Narrator: The Rev. Dr. Harold T. Lewis

Interviewer: Dr. Joseph Downing Thompson, Jr., Assistant to the Archivist for the African American Episcopal Historical Collection

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Abstract:
The Rev. Dr. Harold T. Lewis, formerly Rector of Calvary Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Pittsburgh, discusses the lawsuit that the church brought against Bishop Robert Duncan over the possible withdrawal of the diocese from the Episcopal Church. In the second portion of the interview, Father Lewis recounts his ministry at St. Monica’s Episcopal Church in Washington, DC.

Transcriptionist:
Audio Transcription Center
129 Tremont St.
THOMPSON: Today is January 9, 2013. This is Joseph Thompson, Assistant to the Archivist for the African American Episcopal Historical Collection, the AAEHC. Here with me is the Reverend Dr. Harold T. Lewis, who has graciously agreed to sit for a third oral history interview for the AAEHC. The other interviews were conducted by the Reverend Melana Nelson-Amaker. Today’s interview is taking place in the Bishop Payne Library of the Virginia Theological Seminary, the home of the AAEHC. Thank you very much for being here. In previous interviews, you discussed your research and writing, as well as your work in the Office of Black Ministries with the national Church. Today, we intend to focus on your work in parish and diocesan ministry, including your tenure at Calvary Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Pittsburgh and at St. Monica’s Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Washington. Why don’t we begin with your most recent post first?

LEWIS: OK.

THOMPSON: You arrived at Calvary Episcopal Church and to the Diocese of Pittsburgh in 1996.

LEWIS: Yes.

THOMPSON: What stands out when you recall those early months and years at Calvary and in the Diocese of Pittsburgh?

LEWIS: Well, it was a good experience from the beginning, and it was a good chemistry which was developing already between me and the parish. And they had asked for somebody who could articulate their particular vision for ministry because the diocese was shifting more and more to the right, and Calvary found itself odd man out. And, so, I said, “Here I am, send me” -- and that I could articulate their -- what they call moderate theology -- reasonable theology. And, I said, “OK.” Neither of us -- neither the parish nor I could foresee what that would mean, ultimately. But, the Post Gazette had a headline the day I arrived, saying, “White Church Calls
Black Rector.” And, you know, they made a big deal of the racial thing because that was -- as they say in journalism -- “man bites dog.” So -- but -- as I told them at the church meeting when they asked me if I thought I could adjust to being in a mostly white parish, I told them that I had in fact been adjusting to white people all my life and asked them if they could adjust to me.

(laughter)

LEWIS: And I found the bigger adjustment was not race -- certainly not from my point of view -- but style. Calvary was the first parish I’ve ever served where I was called by my Christian name. It was a level of informality that I wasn’t used to, and I grew up in a strict West Indian household where titles were important, and that’s true of black people in general. And so when I saw older people, I would call them Mrs. Smith and Mr. Jones, but at Calvary, they took this not so much as respect but as standoffishness. So we kind of worked that out and so on. But things got off to a good start. I think one of the first things I did, as I told them I would, is that we have to -- that the centrality of the Eucharist would have to be observed and because what I had found there was Morning Prayer every other Sunday, and I told them that just wasn’t going to happen.

(laughter)

LEWIS: And what I learned later is that the other finalists -- there were 150 people who were considered for the job -- there were four finalists at the end of the day -- and the other guys -- to this day I don’t know who they are -- but I understand that although they were not like me, Anglo-Catholics, they all said the same thing about the centrality of the Eucharist, which made the statement this was not a Catholic issue anymore. It was just where the Church was moving. In fact, the Prayer Book is very clear about that fact. So we underwent some metamorphoses and a few bumps in the road here and there, but by and large, one of the things I can look back on now is to say that it is a solidly Eucharistic parish. Morning Prayer is a lovely memory, you know. [Part 1, Track 2] So it was a good experience.

THOMPSON: **How would you say, at this point, does Calvary fit liturgically with other churches in the diocese? Is it the norm?**

LEWIS: Well, it’s considered the high church parish, you know, but that’s all relative of course. Incense is rare, but we use it every now and then. But the Eucharist is sung. We have a great space, you know. It is a beautiful, magnificent cathedral-like, Ralph Adams Cram building, and what I have tried to do in connection with my director of music -- whose name is also
Lewis -- we basically tried to create liturgy which fills that space, and we bring some grandeur and beauty to the worship experience. And so that has become now normative to Calvary, and people look forward to it. And in some ways, I guess, didn’t know what they were missing -- and now they have it, and they won’t do without it. So, I think from a liturgical point of view they’ve certainly moved along.

THOMPSON: Now, you mentioned you were brought in, in part, because Calvary felt like they were a kind of outlier, and they wanted you to help them along in that. Would you say a little bit more about the diocese and what it was like when you came?

LEWIS: Well, the interesting thing about 1996 is that it was also the year that Robert Duncan was consecrated so when I got there he was a coadjutor. And so -- he had come -- he was on the staff when he was elected. He was nominated from the floor, interestingly enough. One of the members of Calvary was the chair of the search committee, and the search committee did not report him out. They-- for reasons which were officially guarded-- said that he did not meet the criteria of the committee. Unfortunately, the by-laws then provided for the possibility of nomination from the floor, which, in fact, happened, and he was elected, and he clearly had an agenda. And, the agenda was -- I think early on -- to take the diocese outside of the Church as we look back over the actions. I was one of the first to smell the rat, and people thought I was crazy. Now, they see that I was not -- I may be crazy, but that was not an example of that, you know. And so I think the diocese was extremely divided. It was divided by design. It was a divide and conquer approach -- and -- but it wasn’t -- you know, I used to say there are three kinds of Episcopalians -- low and lazy - - broad and hazy -- high and crazy --

(laughter)

LEWIS: And whereas -- but we all respected each other in our respective positions. But, in the Diocese of Pittsburgh, we -- the so-called progressive parishes of which Calvary was the flagship -- were considered heretics. We were told we were heretics. We were apostates. Those are pretty strong words. And outside of the fold, you know. When I made the comment that I was not elected to go to General Convention as a deputy, I was told at a public meeting by a priest in the bishop’s presence that I couldn’t expect to be elected because I do not believe what a Christian ought to believe. That’s how divided things were.

THOMPSON: Did you feel that from the beginning?

LEWIS: From the -- virtually from the very beginning -- yes -- early on -- and so -- and then things came to a head, of course, in 2003, when Gene Robinson
was elected, and the diocesan canons were changed, and the resolutions were brought forward which crystallized a lot of the thoughts and then that’s when we moved towards, you know, our particular action.

**THOMPSON:** Would you say more about bringing the lawsuit -- and the preparation for bringing the lawsuit? Was it something you and others had been planning for a while? Did it happen rather suddenly in response to [Part 1, Track 3] those resolutions? If you’d just give more background on that.

**LEWIS:** I don’t think it was sudden. I think it may have appeared to be sudden to all and sundry, but it was something that we discussed along the way because we felt -- there were two reasons I think we brought suit. Number one, it was a matter of law, a matter of the rule of law. The question was we believed that Bishop Duncan did not have the right to change the canons of the Church just because he didn’t like the way the Church had made decisions. And the other reason was that since the ramifications of the actions resulted in real property being affected, then it became not only an ecclesiastical matter but a civil matter. And that is how we went into the Court of Common Pleas. So those are the two motivating reasons that brought -- that made that action necessary. It was a painful thing to do. You have to realize that I grew up in the Diocese of Long Island where bishops were just a little lower than the angels, you know, and I would never have dreamed of suing a bishop. And, so, I have a great deal of respect for the office and tried to maintain that respect for Bishop Duncan for the longest time. Then a few things happened that just made that impossible. Just to fast forward, the turning point -- the absolute turning point -- when I lost all respect for him and could no longer respect his office is when -- at the convention following the filing of the lawsuit -- at the diocesan convention -- he, at the very end of the day, brought up -- invoked a canon -- a rare canon in the diocesan constitution and threatened to remove Calvary and another parish that had been part of the lawsuit because we had done this terrible thing. And he maintained that the reason for the existence of this canon was to punish parishes for egregious acts. Well, I’ve been Episcopalian all my life, and one thing the church is not is capricious. If a canon exists for the purpose of discipline, then the offense and the treatment and the disposition are all mapped out. It’s not left to chance. It’s not, you know, inferred and so there was nothing specific about that. Therefore then that wasn’t what the canon was about. But he just lied. And so that was the end of that. But we took that action -- I was at the General Convention in 2003 when the House of Bishops voted to approve Gene Robinson’s consecration. Bishop Duncan got up and, with several other bishops, maybe 20 -- some of whom had jurisdictions and some who didn’t -- and said they would leave. First of all, leave the house that day in protest, but also that they would take actions to secede from the Church or words to that effect. I believe that
one of the fruits of our labors was not only saving the diocese and saving the assets of the diocese for the Diocese of Pittsburgh, but it served as a deterrent to other dioceses who I think would have followed Bishop Duncan because only three other dioceses, in fact, followed him, whereas at least a dozen threatened to do so at convention. So, I think we saved the Church in a greater way than just the Diocese of Pittsburgh.

THOMPSON: That leads to another question about the other dioceses that were facing this kind of schism and also the national Church. As you were filing the lawsuit and making these preparations, to what extent were you in touch with the national Church and with other dioceses who were going through the same thing?

LEWIS: Well, we certainly were in touch with the national Church. Bishop Griswold was the Presiding Bishop then and – for whom I have a great deal of respect. At the same time, he is -- for want of a better term -- risk averse. [Part 1, Track 4] I think that he is a quintessential Anglican prelate who basically feels that if you just get together and have a glass of sherry at the end of the day, things will work out. I don’t think he wanted to understand -- or was incapable of understanding -- the evil that was abroad and so was loath to take any action. So we had to work around him. This attitude changed markedly when Katharine Jefferts Schori became Presiding Bishop. She was supportive of our position and, of course, the national Church filed suit in its own right in support, and she took a very strong stand with the other dioceses. In terms of our relation to the other dioceses, I think one of the little known facts about the lawsuit is that it hinged on a very -- well, it hinged on several things but -- we got a stipulation approved by both parties -- Calvary, et al. and Bishop Duncan, et al., the other side -- and basically, he agreed to very clear wording that if he were to secede, separate, realign, whatever you want to call it, that the assets of the Church would remain in the Episcopal Church of the United States of America. He couldn’t but sign that because if he had refused to sign it, he would have blown his cover. So what he did -- he went along with it -- and this is on record. So everything else was basically upholding what he had already agreed to, but he seemed to have amnesia -- and then well that’s not exactly what he meant -- and then he tried to do various things. He even went so far -- to show you the duplicity of it all -- of going to Harrisburg and to the State Department and actually forming an organization called the Episcopal Diocese of Pittsburgh of which he was the sole signatory thinking that when the court read anything about the Episcopal Diocese of Pittsburgh, that would be him, and he could claim the most toys and go home. I’ve become legal expert by default, you know, and I’ve pored over more legal documents than I ever thought I’d have to. And a lot of them you really need a translator, you know. But, the judge’s decision in this case was crystal clear. Any three year old could understand it. He said, “No matter by
what name you call yourself,” -- he said to Bishop Duncan – “you are not the Episcopal Diocese of Pittsburgh.” And, somebody said, “Well, how could he use that?” Well, because the official name of the Episcopal Diocese of Pittsburgh, formed 1855 -- 1865, rather -- Calvary is 1855 and ten years older than the diocese -- it was a very flowery Victorian name -- “the gentlewomen and gentlemen -- blah, blah, blah and yada, yada -- Protestant Episcopal Church of southwestern Pennsylvania…” So that’s why the name was available so therefore, we were the only diocese that had taken that action and, therefore, had that leg up. And so therefore we didn’t have a common ground with the other dioceses who were caught unawares.

THOMPSON: What other options, if any, did you consider before filing the suit? Was that more or less the main option?

LEWIS: No, that was the last resort, I think. I think we were motivated by the words of Isaiah, “Come let us reason together though our sins be like scarlet.” Know what I mean? But there was no negotiation to be had. Bishop Duncan was absolutely dead set on his course of action, and he did not factor in the rector and vestry of Calvary as an agent that would thwart his plans, but we did.

THOMPSON: You have a background in canon law? You have an honorary degree in canon law? Is that right?

(leather)

LEWIS: I got an honorary degree in canon law from Seabury-Western, and that’s 2001. And then, as I told somebody, having gotten the honorary degree, I then earned it.

THOMPSON: So how did you get the honorary degree before earning it? Do you know that story? [Part 1, Track 5]

(leather)

LEWIS: There is a story. I was on the board at Seabury-Western, or was about to be on the board, and -- I remember that time -- and Dean Lemler wanted to honor me and, you know, and also perhaps court some Calvary dollars and so on. You know, it’s all about that. And so, they gave me an honorary degree so they decided to give me a DD, and I said, “I already have one of those.”

(leather)

LEWIS: So he said, “What about a Doctor of Canon Law?” So I said, “Fine.”
THOMPSON: We are glad you had the opportunity to earn that degree. Calvary’s Senior Warden was also named as a plaintiff in the suit so would you describe the level of support you found with the vestry and with the parishioners, and is this something that you had to convince the congregation to do or to support?

LEWIS: Well, not really. Yes, obviously we had to convince them, but we didn’t have to plead and cajole and beg. First of all, as you know, we had a parish newsletter called, “Agape,” and I wrote something called the “Rector’s Ruminations” every fortnight. And so, through that and other teachings and so on -- keeping people abreast -- they were very much aware of what was going on so that by the time it got to the lawsuit, it wasn’t like something out of the blue. They could see it coming in a natural progression. One person that has to be mentioned is Walter DeForest, who was our lead counsel, a former vestryman, a cracker jack attorney. I mean, he is legion in Pittsburgh. I mean, people just walk the other way when they see him coming because they know they just won’t win the case, you know? And I’ve seen him in action in a courtroom, and it’s just wonderful to behold how clear he is, and he brings his charts and everything. And so, he would explain to the congregation what’s going on and so on. And the vestry was all abreast of this so by the time we got to the suit, the vestry was on board. And this is important because I’ve always said -- I used to teach at “815” -- that the real power base in the Episcopal Church is not the bishop’s office at all. It is the rector and vestry of the parish, of strong parishes. And so, I always believed that en principe, but I think I proved it in effect because you see, one thing I learned -- two things I learned about the law. It is slow, and it is expensive, OK? And the little man is always done in because he has neither time nor money, and he could be worn out by those who have both. We had both. And you see, we put our fortune on the line -- not the whole thing -- but we would have been hundreds of thousands of dollars poorer if we had lost the case, OK? And I might not have stayed as rector -- you know -- I mean, I don’t know. But it would have made it very difficult. It is because we had money that we could go toe-to-toe with the bishop, and we had the wherewithal to -- not the wherewithal, but also the knowhow and savvy and so on to carry it through. So is that what you asked?

THOMPSON: Yes.

LEWIS: Yeah. So the congregation was supportive because they trusted us and because it’s a very cerebral congregation by the way.

(laughter)
THOMPSON: OK.

LEWIS: So, therefore, nothing goes over their heads. You know what I mean? And they are good Anglicans in that they believe in reason, you know what I mean? And so, when it is mapped out and so on -- you know? The other thing is that as they get around the church -- people travel a lot -- they realized that we were getting famous outside of the diocese, and their friends [Part 1, Track 6] in St. Louis or Walla Walla or even London, you know, would say, “I’m glad to hear what you’re doing.” So that helped. So, as a result, we had the people behind us and we had -- one of the things we did -- or the court allowed -- is that all of the money -- there were then 75 parishes, give or take, in the diocese -- and our assessment was close to a third of the diocesan budget, OK? So we put that in escrow. The court allowed us to hold it back until such time as the court was -- the court case was settled -- you know -- and Bishop Duncan accused us of sabotaging the diocesan mission and so on and so forth. But -- so I remember, however, that -- after Bishop Duncan’s last appeal, and it was clear there was no place else to go because for a variety of reasons, he couldn’t go to the U.S. Supreme Court -- but, it went to the Pennsylvania Supreme Court, and when they finally ruled in our favor, a parishioner said to me at the door, “You have been vindicated,” which said to me some people were holding out, and well they should. Mr. DeForest taught me a lot of things, but one of them is that, I’d say, “Well, this is a slam dunk because things -- we have all our ducks in a row.” He said, “No such thing in the law -- a slam dunk.” “Not until the gavel falls is the matter closed.” So this could not have been done on the whim of the rector. It was done because the people supported it and believed that it could be done.

THOMPSON: Whose idea was it to bring the suit? Did it sort of emerge out of conversations you were having or was it pretty much your idea to bring the suit?

LEWIS: It was hatched by me and Walter and, you know, because it’s kind of a chicken egg thing -- but -- because he knew how to do it. But, it occurred to me that it may have been the only resort, and then he said, “Well, if you want to do that, this is what needs to be done,” and so on and so forth. It was fascinating.

THOMPSON: You mentioned the threat that Bishop Duncan made to exclude Calvary. What were other repercussions after you had filed the suit that you remember?

LEWIS: There were a lot of ad hominem things. He, in a diocesan gathering in which I was present, he actually accused me of being a plant for “815” based on the fact that I had been there, but of course, I hadn’t been there
since 1994.

(laughter)

LEWIS: But he gave -- the people had such a fear -- a phobia -- about “815” and a belief that Katherine’s the wicked witch of the North -- that they believed stuff like that, you know. So he would suggest that I was -- you know -- doing -- I was in the diocese to thwart his stuff. Another thing he did -- and this is where my international connections helped -- I was having conversation with the Bishop of Burundi -- of all people -- whom I have known because I used to work in Bukavu, Zaire next door. And he said that he was in Tanzania -- Dar es Salaam -- for the primates meeting to which Duncan was somehow invited, and Duncan was making a big point of the fact that he was supported by everybody in his diocese except one black priest. So, I called him -- Bishop Duncan -- at home -- I said, “You will not play the race card.” That’s exactly what it is -- I mean -- because he is now pitting me against my brothers in Africa, you know what I mean? And making me the bad guy. So that’s the type of thing that he did.

THOMPSON: So in October 2008, the delegates at the convention of the diocese voted to leave the Episcopal Church at which point you led your delegation out of the meeting, stating that you could “no longer participate in this convention.” What was that moment like for you?

LEWIS: Well, we did it under advice of counsel because we had to make it clear that we would have nothing to do with the new [Part 1, Track 7] dispensation and that to have stayed there after he had declared us to be part of the -- what do you call it?-- the Province of the Southern Cone -- would have been to tacitly approve what happened. But it was a very sad moment, and I remember sitting in front of the delegation from St. -- what’s the name of the place? -- Church of the Ascension -- which is one of the other large parishes. Interestingly enough, it was founded by Calvary. Calvary, you know, planted about a dozen missions in its early years of which Ascension was one, and they became what we call now a wayward daughter, and there was a former parishioner of ours who was now a delegate for them -- that misguided soul -- and so I saw people I knew, you know, from the other side, and it was very, very sad. But the New York Times was there, and other people were there, and we were interviewed at the door, but that was when the rubber hit the road, and it was now a done deal. And although I had the support of people in the parish, you’d be surprised how -- maybe you wouldn’t be surprised -- but there were people in the diocese who gave me a hard time even after that.

THOMPSON: This is people in the diocese who remained in the -- ?
LEWIS: Who remained. Even those remained. Yes. Obviously those (inaudible)

LEWIS: For instance, I saw red when I got a certificate in the mail saying that, “as such of today, blah, blah, blah -- I have been admitted as a priest in the Province of the Southern Cone,” and I thought, “I am nothing of the kind.” I sent a copy of that to Bishop Jefferts Schori, and I said, “This is what is going on here. You should come here as soon as possible.” That was like the 15th of October or thereabouts. Anyhow, she came All Saints’ Day. I mean, she was there in a fortnight. But my issue was that the then president of the standing committee had doubts about whether she should come. “Well, you know, some people don’t like her.” I said, “Well, people don’t like her because they have been poisoned. Their minds have been poisoned against her.” You know? I said, “Well, give her a chance to speak for herself.” Know what I mean? So, she came -- a big service at Calvary -- baptized, confirmed, blah, blah, blah -- and then, in the afternoon, she had an open forum for everybody in the diocese, and she’s very good on her feet and, you know, impromptu stuff, and she answered people’s questions. And it was a turning point because people believed in her, but if I had listened to the powers that be, you know, I would have postponed it. You know, people are very reticent, and I -- back in the middle ages -- I’m trying to think what year it was -- 1963 -- I was arrested in a civil rights demonstration in Brooklyn. It was the first time that a civil rights demonstration had really come to the North. That was the year I went off to McGill and so, until that time, I had been involved in rallies and all that, you know -- very much involved -- my wife and I -- she wasn’t my wife at the time. And I believed that the skills I learned as a civil rights activist were going to be put to use in this new thing. It was a different cause, but they were very similar causes. They were all matters of justice -- and so -- and when you are motivated by justice, you do the right thing and not the propitious thing or the safe thing -- you know what I mean? And that’s been -- and I always -- I just lead and just do it and a lot of people, that wasn’t their MO. So that’s how bad it was.

THOMPSON: So the split occurred, and then there was a transitional period in which various bishops were brought in, I believe Bishop Johnson, Bishop Jones. What role did you play in that restructuring, and how was your experience different in the diocese after the split?

LEWIS: Well, it was -- that’s an interesting question. There are now two kinds of Episcopalians in the diocese: those of us who weren’t going anywhere in the first place, and those of us who were thinking of going someplace else but thought again and decided to remain. And I remember the major day when twelve rectors of the conservative ilk who were -- who had drunk Duncan’s Kool-Aid big time actually went to him in a body and said, “We can’t go with you.” Let me say this -- those guys made it very clear that
they are more hurt than we are -- you see? We didn’t trust the man. There’s no love lost between us and so we saw him from very early on as an enemy. But they loved him. He can be very charismatic. And he promised them the moon but also promised that when all was said and done, he wouldn’t leave the Episcopal Church. So when it became clear that he was going to leave the Episcopal Church, they felt betrayed, and what made it worse is that it became clear that that was always his intention. It wasn’t as if he then -- he decided along the way, but he had used them. So they were devastated. And he -- it was like a chess game -- I mean -- he moved heaven and earth to -- to seize, I would say -- to get some of these congregations in his column, and sometimes he didn’t succeed in getting them, but the parish is decimated in the process. I mean, there are a lot of little parishes which have just suffered -- you know -- in the wake of this because we lost not one soul at Calvary Church over this, not one soul. We gained people because people came to us when they were no longer welcome in the parish they came from. But, if ten people left Calvary, we would feel their departure, and the treasurer would notice -- no question about it. But, in congregations with, you know, 16 pledging units, if ten leave, well there it goes, you see? And so -- and he had created these little parishes basically just to create votes for himself, and in the fullness of time, it was collateral damage as far as he was concerned. They were just dispensable.

THOMPSON: You mentioned just now the fact that there was never really any love lost between Calvary and yourself and Bishop Duncan. What are some of the things that caused you very early on to distrust his intentions?

LEWIS: I will tell you. There was one signature moment -- you know what I mean? And I remember it happened on my birthday one year -- and he -- he used to take me to breakfast. He seduced me -- tried to seduce me early on -- you know what I mean -- you know. I didn’t look at it as a seduction. I just felt that I was a cardinal rector, and in fact, he said as much. He said, “You have the big parish -- you know we should be friends.” Fine with me. So he took me to breakfast from time to time and once, at one of these breakfasts, I said, “Bob” -- I said, “You know every time you come to Calvary, you bomb.” And I said, “I want you to look good.” One of my first official acts with the vestry -- long before -- had to be the first six months probably -- was to send a letter to him and Bishop Hathaway protesting their pastoral letter, which we felt it wasn’t, on the matter of human sexuality. It was absolutely uncharitable. You know what I mean? And we called him on that and sent copies to all the clergy in the diocese. So that was the -- what do you call it -- the opening salvo. So, therefore, there was always a sense of -- on this issue and others -- a sense of distrust. Calvary, after all, had an AIDS ministry when most people were saying that AIDS was the scourge of gay
people. So on that issue alone, there was some division. But moving right along. So I said, “Bob, we know we don’t agree on things. People don’t want to necessarily agree, but they’ll want you to respect their opinions -- you know what I mean -- and just be open to dialogue -- at least be there to say, “Let me hear what you have to say” as opposed to cutting off debate.” He said, “Fine.” So he said that on his next visitation, he would have an open forum at the adult forum hour, and he would just be there to answer questions and so on and so forth -- so, at this point, you know, I am trying to really make him look good and have good relationships so I said fine. So, I told the vestry, the parish council, “Make sure you come to this event 10 o’clock Sunday morning. The bishop is going to do x, y, and z. He promised.” Well, he arrives, and he is laden down, and he has a projector in one hand and something else in the other. He had just come back from a mission trip to Rwanda and Uganda and began to show the slides, and it was clear that he had done this to fill the hour up so that he wouldn’t have to honor his promise to talk about things. So, I said fine.

We had the service. Morning and evening, the first day. So then, I made an appointment to have lunch with him -- breakfast -- that was our thing -- and it happened to be Maundy Thursday. I said, “Bob, this is Maundy Thursday, the day of the Last Supper, and I want you to know this is the day of our last breakfast.” I said, “If I get together with you on a Thursday and make plans for Sunday and you change your plans and don’t give me the benefit of letting me know that you are going to change them, then we have a trust issue,” you know -- so that was it. So it was that type of thing, of which that was symbolic. He could not be trusted. And --

THOMPSON: Was that, in fact, your last --?

LEWIS: It was in fact the last breakfast.

THOMPSON: Describe if you would, your thoughts when the -- what I believe is the most recent verdict was passed down in 2011 -- decided in the favor of your suit -- that the Anglican Diocese of Pittsburgh would not be able to take property. What were your thoughts and feelings at that point?

LEWIS: Well, we felt vindicated -- justified -- you know -- and the people were relieved and happy that we were right all along. And also, pleased that -- well -- you know -- Calvary founded Calvary Camp in the 30s for our choir boys, and then, over the years, it became co-ed and bigger and interdenominational -- whatever -- and it is now a major institution, and it is on the banks of Lake Erie in Ohio. Many years ago when the diocese and Calvary were good friends, we sold it to the diocese for a dollar for legal reasons and so on and so forth. And so that was one of the things in the offering. We just saw that becoming some international Nazi gathering place -- you know what I mean -- for his people -- and not to mention some $25 million dollars of endowment and various other accounts and so
and so forth. So it was a real issue in terms of holding onto assets which he had no right to. And, he would -- we would have clergy conferences which I’d go to -- and I’d even be the organist for the services, you know? And yet, after worship, we talked and he said that if and when he secedes, he would become a bishop of the Province of the Southern Cone and retain his role as Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Pittsburgh. I said, “No, you won’t.” I said -- I told him, “I will see you in court. You just can’t have it both ways.” [Part 1, Track 10] But there’s people who up to the last minute thought he could. You know what I mean? So that was a day of -- not dancing in the streets in jubilation -- you know -- but quiet delight that it had come. It wasn’t gloating -- you know -- but -- it was a good day.

THOMPSON: Describe the Diocese of Pittsburgh today, if you would. And what are its prospects for the future, in your opinion?

LEWIS: I think they are good. One of my last official acts was to serve on the search committee for a new bishop. Everybody was delighted that I was on the committee because it meant that I would not myself be a candidate.

(laughter)

LEWIS: And they just lived in great fear -- you know -- and because they felt that I might feel that I had earned it -- you know what I mean? And there’s an argument for that, but I’ve run for bishop more than once. I’m old. I have no interest whatsoever. But I did have an interest in getting the right person in. I think we did. Dorsey McDonnell is a bright man, a sensitive guy, and has made some very good moves early on when he had to. And some of the people who were not his supporters in the election process are now his greatest friends, and he’s done that in short order. So I think the man at the top -- while not perfect -- none of us is -- is the right person at this point. And he has sought out my counsel about a few things, and one of them is bringing the clergy together in a way that they hadn’t been before. And so we have -- we have found that there are a few people with whom I am now talking in a way which I didn’t before. And, you know, some of them -- to their credit -- I mean -- I took these guys to lunch individually -- you know -- 15 years ago -- 12, 13 years ago -- whatever -- and I would say, “This is what’s going to happen. This is what’s going down the pike.” And they said, “Oh, no -- nothing in our experience” -- you know -- “justifies that” -- fine --. Well, they’ve all but lined up now to say, “Harold, you were absolutely right. We now see what Bob was up to, and you were the prophet.” Of all the things that I removed from my office, you know, plaques and honorary degrees and everything -- the thing I cherish most was a crystal ball which was given to me at the diocesan convention before last, and it was called the “Soothsayer Award,” and it was given for obvious reasons because I had seen down the
pike and everything, and I was very touched by it, and it was done in jest, but it was a serious thing behind it and -- one thing – in terms of where the diocese is today -- if anything is present that was never there before, it’s humor. You know what I mean? We could laugh about the “Soothsayer Award” for instance at the convention, and Bishop Price -- you know Bishop Price?

THOMPSON: No.

LEWIS: He was the most recent interim, and he is a Santa Claus type looking guy – - roly-poly and jolly and has a sense of humor and very low-key -- and so he really set the tone for bringing people together, and Dorsey is now building on that so I’m absolutely optimistic about where the diocese is going. The only thing that remains, you know -- we got the diocesan assets – but some of the congregations that squatted I call it -- the so-called Anglican parishes are actually in Episcopal Church buildings -- you know what I mean? And so by letter of the law, we should kick them out - - but -- I guess, being too Christian -- and we are working out various deals with them on a case-by-case basis.

THOMPSON: So when you look back on the events of the past ten years, what lessons have you learned or what insights have you gathered from a theological or spiritual perspective about this whole episode?

LEWIS: I would say, the Lord’s on the throne, you know, [Part 1, Track 11] and I think we were faithful to this cause of preserving the Church, and we’ve been rewarded. Not only have we been rewarded, but the Church has benefited. The diocese is smaller, but it is healthier. It is more of a -- there is more of a genuine spirituality. See, I’m a Catholic churchman, and Bob Duncan pretended to be, but he really was making the church into a sect -- and so I think we are seeing the benefit of -- of ministry to all in the name of Christ. And I think -- sometimes people have called Calvary a liberal congregation. There are some old members who would cringe at having liberal and their name in the same sentence. They’re old card-carrying Republicans. They’re old money. They’re old this and that. But, in Pittsburgh, liberal means that you believe that gay people can go to heaven. It’s almost as simple as that. And so this is another -- I mean -- we have been a gay-friendly parish, but it’s been -- as one lady said -- she’s about 85 -- she says, “It’s a non-issue here.” You know what I mean? You know it’s not-- nobody is carrying placards or “Act Up” stuff and all that -- you know what I mean -- if the junior warden is gay and somebody else is -- the director of the altar guild is gay -- and -- but they may not be -- I mean, it is not an issue. And we again were proven prophetic because the bishop said to the clergy gathering that -- because there are at least two or three partnered clergy who have been you know, like behind some rock some place --
-- he said, “There are no second class clergy in this diocese.” I mean, for
the bishop to say that is amazing. At my final service, he made a
comment that he wanted to thank me for everything that I had done to
provide him a diocese.

To preserve the diocese that he can rule over -- you know what I mean?
And that was -- again -- to have a public statement in front of 800 people
from the bishop whose predecessor would not give me the time of day, it
was an amazing thing. “Unless you see signs and wonders, you will not
believe,” and so there a lot of signs that things are going to be a lot better.

Why don’t we transition a bit?

OK.

And talk about your time at St. Monica’s here in Washington -- in the
Washington area, in the Diocese of Washington. You served there
from 1973 to 1984? Is that correct?

’83-84 -- something like that, yeah.

And first as Vicar and then as Rector?

Yeah.

So, what drew you to -- when thinking about your call there -- what
drew you to St. Monica’s and what drew them to you?

Well, my first year of ordination was spent in Honduras. Everything -- all
of my jobs have been surprises. I ended up in Honduras because Claudette
and I had spent a summer in Guatemala and met Bishop Frey, who was the
Bishop of Guatemala and in charge of Honduras. And so, a year later, he
needed a priest ASAP, and he asked me to come. I came as a deacon --
was ordained priest there. And we had plans, but they didn’t work out and
so when bishop called, we went. The next year we were in England. I
studied at Cambridge University. So we came back -- all dressed up and
no place to go. That was 1973. It was the year of the General Convention
in Louisville and so I thought it was cheaper to go to one place and look
around for a job [Part 1, Track 12] where the Church was assembled, as
opposed to flying all over the place. And so, at Louisville, I met Bishop
John Walker, and he told me about St. Monica’s. Interestingly enough, I
also met Jay Walker -- later Bishop of Long Island. He was then the
rector of St. Matthew’s and St. Joseph’s in Detroit -- and he offered me a
accuracy -- and -- but he took too long -- whereas Washington moved very fast -- so by Advent Sunday, I was in. So I ended up there because I had a sense of -- I would go where the Lord sends me -- and here was a sign -- Bishop Walker -- and it was a challenge. St. Monica’s had been a mission since 1899, and the bishop had told them that it would close the doors unless it became self-supporting. And so this was the last chance -- so -- if I was chosen. In less than three years, we were self-supporting. It was not rocket science. I just figured out that the people had a mission mentality, and they fundraised you to death -- you know -- raising money for this, that, and the other. So people were literally holding back from their pledge because they knew by the time they got to the parish hall, they would have to support five or six different little fundraising activities. So we banned fundraising and put the money in the plate instead. So -- and -- I must say that the stewardship skills I learned at that place have helped me even most recently in a parish with a multi-million dollar endowment because people at St. Monica’s didn’t give because the church had already been provided for them -- you know -- as a mission -- and a lot of people at Calvary didn’t give because it had an endowment, and the dead people were paying the bills. So same idea.

(laughter)

LEWIS: So -- it was really -- I learned a lot about stewardship there and so --

THOMPSON: I’m noticing that my batteries are going down here on the recorder so I’m going to stop this recording, and we’ll take up in a moment.

LEWIS: OK, fine -- good.

[Part 2, Track 1]

THOMPSON: This is Joseph Thompson with the Reverend Dr. Harold T. Lewis. We are continuing our oral history interview, January 9, 2013. We were talking about St. Monica’s and the Diocese of Washington. So would you describe St. Monica’s in terms of liturgy, politically, the neighborhood -- if you would -- just a description of St. Monica’s when you went there?

LEWIS: St. Monica’s when it was founded in 1899 was in Southwest Washington at a time when southwest Washington was not developed as it is now. It was “the hood” really. And it was a black neighborhood. And so in the 50s, during the time of white flight, people left Southeast Washington and went to the suburbs. And so black people moved into the places abandoned by them and Southwest became a lot of office buildings, government buildings, high rises, and so on. But a funny thing happened. By the time I got there, gentrification had begun, and white people were
moving back into the neighborhood. So a lot of people from -- very few people from St. Monica’s lived in the neighborhood anymore, but they were very devoted to the congregation because of family ties. They ran the gamut economically speaking, but a lot of teachers, a lot of government workers, people who had come north to Washington for the security of government positions and that type of thing. Liturgically, it was always -- I found it as and maintained it as -- an Anglo-Catholic parish -- and -- so that was not even an issue. We -- services were beautiful and lovely and improved. And we had daily masses, and Carleton Hayden used to come over to celebrate one day and somebody else another day. The Roman Catholics two blocks away became friends. They gave us a statue of Mary for the Lady Chapel -- and a lot of the things that I ended up doing later -- what I did there. I mean -- when the primates of the Anglican Communion met in Washington, I managed to invite three of them to Calvary for a great pontifical mass. At that point -- based on Bishop Walker’s recommendation, I was appointed Commissary to the Bishop of Bukavu-Zaïre, which meant I was his representative in the United States. He later became the Archbishop of Burundi, Rwanda, and Zaire, and that’s how I got to work for him and with him. And so we put St. Monica’s on the map, as we later put Calvary on the map. You know, I invited Desmond Tutu and Martin Luther King, III and the Archbishop of Canterbury to Calvary. So it was -- we -- I was -- at that time -- during that time -- I was appointed to the Commission on Black Ministries, and we managed to get a grant or two from the commission to do some outreach ministries and so on. And so it was a pretty thriving place, and it wasn’t large, but it was viable. And we had a -- after you become self-supporting in the diocese, they require that you maintain that self-support for a number of years -- two more years -- something like that -- so they see that it’s a pattern and not just a spike -- and after that we could celebrate the parish status and my institution as Rector. So -- and -- there were a lot of people -- I remember -- going to the convention at which we were admitted as a parish in the diocese and a lot of people who remembered the old-- [Part 2, Track 2] they weren’t around 1899 -- but they were in the old St. Monica’s before it moved from Southwest. So they saw that progression and were delighted. I had very good years there. And my wife was very involved doing things in the parish, and we still have friends from there. Some of them came to my farewell service at Calvary last year. So I think Bishop Martin -- who was my Rector in Brooklyn -- you know -- said, “You can make the parish machinery hum. You can build up the bank account and build a new building, but unless you are there when people need you” -- you know -- “everything else is for naught.” And so I really took him to heart, and so my ministry was very pastoral -- and -- so that -- you know -- taking communion to people - - visiting the hospital -- you know -- visit them in jail. It was all part of it. I think some of my basic pastoral skills were honed there.
THOMPSON: You alluded a moment ago to your work at the national level while you were at St. Monica’s. How did, or were there other ways that, your work at the national level affected what you were doing at the parish or vice versa? Because it was at this time that you were becoming more involved, right? Which led eventually to you going to “815”?

LEWIS: Yeah. I didn’t intend to go to “815,” but Frank Turner drove a hard bargain, and the Commission on Black Ministries took a vote, and I got more votes than there were people on the Commission.

(laughter)

LEWIS: Because people voted for me as a second choice as well. When Bishop Allin met me for the job interview, he said, “Father Lewis, I’ve heard so much about you. You sound just too good to be true.”

(laughter)

LEWIS: “So I decided to make some discreet inquiries of my own” and I figured that -- I said, “Oh, I still got the job.” So I think -- you know -- I think I had a five year plan and ended up staying there 11. And it was -- working in the national Church can be -- and often is seen as -- a liability -- you know -- because people think the clergy there are the clergy who don’t say their prayers anymore -- they get farmed out to do bureaucratic work because they can’t cut it in the parish. And of course there are examples which justify that opinion. But the double whammy is that when you are in an ethnic ministry, it tends to typecast you. I remember when I was a candidate for Bishop of Michigan, a lady said to me, “How can you expect to come minister to us here when we are mostly white, if you are in charge of black ministries?” So I said, “Well, black ministries is a specialty. It’s something I just happen to be doing. It’s not who I am.” I said, “If I were an expert on World War II, it wouldn’t mean that I had never heard of the Peloponnesian War, you know?”

(laughter)

LEWIS: And so she says, “Oh.”

(laughter)

LEWIS: Which taught me -- that -- suddenly I brought that up first after that -- you know what I mean? But it was interesting. I kind of went back and forth. But -- no -- I think -- I can’t think of how “815” involvement affected me - - I’m sure it did in some ways, but more the other way around, I think.

THOMPSON: Sure. Who are some of the most memorable individuals from your
time at St. Monica’s?

LEWIS: Oh -- I -- one of them is Doris Summey, who came to visit me when I got my doctorate in England -- she and her husband came -- to that. [Part 2, Track 3] They came for the installation at Calvary. They came for the farewell at Calvary. But the relation we have is that I was her accompanist. She used to give concerts. She was a great diva, and I would accompany her on that -- you know. And so, in fact, we had a reprise in my living room when she came in November. And, I remember Mrs. Norwood -- Hilda Norwood -- was good for my humility. I remember -- we had something -- have you seen my book called Elijah’s Mantle?

THOMPSON: Yes -- yes.

LEWIS: And there’s a story in there, which I tell, that I banned corporate communions. Corporate communions -- I don’t know if people still do it, but it was an idea that if you belonged to the altar guild let’s say -- the women of the church or whatever -- you would meet on a given Sunday and that Sunday, you would have a corporate communion, which means that all the members of your guild would sit together in church and then go up together and communicate in a body, and it’s corporate communion. And they would go up first, ahead of everybody else. And I’m an elitist so usually things like that wouldn’t bother me -- but the fact that it did bother me -- I said, this sounds -- this looks wrong and it looks too preferential -- un-Christian -- so I just banned it. I just banned it one day. No more corporate communions, you know? I went on to the bake sale and so on and so forth. Well, the next Sunday, here comes the delegation led by Mrs. Norwood, you know? And we’re talking -- now we’re talking, you know, hat and gloves and high heels, you know? (laughter)

LEWIS: And so -- and I thought, “Oh, this is trouble.” I knew I had lost before the meeting began. And so Mrs. Norwood spoke for the group and she said, “Father Lewis, you have suggested that we are having corporate communion to make ourselves more important, but that is not the case. We do it -- this is the Daughters of the King -- we do it because we -- it helps us prepare spiritually for our meeting on the third Sunday.” And she says, “and the Daughters of the King have been having corporate communion and its meeting every third Sunday of the month since 1930-something, since before you were born.”

(laughter)

LEWIS: “And so we request that you rescind your decision,” which I did on the
spot, and I said, “Obviously it means much more to you to have it than for me for you not to have it.” She didn’t let me off the hook, she says, “Thank you, Father,” she says, “It takes a big man to admit when he’s wrong.”

(laughter)

LEWIS: And so I learned that you don’t have to be high-handed. In fact, it’s usually best not to be. And so there were some good people there, and I learned a lot.

THOMPSON: You have stated that the Right Reverend Richard Beamon Martin greatly influenced your preaching style. Would you say more about how he influenced your preaching style?

LEWIS: Well, first of all he had a presence in the pulpit. You know? You were impressed before he opened his mouth. He just looked like he had something important to say, you know? Number two, he was a master of the homiletic art. He often didn’t have -- when he preached at my installation at Calvary --- he did not have so much as an index card, but he preached for 45 minutes to people who were accustomed to 12 minute sermons on a good day, and yet they were sitting on the edge of their seats wanting more because he is a spell-binder, and he tells a story, and he knows his Bible like he wrote it or something, you know. So by the time he tells a Biblical story -- applies it to your life -- and so on -- and he says it with such authority. I remember I preached in the chapel at General, and a year or two later, I was the preacher at the church of the Cathedral of the Advent in Birmingham, Alabama -- and there was a clergy couple -- husband and wife [Part 2, Track 4] who were ordained and they were in General at the time -- and now they were -- or one of them at least -- was at Birmingham at the Cathedral. Anyhow, they both came for this Lenten preaching service I went for, and they brought up a sermon I preached at General Seminary, which I had long forgotten, but what they brought up was that I spoke with such authority. You know? I said, “Well, that’s what preaching is about” -- you know?

(laughter)

LEWIS: If people don’t believe that you are convinced about what you are saying, how can you expect them to be? And -- but -- people -- and so that’s kind of --. The other thing about Bishop Martin’s sermons is that they are always Biblical. You know? You’d be surprised how many people preach, and you don’t hear Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John. To me, as somebody said, “There’s a reason why the sermon follows the lessons.” You know what I mean?
And so -- I remember -- there’s a parishioner at Calvary -- two sons -- now -- in their 20s now -- little boys then -- and they would discuss the sermon on the way home in the car. And one day, a guest preacher came and the little -- one of the kids who was maybe eight, said, “Daddy” -- says -- “Father so-and-so didn’t mention any of the lessons that had been read in his sermon. And he mentioned some other Bible verses who had nothing to do with the lessons.” So -- I mean -- they had been already groomed. See, what I do when I preach, I announce the text at the very beginning because it helps. It’s like the title of a book. It helps people focus on what you’re going to say. It helps the preacher focus on what he’s going to say, too. I had a class which I called, “Lewis’s Ten Commandments of Good Preaching.” One of them was “Thou Shalt Not Preach the Entire Faith in Every Sermon.”

You have next week -- you know? So, if you have a little snippet -- stick to that -- and sit down -- then people can take that. Then next week, do something else. So -- I mean -- I could go to my grave -- and will -- without having mastered the art as Bishop Martin did. I mean -- I preached his funeral last year, and I said in my sermon that I asked him how he was feeling -- when I went to see him for the last time -- he was in ICU -- and I said, “Good morning. How are you doing?” He says, ‘Harold,” he says, “I am blind. I am 99 years old, and I’m marching on the King’s highway.” There was a sermon. Right off the bat, you know. He was still preaching.

And we had -- we had sent him sermons -- and then I said to my secretary, “There is no reason. He is blind.” Well, at that very day, he says, “You’re not sending your sermons anymore.”

The chaplain at the hospital would read them to him -- you know what I mean? And he -- and it was -- we had a mutual admiration society, but -- once I was a litanist at a consecration for the Bishop of the Virgin Islands and Bishop Martin was the preacher and so when he preached there -- I was sitting on the other side of the chancel -- and I said, “My goodness -- you sound just like me.”

Of course, what I meant was -- I had learned from him. So -- and I have a
great affection for him -- you know.

THOMPSON: One last question. You are well known for your work with the Office of Black Ministries and for your published writings, but of course, you have been a parish priest for quite a few years. What would you like for people to remember about you, or to know about you, as a parish priest?

LEWIS: Another chunk of time I spent in the parish was at St. Luke’s, New Haven -- while I was at “815” -- because I lived in New Haven -- and -- you’ve been to St. Luke’s?

THOMPSON: Um-huh. [Part 2, Track 5]

LEWIS: And Father Rogers was very, very gracious in allowing me to celebrate and preach even on great holy days and so on, and do funerals and the whole nine yards -- and that was a -- what’s the word I’m looking for? Provided some balance for me while I was at “815” -- you know what I mean? Because I could -- you know -- hang my biretta there and function as a priest and not just hop on a plane someplace. And that was 11 years -- you know -- part-time clearly -- but just as important, I think, as the other two places. And all those places I would want to think -- hope -- I would hope to think that people would say of me what Bishop Martin had said that -- you know -- that I was there when they needed me. And when Calvary prepared a digital scrapbook for me -- but, I have yet to put the disc in to look at it that way -- but, I’ve been reading -- because I’m old-fashioned -- reading the actual hard copies of everything people wrote -- that kind of thing. And they said -- but the amazing number of people that would say, for instance -- one lady said -- “We remember you for what you did for the diocese and great preaching and blah blah blah” -- but it said, “I especially remember when you came to visit me in the hospital after my operation.” You see, I think Calvary has always had at least three clergy on the staff, and I don’t know -- the impression I get sometimes is that underlings went to see the people in the hospital and the rector did something else. So many times I would go to see people and they would be surprised, you know, and so it was -- people were honored that the rector came, you know? One parishioner had had I think knee or hip surgery, and she was walking around the -- you know -- get you exercising -- and so it was at that point I came in and saw her when she came back to her room and so -- I mean there’s a lot of people mentioned that -- something like that -- or a funeral -- being there at that time -- so -- those are things that really have mattered in the fullness of time -- you know.

THOMPSON: Well, you have given us a very rich interview. Is there anything else you’d like to add that we haven’t talked about?
LEWIS: I don’t think so -- except that -- I guess this other thing I would like to be remembered for -- is nurturing others’ vocations. You know? Alan McFarlane who was the curate at -- one of the curates at St. Phillip’s -- said to me -- I had no intention to become a priest -- it was the last thing on my mind -- and I said, “I’m not cut out for that type of thing.” He said, “God doesn’t choose the worthy. He makes worthy those whom he chooses.” And I said, “Oh, okay.” And one thing led to another. But I’ve preached about 30 ordination sermons, you know? And have -- I’m even now involved in the mentor -- second three year program here -- with one of the graduates. And I find that -- and the -- Calvary’s tradition has been to train up curates and send them off, you know. So I’ve done about three or four of those in my time -- so -- and they all -- you know -- come back -- or write back -- or call to say -- you know -- “What you said was true or I learned this and that from you.” So that’s been heartening and that’s why I named that book Elijah’s [Part 2, Track 6] Mantle, you know. There’s a hymn. They changed the words, of course, you know, “God of the prophets, bless the prophets’ sons” -- it’s now “heirs,” of course. “Elijah’s mantle o’er Elisha cast,” you know. And so the idea is that each generation -- you know -- kind of builds on the previous generation. So there we are. 41 years into it, and the official part of it behind me but hope to have a few more good years to do some things.

THOMPSON: Well, thank you very, very much for the interview.

LEWIS: You’re welcome.

THOMPSON: And Godspeed to you in your retirement.

LEWIS: Thank you. Appreciate it.