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Pastor of Altadena Baptists Church since 1972

I was involved in the politics of getting more enlightened school board members after the reaction to forced busing brought in some real reactionary right-wing people. So, I was involved in the nuts and bolts of organizing. The groups that came together, in '72, '72, around this and said we've got to do something, ranged from fairly moderate groups like the church group that I was part of, to really edgy people. We always had conflicts about how radical we wanted to be. The student representatives that I remember came from a group at Blair High School who were symbolically long haired and wanted to get more confrontive about everything.

Q: So George I wanted to ask you, before you came here you wouldn't have called yourself an activist...

A: Oh man, Totally not!

Q: So what happened, how did you become an activist?

A: Dr. King.

That picture of a little girl next to a "colored" sign on a water fountain.

But I grew up in a lily white town in New Jersey. And I went to college, and I got a couple of Black friends, and I went to seminary, and I got a couple of Black friends, and that was it. And my parents, I never knew them to vote. Everybody in our world was nominally Republican.

Even when I was in Massachusetts and I was involved in a group called the Free Fellowship for Racial and Economic Equality, that was a powerful learning experience, for the first time I was involved with interracial discussions, all through the 60s...I think I remained a Republican all through those years.

I was contacted by this church, where I had worshipped in seminary when I was at Fuller. By the time they contacted me, in 1969, 1970, maybe even '71, there was a phrase in their prospectus which they sent to me. It said, "Between the 60 and 70 census, Altadena has changed from 4.5% Black to 27% Black." They were presenting that as a problem I should know about, and they said traditional churches in the community were handling this in different ways. And they mentioned that some churches had moved East, bought other property, sold to Blacks and whatever. They had decided that they wanted to be a neighborhood church. That's all they said to me. So, when I came out here to visit and when I talked to the interviewing committee when we came out here, I told them, I said, "That really is something I want to do, I want to be part of a church that intentionally integrates."

Q: Because you felt called to service by Dr. King.

A: Right. Exactly. Although this church was lily white...

Q: You saw the way to be a force for...

A: That's what I wanted to be.

So when we came, that was part of the understanding. We let it be known that we were anxious to have black families be part of us. Nobody's out there saying, "Oooh, please let me in." I wanted to really make it happen. Every now and then you'd have a black visitor and I really gave them the personal rush. I'd go to their home and everything, and nobody stuck. I remember in prayer telling God, "Why is this happening?" and giving up.

And the next Sunday, two families came, and they're still with us! The Devonnes and the Blackwoods, and they saw each other, and they both were really looking for a church home, and they became part. We've been affirmative both about race but also about gender. We've become an integrated church. I apologize for not being black myself but it's the best I can do.