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Rev. Brooks Ramsey, Memphis Ministers' Association, 1968

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Judy Schultz- 68, we are in the office of Brooks Ramsey the pastor of 2nd Baptist church. The two interviewers are Judy Schultz and Joan Beifuss. Now just for general background why don't you tell us something about where you went to school, where you went to seminary where you were before you were in Memphis?

Brooks Ramsey- Well I have had a checkered career, I am a native Tennessean by birth and I spent most of my active ministry in two states, Texas and Georgia. I went to school at Union university here in west Tennessee. Baylor university at Waco Texas. Took my master of divinity at Southwester Seminary in Fort Worth. This is my academic background. I did some work toward a doctorate at the seminary and was a teaching fellow my last year there. So I have been in Memphis 5 year.

Judy Schultz- You have been in Memphis 5 years.

Brooks Ramsey- Right.

Judy Schultz- Did you, were you in Memphis sometime before the you were in Houston, is that where you were?

Brooks Ramsey- Of course, I grew up in Memphis and I was gone about 18 years.

Joan Beifuss- Oh you grew up in Memphis?

Brooks Ramsey- Yes.

Joan Beifuss- You went to school?

Brooks Ramsey- I finished high school here.

Joan Beifuss- Which high school?

Brooks Ramsey- Central high school.

Joan Beifuss- And then you went where after?

Brooks Ramsey- To college.

Joan Beifuss- Well where was your pastorate right before you came back here?

Brooks Ramsey- Albany Georgia. First Baptist Church Albany Georgia.

Judy Schultz- You liked it down there didn't you Martha Lee did.

Brooks Ramsey- This was of course I was there during the racial crisis in Albany, there is where I got to know Martin Luther King personally for the first time.

Judy Schultz- So you knew Martin Luther King?

Brooks Ramsey- Yes.

Joan Beifuss- Tell us about Albany Georgia would you what was happening in Albany?

Brooks Ramsey- Of course when I went to Albany I had a little bit of fear about the situation because it is very deep south and I talked to the committee the (muffled) committee about the racial situation. They said oh we have great relationships with the negros. There is no city I Georgia that has better relationships than we have. So I went there somewhat dubiously but convinced that they were shooting straight with me. Things went alright for the first couple of years I guess. Periodically I would preach along the lines of race relations and it began to stir up a little bit of resentment on the part of the people. But I think the real difficulty came when the court ruled that the train station, and bus depots were to be desegregated. And so we had the freedom riders come through Albany and the first mass arrests were made there. I think over 700 people were arrested at one time because, and this was the beginning of the Albany movement. So I began to work behind the scenes trying to reconcile the differences as did some of the other minister's of the city did. But we didn't have much to go on, the city administration was adamant, the chamber of commerce was adamant, the mood of the city was to have no compromise what so ever. I remember the negro ministers came to me, I was pastor of the 1st Baptist church and in a city like that it is usually a prestiged church. And so the negro ministers came to me and asked if I could use my influences to help desegregate the registration lines. They were not allowed to register to vote in the same lines as white people. And so I thought this was a legitimate grievance they had and so I did my best to help along that line and it seemed to stir up more resentment. In my own church I had done my best to get them to desegregate at least for public worship without going into the discussion of membership. So that when a sit-in or kneel-in was threatened I met with my deacons over the protest (muffled) and asked them to vote to seat these people and they would not do it, they were quite violent in their opposition. I asked them if they would seat them in the balcony, if we cleared the balcony, they refused to do that. I asked them if they would seat them downstairs in the basement at least to keep from turning people away from church, from the house of worship and they refused to do that and so as a last compromise I asked that they not arrest anybody who came unless they were provoked in physical violence. To this they agreed, this was in January or February of 1962 and then the demonstrations started shortly after that and continued through the summer. And during the summer we had our first kneel-in and the first 2 people that came were arrested and so this triggered opposition against me because I made a statement to the paper that I was not in favor of the arrests. And the newspaper reporter asked me why did I disapprove of the arrest and I made a statement saying that this was Christ's church and I could not build any walls around it that he did not build and Christ did not build any racial walls around this church as far as I knew.

Joan Beifuss- Now tell me something I have never seen a kneel-in. Would this happen while they were in the pulpit preaching?

Brooks Ramsey- Well a knell-in would be the name of people coming into a church to be asked to be admitted for worship. Not that they would actually kneel.

Joan Beifuss- Yeah but would you be in the pulpit when they were coming in the back door of the church trying to ...

Brooks Ramsey- Yes I was the Sunday they came, I didn't know until after the service that they had been arrested.

Joan Beifuss- Now would the police simply come with them because they knew they were coming.

Brooks Ramsey- Well the police were sitting around all the churches every Sunday during this crisis. They were just across the street and the head usher waved to them and they came over and took them away and it is as simple as that.

Judy Schultz- Did they push them outside the building for the police to arrest them, or did the police come inside the building?

Brooks Ramsey- No actually they never got up the steps, when they put their foot on the first step going up and there were a number of steps going up to the sanctuary. So I asked the head usher why he did this after promising that he would not have anyone arrested and he said that it was going to provoke trouble, people were getting upset and you know it was going to cause trouble and he felt like for the safety of the congregation he should have them arrested. But I stayed on Albany a year after that and then came here. I came here having discussed with the deacons of this church my particular viewpoint asked them to ask any questions. You know that I have been controversial and I want you to investigate but they didn't do much investigating.

Judy Schultz- You say while you were in Albany you first met Martin Luther King.

Brooks Ramsey- Yes.

Judy Schultz- Well tell us about that?

Brooks Ramsey- Well Martin Luther King came during the demonstrations to kind of head them up I guess. It was sort of like the Memphis situation I guess, local leaders felt like they needed someone of leadership caliber to come in and head up the organization and Martin Luther King had come down. I remember the very first time I met him a group of ministers were asked to go to a colored church that we might meet with colored ministers and discuss the situation. There were 4 or 5 white ministers and 4 or 5 colored ministers. So we went to the church and the chairman who was a negro man said Dr. King is in town and we have taken the privilege of asking him to meet with us if you don't object because we know it might get you in trouble if your congregation finds out that you had met with Dr. King. Well a lot of us were glad that we were meeting and so he stepped into the next room and Martin Luther King came out. He was personally disarming. He is quite different from his

newspaper image, his mass media image. I think generally the white population thinks that Martin Luther King is a rabble rouser, flamboyant. Actually he was very quiet and mild, almost gentle. And we talked a while and then we went to several other meetings together and he came back periodically throughout the crisis and preached to negro churches and we had meetings such as is.

Judy Schultz- Did you keep up the contact each time that he would come back, did you continue to meet?

Brooks Ramsey- We met several times. After the major crisis I think communication was kind of broken down between all of us. I maintained some communication for a while, well I guess all the way until I left. The negro ministers confided quite a bit in me. There was this polarization that took place there as it has taken place in Memphis I think.

Judy Schultz- Then you felt at that time he really was not a man of violence as some people have pictured his nonviolent movement?

Brooks Ramsey- No, no. I have never believed that Martin Luther King was into violence. I think that, well it was said to me one time he said that he was not only called to lead his people to freedom but also to emancipate the white congregation. That he thought that if we could win this battle the white minister would be a lot freer and I really felt he was sincerer when he said this. I know from remarks he made after the Albany situation he appreciated the position I took. My daughter met him once in Memphis at the airport and she went and introduced herself to him and told him that she was my daughter, and he said I am so glad to see you and tell your father how much I appreciate what he did in Albany.

Judy Schultz- Is that when he came in here this Spring?

Brooks Ramsey- No this was, oh he was here I guess it was about a year before this. This was at that time.

Judy Schultz- So when you came up here you told the deacons that there had been controversy?

Brooks Ramsey- Well they knew it and I met with the deacons and asked them to ask me questions about it because I had nothing to hide and that was, I had been involved in the controversy in Albany so I said that I am here to answer any questions you have got because I want you to know the facts. But at that time I think they were so anxious to get a pastor that they didn't really investigate.

Judy Schultz- Well did you come right after this church was formed?

Brooks Ramsey- Ten months after it had been formed, I was the first pastor the church had been formed about 10 months before I had come.

Judy Schultz- It had broken off from Bellevue?

Brooks Ramsey- Yes, they had been this time without a pastor, they had different pastors to come in and preach but I was the first permanent pastor.

Joan Beifuss- Just for the record I am not clear about the breaking off from Bellevue Baptist church. What?

Brooks Ramsey- Well the group that originally formed this church came out of Bellevue and in a period of (muffled).

Joan Beifuss- Was this church the liberal people that came out of Bellevue?

Brooks Ramsey- I don't think you can classify either side conservative or liberal and I doubt if there were very many liberals on either side.

Joan Beifuss- Was there a key issue out of which they came out of Bellevue Baptist Church?

Brooks Ramsey- I think it was a personal conflict. A power struggle.

Judy Schultz- More in terms of administrative methods than theology.

Brooks Ramsey- Which I would say is a power struggle, who was going to control the church. But I don't think theology was involved with it.

Joan Beifuss- Ok I agree with you on this conservative terminology I just can't find any other hook.

Brooks Ramsey- I haven't met too many liberal people here in Memphis.

Judy Schultz- That is very true.

Brooks Ramsey- Some.

Joan Beifuss- Ok well let's....so when you came here were you interested in what the racial situation was in Memphis before you came in?

Brooks Ramsey- Oh yes.

Joan Beifuss- And what was your impression of that before you came in or came back?

Brooks Ramsey- Well of course I had heard of the tremendous race relations that existed in Memphis as the model city and I guess I swallowed that somewhat like I swallowed the situation in Albany. I didn't really do too much investigating before I came but when I came one of the first things I did was to accept an invitation to preach at a negro church. I took some of my members with me we had no problems, had a very good relationship. And then we had a pastor's meeting, dinner, at Owen college one night where the negroes and the white ministers met for the first time as far as anybody could remember.

Judy Schultz- And when was this?

Brooks Ramsey- This was about the fall of 1963 I guess.

Joan Beifuss- Was this just the Baptist ministers?

Brooks Ramsey- Just the Baptist ministers. It was really arranged by Dr. Guy Bell and Andrew Warton and in a home mission board with negro work. And he used as a valid reason I think Dr. Ralph Moore's retirement as city missions director for the white Baptists and Dr. Moore was well respected by the negroes. So Dr. Bell and me said let's get together and honor Dr. Moore on his retirement. And it was his method of getting the negro and white ministers together for the first time and they had this banquet. And I remember one negro minister stood up and he said that he had been in the ministry for 57 years. He said I prayed that an hour like this would come, and he said I can die happy now because I have broken bread with my white brother. I was so amazed because I thought Memphis would have been farther along than that. But from that time on I was not too active working in race relations though I was doing quite a bit of preaching now and then working in the sermons and at times preaching a whole sermon on race relations in my own congregation because I felt like we had to move, I think that sometimes you have to wait for the right opportunity. I had to get my feet on the ground that we were on the building program getting moved out here, a lot of extinguishing circumstances. And I was not less interested in race relations just absorbed in other matters.

Judy Schultz- Well all this time, say the beginning of the church and the first few years here, then the congregation didn't show too much reaction one way to another to your participation and your mention of race relations.

Brooks Ramsey- No not a great deal, except we had a philippino boy visit (muffled) on Wednesday night I guess 3 years ago. He was very dark skinned, I found out later he was Phillipino but he could have passed for an American negro he was so dark skinned. At that time when I walked out of the church on Wednesday night I guess there were a dozen or more people standing on the outside really going over the situation and really upset about it. And I couldn't quite understand that but that was the first dark skinned person, real dark skinned person who visited our church. We moved out here and we had no other episodes within the last year and that was when the real trouble started I think.

Joan Beifuss- Well now a did you join the ministerial association?

Brooks Ramsey- Yes shortly after I came in, the general assembly, the Memphis ministerial association, yes I joined that.

Joan Beifuss- Were there many Baptists, laboring under the (muffled).

Brooks Ramsey- There are not many Baptists who are members of the ministerial association.

Joan Beifuss- Now is there not also a Baptist minister's association?

Brooks Ramsey- Yes the Baptist minister's association meets every week. And they have lunch together on Monday and , but not many of the Baptists belong to the Memphis ministerial association.

Judy Schultz- Well do you think that is just out of choice, or do you think there is some general feeling about the general ministerial association?

Brooks Ramsey- Well I think the extreme conservatism of the Baptist pastors and the Baptist laity in this area I think basically it is a theological problem. That they feel, they shy away from any ecumenical movement at all even to the ministers getting together. Because they feel the doctrine of the Baptist church will be diluted and I don't share that view at all. And I have always belonged to the general minister meetings and they see I belong to an ecumenical spirit and so I immediately joined the Memphis minister association when I came. But there are I suppose have been half a dozen or more Baptist ministers who have periodically belonged to the Memphis ministerial association. But that is out of 125 churches you see.

Judy Schultz- Well in the Baptist minister's association had they ever at any time talked about race relations? Or is it a subject that is shyed away from?

Brooks Ramsey- It is not talked about a great deal Judy but it is in recent months I guess it has at least been brought up and at the present time I am chairman of the interbaptist committee of the Baptist association. And we have secured an arrangement between the white Baptist ministers and the negro Baptist ministers that every 2 months we will swap meetings. This last month in the month of June we met in a white church and we had the negro Baptists with a program. And then in August we will meet in a negro church and the white Baptists ministers will arrange the program. So we plan to do this every two months, this is one step forward.

Judy Schultz- Has it been fairly well received? Did you get a fairly good attendance of negro ministers at your meeting?

Brooks Ramsey- It was fair not what we had wanted.

Joan Beifuss- Was, now prior to February or prior to this meeting had there been a separate white Baptist ministers group and a separate negro Baptist ministers group?

Brooks Ramsey- No they have always been separate.

Joan Beifuss- They have always been separate.

Brooks Ramsey- So far as recent history is concerned I am sure there has been a white and a negro in fact there are several negro Baptists, they are not together. As you know there is a national Baptist convention and a national Baptist convention progressive and they are somewhat of equal strength over the nation I think. But they have their own separate conferences.

Joan Beifuss- but then there is the negro minister's alliance.

Brooks Ramsey- Right and all the denominations belong to that. That is the one reverend Starks raised up.

Judy Schultz- Well then leading up to say the events of February and the beginning of the strike, things had been fairly quiet and the ministers in general across Memphis had not really worked to hard at stepping up the interracial...

Brooks Ramsey- Well I think this started prior to February though. It started last fall when Rabbi Wax became president of the Memphis ministerial association. He appointed a race relations committee.

Joan Beifuss- was that the first time there had ever been race relations committee?

Brooks Ramsey- Well there had been a let me see I forget the title of it, it was a social action committee. But he changed the name of it to make it more specific to race relations committee. I was on that committee and we began meeting in the fall and discussing what we could do. We had 3 or 4 meetings and we decided on promoting race relations day, also getting the full page ad in which we would have a statement of faith proclamation concerned. And appealing to every church to do something on race relations day. And this had been in the making since the beginning of the fall.

Judy Schultz- Who else was on the committee?

Brooks Ramsey- Well, Father Veron was on the committee and reverend Jordan, first Baptist church Beale for the negro ministers. Let's see who else? I remember Mr. Orgill met with us but he was not on the committee, he is not a minister. He met with us several times and discussed several different things in the making. I don't recall all of the individuals on the committee.

Judy Schultz- Now when was race relations Sunday?

Brooks Ramsey- It was February 11th I believe second Sunday in February.

Judy Schultz- We were working on pin pointing that date in an earlier interview.

Brooks Ramsey- It always comes, this is a national day, and it always comes closest to Lincoln's birthday.

Joan Beifuss- So the ad was in the preceding Saturday.

Brooks Ramsey- Right, it was in a week before the Sunday which we put it 8 or 9 days before race relation day.

Joan Beifuss- Now was this the first time the ministers association here had done anything like run an ad in the paper?

Brooks Ramsey- It was the first time since I had been here and the first time I think that it had been done as far as anybody could remember.

Judy Schultz- Well within the minister's association what was the reaction to the plans to work on the race relations.

Brooks Ramsey- oh I think all the men in the Memphis ministerial association were committed to a plan of action. They realized that we had to move, they were in sympathy with the movement. I think those that belonged in the Memphis ministerial association almost totally cooperated in this.

Joan Beifuss- How many members does the Memphis ministerial association have?

Brooks Ramsey- I am not sure how many members I think I would take a guess and say between 60 and 80 somewhere along that, on good attendance days, on days of good attendance there would probably be 40 to 50 present of the ministers, that is all the denominations. There had been more, I take that back I have been there when I am sure there have been over a hundred present for special occasions.

Joan Beifuss- 60 or so active.

Brooks Ramsey- Yes who come very regularly. You could get this information from Rabbi Wax.

Joan Beifuss- Well so then...

Brooks Ramsey- I am not real sure on those facts, figures.

Joan Beifuss- At the time then the garbage strike was starting this was the time of race relation Sunday.

Brooks Ramsey- Yes I think.

Joan Beifuss- It must have been the same day the strike started on the...

Judy Schultz- The strike started on February 12th.

Brooks Ramsey- Well it started the next day. After race relations day.

Joan Beifuss- Was there any flak back to people of in the ministerial association because of the (muffled).

Brooks Ramsey- I don't think a great deal I think the response was good on the part of some people and those who disagreed they were not violent enough in the opposition to really make a voice about it. In my own church I didn't get any serious repercussions. I had a Nigerian preach on race relations day.

Judy Schultz- And how was he received.

Brooks Ramsey- He was received extremely well I thought, Dr. Joseph Abedtape is from Legas Nigeria. He has his doctorate from Columbia University and he was president of our Baptist academy in Legas and a very fine educator. He is in this country on a loan to the health education welfare department for a year to discuss

African Educational Affairs, to lead seminars on college campuses. And I got acquainted with Dr. Abedtape in Georgetown when I was speaking in Georgetown Kentucky. And so I got (muffled) it would be a good first step to have one of the products of our foreign mission program to speak and that I could get by with this better than I could having an American negro speak. So I thought it was a good first step and so I invited him and he is a versatile type of person and knows what the situation is and in spite of that he still has a great love for America. And in Africa in his sphere of influence has been one of the pro western type leaders. He said I know the situation I would like to fit into your plans I will do whatever I can. So I said Joe you come and be with me on Sunday morning. I will introduce you and let you bring a few words of greetings. I will announce at that time that you are going to preach at the evening service. This way the people will not be a captive audience and it will be a good barometer to tell how they are receiving you. If they resent it tremendously then the congregation will be very sparse, if their hearts are in it then we will have a good crowd. He agreed to this and thought it was a good plan. And I was delighted that Sunday evening service we had one of the largest attendances we had in a long time and the people were most warm and most gracious to Dr. Abedtape. Though I had some people that stayed away from the service because they didn't want to have a black man preach to them.

Joan Beifuss- I am trying to get this and kind of wider perspective. In other words you would say leading up to the beginning of the garbage strike here in the churches at least things were gradually opening up a little bit.

Brooks Ramsey- Yes they had started to move. We weren't working in a crisis because there was nobody knew the crisis was going to come, it was very calm last fall. I think the ministers had just come to the conclusion that they had waited long enough it as time to move in this area. And it was something the church had to face.

Judy Schultz- The crisis made them face it faster.

Brooks Ramsey- Then the crisis that's right. In a way I am sorry the crisis came and in another way I guess it spurred us on to more action.

Judy Schultz- Well did you ever attend once the sanitation strike began did you ever attend any of the meetings that the strikers had, or any of the meetings at Clayborne Temple, or did you have any communication with negro ministers about what was happening?

Brooks Ramsey- No, I attended several meetings but always, but disassociated from Clayborne Temple and the movement as such. I went to St. Patrick's church for a meeting where white and negroes met together ministers primarily and we listened to the labor representatives and also to the negro ministers. Ralph Jackson, Jim Lawson, and Mr. Champa and so forth were there presenting their side. I was on several committees in the ministerial association that was working with the negro ministers and working to contact members of the city council to try to get them to

use their influence to solve the strike. This was going on behind the scenes but I did not attend the movement meetings as such.

Joan Beifuss- What was the, what were you trying to do in reaching the city council members?

Brooks Ramsey- It is hard to say except that this was later on and we felt like it had come to a head on confrontation and that the matter of dues check off and union recognition had ceased to be matters strictly of labor and management but they become moral issues and we met in Rabbi Wax's office, a group of ministers and decided that we should go as two or three of us at a time to different council members and ask them to have some kind of compromise on labor, union recognition and dues check off. Because this was the thing that was standing in the way of settling the thing.

Judy Schultz- And did you go and talk to a councilmen yourself?

Brooks Ramsey- I was on a group that talked to two councilmen.

Judy Schultz- Who did you talk to?

Brooks Ramsey- I talked to Mrs. Awsumb and to who is the lumber man?

Joan Beifuss- (muffled)

Brooks Ramsey- Hyman, Billy Hyman.

Judy Schultz- And how did they respond to the interest that you took and the appeal you were making.

Brooks Ramsey- It is hard to really spell out Judy. I thought Mr. Hyman was more sympathetic and I think maybe he saw the issues a little clearer. But I think the thing that they were trying to do at that time was to keep a good relations hip between the city council and the mayor, and of course some of them on the city council were very adamant and said we will never give in, we are against labor unions per say. We will never agree to the dues check off system and so forth so this was kind of their attitude.

Judy Schultz- Was this towards the end of the strike, was this getting into march when you decided to take these steps or was this still in February?

Brooks Ramsey- This was getting towards the end of the strike, I mean before the march took place, I would say I would have to do a lot of recalling but I would say it was about 2 weeks before that point. Maybe 10 days to 2 weeks before the march.

Judy Schultz- But you all didn't try to go to the mayor and talked to him?

Brooks Ramsey- No there had been some of the ministers that had gone to the mayor.

Judy Schultz- Oh they had.

Brooks Ramsey- One I am not going to give his name but is fairly close to the mayor and he served as a kind of liaison group between our group and the mayor. And he had talked some to the mayor. I am not sure all that had gone on between Rabbi Wax and the mayor or the ministerial association as such I was just a part of this particular community that was the contact for the councilmen. I was out of the city some during that time too.

Joan Beifuss- There was so many meetings going on kind of under the surface.

Brooks Ramsey- Sure that's right. Everybody was trying to do something but nobody knew exactly what to do.

Joan Beifuss- Now when you knew that Dr. King was coming back in, or was coming in to lead a march did you have any reaction, did you think that was a good idea, or what was your thought on that?

Brooks Ramsey- Of course, Dr. King had come one time and had met and had spoken at Clayborne Temple. I knew that the temple was going to pick up because when he assumes the leadership of a movement things take on a different mood I think. I didn't have too much fear about that because I really believe that he was nonviolent and that this was his philosophy, sincere philosophy and I thought he would do everything he would to keep it nonviolent. Albany was completely nonviolent, we had no difficulty at all, we had mass arrests and mass jailings but there had been no rioting looting and the police in Albany I must say as a tribute to them had exercised unusual restraint. And so I didn't have a great deal of fear at that time but I was in New York when the march took place and when the riots broke out. And my wife and I were passing through New York just for a day or two on our way back from a convention in Washington. We went to a restaurant to eat that night, we had been out sightseeing all afternoon. We went into the restaurant and about 8:00 and I had not seen the paper and we were sitting next to these people with whom we began to talk and when they found out we were from Memphis and they said you had trouble today. So it was quite shocking because all of our children were here by ourselves and we didn't know what it was all about. So I went out immediately and bought a paper and saw the headlines that there had been rioting, I tried to put in a call to Memphis and finally got through about midnight New York time. And to find out that the children were alright. (muffled) demonstrations. Of course I thought it was very bad and yet I know that here again I don't think that Martin Luther King was not responsible for this. I think the militant determined that they were going to make it a violent march rather because they had been left out. I think the negro ministers can probably bring you up to date on that and share.

Joan Beifuss- Prior to the march you thought there was great polarization in the community by then, by late March.

Brooks Ramsey- I didn't sense great polarization, a lot of resentment but I didn't think it would come to the point where it was crystallizing.

Joan Beifuss- In other words your communication lines were still open.

Brooks Ramsey- Yes still open. During this time though they were breaking down. I think many of the negro ministers felt like the white ministers weren't doing all they could have been doing and they left them out to fight the battle alone and so they resented this and they kind of (muffled).

Judy Schultz- Well when you got back in town did you have a chance to talk to anybody who had been involved with the march or the riot? What did the ministerial association do after the riot, did they meet and discuss it?

Brooks Ramsey- They met privately in small meetings and then they met in a mass meeting and assigned to a committee with the responsibility of drawing up a resolution to take to the mayor and they were to bring that back the following week. Well in the meantime Martin Luther King was assassinated. And so when we finally met to approve the resolution we had the memorial service at St. Mary's Cathedral and then adjourned to go into the parish hall and discuss the resolution, it was approved immediately and that was when the men decide they would walk to the mayor's office.

Joan Beifuss- What kind of a memorial service was it?

Brooks Ramsey- It was attended mainly by ministers, black and white ministers.

Joan Beifuss- Was there a sermon?

Brooks Ramsey- It was I would say it was (muffled).

Judy Schultz- Did various ministers from different denominations say eulogies?

Brooks Ramsey- No we didn't have any eulogies, James Lawson brought a eulogy and he is the only one that eulogized Dr. King other men read the scripture and had the prayers and so forth and sang hymns together. I said no Episcopalian because it was certainly not high Methodist. (muffled).

Judy Schultz- These distinctions. Do you recall what hymns you sang, I am just kind of curious, about this little memorial service with Dr. King because it seems to me that was the most meaningful one in the city perhaps.

Brooks Ramsey- I think it was one of the most moving services I have been too. I don't remember any of them, I think that we sang God of our Father who is Almighty and Knowing.

Joan Beifuss- Let me back track a moment when did you know that Dr. King had been shot? How did you find out that Dr. King had been shot?

Brooks Ramsey- I will have to recall. I walked into the house from the church, what time was he shot late in the afternoon?

Judy Schultz- Around 6.

Brooks Ramsey- I came in from the church and I walked in the door and my daughter said Martin Luther King has been shot. I thought she was (muffled) and I looked at her and I saw that there was a real serious look on her face and she was not just pulling a joke. And of course I immediately was horrified and at that moment even though he was not dead I could not help but feel that he was going to die. It felt so final inside of me. I was deeply grieved.

Judy Schultz- And then you did find out that he was dead.

Brooks Ramsey- Of course I stayed at the television until it was announced he was dead.

Judy Schultz- Did you talk with any of the other ministers during that evening?

Brooks Ramsey- No, just the family. Just the family.

Joan Beifuss- Let me go back a little further..

Brooks Ramsey- Excuse me let me take that back. I believe Rabbi Wax called my house, during the evening and told that we were to have a meeting the next day.

Joan Beifuss- That was on Thursday that Dr. King was shot there had been a meeting the previous day Wednesday afternoon of a group of ministers..

Brooks Ramsey- I was not in it.

Joan Beifuss- Ok I think that was when they were discussing...

Brooks Ramsey- Now wait a minute was this the meeting that the staff put all these things in perspective, was this the meeting of the AX steering committee, are you familiar with AX?

Joan Beifuss- Yeah, it could have been I am not sure.

Brooks Ramsey- Was it at St. Mary's cathedral?

Joan Beifuss- Yes.

Brooks Ramsey- A small meeting?

Joan Beifuss- Yes.

Brooks Ramsey- Yes I was in on that.

Joan Beifuss- And what were they doing?

Brooks Ramsey- Of course we were discussing long range plans. We have, we were hoping to get some thing started of an ecumenical type of action and this had been in the making for quite a while. And this was, we were being assisted by an organization called AX of which reverend Bill Jones is connected with. We had been meeting to try to get some thing going in the way of dialogue or institute. And that

what we were doing then was crystallized in the month of June when we had it at the Memphis theological seminary in that institute. About 40 or 45 of us went together for two days. And this is some thing that is continuing, and we hope something permanent comes out of it.

Judy Schultz- And I thought Father Greenspun since we interviewed him and he said something about at that meeting on Wednesday afternoon, some of the people who were working on the resolution, were to meet the next morning at a Baptist Church on Mississippi?

Brooks Ramsey- I was not in on that.

Joan Beifuss- Then so you went in the procession to see the mayor or he march...

Brooks Ramsey- Well whatever you want to call it, we didn't call it a march. We called it a stroll to the mayor's office.

Joan Beifuss- Tell about that.

Brooks Ramsey- Well we felt like that this resolution that we had passed appealing for the settlement of the strike, which the strike itself had been the cause of the difficulty. That the two issues of labor union recognition and dues check off had become more than political they had become moral in their overtones. And feeling that labor unions are a legitimate part of society, feeling that some compromise could be worked out on dues check off system we asked the mayor to consider this, excuse me.... (Tape Break)

Brooks Ramsey- Where were we.

Joan Beifuss- Procession to the mayor I believe.

Brooks Ramsey- Well of course we decide that it wouldn't be a march in the sense of a demonstration, but we would just walk to the mayor's office we would observe all the traffic lights, we would not ask for any escort. We had not gone a 100 yards or so until the police converged on us to protect us and so forth. It was quite a feeling. They were just two Baptists at that march.

Judy Schultz- You and..

Brooks Ramsey- Bob Troutman.

Judy Schultz- Bob Troutman

Joan Beifuss- From...

Brooks Ramsey- (Muffled)

Judy Schultz- Then when you got into the mayor's office what happened?

Brooks Ramsey- Well someone read the resolution to the mayor, we gather into the office and it was quite crowded. I was near the back, and the resolution was read and then rabbi Wax made his statement and then there was some flurries of speech you know. And you would have that information so no need in my repeating (muffled).

Judy Schultz- And then Dick Moon said he was going to stay.

Brooks Ramsey- (muffled).

Judy Schultz- Now what kind of reaction did the other ministers or at least did you have when he said this, because obviously that hadn't been planned.

Brooks Ramsey- Yeah I felt it was unfortunate I felt that we should go and do what we planned to do. Take the resolution and read it to the mayor and this was as far as I personally wanted to go and I thought that the interaction that took place was not helpful.

Judy Schultz- Do you think, how did the mayor receive you, I mean how did he talk tot eh group, did he listen?

Brooks Ramsey- I was at the back and I couldn't see his face all the time but I would say that he listened but he is a man who doesn't show much emotion one way or another so I couldn't tell what his reaction was. He had very little responses, he was courteous and he thanked the men for the resolution and so forth. Said he was going to continue to try and work for a solution to the problem.

Judy Schultz- Then you all left ad went directly back to St. Mary's?

Brooks Ramsey- No we scattered from the city hall, each man went his own way.

Joan Beifuss- Was there any feeling on your part or perhaps on those you have talked to, that had the ministers gone before Dr. King was killed that it would have had any effect on the mayor?

Brooks Ramsey- I hadn't discussed t his with anyone and I think this is a matter of speculation that would be hard to know. I didn't know the mayor's mind or sentiment well enough to really predict how he would react. So it would just be a wild guess on my part. I really don't know.

Judy Schultz- What if the ministers had come out stronger earlier in the strike? What if they had been stronger statements.

Joan Beifuss- This is all suppositional.

Judy Schultz- Yeah it is all...

Brooks Ramsey- It is suppositional. If you just want my feeling, I don't think it would have done any different. I think that the ministers would have been looked upon as getting out of their bailey wig, meddling in some thing that is not their

responsibility. Of course this is the accusation that has been hurled at us since but the minister ought to stick to his preaching and leave the politics to other people, and that a minister ought to never get involved in politics. Anything that has to do with social action.

Joan Beifuss- Then that Sunday the Sunday after Dr. King was killed, did you preach a sermon concerned with the events of Memphis at all.

Brooks Ramsey- I did not preach a sermon I made an announcement, a lengthy announcement in which I appealed to my people to go to the Memphis cares program and one of the critics, one of my critics used this against me. He timed me and said I took 12 to 15 minutes to eulogize Dr. King, Martin Luther King and so he had his watch looking at it and I saw him looking at his watch but later on in one of the meetings in which this was brought up by my deacons at length said that I had wasted 12 to 15 minutes of worship time eulogizing Dr. Martin Luther King. But in this presentation I simply stated three reasons why I was going to the Memphis cares memorial service. And I asked the people if they could join me for any one of these three reasons to do so because I thought it would be a gesture of reconciliation on our part.

Judy Schultz- And then you also participated in the memorial march on Monday?

Brooks Ramsey- No.

Judy Schultz- you did not.

Brooks Ramsey- I watched it on television. I did not feel that I just didn't feel led to go, I just didn't feel that I should have gone and I don't know why I would have gone if I felt I should have gone.

Joan Beifuss- (muffled).

Brooks Ramsey- Yeah that is right. And what I have done has not been for show and I felt if I had gone down there it would have been....

Joan Beifuss- Well now since then, just (muffled) the articles about you in the paper and about the problems here.

Brooks Ramsey- Yes.

Joan Beifuss- Now there is one thing I want to ask you about that, I am sorry it is on the tape. Someone said a charge (muffled) men's in your church what is that? What does this mean?

Brooks Ramsey- This stems from an old line type of service where the preacher would preach in a very emotionally toned voice, and then people get this emotionally wrought up and they would say amen. Much like, only to a lesser degree that which goes on in the negro churches today and it is a part of the old southern

tradition back in the days of extreme emotionalism and I am not this type of preacher so I don't expect people to jump up and say amen.

Joan Beifuss- I would think most of your people in the church out here in east Memphis would also not be.

Brooks Ramsey- Most of them are not, I don't think this would represent the feel of the majority.

Joan Beifuss- I just wondered I had never come across that term before.

Brooks Ramsey- No there are few who are like that, quit stomping religion with fast gospel type music and so far as I am concerned this type of service doesn't help me worship god.

Joan Beifuss- Well are you ok now as far as your church goes here?

Brooks Ramsey- I really don't know. The deacons told me 18 to 17 to defeat a motion to recommend my ousting. And I felt that this was too close for me to continue without getting some sign from the congregation. So I announced the next Sunday after that vote was taken that I would present at the business meeting a method by which the church could vote on me. Whether I would stay or I would go. And the following Wednesday after much thought and prayer I felt that I should not demand the vote but give the people the right to vote if they wanted to vote. So I read a statement that I set forth that I was not asking for a vote but if the congregation felt it was necessary that I was willing to be voted but I would want to lay down some ground rules. That the vote be taken on a Sunday, that it be taken after the congregation had been properly notified and it would be by secret ballot without discussion. Some of my supporters at the Wednesday night meeting felt that a vote should be taken in my favor and so one of the men said I make a motion that this coming Sunday we vote to give our pastor new confidence. And this was opposed by my critics, they opposed to having it on Sunday and they quoted the constitution that we couldn't have Sunday meetings which is not in our constitution they thought it was but it is not really there and we don't have any record in our official constitution of this being adopted by the church. So this went on and then there came personal attacks on me during the Wednesday night session. Well finally someone said if people object to the Sunday vote than I make a motion, a substitute motion that we give our pastor a vote of confidence tonight. And so this was discussed awhile pro and con. And when the vote was taken there were 42 people that I counted that stood up in opposition, the rest voted for me and those who voted for me had been estimated from 5 to 6 hundred people who were here. After this vote was taken the man who made the motion also made a second motion that it be made unanimous which would have been given the minority to the group would have said we have been defeated and (muffled) we will vote to make it unanimous. When that vote was taken there was still 39 people that stood up, which shows that their opposition was pretty serious. It has continued since then, constant agitation and I understand that this coming Friday night they will try again to have some, I

don't know what they are going to try to do, have some kind of vote to oust me. They whole purpose now is to get rid of me as the pastor because of my liberal views.

Judy Schultz- But there aren't any liberal people in Memphis.

Joan Beifuss- What does that do to you then as a minister. You do what you think is right and run into opposition like this within the church,.

Brooks Ramsey- Well of course your first inclination is to run. Because I am not by nature a fighter, I don't like fights and I don't like the mess you are going through. But I feel that when you are standing for a principle that you know that what you are doing is more important than you yourself. This is the only reason I am staying for the good of the church and for the good of the cause and I believe that if the church does not become related to the problems of society today that we are going to wither and die on the vines and our influence will dissipate and I feel that the church has got to wake up. Our southern Baptist convention met in June in Houston and passed a very strong statement of concern on race and I was much encouraged by it but of course the problem is getting it down to the grassroots, that this is the way the leadership feels. I think the vote on it was something like 5600 to 2100.

Judy Schultz- But then they also elected a man as presiding officer who is not known for his liberal views.

Brooks Ramsey- No he is a real conservative theologically but he has taken a strong stand since then for an open church, a desegregated church and he said he preached a sermon in his own congregation the following Sunday after the convention in which he said this church is open to all people and though we have only 3 negro members at this time we are going to make an attempt to reach more and this church will be a lighthouse to all peoples. Which is a tremendous step forward, now theologically he is very conservative. But on this issue he has moved a giant step forward.

Joan Beifuss- Did you find what happened here this spring and Dr. King's death has it made a difference to some people that you know?

Brooks Ramsey- Oh yes. I think some of my people have had to think seriously for the first time about their attitudes. I think one man after the vote of the deacons meeting came to me and said I came with a determination to vote against you and as soon as I sat in the deacons meeting some thing wouldn't let me vote against you. And he said I went home and all night after that I wrestled with myself and he said for the first time in my life I saw how deep my prejudices were and he said I am a better man today and I have got a different viewpoint. Now this was one of those priceless moments but other men I have seen other men because they have had to face crisis have moved in the right direction and I think 6 months ago I wouldn't have had nearly the support I have got today. I am not sure if it is enough support to keep me in the church I really don't know though I am encouraged by the vote that was taken. The opposition was saying that this did not represent any true poll of the

people because they had not been properly notified that a vote had been taken that night.

Judy Schultz- So this Friday may be another attempt?

Brooks Ramsey- It may be another attempt and I really don't know what will come of that, I am not a prophet and I cannot predict. But I do know that my support is stronger today than it was 6 months ago (muffled). Many of the people and overwhelmingly for the young group. The young people were (muffled) when this business meeting was being held. They wanted to return and I urged them not to return to go on and complete the(muffled). They wanted to be here to support me but they took a vote, I think they were in Washington when they voted. And there was only one young person out of 91 who voted against me. The rest of them you see, and this is the whole thing. Unless these young people as they get old and settle into the status quo assume the same attitudes their parents have had, but at this moment these high schoolers and college kids I think are a lot more progressive than their parents. Was one of the criticisms turned against me was that I have contaminated the youth, I have corrupted the young people.

Joan Beifuss- (muffled)

Brooks Ramsey- I said that really makes me feel good because that is why they put Socrates there.

Judy Schultz- Well I think we have had a most profitable interview. Is there any other thing that you might think of that you just might add for posterity or on your observation concerning Memphis?

Joan Beifuss- Let me ask you something.

Brooks Ramsey- Yes.

Joan Beifuss- I think I am getting way off base with this. Do you see Martin Luther's death as a redemptive death in the Christian churches in this country, can you push it that far at all or...

Judy Schultz- That analogy has been used.

Brooks Ramsey- Well I would hope it would be a lot more redemptive than it has been I have been disappointed that there has not been more depth of feeling concerning it. That from what I can see many of the people just passed over it and forgotten. I do not sense it has moved the people deeply or on a permanent basis.

Joan Beifuss- What about the clergy, is there a difference on how it has affected the clergy.

Brooks Ramsey- Yes I think it does have an effected the clergy much more profoundly than it has affected the general mass of people. Because we identify with him and we know the same thing could happen to us and there is hardly a man in

any church who has taken any kind of stand who hasn't been threatened one way or another either by the loss of his job or by the loss of his life.

Judy Schultz- Like the fellow who got beat up over in Arkansas.

Brooks Ramsey- Yes, I don't know what issues were involved.

Judy Schultz- Well he had a small Baptist church over there and the board of deacons had been inactive for like 9 years or something so he finally decided that the church was unified enough to kick them out and he made an announcement and after church he walked out on the steps and 9 of the deacons jumped him and beat him up and kicked his teeth out and blacked his eyes.

Joan Beifuss- Surely that is not typical.

Judy Schultz- No, but that is an example of where you think a minister would certainly, church members on church property you don't expect physical violence.

Brooks Ramsey- Well of course this is very regrettable thing, but yes I have received threatening phone calls and some threatening letters in Albany, (muffled) and Memphis since this has taken place. My daughter has received a couple of them to pass a message on to me and it has upset her greatly because I have not worried about it because I think most threats are just threats. But now and then there is a psychotic individual who will do something like this. I mean I think we can identify with a man who stood up for what he believed is right and because of that having to die for it. So I think it has moved the ministers more deeply and I think it has made some ministers more courageous to take their stand.

Judy Schultz- Do you think, what is the ministers name over at McLean Baptist?

Brooks Ramsey- Wally Barker? That was he who just walked out in front of you.

Judy Schultz- Oh really is that right? Well I don't know who he is I just read in the paper about him being...

Brooks Ramsey- He had been here talking about another matter.

Judy Schultz- That he apparently is moving of course he is in sort of an ecumenical group over there that midtown area of the churches that are working together too.

Brooks Ramsey- Right, Wally Barker is very progressive, Wally Barker, Bob Troutman and a few others and (muffled).

Joan Beifuss- Didn't reverend Troutman go through some thing like this at Prescott in March?

Brooks Ramsey- Sure, right because his church is the only Baptist church that actually has a negro member.

Joan Beifuss- The only Baptist church in Memphis or...

Brooks Ramsey- In Memphis.

Joan Beifuss- Would that make it also true in Tennessee probably?

Brooks Ramsey- No there are negro members in Tennessee.

Joan Beifuss- I remember that happened at Prescott.

Brooks Ramsey- There are a number of churches in Tennessee that had negro members, first Baptist Nashville, first Baptist Knoxville I think and places like that. But east Tennessee is more liberal then than west Tennessee by far.

Joan Beifuss- Do you see any change in Memphis overall in 3 months since April? Do you think the city is changing at all, could the same prices (muffled) happen again.

Brooks Ramsey- Oh yes it could happen again yes.

Joan Beifuss- And the same and everyone is still learning that the same laws (muffled).

Brooks Ramsey- At this moment I don't see any difference now than existed back in February and march.

Joan Beifuss- Except they are having work shops now.

Brooks Ramsey- There have been more things done but we still don't have any handles to hold on. See back in February and March everybody that was concerned and wanted to do something and they didn't know what to do everybody was meeting in separate meetings and this is one of the purposes of our trying to get some type of permanent organization going where with we can channel some of this activity and because I don't think, see Memphis has never had what other cities have had a council of churches. Or any type of unified church movement and I think this has made us, made it more difficult to cope in our problems.

Joan Beifuss- What about Edmund Orgill and that committee.

Brooks Ramsey- Yes, I was on that committee.

Joan Beifuss- Oh were you when?

Brooks Ramsey- Well we had been working on that for a year and half almost.

Joan Beifuss- no I don't mean the..

Brooks Ramsey- The interfaith meeting that was at Southwestern?

Joan Beifuss- No Orgill's committee that functioned here when schools were desegregating.

Brooks Ramsey- I was not here then.

Joan Beifuss- But there was some kind of a...

Brooks Ramsey- Yes...

Joan Beifuss- human rights organization of some sort but it seems to have not functioned for several years.

Brooks Ramsey- I don't know the details of that because I was not in the city when that was taking place.

Judy Schultz- Well...

Brooks Ramsey- I don't have anything.

Judy Schultz- You don't have anything to say, ok well thank you anyway. (Tape End)