

CHARLENE WEST, INTERVIEW, 2004

At Muse Memorial Church

I'm the daughter of a minister, of a long line of ministers in fact. I'm the third daughter. My father gave me his name because he despaired of ever having a son. He was Charles H. and I'm Charlene Helen. So, I think that it must have been prophetic because he gave me his name. I always loved the fact that I was a minister's daughter. I was always super proud of my father and he was my hero.

I became a Christian when I was very small. I can't remember when I started or learned to pray. But I do remember a definite time in my life when I knew I needed to make a decision for Christ and invite him into my heart. That happened when I was seven years old. And that has stayed active in my life all these years. It's been a long time now.

So, I grew up working in the church, sort of being "right hand" to my father with things that had to do with his office, such as typing his sermon outlines along with the music and all that. Then I chose to go to Southwestern Pentecostal Holiness Bible College. There I met my future husband. We were married in 1950.

I never aspired to be a preacher. In fact, one class that I had with the famous teacher Dr. R. O. Corvin, he was going through the class asking, "Who is called to preacher? Are you called to preach or not?" When he asked me I said, "No, I'm not called to preach." He said, "Well are you called to be a preacher's wife?" And this brought a lot of laughter and I said, "Well okay." I sort of let it slide. But it was really what I wanted to be. I wanted to be a pastor's wife, and have a family, and live in the pastoral home, and carry on the work that I had seen in my father's life. So, I did. I got married to my one time sweetheart, the only one I really ever had. That was in 1950.

In 1960 I had a tremendous experience one Sunday morning. I woke up really early in the morning and my family was still all asleep. It was like there was a dead sleep over everybody and I was wide awake.

I went over into the den and that moment I knelt to pray I had a tremendous experience with the Lord. I had a vision and the Lord really spoke to me. I saw myself—we were living in Ada—but I saw myself going down through Texas and Mexico on through central America to the upper part of South America. From there I saw myself as a small figure on a screen and from there the figure got larger and then disappeared.

I didn't understand the vision. I didn't know what it meant. And the Lord spoke to me at that time and he said, "I hold you in the hollow of my hand. I'm going to take you to many nations." And, well he never said, "You're going to preach." To me, the call to preach would have really have been an impressive thing for me.

So, that would have been March of 1960. I struggled on until September of that year when I had a definite encounter with the Lord and he really did tell me that I was to preach. And I said, "Lord I just ask one thing and that is that you will anoint me with the Holy Spirit when I speak." And from the first time that I spoke after that I felt a tremendous anointing of the Holy Spirit and everyone in our congregation said yes, she's called to preach. And everybody in the area agreed, because I had already been trained in Bible college and by my father, and it was just like I was projected immediately into the pulpit ministry to help my husband. Also, in the district the pastors there invited me and I just began holding little mini revivals.

A few months later my husband took a trip to the Holy Land and I took charge of the church and the radio program and all of that. So, that was the beginning of my ministry in the pulpit.

At that time I had done just about everything except be a preacher and a missionary. So, this about me going to other nations—I just put that on hold because I thought I’m a mom. I had four children and my youngest, at that time, he was just about four months old. So, I thought this is something for the future and God knows all of that. He will bring it about in his timing.

A few years later, about four years later, I had this urge to learn Spanish. I didn’t understand why. One day I was listening to the t.v. and on channel 13 they gave classes in Spanish. And they were using the same book I used in high school Spanish. I took two years of Spanish at Camino Real. And it just kind of got into my spirit, why don’t I go over to OU and see about enrolling over there and pursuing this? I really wasn’t thinking about this vision that I had; I just kind of put that on the back burner. I told my husband about it and he said, well if you really want to and can manage your schedule with the family and all. My youngest son had just started kindergarten.

So, I was able to go to school with the MWF schedule. I was able to leave after my son left for school and get back before he came back. So, it worked out just fine. And the ladies in the neighborhood would take care of him if necessary.

I pursued that until we moved to Bakersfield, California. I had had two years of going to OU at that time. I needed another year to finish, but since it seemed that we were called to Bakersfield that’s where I went.

It was there that my husband passed away in 1969. The weekend before he died, he had been in Oklahoma City. And he came back that Friday night and he said, you know I heard your general youth director say, if he could, he needed to find someone with some Hispanic studies to chaperone a group of Youth in Action team to Costa Rica. And he said, I volunteered for you. I said, well what about these four kids? And he said, we’ll manage. We had a lady that was real

good; she was like a grandma. So, I said okay. This was a Friday night and the next Tuesday morning my husband died of a sudden heart attack. The Bakersfield church asked me to stay on as pastor. We had just completed two years of a television program. And I did stay on. We stayed on and nothing dropped—attendance did not drop.

Later the youth director called me and said, you know I'm still depending on you to take this group to Costa Rica. And I said, oh, you know the changes that have happened in my life. I don't think that I can do that. I said I've just been right here with the church. And he said, why don't you talk to the church board. And so I did and they said, well you know, Brother West made arrangements for you to make that trip and you've been right here with the church during this tie. If you want to go, they said, we feel like you should go. We can take care of things here. There are ministers that you can schedule. It was to be a month. And so I said, well okay. So that was when I went to Costa Rica. That was in June. I was able to preach in Spanish at that time. I did some preparing before I left so I would be able to. But my Spanish—I could speak better than I was able to understand.

When I got back, the Lord began to bring this vision back to me. And I saw myself going south in the Latin American countries. I saw myself alone which is something I have never understood. I had never shared this with my husband because I didn't want to be misunderstood. But the Lord brought that all back to me and it became a real insistence. So finally I decided—after making all kinds of excuses to the Lord like—Lord you know they have never sent a widow with kids to the missions field. A lot of single women had gone, but never a woman with children. So, I said, I don't think they're going to do that.

I decided I would just call and talk to the Missions Director who was Floyd Williams at that time. I thought—I'll just put the monkey on their back and if they don't want to send me,

then okay. And you know what he said? I've known you for a long time and I believe that if you say you're called, then you are. I'll put the papers in the mail for you right away and so he did. I got them the next week and it was almost like a book, you know. I filled out all these papers on the doctrine and that sort of thing. And then I had to raised funds. I was still raising funds when I left a year later, the week of my husband's death. I left to come back to Oklahoma to visit my parents and had missionary places and purposes along the way. I went all the way to Florida. I had bought a new Volkswagon van and had driven across the country with all my children, except for Paul the oldest who was in college.

So, that was how I became a missionary. Because I was called. And I've just sort of been almost everything—a teacher, a preacher, an educational director, youth missions, and what-have-you—whatever the need at the particular time. But preaching is a very special part of my life. And there are some people—I mean, they can or they can't. But with me it's a compulsion. I feel that I'm not really happy unless I'm in it. In a situation where I can be sharing the ministry in that way. Preaching is a vital part of my life.

Would you tell me more about your work in South America?

I was in Costa Rica nine years and then I went from there to Venezuela. In that time I became a part of the preaching team and we taught in different parts of Latin America. I was there for thirteen years.

All of the churches there already had a Bible study, but this was to be a notch above that. We taught things like church growth, the gifts of the spirit, and things that maybe weren't emphasized as much in the other subjects. I taught and so did John Parker. We were members of the team teaching together. While I was there, I was sent over to Colombia because we didn't have much over there. While there I began a church.

I came home at the end of '91 in December. I came home because I had felt like I had finished the work I needed to do in Venezuela. I had been there at the very beginning when they didn't have anything there. I had been involved in a number of church planning projects. So, I felt like my time was finished, but I didn't know what the Lord wanted me to do.

I got a map and I put my finger on each Latin country and I didn't feel any drawing toward anything. So, I called the Missions Department and told them that I felt that my time was up here. If they had anything that they needed me to do, I would be glad to consider it. But actually, at this particular time, and all of this is a part of God's time, if a door's not open in an area, well you can't go through it! There was really nothing they could offer me right then. However, at the same time that I was here and talked to them, Bishop Underwood talked to me. He said, "I just heard today that you are not going to stay in Venezuela." And I said, "That's right." "What are you going to do?" he asked. And I said, "Well, I don't know. I just know that I'm through there." And he said, "Well, do you have any direct leading?" And I said, "No." He said, "Well, come back to see me tomorrow."

So, what he did was talk to Brother Leggett who was the director of Evangelism USA. They needed a director for Hispanic Ministry. We had Hispanic conferences and we had Hispanic churches and people working in different Anglo conferences, but we didn't have anyone working on a general level. So, they had tried to suggest one man and another, but others would say, "Oh, not him." Anyway, Brother Leggett had not found anybody that he felt was the right person for it. So, Bishop Underwood told him the fact that I was just home and I might be able to do what he wanted. So, I always felt like part of my success on the mission field was partly due to the fact that I was not displacing anybody. I was willing to go and take something nobody else wanted. For instance, if a church's pastor had left and nobody would take it, they

would ask me. I would go and plant a church. I don't think people were ever jealous of me because I was not displacing anybody. I was not a threat to anybody. So, I think that that was one reason that I was able to go into Evangelism USA and become the first director of Intercultural Ministry. And, we were in that for a couple of years and then we broadened the office to become the Office of Intercultural Ministry. I was there for seven years.

The summer before I left, which was in General Conference, I had a very definite experience with the Lord when we were taking communion. And he let me know that my time with Evangelism USA was going to be limited and I would be heading into a different area of ministry. And I didn't know why or what. But it was so strong that I wanted to see Bishop Underwood because I had become a missionary under him and he had become a key person for me to talk to. But he was always surrounded by people. But when I went down to the lobby and he was by himself, I was able to talk to him alone. And he said, "Well, what does the Lord want you to do?" And I said, "I don't know." And he said, "Well, stay where you are until the Lord leads you otherwise."

I talked to Bishop Leggett and he told me the same thing. I talked to Dr. Carpenter and he said the same thing. I told him, "You know I'm leaving this department and you may have someone you would like to put into this position. And if you do, then please feel free to do it." I said, "My time is going to be limited here so if you have somebody to put in the position, please feel free to do it." And he said, "I don't have anybody. Please stay until you know what the Lord wants you to do." That was three leaders of the church that all told me the same thing.

So, I didn't leave for any problem or difficulty – at the headquarters or on the missions field. I left because it was God's timing. And I think it's so important to know God's timing. And so I shared this with the department there and they were all really nice. But Debbie

Whipple, she was always really interested in me, would always ask me, “Has God told you what He wants you to do?” And I would say, “No.” And finally one day, I just opened my mouth and I said, “I’d like for us to have a strong Pentecostal Holiness Church here that will train people to branch out into the work and plan other churches and make the church grow, a training center and all that.” After I talked to her, I just went and sat down in my office and started writing. And I wrote all the strategies for our church. I shared it with Dr. Carpenter and he said, “We’ll support you.” And Evangelism USA supported us for the first year.

We started in October of 1998 and then they supported us for a full year. During that year we were able to get a base of people and we worked on a shoestring. I didn’t ever want to take more money. I just always felt like there were other people waiting to start other things. But, I always felt like they helped us and that was wonderful.

We were at one church building for two and a half years but then we went about seven miles southeast over the Central PH church where my husband and I had once pastored. In fact, we had bought that property for the church. But, they were really nice to us and they said, “you can come on over and have your Hispanic services here.” So we did. We were there for another two and a half years when the original Muse Memorial church property came open. And it was just like – I knew – it was a tremendous experience of “knowing” that this was the place God wanted us to be and God just telling me that “Nothing, nothing, nothing is impossible if you can believe for it. I have the funds for everything you need.”

So, I started writing friends and everyone I knew that had been connected with Southwestern in the past and Bill Anderson, who was the pastor here at the time the church was built. In fact, he spoke during our first service last October and he has sent money to us a thousand dollars at a time. He helped us raise the hundred thousand dollars we needed for a

down payment. As it turned out, we didn't have to raise all of that because our loan had been approved for the \$325,000. So, we only had to put up the \$75,000 when we signed the papers about two weeks ago. So, we've been through a lot of hurdles.

The church was in terrible condition. The plumbing was awful and there were leaks everywhere. The carpet was up and out in all the entrances. And all of the pipes under the sinks were corroded. Right away we carried away three big truck loads of junk. It was a challenge. We had people over here working every night except Sunday night for our services. They worked every evening for five months. They were painting, cleaning, repairing, renewing, and rejuvenating. Electric lights, bulbs – everything. And then, when we came in October we had to redo the heating which only cost us \$600 dollars. But there have been a lot of things. We kept the insurance up even though the property wasn't ours. We feel like we're getting it back. But, of course, this week somebody came and banged out one of our doors. But when I told the congregation, we praised the Lord because in everything give thanks and we prayed for the person who did that. And maybe he'll come back here and receive the Lord.

What are some of the things your church has to offer?

All of our services are in Spanish. We are in transition. We want to have a cell-based church. That is, we want to have a church outside of the walls of the church. It's a program that began in Bogota. I was there in February and saw it. Their idea is that the pastor will get twelve leaders and challenge them and they will reach twelve more to have a hundred and forty four. And so on.

The different cells will have different interests; some for children, for youth. We want the youth to be under the youth leader and to work with twelve and those twelve will work toward twelve. We have a *pre-encounter* for them to use where they share the four spiritual

laws. We also talk to them about deliverance. And then we have an *encounter*. The *encounter* should go from Friday evening to Sunday noon, but we only did the first one that way because our church is not too big and they noticed the absence of the participants. But a little bit later we will go ahead and have it on through Sunday because in the *encounter* you go through the inner healing and you work toward telling them what the vision is of the twelve and the challenge of multiplying. After the *encounter* we have a *post encounter* for four classes to bring everybody together and help them not to forget what they've learned and not to lose the momentum.

Next, they start in the school of ministry. This is important because in the school of ministry you are teaching them the basics of what they're going to be teaching and you're telling them how they're going to start their cells. They don't have to be a theologian. When we started this program, we had out ministerial studies sort of like the Bible Institute that we had on the missions field. It covered the whole panorama of the Bible, stuff like theology and homiletics and hermeneutics and those subjects which are very important for the professional minister. But, for the moment, we've sort of put that on the side; we don't want to lose it. But what we're doing right now is we're not training them to be a theologian, we're training them to be a soul winner. Because you know we have our Sunday school and a lot of our people have come into our church through the Sunday school in the past, but that is changing. There are a lot of Sunday schools that are giving information, but not teaching people to be soul winners. So, our endeavor is to train soul winners.

A lot of people have said, "I don't know what to teach if I'm going to teach in a Bible cell." Where, there are different ways of doing it but some will have a copy of the pastor's outline for the sermon for instance. I've thought about giving them a fill-in-the blank outline and

then they fill in the blanks and then in the cell they go over questions like, “What was it that impressed you?” Or, “Did the Lord show you something else that wasn’t said in this scripture?”

So, you have the whole gamut. What those people want to do is bring in the unsaved, people who don’t have churches. We want to bring in people, invite them into our homes because a lot of people will go into a home that won’t go into a church. So, whenever they go to a Bible study cell, you start giving them the four classes beginning with the *pre-encounter* so that they can become a cell leader too. That takes a process of several months and gives them time to mature as Christians.

So this began in Bogota. I was there in February and this vision of the twelve has absolutely gone around the world. It is not a denomination. They believe in Holiness. And they believe in the Baptism of the Holy Spirit. And, they really, really emphasize the cross and getting rid of anything in your life that isn’t like Christ. I saw people from our church and people I knew from Hawaii. I saw the superintendent of the Filipino work here and the superintendent of the work in Spain. There were people there from all of the continents. It was a joy to me to see them because I knew these people. They didn’t know each other so I got to introduce them. Of course, when I got there, I also met with the superintendent of the Venezuela people, one of my spiritual sons, and so I got to be with a lot of people that I had seen grow up in the church in Venezuela. So, that’s where my church is at right now.

Sunday night we probably had a hundred and twenty-five in the service. We are running around a hundred. We’ve lost a few people. We’ve seen the enemy fight to try to disrupt people over little things. So, I’ve really had to warn the people that the enemy doesn’t want us to do this, that this church is invading his territory.

There's a lot to be done and the Lord has put us here to do it. I've warned people that we are here in a spiritual battle. On Tuesday through Friday morning from five until eight we're open for prayer, so I'm here at that time. And on Tuesday night we're having classes to teach people to speak English. And then Wednesday night we're having our *post encounter* right now. They need to do that in order to go into the school of leaders. That meets on Saturday evenings. Friday nights our children meet here. We have a children's praise group that have little white outfits and banners.

You have a thriving ministry and seem to be very busy!

When I was working for headquarters, you know, I traveled a lot with the department. They asked me to direct the district in the Minnesota area so I would go up there three times a year and I did other things, seminars and studies. But, usually, I was in Oklahoma City and when the day was over, I could come home. I could work out in the yard and stuff, but this, this is in the day, it's in the evenings, and it's in the nights. Brother Leggett called me "Mrs. Caleb" because I was at my age starting this venture. But the Lord doesn't call you to do something without giving you the strength to do it. So, I had a wonderful time of prayer recently with my daughter. She has been a missionary in Venezuela for fifteen years. They came to Venezuela before I left. They came and when I left, they stayed on. And then they planted a church and then they were in Spain for fifteen months. Now they're waiting to go back to Spain. Leaving a legacy is important.

What else have you been doing?

Well, I was working on my doctorate, too, but I had to put it to the side for a while. They had quite a bit of revisions they wanted me to do on my dissertation, even going back to my title.

But I'm paying \$1700 a year for being in this program and in the last couple of years I've really questioned if I was supposed to be doing that.