like, "I'll have to get you a copy of it." And sure enough, probably three or four days after the trial was over, something arrives from Amazon or wherever the heck it was. It's a copy of a book called *Up South*, which really—

WC: By Matthew Countryman?

IM: That's right.

WC: I know the book.

IM: Is really a very good book that gave me background over folks with whom I'd been working ever since I'd been here, but didn't know the full back story, so to speak. I just thought it was a—yeah, I really genuinely appreciated it.

WC: It is the history of the black civil rights movement in Philadelphia.

IM: I just appreciated his mentioning, I wasn't aware of it, blah blah blah, didn't get a chance to read it until I finally retired.

WC: Cecil Moore.

IM: Huh?

WC: Cecil B. Moore, the people who essentially were the backbones of the black civil rights movement in the sixties and seventies.

IM: It's funny; I know Cecil's daughter pretty doggone well, and we chat every once in a while. I just didn't know the full background on Cecil. I think Charles is probably one of the most charming and witty guys and all of this stuff. On the other hand, I think he was just absolutely dead wrong in relationship to his position concerning DCMM. I think he made the mistake of believing that the kind of passivity that is probably true for the church in a whole bunch of situations and so forth, that that kind of passivity was going to be universal. The truth of the matter is, I think that he just ran into some folks who, one, did know a thing or two about real fights, not play fights, but real doggone fights, and who, you know, basically weren't going to act nice if your agenda in relationship to us is to cut our throats. I mean, I just think it was that doggone—that doggone simple.

WC: So he expected you to roll over and play dead?

IM: Sure did—no question. No ifs, ands or buts about it. I think he probably was able to maneuver at least three or four pretty serious moves in relationship to DCMM, all of which were just flattened. I think when he eventually came up with this business, which I'm going to be honest with you, is pretty doggone sad, it's also fundamentally stupid to bring in this guy, or to take advantage of this guy, who's new to the diocese.

WC: You're referring to—?

IM: Elliott Waters, up at Church of the Annunciation up on Lincoln, Lincoln Drive, who, you know, like probably everybody else, is concerned about what's my status? What's my standing— that kind of level of baloney.

WC: He's an African American?

IM: African American.

WC: He is the person who chaired the committee?

IM: He chaired the committee to which we, as DCMM clergy, would have to apply for our salaries. If you're chairing a committee that I have to make an application to if I want to set up this kind of program or that kind of program, or whatever, that kind of thing ought to be evaluated. If you're talking about me and my salary, I already work for the bishop. All the bishop's got to do is send me a letter or an email saying, "Ike Miller, your butt is fired." [Laughs] And that's it. I mean, it's also all hell breaking loose, but that's it. You don't need to have any kind of intermediary to handle that kind of issue.

And for Elliott to be dumb enough to walk into that kind of position, and so forth, without asking anybody else in town, "What the hell is this that I've just said yes to?" and for Charles to think that that one isn't going to be seen through in the twinkling of an eye, is just— you know, it's either dumb as hell or the height of arrogance, [laughs] or a combination of the two.

WC: So basically, what you're saying is that Elliott Waters agreed to do Charles's dirty work?

IM: Darn right, darn right, in my opinion, for the sake of gaining some kind of damn status for himself. That's my basic, it's my basic sense of it and so forth. What's the word I'm thinking of? I mentioned it in

that little piece that went to the transition team, the Galilee Group. Galilee, by the way, was, it seems to me, the venue where when all of this stuff was going on with Charles, he got the chance to ventilate, and to maintain at least something approaching some sanity going through this business.

WC: The group, the Galilee Group was a—?

IM: It was clergy from the Merion Deanery, and the vicars of the DCMM diocesan mission congregations. What ended up being, I guess if everybody would show up at a meeting, eighteen or twenty folks. [It] probably began meeting, I think, at the initiative of John Horner, who used to be at St. Mary's Ardmore, and John Midwood, who used to be the archdeacon—began meeting shortly before, or maybe shortly after Charles' election.

WC: Why did they start to meet?

IM: I think the basic idea grew out of Merion Deanery clergy asking themselves the question, "What are we doing, so to speak, or what is it, what is it that we collectively are about?" And it seems to me the idea was, well, maybe some kind of answers to that can be discovered if you as a group are meeting with these folks as a group, and maybe out of that interaction something can happen.

WC: Did Bishop Bennison create this group, or did this group—?

IM: No, this group came—it really was initiated by John Horner and John Midwood, yeah, yeah, yeah. At any rate, the Union of Black Episcopalians, God bless them, came out with a letter, I guess an open letter to the diocese, that basically said—without coming out and saying it, basically said, "This kind of stuff is racist, and it smacks of

the kind of historic divide-and-conquer stuff that was a part of black peoples' history in this country going back to slavery."

WC: You're talking about the committee led by Reverend Waters?

IM: Yup.

WC: That was what was racist?

IM: Yup, yup. And I mean, it's the whole process by which you set up a privileged class to serve the interest of those who have the power. It's just that simple.

WC: To use an analogy, we're talking about the difference between house slaves and field hands?

IM: It comes pretty doggone close to that. I mean, it's pretty—yeah. My sense of it is, it comes closer to the whole kind of business of the overseer in relationship to the rest of the field hands, and it's the overseer who administers the discipline, and drives the folks picking the cotton, or whatever and whatever. It comes out of that same cesspool. And the truth of the matter is—and you know, I've really never talked with any of the Merion clergy about this. A bunch of them have moved on to other places.

I think they basically decided, "Rather than take Charles on about this stuff, that has got to do with this stuff in relationship to race, we're going to take him on about money and all of that Wapiti stuff." And that's when [the] Standing Committee began to get very doggone serious about the fact that there's something going on with all of these blasted funds, that have somehow been emptied, declared—what's the phrase—undesignated, and next thing you know, we've dumped this kind of money in Wapiti. I don't think Charles ever heard it, but yeah, I used to try to tell him, "Look

Charles, I think if you work with DCMM, you could raise more money than you could fighting us." It may or may not have been true, but I mean, certainly as I looked at The Advocate's ability to generate support, and I think the same thing was true with St. Gabriel's under [The Reverend] Mary Laney's leadership.

WC: She raised a lot of money?

IM: Mary raised a heck of a lot of money. It would have been possible—I think Charles would have been able to see a lot more happen that he had wanted to. I cannot remember who it was that told me this, but it was probably very shortly after Charles was elected, it was at some gathering at—is it Robert Montgomery Scott's house? And Scott asks him, point blank, "Are you about to close all of the poor congregations?" You know, that's just—tactically, strategically, that's just not a favorable light to find yourself in.

WC: So you interpret that to mean that Scott thought this was a good idea?

IM: Oh, I think he thought it was an absolutely no good idea. I mean, you know, how can you do this?

WC: Ah, I see, so Scott was defending the poor congregations?

IM: At least obliquely, yeah, yeah. On the other hand, you've got to—you've got to have some sympathy for Charles. One, all of these urban congregations that you darn near—whose physical structures you darn near stumble across if you walk a few blocks in the wrong direction somewhere around here, that's a rough situation, and it's a rough burden for this diocese as a whole. Two, when you look at the exodus of "Episcopal-type people" from the city proper to the suburbs, it means that, I mean, that's another hard blow.

My gut tells me, when you look at the fact that this church stuff, on its own, so to speak, it's probably far less appealing and attractive than it was "back in the day." I mean, even when I was a kid, church was just "what was assumed." Nowadays, that's not the case. What's called the millennial, Millennium Series, with Elizbeth Salander, *The Girl Who Kicked the Hornet's Nest*, and so forth? I don't know how many millions of copies those three books have sold worldwide, and the absolutely great kind of thrill of reading, there are about three references to the church in those book. But they have chapter titles like: Christmas Eve, First Monday in Easter, Maundy Thursday. But when it comes to the substance of what religious faith is about, oh they were just designations on the calendar. Nobody lives their lives in relationship—are you crazy?

I don't know what you do with that. My theory, by the way, has always been: this business about justice touches each and every person on some kind of level that's real and meaningful, and if we can give people the chance to be involved in something that moves this stuff about justice a little bit closer—was it?—speaking of Martin Luther King—thing this morning, "The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice. It doesn't bend by itself." If we can just figure out ways as a church to give folks that sense, what I'm doing with my life in this little piece of time is helping to bend that damn moral arc, then I think you've got something that people begin to say, "Hell, I want to be a part of that, and I want to be a part of it 'cause that's—" everybody probably does this, right?

We project our—that's the only reason I take this stuff seriously. If it were just to put on women's clothes and wear a little,

fancy scarf around the—I'd figure out! I really do believe that if you can craft that stuff in that kind of way, you damn near have to beat people away from our doors. Because people want to invest their lives in something that's got some meaning, in something that you can honestly give yourself to, and I think it can work. I think it can work. I just think it can.

WC: So the church is not an end in itself?

IM: Hell, no! Never has been.

WC: So it's a means to a larger—?

IM: And, yeah. Yeah, it's just that. It's just that. I was—actually it's a friend, as much of my daughter's as of mine, whose birthday is Christmas Eve, and so you invite yourself to a party, and whenever I can and have got the energy, go off to a party. This would have been years ago. But he introduces me to a guy that was either part of SNCC or the Black Panthers, and he says, "This is Ike Miller. You know, he's retired as pastor of the Church of the Advocate," and stuff. This guy just breaks into this great smile, like, damn! You know we've been friends for the last 20 years and I haven't seen you, etcetera, etcetera. And I think we get started with some kind of discussion about Barack Obama, and he just comes up with this [snaps fingers] great analysis and so forth.

I think the reason that crazy place is loved to the extent that it's loved, is because of the fact that almost by definition, people understand, "Oh, you're trying to be about something that has to something with this craziness called justice. Of course I feel that way." And never met before, his buddy was vouching for me. But that kind of sense of relatedness, we're in this together kind of

business, I think the church can do that. I'm convinced that the door is not closed on that possibility for us; I really am.

WC: Is there anything we haven't talked about that you think we certainly should talk about?

IM: Probably; there probably is. I can't think of anything. But let me just raise one thing. I hope, and I think I've said this to Pam [Nesbit]; my memory doesn't serve me. I hope somehow if this remembering business goes on, and frankly I do think it's more important than just that span of time when Charles was here, but I really would hope that there could be more time for folks to spend time with you. I mean, God, this is an incredible amount of time we've spent together. But I just think it's so blasted important to get that sense of the texture and the feel of what the heck this place is about.

Another thing is, you know, I really have enjoyed my time in this diocese. I mean, I think—I may have a couple of scars and all of this kind of thing, but I really do find myself saying, you know—people ask me what feels like home, Atlanta versus—. You're crazy! Philadelphia's home. I mean, that's it. There are good people I know in Atlanta, and I need to get to, but this is home. Just, I really have found myself. I probably ought to consider myself lucky that I ended up here, as opposed to probably a whole bunch of other places that would not have made the kind of sense that this place has for me.

WC: I feel the same way, for a lot of different reasons.

[End of Interview]