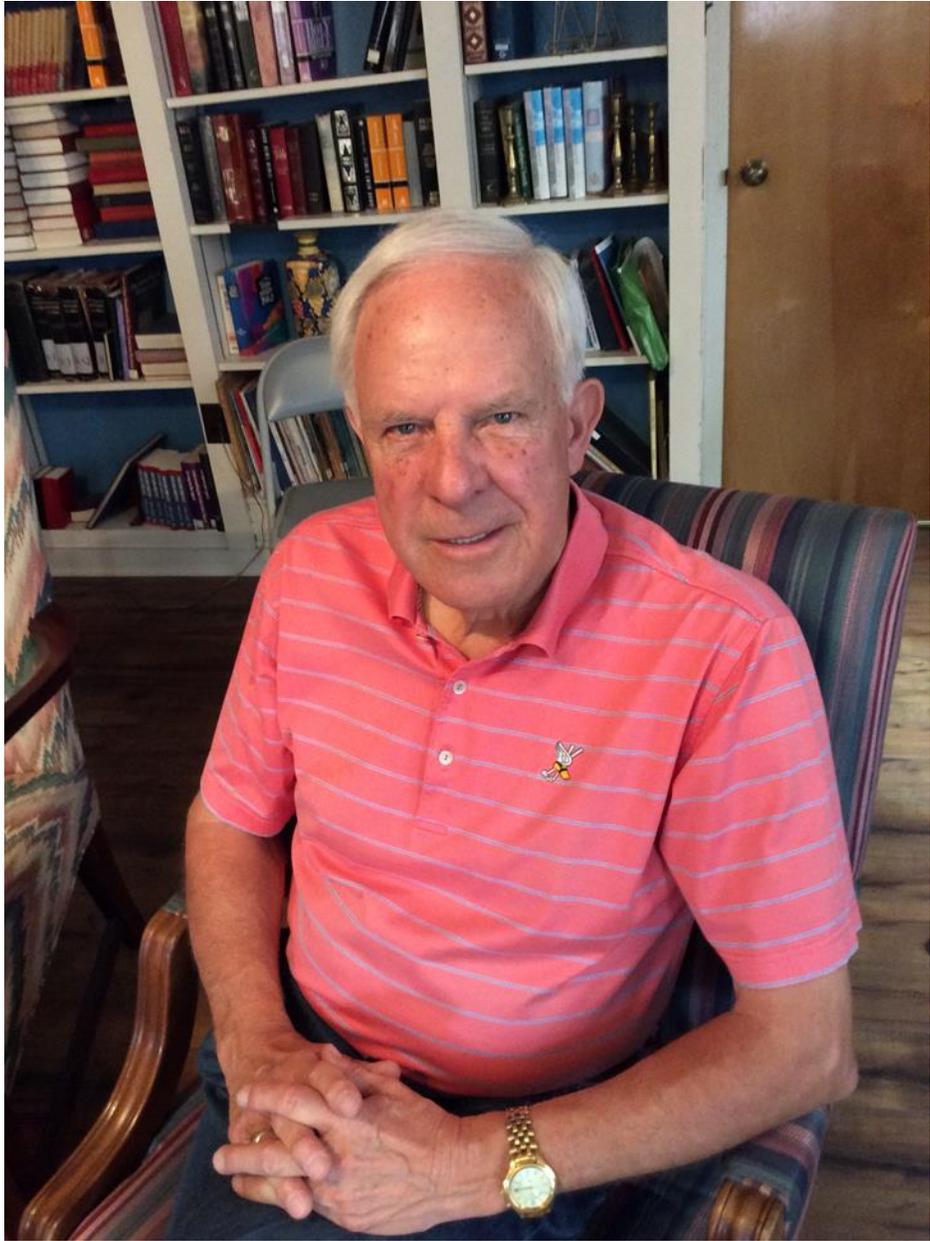


Methodist University Community Oral History Project  
Methodist University  
Fayetteville, NC

**Charles Koonce**

Interview Conducted by  
Peter Wildeboer  
April 5, 2017  
Holy Trinity Episcopal Church, Fayetteville

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Charles Koonce

Interview conducted by  
Peter Wildeboer

Descriptive Table of Contents:

- 0:17—Born February 25<sup>th</sup>, 1942 in Cumberland County, North Carolina; description of childhood in Hope Mills, North Carolina and life during and after attending Campbell College  
—general characteristics of the Episcopal Church
- 4:24—Support of the motto “Come in to worship and go out to serve;” volunteer opportunities within in the church and community involvement of Holy Trinity Episcopal Church; evangelize through these actions and services  
—supports the hypothesis that Holy Trinity Episcopal Church broke off from St. John’s Episcopal Church; not sure of the motives that caused the break
- 10:00—discussion of the Civil Rights Movement; memories of segregation in college, public venues and private businesses  
—Koonce describes a lack of support of segregation and racism in his family or church, though most likely present in the community
- 13:35—the Feminist Movement was recognized in the Episcopal Church by having females on the vestry; women participated in the services may have been an offshoot of the movement, but it seems it was progressing to that regardless  
—Holy Trinity Episcopal Church and the Episcopal Church in general can be labeled progressive; the LGBTQ Movement caused the most concern at the national level and at other churches, but not so much at Holy Trinity
- 20:11—Holy Trinity’s view is the acceptance and welcoming of all; this acceptance allows for the unification of Holy Trinity’s members  
—Koonce grew up in the Vietnam Era and saw protests covered by the media were seen nationwide, but not as severe in the Fayetteville community; discusses the effects and tolls of the war
- 23:32—Lack of organization from Holy Trinity in favor of either stance  
—Lack of political involvement witnessed in both the Peace Movement and the recent presidential elections by Holy Trinity and the Episcopal Church
- 24:57—Positions held by Charles Koonce and his wife [Connie Koonce]; effect of holding a position and being a member has had on his life  
—The growth of the community has influenced the growth and structure of Holy Trinity
- 29:48—Open-mindedness on subjects and movements allows him and other parishioners to consider and accept opposing positions  
—Holy Trinity is a family-oriented church open to all; military families are pivotal and important in the function of Holy Trinity
- 34:17—There may have been a time when Episcopalians were recognized as affluent and educated, but the acceptance of all allows for this image to be dispelled to some degree; Holy Trinity is comprised of white-collars and blue-collars with differing education levels  
—Reflection on what this interview has offered to him and closing remarks

Interview of

**CHARLES KOONCE**

Interviewed by

**PETER WILDEBOER**

0:01

**WILDEBOER:**

So this is Peter Wildeboer conducting an interview about Holy Trinity Episcopal Church. It is April 5<sup>th</sup>, 2017 and we are situated at Holy Trinity Episcopal Church. Can you please state your name and your birthdate?

0:17

**KOONCE:**

My name is Charles Koonce and my birthdate is February 25<sup>th</sup>, 1942.

0:24

**WILDEBOER:**

Alright, so let's start off with the basics. Can you tell me a little about your childhood?

0:29

**KOONCE:**

I'm a native of Cumberland County. Parents were hard working, parents also from the area. And I grew up outside of Hope Mills and attended Hope Mills School, graduated from Hope Mills High School in

1960. Throughout my childhood very actively involved with baseball, primarily. It seems that we were a baseball family, but also associated with other sports, along with scouting and things of that nature.

1:04

**WILDEBOER:**

Alright. So since this is a study about Holy Trinity, were you an Episcopalian your entire life?

1:13

**KOONCE:**

They say “cradle Episcopalian” [an Episcopalian who grew up in a household in which Episcopal Christianity was practiced; an Episcopalian who converted to Episcopal Christianity as a child; an Episcopalian who was raised by Episcopalian parents]; I went to a small Episcopal Church in Hope Mills called Christ Episcopal Church. Actually was introduced to the Episcopal Church prior to that; at an early age my grandparents, who lived near us out in the country, would drive to Massey Hill to the Good Shepard Episcopal Church. And I would—I went there until probably about age ten. And then we began attending the Christ Episcopal Church in Hope Mills and remained a member there through all of high school and even through four years of college. When I graduated from college, two or three years later my wife and I had decided we then wanted to pick a church that we wanted to call home. We had a young son at the time and we had attended Holy Trinity on several occasions. It was a lot more convenient at the time and seemed to be a more growing and family-oriented church than the small Episcopal Church in Hope Mills that we grew up in—or that I grew up in.

2:38

[...]

8:12

**WILDEBOER:**

So there's a theory—well, okay, it's a hypothesis—that we developed in our class: that Holy Trinity may have split from St. John's Episcopal Church in 1951. Have you ever heard of any conjecture about that or is that just—.

8:28

**KOONCE:**

I think that is a truism.

8:29

**WILDEBOER:**

Okay.

8:30

**KOONCE:**

I think that is, that is, that is most likely well-documented. And there are some parishioners that were founding members of this church, who previously were members at St. John's. It's hard for us to, in this day and age, look at our facility and realize that at one time this was out in the country. This was not downtown Fayetteville as St. John's is; that was the epicenter of all the religions—all the churches I should say. But as Fayetteville began to grow following the war, particularly in the 50s, this became a very attractive site. And a small church was built on the shoulders of those folks who were members at St. John's. I don't know whether St. John's was becoming overcrowded; I don't know the rationale behind wanting to start a new church, but I have heard it often that—. And I think, you know, looking

back, the church group probably had to get permission from the church body, the Bishop of East—the Dioceses of East Carolina. But I would say with a lot of confidence that Holy Trinity had its birth from members who were members at St. John's.

10:00

**WILDEBOER:**

So, the next—so, the big movement after the establishment of Holy Trinity would have been the Civil Rights Movement in the 60s and late 50s. Do you remember anything about the Civil Rights Movement?

10:15

**KOONCE:**

I do. I was a student at Campbell College at the time. The first two years it was Campbell Junior College and they became a four-year campus while I was there and was in the second graduating class. So my timeline of college years, 1960—Fall of '60 through the Spring of '64. And we were totally segregated. There were no African Americans enrolled at Campbell during my stay there, nor were there African Americans on faculty. And I recall coming home one weekend and there was a popular movie just released and if I recall it was—you may not have heard of it—it was called *The Longest Day*. It was a World War II epic with a lot name actors involved. And I wanted to take my dad to that movie and I stopped in town—I had a ride with someone, I did not have a car. But I stopped in Fayetteville and approached the ticket window at a theater downtown and asked to buy two tickets, but not for that performance, a performance the next day afternoon. And the lady informed me that she could not sell them to me. And I was certainly inquisitive and wanted to ask—"I don't understand." I don't know that she knew me, but she quickly explained, "How do I know you won't give them to somebody?" And that was probably the first personal situation because I became aware that there was an entrance to the left

side of the ticket window and the main entrance that I was used to going through. And that entrance to the left of the ticket window led you to the balcony. And the African American population were required to sit in the balcony. And she was afraid I was going to give the tickets to somebody that would allow them to come through and sit wherever they wanted to. But yes, I'm old enough to recall—we didn't have convenience stores during those times, we had gasoline stations on the corners. And they had separate bathroom facilities, so marked for white folks and for African American people. So I truly remember that, yeah.

13:08

**WILDEBOER:**

So would you say that, most of the population was against the desegregation?

13:18

**KOONCE:**

Well, if—when you ask “most of the population,” I suspect you are referring to local population—

13:24

**WILDEBOER:**

Yes sir.

13:25

**KOONCE:**

—because I—you know, obviously across the country that would not be the case. During those, during those times, I'm sure there were people who felt like segregation may have been the right thing. It could

well have been that's they were brought up with. I think my family lived an isolated life, out in the country. We didn't have neighbors per se, but I think the thing that influenced me a lot about the segregation growing up: it was never something we discussed at home, but my mom and dad never, ever, that I recall, made a disparaging remark about another fellow man. And, and being racial was not something that was inbred in us.

14:33

**WILDEBOER:**

Would you say that was influenced by the Episcopal Church and that was a common theme within it?

14:38

**KOONCE:**

Probably not. My dad was not a church goer; I think he grew up Baptist and would go with us occasionally. But I think it was just his character, as well as my mom. To my knowledge, his only vice was smoking. He was hardworking, he was not a drinking man, loved his family, his kids were his life, and worked side by side in the carpentry world with white folks and black folks. There was not a racial bone in anyone's body in our house.

15:26

**WILDEBOER:**

Do you think that's because the way he was raised?

15:28

**KOONCE:**

Yes.

15:29

**WILDEBOER:**

Okay. So—.

15:32

**KOONCE:**

But it, you know—I'm glad the Civil Rights Movement began during a time that I could witness it. I am not proud of the violence that occurred, especially in the Deep South. But I guess bottom line, progress has been made and and will continue to be made.

15:56

**WILDEBOER:**

Did you recognize any significant, I guess, movements within the Episcopal Church at the time, as well?

16:06

**KOONCE:**

Not that I recall.

16:08

**WILDEBOER:**

Okay.

16:08

**KOONCE:**

Not that I recall, other than, other than when an African American family would choose to come and worship with us, our church body embraced them. They were not shunned, they were not moved to the side, there was no special section, they were one of us.