

**1121-084-GSM-gau (USMARC); GSG (OCLC/SOLINET)
City of Savannah Municipal Archives, Savannah, Georgia**

Record Series #: 1121-084
Name: Faith in Action collection
Dates: 2024
Extent/Size: 30 interviews
Language: English

Creators:

Eric Darling is the Team Leader, and fills the roles of cinematographer, editor and web designer. Darling has worked as a photojournalist, television producer, and is the owner and creative director of eThree Media in Savannah. He has received numerous honors including the Eagle Award from the Mountain Film Festival for production of a Georgia environmental and endangered species video wall.

Mickey Youmans is a project Cinematographer and Producer. Youmans is a photographer and cameraman who helped develop the Savannah College of Art & Design's Film/Video Department, and has worked for A&E, the History Channel, Time-Life, among many other clients. He received an Emmy for his work on the historical documentary "The Editor and the Dragon: Horace Carter Fights the Klan."

Tom Kohler serves as a Producer, as well as filling the role of Interviewer and Community Liaison. Kohler, a Savannah native, retired from Chatham Savannah Citizen Advocacy after 40 years of service. Previous projects include creating/organizing "When Brothers Dwell In Unity" and the "Indigenous Wisdom Listening Project," and co-authoring *Waddie Welcome and the Beloved Community* and *Disciples Among Us*. Kohler has been recognized for his work by the Toronto Summer Inclusion Institute, and he was the first non-African American to be honored by being invited to be grand marshal of the Martin Luther King, Jr. Day Parade in Savannah, Georgia.

Project History:

The Faith in Action collection is a product of the City of Savannah's first Savannah Community Memory Project (SCMP) Residency, "Faith in Action - Perspectives on Savannah's Inter-Faith Community." This project was selected through a competitive procurement process and was completed in 2024-2025. The project focuses on inter-faith action across the city of Savannah. Over time, the Savannah community has seen impactful efforts that have brought together Savannahians of different religions, races, classes, and ethnicities. These actions take shape in formal and informal ways, both individually and collectively, across houses of worship, groups of citizens, businesses, and not-for-profit organizations. "Faith in Action" recorded the oral testimonies of Savannah's inter-faith community with a wide diaspora of community leaders, historians, and citizens from different walks of faith and experience. The project aims to illustrate for posterity how efforts toward forging these connections serve to bolster the Savannah community at-large and how doing so plays a major role in defining and redefining the character of our city. The project included an educational website for youth (<https://www.interfaithsavannah.org/>); a teacher curriculum training event; and an archival collection preserved in the Municipal Archives.

The SCMP is a wide-ranging initiative of the City of Savannah's Municipal Archives to preserve and share a more complete history of Savannah's diverse communities in their own voices. Under the SCMP umbrella, the Municipal Archives: collects oral histories from significant individuals the Savannah community; partners with neighborhoods to conduct community archiving events (visit the [Voices of Savannah portal](#) to watch oral histories collected); partners with community organizations to preserve Savannah's LGBTQ+ history through the [Proud Savannah History Project](#); and hosts the SCMP residency to facilitate the creative collection and interpretation of community memory.

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Scope and Content:

The Faith in Action collection includes thirty oral history interviews with community leaders, historians, and citizens from different walks of faith and experience in Chatham County. Members from the Jewish, Catholic, Protestant, Buddhist, Baha'i, and Muslim faiths, as well as representatives from Habitat for Humanity, Old Savannah City Mission, and the Savannah Police Department were interviewed. The collection is entirely digital in format. For each interviewee, the collection contains an oral history recording, a transcription of the interview, and headshots of the interviewee.

System of Arrangement and Ordering:

The Faith in Action collection is arranged alphabetically by interviewee's name. See the attached inventory.

Conditions Governing Access:

No restrictions.

Conditions Governing Reproduction and Use:

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Digital Access:

The oral history interviews and corresponding transcripts are available digitally online through the Voices of Savannah portal at: <https://www.savannahga.gov/3319/Voices-of-Savannah>. If you have issues accessing the material, please contact the Archivist via email at Archives@savannahga.gov or call the Municipal Archives at (912) 651-6412.

Access Points:

Activism
Asbury Memorial Methodist Church (Savannah, Ga.)
Backpack Buddies
Baha'i Faith
Bethesda Academy
Catholicism

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Christ Church (Savannah, Ga.)
Civil Rights
Family Promise
Georgia – Savannah
Homelessness
Hunger
Interfaith Relations
Islam
John Wesley
Judaism
LGBTQ
Mickve Israel Synagogue
Old Savannah Mission
P.A.C.K. (People of Action Caring for Kids)
Presbyterian Churches
Prison Ministry
Religion
Salzburgers
Savannah Seaman's House
Unitarian Churches
Unitarian Universalist Churches

Preferred Citation:

Record Series 1121-084, Faith in Action collection. City of Savannah Municipal Archives, Savannah, Georgia.

Processed by:

K. Zacovic. November 2024.

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Inventory (arranged alphabetically):

Collection available online at: <https://www.savannahga.gov/3319/Voices-of-Savannah>.

Interviewee, Date of Interview (Item #) [hyperlink for interview and transcript]

*For each interviewee, the collection contains an oral history recording, a transcript of the recording, and headshots of the interviewee.

Ali, Sakinah Ziyada, September 11, 2024 (Item 1121-084-0001) [[Interview](#); [Transcript](#)]

Sakinah Ziyadah Ali discusses her journey to embracing Islam, her community work at the mosque, and the various interfaith collaborations her congregation has fostered in Savannah. She highlights the mosque's outreach programs, such as prison ministry and food security initiatives, and reflects on how the community has generally embraced the Islamic faith, fostering mutual understanding and respect among diverse religious groups

Beatty, Margaret, April 5, 2024 (Item 1121-084-0002) [[Interview](#); [Transcript](#)]

Sister Margaret "Margie" Beatty, a Sister of Mercy, has devoted her life to community service in Savannah, focusing on practical assistance for vulnerable populations. Her work includes running St. Mary's Community Center, organizing health services such as blood pressure screenings in local barber shops, coordinating tax preparation assistance for low-income residents, and collaborating with community organizations to provide vocational training and healthcare access.

Bostick, Katrina, February 15, 2024 (Item 1121-084-0003) [[Interview](#); [Transcript](#)]

Katrina Bostick, a Savannah native with deep community roots, discusses her journey of service through Family Promise, an organization supporting homeless families with children. Influenced by her family's entrepreneurial spirit and her own spiritual beliefs, she emphasizes the importance of interfaith collaboration and community outreach in her work to address issues like homelessness and food insecurity.

Buttimer, James, February 15, 2024 (Item 1121-084-0004) [[Interview](#); [Transcript](#)]

James Buttimer describes his background in a large Irish Catholic family in Savannah, reflecting on his Catholic education and cultural heritage shaped by strong religious women in his family. He recounts his efforts to honor Savannah's religious order history in his master's thesis, detailing how women led the establishment of religious institutions during a challenging era for the Irish community.

Bynum, Dana Felty, September 11, 2024 (Item 1121-084-0005) [[Interview](#); [Transcript](#)]

Dana Felty Bynum discusses the unique interfaith atmosphere in Savannah, noting its historical diversity and openness to different religious traditions, with communities like the Jewish and Irish Catholic populations contributing to a culture of religious acceptance. She reflects on her journalistic experience, highlighting her work with the African American faith community, including figures like Reverend Matthew Southall Brown, and the role of faith leaders in bridging divides and educating the wider public.

Campbell, Walter, June 21, 2024 (Item 1121-084-0006) [[Interview](#); [Transcript](#)]

Walt Campbell, Ph.D., shares insights into Savannah's history, focusing on the influence of Unitarianism and the progressive efforts led by notable local figures. He discusses how interfaith cooperation and social reform initiatives shaped the city, highlighting the community's complex relationships with race, economics, and faith

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Chaney, Michael, February 15, 2024 (Item 1121-084-0007) [[Interview](#); [Transcript](#)]

Michael Chaney reflects on his work within the Savannah community, focusing on social justice and community support through faith-based initiatives. He emphasizes the importance of community building, addressing systemic issues, and fostering an inclusive environment that champions the dignity and well-being of all individuals.

Cheatham, Becky, February 15, 2024 (Item 1121-084-0008) [[Interview](#); [Transcript](#)]

Becky Cheatham discusses Christ Church Episcopal's impactful community outreach efforts, from long-term projects like Project Smile in Belize and local homelessness support to more recent initiatives such as the Over the Moon diaper bank. She emphasizes the church's historical role and commitment to community service, highlighting the collaborative spirit and dedication of its members in fostering positive change in Savannah and beyond.

Farbo, Brittany, September 12, 2024 (Item 1121-084-0009) [[Interview](#); [Transcript](#)]

Brittany Farbo shares insights into her life shaped by diverse religious influences, global travels, and her work in theology and national security, where she examines the intersections of faith, culture, and societal stability. She reflects on Savannah's unique interfaith tolerance, contrasting it with her experiences abroad, and describes her dedication to community service and support for others as central to her values.

Haas, Robert, February 15, 2024 (Item 1121-084-0010) [[Interview](#); [Transcript](#)]

Rabbi Robert Haas reflects on his 11 years in Savannah, emphasizing the importance of building relationships before leading in a house of worship and the value of interfaith dialogue in fostering community respect. He believes that encouraging people to visit different houses of worship could help transform Savannah into a safer, more connected place, while also discussing how media focus on negativity distorts perceptions of the world.

Hanson, Robert, February 15, 2024 (Item 1121-084-0011) [[Interview](#); [Transcript](#)]

Robert (Bobby) Hanson, a 73-year-old man from Savannah, shares his life story, including growing up in the area, his early aspirations in music, and the challenges he faced in his career and education. Over time, he found purpose through his church and community service, particularly in hospital visitation, homelessness outreach, and supporting his daughter's organization, P.A.C.K, which distributes food and clothing to children in need.

Hardnett, Candace, September 12, 2024 (Item 1121-084-0012) [[Interview](#); [Transcript](#)]

Pastor Candace Hardnett, a Marine veteran and pastor, recounts her journey from Virginia to founding an inclusive church in Savannah, Georgia. She discusses her ministry's focus on serving the LGBTQ+ and African American communities, her activism for equality, and her efforts to create a welcoming spiritual refuge for all.

Hendricks, Christopher, September 11, 2024 (Item 1121-084-0013) [[Interview](#); [Transcript](#)]

Professor Christopher Hendricks, Ph.D, a historian specializing in Colonial America, discusses Savannah's diverse religious heritage and its interfaith contributions. He highlights key historical figures, events, and communities, such as John Wesley, the Moravians, Jewish settlers, and African American congregations, emphasizing their roles in shaping Savannah's unique cultural and religious landscape.

Hester, Billy, February 15, 2024 (Item 1121-084-0014) [[Interview](#); [Transcript](#)]

Reverend Billy Hester explores his spiritual journey, the founding of the Asbury Memorial Church in Savannah, and its evolution into an inclusive community emphasizing love and acceptance. He reflects on

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the church's transition from traditional roots to a congregation known for its progressive stance and vibrant approach to worship.

Johnson, Kathryn, February 15, 2024 (Item 1121-084-0015) [[Interview](#); [Transcript](#)]

Kathryn Johnson discusses various outreach ministries focused on addressing local and global needs, from supporting underserved communities in Savannah to international missions in places like Ghana and Thailand. She highlights the importance of compassion, trust-building, and personal sacrifice in fostering meaningful connections and transformative service.

Johnson, Otis, April 5, 2024 (Item 1121-084-0016) [[Interview](#); [Transcript](#)]

Dr. Otis Johnson reflects on his life journey, emphasizing the importance of learning, growth, and sharing knowledge with others. He speaks about how he never expected to be in his current position and views his achievements as part of a larger, divine plan. Otis expresses his passion for learning about new topics, like black holes and agricultural innovations, and highlights the need for constant exploration and curiosity. He also shares his belief in the value of helping others, leaving a legacy, and the challenges of providing context rather than just sound bites in political discourse.

Kahn, Paul, June 21, 2024 (Item 1121-084-0017) [[Interview](#); [Transcript](#)]

Roshi Paul Genki Kahn shares his journey from a challenging childhood to a profound spiritual and professional life. Rooted in Zen Buddhism, he describes how early experiences shaped his outlook, including a transition from atheism to spirituality influenced by LSD, yoga, and Zen teachings. Now leading the Zen Garland Order and working as a psychotherapist, he emphasizes holistic practice, community engagement, and integrating Zen principles with modern challenges and interfaith dialogue.

Kohler, Thomas, April 5, 2024 (Item 1121-084-0018) [[Interview](#); [Transcript](#)]

Tom Kohler reflects on the importance of faith and fellowship in building community through the Chatham Savannah Citizen Advocacy program, where people from diverse backgrounds come together to support one another. He emphasizes how Savannah's slower pace fosters meaningful connections, with stories of personal bonds bridging social divides and showcasing the city's true spirit of shared humanity.

Lester, Rexanna K. and Kevin Ionno, September 12, 2024 (Item 1121-084-0019) [[Interview](#); [Transcript](#)]

This interview highlights the Unitarian Universalist Church's active community engagement, including environmental initiatives led by the Green Team, such as promoting sustainable living and energy efficiency. It also underscores the church's long history of social justice work, its welcoming atmosphere, and its continued focus on inclusivity and interfaith cooperation.

Lester, James Stanley September 12, 2024 (Item 1121-084-0020) [[Interview](#); [Transcript](#)]

Stanley Lester discusses the importance of both older and younger generations in supporting the church, highlighting programs like children's ministry and community outreach efforts such as Samaritan's Purse. He also reflects on the challenges of addressing local need and the personal fulfillment that comes from helping others in the community.

Love, Ruth and John Ruehl, June 21, 2024 (Item 1121-084-0021) [[Interview](#); [Transcript](#)]

John Ruehl and Ruth Love reflect on the evolving role of White Bluff Presbyterian Church in a changing, diverse Southside Savannah, emphasizing the need for faith in action and adapting to the neighborhood's shifting demographics. They discuss the challenges of letting go of traditional practices while embracing new opportunities to serve and connect with their community, particularly in light of post-COVID transitions and community organizing efforts.

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Martin, Ben, April 5, 2024 (Item 1121-084-0022) [[Interview](#); [Transcript](#)]

Ben Martin of Wesley Monumental United Methodist Church discusses the church's deep involvement in community outreach, including its work with the Wesley Community Center, refugee resettlement, and Family Promise. He emphasizes the church's commitment to living out faith through actions, fostering unity across political differences, and supporting young families in the community.

McDaniel, Larry, June 21, 2024 (Item 1121-084-0023) [[Interview](#); [Transcript](#)]

Larry McDaniel discusses the mission of the Old Savannah City Mission, emphasizing its commitment to serving the homeless, regardless of background, and providing essential services like food, shelter, and rehabilitation. He also shares plans to build a sanctuary for homeless women and children, highlighting the mission's ongoing efforts to meet critical community needs.

O'Brien, Helen, April 5, 2024 (Item 1121-084-0024) [[Interview](#); [Transcript](#)]

Helen O'Brien reflects on the profound influence of her mother, Mary O'Brien, whose gift of presence and deep empathy shaped her activism and relationships with others. Mary's commitment to interfaith understanding and her belief in the value of truly seeing and listening to people are central themes in Helen's memories, highlighting her mother's lasting impact on her family and community.

O'Neal, Michael, September 10, 2024 (Item 1121-084-0025) [[Interview](#); [Transcript](#)]

Mike O'Neal discusses his work with the Baha'i faith and the impact of Parent University, a community-driven initiative designed to empower parents through education and service. He emphasizes the importance of unity, consultation, and selfless service in building stronger, more connected communities.

Ray, Jermain, June 21, 2024 (Item 1121-084-0026) [[Interview](#); [Transcript](#)]

Jermain Ray, an administrator at the City Mission, emphasizes his role in fostering a supportive environment for individuals facing homelessness by providing guidance, security, and food. His approach focuses on maintaining dignity and respect for residents while aiming for long-term solutions, including the goal of reducing homelessness in the community.

Reyes, Aida, September 12, 2024 (Item 1121-084-0027) [[Interview](#); [Transcript](#)]

Pastora Aida Reyes shares her journey from Orlando to Savannah, where she began working at Compassion Church before eventually starting her own churches in Georgia, South Carolina, and Massachusetts. She discusses her vision for building a church, a youth center, and a community space to serve local families, as well as her strong commitment to helping others through her mission-driven work.

Rouche, Kenneth, June 21, 2024 (Item 1121-084-0028) [[Interview](#); [Transcript](#)]

Chaplain Kenneth Rouche shares how his father's example of selfless service, such as fixing a woman's car, led him to pursue ministry despite initially resisting it, promising his wife he would never become a preacher. He highlights the significance of interdenominational collaboration in Savannah, particularly through the Savannah Alliance of Pastors, and expresses a desire to leave a legacy of service, focusing on making a positive impact on his community, especially by mentoring the younger generation.

Stone, Melena, April 5, 2024 (Item 1121-084-0029) [[Interview](#); [Transcript](#)]

Malena Stone leads a nonprofit, P.A.C.K., which provides over 1.5 million meals annually to children in need, relying heavily on donations, volunteers, and partnerships with local organizations. Despite challenges like rising food costs and supply shortages, her organization's impact has grown through strategic efforts, such as distributing 7 million pounds of food last year and forming successful collaborations with businesses like Tyson Foods.

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Towns, Richard, June 21, 2024 (Item 1121-084-0030) [[Interview](#); [Transcript](#)]

Richard Towns, who oversaw operations and finances for the Seamen's House, shares how chaplains played a crucial role in connecting with seamen, while he ensured financial stability for the facility. He also reflects on his family's strong heritage, including a trip to Scotland to visit his ancestors' homeland and his deep ties to Clemson University, where he chose to attend after receiving multiple scholarship offers.