

## Oral History Interview with Jimmy Carr

By Kay Barksdale

Kay Barksdale interviewing Jimmy Carr Feb. 10, 2015, at Galloway Church

KB: All right, Jimmy, start by telling me how you came to Galloway – where you had been, a little bit, and then why you came here and what position you had.

JC: Joy and I moved to Jackson in August of 1979. I had been at Central United Methodist in Meridian and there I had been the Director of Christian Education. When I came to Galloway, I came as director of program ministries as I remember it, and I was in charge of the total Christian Education as well as the mission area, all of those things, and I stayed until 1994 when I moved to Nashville, Tennessee, as an Associate General Secretary of the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry. I first worked with Clay Lee. He's the one who had reached out to me and had brought me to be interviewed for the position. I appreciate very much his leadership. He taught me a lot that I used in other leadership positions that I held in the church.

KB: You said that he helped form you, that in other places you were able to remember how he dealt with things that I thought was very interesting.

JC: Yes, I always appreciated the way Clay handled things. For instance, if he had a position open that somebody had resigned, that was one of the ministry positions, normally before he announced that, he would know what his next step was. Clay always looked a step or two ahead of where he was. And I guess that helped me as much understanding how I could be more visionary in what I did, not just in hiring and dismissing staff or supporting them but looking beyond day to day happenings to see what was going to happen in the future. Again, not just with relating to staff but whatever the decision was. If you have something, especially in a church like Galloway, you want them to own what's there, you want them to feel comfortable, and if positions were going to be left open, I think he thought it best to go ahead and announce that this position is open and this is the way we are going to handle filling that position.

Of course, change comes all the time. I learned at Galloway I served as the Director of program ministries with Clay, and then when Bert Felder came we reorganized, and I became the minister of program and administration. It was a hard job. But I was able to do that because first of all, we had a good staff and we had the resources to get the staff in the different areas. I only had just a few direct reports. I learned how to go from ministry to administration to taking care of the facilities (janitorial staff, kitchen, etc.) by delegation. First of all you have a person who is responsible, and you train them, support them. That it was very helpful to me. When I went to Nashville as Associate General Secretary with the Board of Higher Education and Ministry, I had a small staff, but the things that really were helpful were the things that I

learned especially from Clay but also from Bert: to begin to make projections of what you are going to do, then figure out where you wanted to go, then come back and put the detail to it. And when I went to work to the jurisdiction as the Executive Director of the Southeastern Jurisdiction, there I had a minimum of 250 people working for me. A lot of times it was around 400 people. Again it was the things I learned at Galloway: put good people in the position, give them the training they needed and let them go. Then you just supervised them and they would report back; then you can handle maybe eight or nine direct reports, because they should be handling their staff and then you can handle where there were difficulties. I learned all of that at Galloway!

KB: Tell me about the early years, things that went on, how many members we had in the early '80s and what were some of the good things we enjoyed.

JC: When I came to Galloway I think we were around 2200 members. The church was on the rebound from some of the things that had happened in the sixties, the early seventies. When Clay came he says that he didn't find many that were very positive about the future of Galloway. He spent time trying to help them see all the good that they had here and then did some few things that were uplifting, like the big fourth of July freedom festival Sunday that we had. We'd always bring in musicians, a lot of color, somebody to do a patriotic speech. Not patriotic like blind patriotism but actually calling the church to task to do what it could do, first of all within its body and then the larger in the community. I was always appreciative of Galloway and its past because it had been at the center of the Jackson community since Jackson was new. It was the first church. And they took the serious responsibility of not speaking for Jackson but always being involved in the life of the city. When I was here, as I guess is true today, whenever there was something controversial happening within the city, news persons would always come to the senior minister for comments and there were good relationships with the state leadership. We started legislative luncheons during that time, continued it and expanded it through the time that I was here.

KB: Didn't Clay start the lunches?

JC: Sunday lunches, that was started while Clay was here. I think that was already going when I came and I just picked up and continued that, and as I remember. It seems they were started to try to get persons who were older in the congregation a chance to have a place to eat after the Sunday worship service. But as you will remember, it became much more than that. It was a time for families to enjoy, a lot of children, a lot of families, and so it became really a gathering time for the congregation. Because we were downtown and people would come downtown for church, have lunch. Then we moved to having almost all of the meetings on Sunday during the same time. It made it more difficult on the staff, but by the time people left, went home, they basically had done the work that the church needed to have done with the lay involvement, not having to come back.

KB: Other things that were interesting at that point; how many Sunday school classes? What was going on in the church school at that point?

JC: Attendance was, gracious, it was probably four or five hundred, maybe more; there was always a class for every age level led by volunteers. All of the teachers, except for the nursery, where we had paid persons, were volunteers who had agreed to be a leader for a year. We spent a lot of time with training. We would recruit, then we would have training for those persons, and then they gave very good leadership in helping nurture our children, young people and our adults. I don't remember how many adult classes there were. Many adult classes that we have now existed then. I guess we had 16 or 18 classes for adults. We tried for a period of time to offer alternative classes so people who had been in a class a long time and really wanted the excuse to leave could try somewhere else, as well as persons who did not have a class.

KB And what about Wednesday nights?

JC: Wednesday nights, we were in the old fellowship hall, which is where the A and B reception rooms are now. We would have I'd say 200 to 300 people depending on what the program was. We had a committee who really knew the community, who knew the church, and I'm not talking about Galloway but knew the United Methodist Church. We had different things we would offer. We would have all the community leaders: the mayor, the governor, the lieutenant governor, but we also had the Bishop here on a regular basis for teaching sometimes; we would have Bible studies, a lot of times we would have alternatives so people would choose one of three or four smaller groups – all the same kinds of things we do today, but now we move them from place to place, not just on Wednesday nights or from time to time, but there was always a good meal, good fellowship. The choir would meet while the program was going on. The children's choirs were not on Wednesday. It seems like they were on Sunday.

KB: And didn't we have a youth choir?

JC: We had a youth choir. Lee Byler may have been our first youth choir person. I can't remember beyond Ken Roberts and Mary Taylor Sigman. Ken did a youth choir for a long time. They would go every year on big tours: New York, the east, the west, and were excellent. Always with a large bus and a good experience for that part of the youth ministry.

We had a good youth group. The youth ministry here, I always felt like, nurtured the kids in the faith and it also trained them. They gave the leadership themselves, not necessarily teaching or leading programs themselves, although they did some of that, but they learned leadership skills as well as being nurtured in the faith during that period of time. And I guess probably we still do. United Methodist Youth Fellowship is not just Galloway now, which is one of the real positive things it has done. I don't remember the numbers, but we always had two groups: Junior highs and senior highs and sometime during that period we moved to three so we had a middle group. But it was always around the same kind of thing. They would have decided what

they wanted to study or who they wanted to discuss; sometimes they did the programs themselves and sometimes the adult leaders did. I guess we had 50 – 60 young people on a regular basis. Because we were downtown, we had the same thing that we have now. Because you had so many schools represented, you may have had 15 different schools represented in our youth. Some of their friends would go to another church, and next thing you know those kids were going; the same kind of thing that happens today. You always had to be sure that you wanted to do something for families, for children, for young people and then as we began to get older, for our older adults, besides their regular things they did in church. We had a group we called the XYZ club when I came here. Extra Years of Zest. They didn't want to be called the XYZs. So they became Resources for Service, RFS. The leaders, I remember, were Russell and Betty Bryant. Betty still lives here. They would have a monthly program very similar to what GEMS has now, and it would be similar kinds of programs. They did a lot of travels. A lot of trips – Natchez, Branson, Missouri, things that were in the community they would do together as adults.

KB: Now tell me about the Players –

JC: Before I came, there was a strong drama program here for years. For whatever reason, the early part of my being present here as a staff that didn't exist. Virginia Fox Metz, Kay Valentine, (Kay King at the time), Ken Roberts, Mary Taylor Sigman, a number of lay people in the church wanted to begin a new drama ministry. That started. They did tremendous dramas and musicals. It was so popular I remember that they gave out tickets for the two performances, didn't have to pay anything, but I think we may have taken a love offering; but they were guaranteed that they would have a seat. A lot of people came to Galloway through the drama ministry. I can think of two or three couples now who are very involved in the church, and that's how they got to Galloway. Sometimes they met in the drama ministry and were married. It was more than just entertainment. Sometimes they did religious shows but most of the time it was just good, clean, family fun.

KB: Lay Leadership. Do you remember the chairs? Were we always an administrative board, have we changed our names as we have gone through?

JC: When I came there was an Administrative Board that met monthly, and there was also a Council on Ministries. The administrative board took care of the finances, the building, and set directions for the church as a whole. The Council on Ministries was an umbrella group that had Christian Education, Church and Society, Missions, all the different areas where there were ministries going on. It had somebody in those areas who were lay people and a lot of people were involved because of that. First of all you had the leadership that had been elected by the charge conference. I never heard any resistance to that at Galloway, but all United Methodist Churches were organized the same way. In the middle 80s and early 90s that all changed. The General Conference through its polity allowed churches as well as Annual Conferences to organize the way they want to. So what we've got now probably is a Leadership Council, and that would be a function that would have filled both the Administrative Board and the Council

on Ministries. The only way I was able to do what the church had asked me to do, what Bert and Clay had asked me to do, was because of volunteers. If we had a staff position, they were going to cover their area and to use a lot of volunteers. I was responsible for missions and church and society. We did a mission trip almost every year out of the United States. That started before I came here and we continued that. We went to Mexico for a long time and we continued that. I probably went to Mexico 10 times. I wasn't the only staff person who went. Other people went also. Dr. Tommy Ross, and Jennie Mae Tucker, I remember being in Mexico City with her. We had already done our mission at a place called Mira Flores and we were having dinner at the hotel restaurant and somebody stole her passport, everything, while we were eating dinner. She had to go to the Consul, and she had no identification and she finally got them to understand that, uh, he finally said, "I'll issue this passport because you've got to be from Mississippi. Nobody talks like that!"

Those were high times, highlights for the church, but the thing I always liked about Galloway was its strong commitment to the Jackson community. Go back and look at the history – Bethlehem Center, all those community centers, Stewpot, which came later, but there was an organization that dealt with medical and dental needs and then there was Stewpot. Stewpot was started through the conversations with St. Andrew's Episcopal, the Catholic, St. Peter's I think, the Central Presbyterian, which was over on Capitol Street. Eventually it picked up Capitol Street United Methodist Church. Galloway was a real leader in that. They started Stewpot and eventually it spread to other denominations – First Baptist became a part of it. But that was all because of a lot of strong, clergy and lay leadership in the community and I always appreciated that about Galloway. Now one of the things – Galloway was one of the first organizations to adopt an elementary school. I was part of that and Galloway was one of the first churches that adopted a school, Brown Elementary. One year people said, "You are always doing so much. You are involved in international things when you've got plenty of things to do here. Why do you do that?" So I counted, and at one time we had about 250 people involved in missions in home and international areas. And the church continues that tradition.

KB Tell me about the building. I remember when Clay's office was behind the sanctuary. How do those kinds of decisions get made. How do we decide how we use the building?

JC: First of all, we really had a difficult time with the fellowship hall. Although it was larger than a lot of churches had, it was not anywhere near what Galloway needed to have. And the building where the children are now was the Consolidated American Life Building. It came available. It had been originally a property of Galloway and for whatever reason had been sold. The church bought that and studied and determined that they could take care of some of their children, youth and adult needs by tying those two building together with a fellowship center. And so that was built to take care of meeting needs and the A and B reception centers could be divided. That was the old fellowship hall; it had a stage down on the south end toward Smith Park. The stage was very inadequate for the things that Galloway was doing at the time. So when they built the fellowship center they built an adequate gymnasium because of the sports

teams we had and for the things we did for meals and other events. They built the stage so that it was adequate for the drama program with a fly so we could have a full scene, scenery pulled up out of the way. That was the vision of people like Ken Roberts, Virginia Metz, Kay Valentine. Those people had the vision of what Galloway could do if they had the resources, and so that was done. All of that came about with the building committee at a capital campaign. Bob Ridgway was the chair of the building committee during that period of time.

KB: You weren't here when we hosted annual conference, were you?

JC: Oh yes. Every year I was here, most of the years I was here, we hosted Annual Conference, until it got too big once we merged with the North Mississippi Conference. I do remember we moved to the Coast, we moved to Hattiesburg, Tupelo, Greenville.

KB What was it like to have Annual Conference here?

JC: Very hard on the church membership, very hard. But the church leadership always took it as, even though sometimes they complained about it, I think they took it as an honor that they could host the Conference and provide their needs. And of course Annual Conference was a good PR thing for the church because it was seen as the lead church in the Conference. So there was a chance for all the delegates around the state to be here. I think that as always, and is today, the membership just buckled down and had people who would organize and did it. I think about Stella Marshall, who coordinated a lot of that as well as a lot of people. Margaret and Ed Jones also.

KB: What about the child care center?

JC: When the building program was started it was with the intent that there would be some kind of child care center as well as taking care of our children on Sunday, and also to take care of the children of the community. They established a committee. Sheila Cumbest was the children's minister at that time. She worked closely with it at that time. I did and then we had lay members of the church. And Brian Fenelon was the first chair and served in that position for a long time. They had to borrow money from the trustees as I remember to get started. We had to have someone in hand as the director a long time before we could open up to the children. They did two or three things that were significant, I think. One was they followed the guidelines established by the health department by the state. And then they had a director who knew what good child education – in fact it was Sharon Briggs. She has another name now, but she's still here and she gave tremendous leadership. It's evident by looking at the number of children we serve today. It was hard for the church to understand you don't, it's not something that ever pays all of its expenses; it is a part of the ministry of this church. And some people didn't understand it. Even now, especially now, it cost so much to go, and those who didn't have children raised the question. I think history will show that it has attracted a lot of people who actually come to the church, and it really stands right there in the center of the city on West Street as a place that is filled with children. We built a playground so that they could see out and people could see in. But our children were protected. That has been a positive thing,

not only for the children but for the families here as well as the church as a whole. It's so much bigger than it was when I was here.

(NEED TO ADD INFO ABOUT LEGACY FUND.)