



## **BELIEF ORAL HISTORY PROJECT**

**Name:** Elwyn Chapman

**Date:** 13 April 2011

**Place:** Town Hall House, Sydney

**Interviewer:** Sue Andersen

### **TRANSCRIPT**

0.00    **SA:**    This is Sue Anderson interviewing Elwyn Chapman on the 13<sup>th</sup> of April 2011 for the City of Sydney Oral History Project, Belief.

**O.K, thanks. Can I call you Elwyn?**

**EC:**    Sure.

**SA:**    Yes, thanks, Elwyn, for doing the interview this morning. I'm wondering whether you could begin the interview by you saying your full name and when and where you were born.

**EC:**    Elwyn \*\*\*\*\* Chapman. I was born in \*\*\*\*\* , New South Wales, in 1944.

**SA:**    And is that country - - -

**EC:**    Southwest, near Cootamundra, around that area.

**SA: Right, right. And did you spend a lot of your years, growing up up there?**

EC: No. My father was a Methodist minister and used to move around, so he was in \*\*\*\*\*. In fact he was in Arian Park but \*\*\*\*\* happens to be the place where I was born in the hospital, then we moved all 'round New South Wales as kids, to Yass, Dubbo, Mullumbimby, then Fairfield, West Ryde and that's where I hopped off and found a wife and married her from West Ryde.

**SA: Right, so you've been living all over the state. And how was that, growing up for you?**

EC: It was when you're a kid – I've actually got a twin brother so it did help – not identical – so moving schools, yes, when you've got to go to a new school and a new place and new town that was all - - -

**SA: So how many years is a minister posted?**

EC: Well, in those days they couldn't stay for more than six years. So there was some places they stayed four, some places they stayed two, some places they stayed six, so we moved around a bit as kids.

2.01 **SA: Right. And so I guess you did all of your schooling over the whole of the state, really?**

EC: Yes, I finished my school – went to Dubbo High School and then I went to Fairfield Boys' High School and I actually left at fifteen and then I did my Leaving Certificate at nighttime and then I became an accountant, CPA, and I did all that at nighttime, part time, so.

**SA: Right. And so you've obviously, being a minister's son you've obviously grown up with a very – well, have you grown up with a very strong religious background?**

EC: Well, obviously growing up, you know, in a Christian family is a very good basis for life and my parents, you know, had it together and so that was good but I actually didn't become a Christian till I was twenty seven years of age because to be a Christian, you can't be born to be a Christian, you've actually got to make that decision for yourself and so whilst I went to church and, you know, went to Sunday school and did all those things I actually didn't become a Christian, a born again Christian, as we say, until I was twenty seven. I was working in a job, I was having lots of problems in my job and just at that time, you know, we're going to church these visiting ministers kept coming each week and week after week, so over about a couple of months, you know, it seemed to be every week they were speaking to me, exactly to me and that's how I perceived it and then I decided, you know, that I needed God in my life and so that's what happened. Even though

my wife was a Christian, I wasn't; went to church but didn't know God in my heart.

**SA: So what's the difference?**

4.03 EC: Well, you can know about God, you can have an intellectual knowledge about God but as a Christian what happens is that we believe that Jesus died on the cross for our sins and that when he died and went to heaven he sent the Holy Spirit which dwells in every Christian, so it's a matter of having – being a Christian isn't about having been involved with religion, it's about a relationship with Jesus and Jesus expects us to submit to his authority and by submitting to his authority we receive liberty. But, you know, Jesus' teaching is really good. I mean, many people will say "Well, I may not be a Christian but I do respect the teaching that Jesus gave". But it's more than that, it's having a relationship with him which means that you acknowledge him as lord of your life and you submit to him and therefore over time the Holy Spirit will change you. We've known people who are drug addicts or who are prostitutes and over time, you know, eventually they got off those, changed their life through the Holy Spirit convicting them and directing them into right living and right relationships and, yes, so.

**SA: So did it take you a long time to come to that decision - - -**

EC: No.

**SA: - - - to be a Christian in your heart?**

EC: Generally it's fairly instantaneous, generally you just come to a revelation that "I know about God but I need to *know* him personally" and that changes you and it changes your thought process, changes the way you think. Often many of us are very selfish people and so they only think of themselves but, you know, God opens us up to reaching out to others because, you know, the bible tells us ..... ourself, we have to ..... ourself and we are, you know, to reach out and the bible also says that the most important thing is to love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, soul and mind and love your neighbour as yourself.

6.24 So therefore love God and love others and reach out to others; that's really the whole of the Christian gospel altogether.

**SA: So, did your family know that you were not a Christian before you were twenty seven, did they have an understanding of that?**

EC: Lots of people probably didn't because I could look like a Christian, I could go to church, I could do all the right things, I knew the form, but I guess my wife would have known that I wasn't a Christian and some of my friends, you know, often used to say – ones that really were

strong Christians would know that I wasn't a Christian, they could tell that I'm not a Christian.

**SA: So how would that look, like what sort of differences was there, say pre you becoming a Christian and post, what did that look like?**

EC: Well, see, what happens is when you receive the Holy Spirit is says that "You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you" so therefore you are a transformed – we believe that you are a transformed life. You say we were transformed from one life that you're living which was for yourself to a totally different life. So you receive power, you become more empowered, we believe you are a more confident person, you're more self assured, you have a good sense of self and therefore things tend to change and blossom in your life.

8.13 **SA: And when you became a Christian did you continue with the same church?**

EC: Yep, exactly the same church but then I started to get involved, started doing stuff. Like I started to get involved in youth work, even though I'd married and had children, I started getting involved in youth work and running – because as I said I had a knowledge of God, therefore I knew all the bible stories, I knew the bible but then I started to really read the bible, I really started to study the bible really, you know, and it started to impact my life. As you read God's word, it speaks to you and it's not just some philosophical book but it speaks into your life and then gradually, your life changes. So therefore when you become a Christian you want to share that good news with others and so I started getting involved in youth work and running camps and teaching young people and that sort of thing.

**SA: Within the Methodist?**

EC: Well, it a Methodist Church, then it became the Uniting Church but within that church, yes. And then we left that church and because what happened is that we started getting caught up in what's called the Charismatic Renewal. That means that, you know, when you become a Christian - in my context anyway – you know, I felt that there was more, so there was more to the Christian life than just going to church and being a good person and reading your bible but there was more.

10.05 So, being caught up in the Charismatic Renewal or it's another word that people know as being a Pentecostal but charismatic renewal and we then got caught up with people we met together. You know, we learnt how to pray for people for healing, reaching out, just reaching out to them and not just reaching out to them with religion or giving them a bible but actually, you know, having the ability to share with

them about God, being prepared to pray with them, being prepared to step out and do those things and then getting involved with young people and seeing their lives change and seeing them moving on in their life and getting their life together.

**SA: And where did you do this? Did you do it at church?**

EC: I did that at the Uniting Church at Thornleigh and then after that I then got caught up in Jesus Cares which was just something else that came my way.

**SA: O.K, so can you just give me a description of what that means, that Pentecostal - - -**

EC: Well, Pentecostal, you can stay within your own church and there are many just Christians want more, which means that there is the Holy Spirit that directs them. As we read our bible and as we pray with others and as we develop relationships with other Christians they tend to mentor you and you grow as a Christian; you become more confident and you want to do more, you want to go and evangelise, you want to tell people about God, you tell people about the good news, many people once they're filled with the Spirit.

12.09 It's being filled with the Spirit, getting more of God and wanting to do more and therefore that's why young people rush off and want to become missionaries. You know, there's a Christian organisation called YWAM which many young people get involved in and it's the largest Christian ministry organisation in the world and they go and they want to serve God and they go and serve God. It's about wanting to do more because as we serve God, God changes us and we grow. I mean, I'm a totally different person to who I was back twenty or thirty years ago because I've been involved in serving God and as I serve God I learn more and I learn about people and their issues and their problems and all of that.

**SA: O.K, so you did this through the Uniting Church.**

EC: M'mm.

**SA: And you and your wife were involved, yes. And then you said you came - - -**

EC: We left, we left the Uniting Church and we joined another church, which was a Charismatic Baptist church which was called Telopea Ministry Centre at Telopea.

**SA: Because they have that - - -**

EC: Because, yes, we left that church because we wanted to grow and learn more about God and so this church was a Charismatic church.

It was a Baptist church but it was Charismatic, it had spirit filled believers and so, you know, the teaching that we received from this church really grew us intellectually and spiritually and moved us, I guess, to another level of faith.

14.01 And it was a church that had many missionaries, many people who have gone from the church and gone out into the world to minister the gospel at far corners of the world.

**SA: And where was it based?**

EC: It was based in Telopea which is near Dundas. And so we were at that church for fourteen years and then for various reasons we don't go to that church any more. But, yes, it was moving us into another level and teaching us many things, teaching us about God, teaching us about heaven and hell, teaching us about healing, you know, how God heals today and all those things, being a more hands-on Christian and being prepared to reach out to others and do God's work in the world.

**SA: So that's a really important thing for you by the sounds of it, that reaching out and the evangelistic kind of approach.**

EC: Yes, yes. Well, that's what many Christians – there are many Christians who go to church and just sit in the pews but there are many Christians who get motivated to do other things and want to do God's work. So you'll find people who want to share more in their workplace, they want to share about God in their workplace. Many want to do stuff at weekends, many take mission trips. You know, when they get their annual holidays they'll be off on a mission trip overseas or maybe they'll be going to minister with other people, maybe the Aborigines, or maybe working with homeless people or marginalised people but they feel that they want to do more than just sit and listen; you know, you grow and learn but you want to use the knowledge you have to help others but the main thing – helping others is one thing but also to sharing the good news that you have, the joy that you have in your life with other people.

16.16 **SA: And were you still working?**

EC: Yep, full time.

**SA: You were working full time and you were doing your - - -**

EC: And had four kids and three foster kids through all that period of time, yes.

**SA: You had a very full life.**

EC: Very full life, yes, yes.

**SA: And so you found your way to Jesus Cares.**

EC: Do you want to start there?

**SA: I think that's a good place to start.**

EC: O.K. Well, Jesus Cares, basically we were going to Thornleigh Uniting Church and there was a young man and his wife called John Jones joined the church and John – it's a similar story – John's wife was Christian but he wasn't and as he tells the story – I was running the youth group and I didn't know he wasn't a born again Christian but I got him involved in the youth work – and he started working with me and then he got involved with another group called 'Full Gospel Business Men' and he got saved and God laid on his heart. He was reading one day – he was a married man with a couple of kids – he was reading one day in the paper how there were kids as young as nine and ten years of age on the streets of Sydney and he wanted to do something about that. So God gave him a vision to start Jesus Cares and so he got a bunch of people together and he motivated them and eventually Jesus Cares started in a coffee shop in Kings Cross on Australia Day 1987. And so, I was talking to John through that period of time and eventually I got involved with the ministry.

18.07 **SA: O.K. So they were not necessarily ministers, they were lay people?**

EC: No, no, none are ministers, no, just lay people.

**SA: Right. So Jesus Cares is an organisation with voluntary people - -**

EC: Yes, yes, yep, apart from one person who has been our coordinator for about eight years but we've been going for twenty three years. So, most of that time we've had volunteers. We ran a refuge for a while which we had a couple of girls who lived there and ran that for eight years but we paid them some money but we didn't really pay them a salary because, you know, our funds couldn't – but they were two committed girls who worked for – one girl worked for four years there and one girl worked for eight years there and the girl was called Colleen and she ran a refuge in Darlinghurst for eight years with a minimal amount of money but she was on fire for God and so she did that for eight years and so we ran a refuge. So we started off in a coffee shop, number 7 Roslyn Street, ran that for two years - - -

**SA: In a coffee shop?**

EC: In a coffee shop, ran the ministry for two years. It was just really reaching out to the people who were coming into the shop and after two years we felt that we needed to move into another level, so we

rented a place in Darlington which then we closed the coffee shop. That's where we ran the ministry for eight years and in that time we had people coming and staying, people off the streets who came and stayed.

**SA: So it was like a house, was it?**

EC: It was a house, yes, where we ran our ministry from. So we started doing a van ministry from there, running the van ministry around the streets. See, in the coffee shop it was really only the people who came into the coffee shop.

20.11 **SA: So, what do you mean the people – just any person?**

EC: So when you had the coffee shop your ministry related - people would find out about our coffee shop and they would come in and we used to provide – we started off charging people but very quickly we changed that and it became a totally volunteer coffee shop and then people found out about us and 'Jesus Cares New Beginnings' Coffee Shop and so they came in and, you know, so on a Friday or Saturday night the place would be packed and we'd be on the – so it was number 7 Roslyn Street, Kings Cross but it doesn't exist anymore – there was a great big building that opened. So we ran that for two years and so we had a lot of people who came to the Lord during that time.

**SA: Because they'd just popped into - - -**

EC: Yes, we had hundreds of people who made decisions for Christ during that time. Kings Cross in 1986/87, it was before the Wood Royal Commission, there was drugs flowing everywhere, there was people everywhere, there was kids everywhere, it was, you know, quite a chaotic place. So during that time there were a lot of people came into the shop but after two years we felt that it was time for us to move out of the coffee shop and into the streets and so we rented a refuge – it was 80 Thompson Street, Darlington – and we were there for eight years. And so in that time we ran our van 'Off the Streets'.

21.54 We used to take our van out on a Friday night and a Saturday night – that was our base – and we also had two girls who lived in the house and basically we'd pick up people off the streets who wanted to change their life, who wanted to make – because people in drugs, people in homelessness, you know, many of them we say are on a merry-go-round, many of them want to get off it but they don't know how to get off it, "How do I get off drugs, how do I get out of this lifestyle of just going around and 'round in circles?" And so they would come and live in the house. We could accommodate up to, probably six or eight people in the house – we had about four bedrooms – and so we did that for eight years.



**SA: So was it a food van?**

EC: Food van, yes. We run a food van 'round the streets of Sydney.

**SA: Right, O.K. So in those early years the van would go out and so you'd be looking for homeless people and also providing food?**

EC: Well, you quickly find out where homeless people are in that time, so you quickly work out where they are and then you quickly work out the times that you're going to be there and they get to know when your van's going to be there and so we just started off just like that.

**SA: How do you know where to find them?**

EC: Well, you find them, you know where they are, you gradually find them. I mean, if I walk around Sydney at nighttime you'll know basically where the homeless people are and the homeless people will tell others. And so that's how we started: we just took our van out and started finding homeless people and then we worked out a route after a while, we worked out where they were, so we'd start off at – we'd go to Kings Cross near the fountain and there were a lot of people there; not very many people there now but in those days there were plenty of people there.

24.04 EC: There were a lot of people around Matthew Talbot Hostel, a lot of people in and around anywhere where there's food, where they can access food, Central Railway there's homeless people, there's also homeless people in Martin Place. So if they know where you're going to be at a certain time they will - - -

**SA: They'll find you.**

EC: - - - they'll find you. So you end up working out your route because there are other food vans around as well. There's Vincents de Paul and the Salvation Army but they tend to go to different places that we go to. We sometimes run into them but not very often.

**SA: Right, right. And so how much engagement is there with the people – can you tell me about that?**

EC: Yes. Well, what we do now is we run a food van on Friday night and on Saturday night. We go to three stops and we also run a meeting on Sunday afternoon in the Salvation Army street level premises in Crown Street. So after a while and after twenty three years the homeless and the marginalised people know about us and so it's about connecting. So we believe – it's called "one to one evangelism" – if you give people coffee and tea and food and if you can give them some clothes or blankets in the wintertime, you know, you're reaching out to their very, very basic needs - so it's not just

homeless people, it's also lonely people. So there are people who come to our van who may have secure accommodation but they're just lonely.

26.01 EC: There are people who are, you know, totally homeless and there are people who are homeless, which is living rough on the streets and there are also people who will be in not permanent accommodation but fairly temporary accommodation and all of those people will come up to the van and so we talk with them, feed them, and we build relationships with them. There are people who we may only see once but there are people who we will see regularly, we've seen for years and years.

**SA: Really?**

EC: And so we'll reach out to those, talk to them. You know, we don't bash them over the head with the bible. If they just want to come up to the van and get some food and talk to us, that's fine, but if they want to know more, if they would like prayer, you know, we're available. And the other thing about us is our consistency and it's our consistency of our leadership. I mean, I've been doing this for twenty three years, there's another guy that's been doing it for seventeen years, there's Bill, our coordinator's been at it for eight years, another guy's been doing it for seven. So there's a continuity of leadership and I guess a confidence in us and they connect with us.

**SA: So that's really important, to have that constant.**

EC: Being consistent, being reliable, being there when you say you're going to be there, rain, hail or shine. There's only a couple of nights in the whole of the year where we're not out. We don't go out on Mardi Gras night mainly because we can't get around the streets, all the streets are closed, and we tend not to be out on New Year's Eve if it falls on a Friday or Saturday night because it's not a safe time.

28.02 **SA: It's not personally a safe time?**

EC: No, it's not a safe time. I mean, any of the violence that you hear in the inner city most cases doesn't come from the people that live there, it's the people who come in from outside, who want to come in for a good time and get drunk. I mean, up in Kings Cross now, you know, the place is awash with alcohol at the weekends because people are coming in and drinking – and I'm sure you've read or heard about a lot of this – and so we don't want to be in those places, really, we want to be where we can make a difference with the people. So there are only a few times where we don't but generally we're out two nights a week.

**SA: And you still go around to Kings Cross area or you tend to work**  
- - -

EC: No, we don't go to Kings Cross really. There's not many - at the fountain there's not really many people there that used to be there so we now are going to the public housing estates at Waterloo, Redfern area. We start off there, we go to Tom Uren which is near Matthew Talbot Hostel where a lot of homeless people sleep around that area and we go to Belmore Park and so they're the three places we go to. There were other places – there are other places but that's where we go and other vans will go to Martin Place, there's a number of food vans go to Martin Place during the week and at the weekend. And, yep, that's what we do.

**SA: Right. And so how many people would you – do you call it ministering to?**

30.03 EC: Well, we would say we were serving.

**SA: Serving.**

EC: We would say we were serving. We would find on a night probably about a hundred people. I think it's changed a little bit over the years. We used to find, you know, two hundred people; it's not quite as many as it used to be.

**SA: There's not?**

EC: Not as many, no, as there used to be and that's also evidenced by the street count that's done by the City of Sydney about every six months and the number of homeless people on the streets or sleeping rough is coming down.

**SA: So is it the numbers are coming down or they're being moved - -**

EC: The numbers are coming down, the numbers are coming down. I think a number of those people are starting to be housed. We come across a number of people who used to be on the streets who have now got public housing, which is – you know, so there are some positive things happening. I think that generally the social welfare people, you know, years ago the thing was that you had to be housing ready, which is a concept to say, you know, "You've got to get off drugs and you've got to get off things and get yourself – like before we'll house you" but now it's called 'Housing First' where basically it's well accepted that if somebody wants to make some changes in their life you need to get them secure housing to start with and once you get the secure housing, start with that, then you can bring in other services and you can help them through those things. So I think that that's been a change over the last few years and of course I think the federal government is putting more money into housing and there is a change; things are starting to move in the right

direction in that. Long way to go but there is something happening out there.

**SA:** So when you were saying before that like early on in the history you were based in Kings Cross and there was, you know, massive amounts of drugs and so on and now there's a lot of alcohol there?

32.12 **EC:** Well, there's alcohol in Kings Cross because a lot of young people – and not just Kings Cross but down George Street but they're not areas we go to; we don't take our van to people who are – I mean they're people who are wealthy people who happen to come in and want to get drunk. So that's really not the people we serve.

**SA:** Yes. And you feel safer around - - -

**EC:** Well, there's no point to minister – you know, I guess it's the people group that God has given us to reach out to, which is the marginalised, it's the homeless, certainly drug addicted, but people who actually, you know, want help rather than, I mean, people who come in. Yes, so I guess that's where we're at, they're the people that we reach out to.

**SA:** And did you say you rented the premises in Kings Cross when you had a refuge?

**EC:** Yes, in Darlinghurst.

**SA:** In Darlinghurst.

**EC:** And we've now moved out of the city, we're now at West Ryde, we rent a house there and so we run our van from West Ryde into the city.

**SA:** And why did you move?

**EC:** I think we actually found premises in West Ryde that were a lot cheaper and we worked out that many of our volunteers would prefer to go to West Ryde. West Ryde's only ten or fifteen minutes from the city, so we found out that it was probably cheaper out of the city, it was a better location, a better location for volunteers.

34.15 **EC:** So that's I guess the last five or six years we've been out of the city.

**SA:** So, do you do all the cooking yourselves or do you have companies that donate to you?

**EC:** When we take the van out on the streets we just prepare basic sandwiches, my wife cooks enough cake for us for two nights and we get hot pies – somebody donates the pies – and that's basically what

we do. So it's fairly simple and now on Sundays we actually provide a hot meal at street level which is the Salvation Army premises in Crown Street and we actually provide a hot meal there and we just run a roster, really. We have three or four people who provide the meal on a particular day and so that food's donated, really, by the people who prepare it.

**SA: Right.**

EC: So as far as food, we get bread from Goodman Fielder for free and we get pies and sausage rolls but everything else we pay for.

**SA: Yourselfes?**

EC: M'mm. But ministry is funded – we have a database of about two hundred and fifty people and they provide us sufficient funds to run our ministry and we're running a fundraiser this year which we've had for the last four years. We have a fundraising dinner where we try to raise funds that will keep us going, so we don't get any government funding.

36.14 **SA: It's amazing dedication, commitment; it's a very big commitment.**

EC: Yes, it is, but most people will tell you that we get more out of it. I mean, we get more out of it by reaching out to others and you meet people who are – it's at the cutting edge of life, O.K. Many of us who can live in suburbia and have nice, safe jobs and we probably wouldn't ever see this side of life, we wouldn't understand this side of life but this is real for the people who we minister to. And we only do a little bit. I mean, we are a volunteer ministry, so there's a lot of stuff we can't do ourselves but we can refer them on to other agencies: a drug rehabilitation programme, we would refer them to the Salvation Army who've got excellent rehabilitation programmes and there's also a team of lawyers that are pro bono lawyers around the city that we can refer people to. So we're limited in what we can do and that's why it's important that we know about other agencies and they know about us.

**SA: Because you were saying that you come into the City of Sydney [Council – local government]- - -**

EC: Yes, inter-agency meetings.

**SA: Yes. And what kind of agencies are there, who attends those meetings?**

37.53 EC: Salvation Army, Wesley Mission, [St] Vincent de Paul as well as, you know, the police, people involved in mental health, a whole bunch of people involved in all sorts of different ministries, the Haymarket Centre where they do detoxes, etcetera, so.

**SA:** So would it be part of your role that if you actually found someone that actually was seeking some kind of rehabilitation you could then refer - - -

**EC:** Refer them on, yes, that's right.

**SA:** And you do them?

**EC:** Yes. And also too, you know, an agency's also got to have mandatory reporting requirements which means that if you found a child of ten years of age out on the streets there is a twenty four hour DOCs worker wandering around the streets of Sydney and so you would ring them – I've done that a couple of times, rung them and they've come.

**SA:** So there are kids that young wandering around the street?

**EC:** There have been, or you might find a parent – there was one case there where I could see a parent who was paralytically drunk and there was a nine or ten year old child and I rang up DOCs and they were down in a flash.

**SA:** How does that – I mean, it would make me very sad to see that on an ongoing basis.

**EC:** Well, it's not on an ongoing basis. I mean, you know, twenty years ago there was so many kids on the streets but there aren't so many on the streets now. There were so many drugs on the streets but there's hardly any drugs; there were needles everywhere but you don't see them any more.

**SA:** So things have changed.

**EC:** Things have changed a lot, yes.

**SA:** And how do you personally kind of deal with, I don't know, just that side of life?

40.05 **EC:** Well, I wouldn't have done it, I wouldn't keep doing it if I didn't enjoy what I'm doing, we wouldn't keep coming out if we didn't feel that we were making a difference and as a Christian you believe that you're where God called you to be. I believe that this is a calling on my life and therefore it's where I want to be and a Christian would tell you that the safest place to be is in the will of God. So if you believe God's placed you there, that's what you do until God calls you out of there. So it's not just me but quite a lot of other volunteers who are very regular and are committed because that's where they believe God's called them to be.

**SA: How do you know, how do you know that that's your calling?**

EC: You have a sense – first of all you believe in your heart and then others will confirm it, you know, other Christians will confirm it or God will confirm it in the way that he opens up doors. You know, we often pray “God, open up doors or close doors because I want to know your will”. Many Christians will pray “I want to know your will, Lord. Do you want me to go to deepest, darkest Africa to be a missionary? Do you want me to go to bible college? What do you want me to do?” and if you fervently pray as a Christian God will open up those doors, he'll close some, he'll open some. You've got to step out a little bit and he'll close it on you but eventually you'll have a sense within yourself that that's where God wants me to go. So that's where I'm at.

42.02 **SA: That's great. Now, you've given us a good explanation of what kind of things that you do, so I'm just thinking that maybe we could – and I think you've probably already talked about it but maybe I'll just ask you directly then about the organisation's belief.**

EC: Jesus Cares is an interdenominational Christian ministry. It is not affiliated with any church and it just happens to have people coming from all sorts of different denominations but because again the leadership, John Jones who's the Chairman, is still involved in the ministry, I'm still involved in the ministry, you know, we believe that our theology is solid and what we believe is solid and in accordance with God's word. We're not a radical organisation, we're not nutty, we're not a cult, we're very much a mainstream Christian group and we wouldn't have survived for twenty three years if we were any of those things and when people come in, when volunteers come and get involved with us they relate very well. They're Christians, they relate very well to the ministry and what we believe in because they're the things that they believe in as well.

**SA: Right. So could you just say those beliefs? I know you've been talking about them.**

EC: Well, we believe that Jesus Christ came and came into the world, Jesus was the son of God and he came into the world and he lived in the world for around about [thirty?] three years and then he died and he rose again and therefore because of his resurrection he sent the Holy Spirit which is that resurrection power into the lives of Christians.

44.19 EC: And so generally most Christians, if they believe in the doctrine of the trinity, which is that we believe in a three person God head, which is one God head, the father, the son and the Holy Spirit, every Christian – not cults but every Christian, whether you're an Anglican, whether you're a Catholic, whether you're a Baptist or whether Uniting Church, whatever, we believe in the doctrine of the trinity and so we all have the same beliefs. We may decide differently about, you know,

whether people are baptised by immersion or whether they're baptised by sprinkling, some of those, but on the basic beliefs we all will believe the same things. So therefore I can have Christians from all sorts of different denominations who will come and they will relate very well to our ministry and what we believe because they're the same beliefs that they've got.

**SA: Right.**

EC: So people get caught up and worry about "Why have you got all these different denominations?" and they were established for different reasons but fundamentally they're the same. That doesn't mean cults, it doesn't mean Jehovah's Witnesses, it doesn't mean Mormons, and there's many, many hundreds of different cults but mainstream Christianity, we're there.

**SA: So you've got Catholics and Uniting Church people?**

46.01 EC: We've got Catholic, Uniting Church, Baptist, Presbyterians, Pentecostals, yep.

**SA: And where do you sit in that? Do you classify yourself as a - - -**

EC: I go to a Baptist church.

**SA: You go to a Baptist church.**

EC: But I grew up as a Methodist, I've been to Uniting, I've been to an Anglican church for a while, I've been to a Charismatic Pentecostal church for a while.

**SA: So would you have to be a Christian to volunteer for your organisation?**

EC: Not necessarily but we prefer it or at least we prefer that you are a Christian or that you are supportive of our values and over time you would become one.

**SA: O.K. So I guess my question also is, is it the act of actually giving, like whether it's food or friendship or support, is that you believe that that's giving the will of God to someone or is that actually active sort of ministry that's happening or – so it's a very convoluted question.**

EC: Firstly, you know, to be a Christian is to have a relationship with God through Jesus Christ. And Jesus said that "I am the way, the truth and the light. That no one shall come to the father but through me". So we as Christians believe the only way to God is through Jesus Christ. So therefore that's the first thing: we need to have a



relationship with Jesus, not just a head knowledge but a heart knowledge.

48.06 And then after we've become a Christian – because the bible says that you are saved by grace, not through works, yes, that anyone should boast. So therefore we become a Christian through faith in God and faith in God alone. However – this is in the Book of Ephesians 289 and 10 it says that "You are made for good works". Therefore God expects us when we become a Christian to do good works for him. We are not saved by good works, we are saved by God's grace and God's grace alone. There is nothing that we can do to earn our salvation, it is a gift from God. But once we become a Christian, God expects us and we would want to, we would want to share that good news with others and there are various ways that Christians operate. I mean, I worked in a bible college for a while. There are many people there that feel that their calling is to teach young people about God. There are many great churches, there are many great ministries around, doing many wonderful works. It just so happens that God called us to reach out to the marginalised and to the poor but there are other people who serve God through reaching out to people who have disabilities, young people, all that sort of stuff.

**SA: So it's not with the aim necessarily of converting them to Christianity, it's actually about you, the service that you can provide for people, like helping people?**

EC: It's serving them because God loves every person and if you read the gospels, Jesus had a real heart for the poor and for the refugee, for the marginalised, so that's what we do.

50.06 But as we reach out, we reach out with God's love and as we reach out with God's love, unconditional love, you know, we believe that eventually that God will change those people into his image, so that's what we do. So, I mean, there's no point going along to somebody with a bible and bash him over the head but they're hungry and they don't have any clothes to wear, it's worthless but if you reach out to them with God's love and try to help them with their basic necessities of life then you can start to talk to them about some of the – and the reason why is that many of them have had dysfunctional lives, who've been involved in lots of stuff that they need to move on from those things because those things are the things that are pulling them down. And God will lift them up out of their circumstances, out of the pit that they've – many people have dug the pit for themselves or many times things have happened to people. There are people who have been born into a very dysfunctional family and it's not their fault but they still need to get out of whatever pit it is, whether they've dug the pit for themselves or whether someone else has dug it but they're in a lifestyle that is not working for them. So there is another way and the other way is to be transformed into the image of God and then they have a sense of self worth. Many people we see are rejected people,

they're homeless but they're hopeless, they have a sense of hopelessness over them, and there's many people who've been on the streets – I know one guy that's been there for twenty years; I've seen him, you know, every week for twenty years.

52.06 So some people respond and some people just don't but if God picks them up out of that lifestyle, an amazing thing, and they can be a new creation in Him. The bible says, you know, "You become a new creation. The past is gone" and so many people have to forgive others to move on in life. Forgiveness is a wonderful thing. It breaks the cycle and we have to forgive. We don't have to forget but we have to forgive and then we can move on in our life.

**SA: Do you ever question your faith or your beliefs?**

EC: No, no.

**SA: So when you've been seeing someone for twenty years and - - -**

EC: I can ask God. I mean, you know, I can ask God "Why was there a tsunami in Japan [reference to events of March 2011]?" I can ask God why when we pray for some people and they're healed and we pray for other people and they're not but that's just God's will and, you know, God says, you know, that "My ways are higher than your ways and God is all-knowing and so therefore we have to accept what's called the "sovereignty of God", we have to accept the sovereignty of God in our life. And, you know, the Apostle Paul which wrote most of the New Testament said, you know, he had a thorn in the flesh and he prayed to God for it but God never released him from it. So, yes, we can ask God questions "Why did this happen? Why did this tragedy happen?" but in the end you've just got to accept it.

53.59 You know, there's a book in the Old Testament called Job and Job said, you know, "While you slay me, yet will I trust you" because in the end, you know, God is the only – and if we believe in eternal life, if we believe that when we die we go to heaven but that our life goes on and so we're only on this earth for a while, so there are things that we may never see the full result of but being Christian every day, every day, you know, we get up in the morning and we thank God for the creation, we thank God for the sun, we're just thankful to be alive because you can always look on somebody else, you can always find someone that's a lot worse off than you are, so yes.

**SA: And so I presume most of the people would feel within Jesus Cares organisation, they would have the same kind of beliefs as you?**

EC: M'mm.

**SA: Yes. And do you actually give – like, I noticed on your website that you actually do training.**

EC: Yes, we train our volunteers, yes. Yes, so we train our volunteers, we teach them – we're doing training at the moment. So we've developed about ten modules that we go through and we teach them about safety, safety on the streets, how to talk to people, not give out their phone numbers, not give away money. We give them certain emergency numbers which they can ring but generally they'll see us. We teach them about homelessness, the people that we minister to, we give them some background and some understanding so they can develop some empathy for people.

56.06 We teach them about drugs, about the sort of drugs, what do you do when there's a violent situation on the street, if somebody is suicidal. We teach them about, you know, basic mental health issues, how do you recognise somebody who's got a mental health issue, how do you talk to somebody that may be sort of going off their heads and of course how to share the gospel with somebody, how to lead them to Christ, things that we believe in, all of that sort of stuff. So over a period of time all our volunteers - so therefore they can go out on the streets. You know, we'll give them a T-shirt or a sloppy Joe to make sure they're identified because I think we believe that keeps them safe as well.

**SA: O.K. So people, they don't go out by themselves, so they go - - -**

EC: No, no, we go out together Friday nights and Saturday nights in a team, so we've got two vans and so - we've also got another ministry in Blacktown but you probably don't want to talk about that anyway; this is only about the city of Sydney.

**SA: Sydney city.**

EC: But, yes, we've got two vans and so we take those out together. Sometimes we might only take one if we don't have sufficient volunteers but sometimes we'll have eight, ten, seventeen volunteers, so.

**SA: So all of that training that you do, has that always been part of your organisation or is that just something that - - -**

EC: We've developed - no, no, we've done training for quite a while but we continue to develop it.

58.00 I mean, there's certain things that you have to do. You know, when they come out in the van they've got to sign an attendance book so we know – we've got a database so if you're a volunteer you need to sign a volunteer's form and give us your details and your commitments to do certain things and to be prepared to accept the

leadership of the ministry but we say we'll insure you. We have volunteers' insurance, we have public liability insurance and we give them a sloppy Joe, a T-shirt and we promise to train them, so.

**SA: Have you ever had any issues that have come up with volunteers and the people that you're ministering to?**

EC: Yes, yes, yes, yes, we've had issues with volunteers, we've had a few volunteers that we've had to ask them to leave because they just were very disruptive, had issues on the streets. Last week, you know, I had one man who was quite drunk who was thinking about laying into me but he didn't. So, yes, we come across situations on the street.

**SA: How do you deal with that?**

EC: Oh, you just learn how to talk calmly to them. But we go around – you know, there are a number of volunteers so, you know, there is safety in numbers but, yes, we have come across some problems and often we'll – we try not to intervene; we've called the police a few times over the years.

**SA: And have you seen changes in your organisation from when you first started twenty three years ago?**

EC: Well, it's dramatically changed, hasn't it? I mean, we started in a coffee shop and now we run a food van and we do a Sunday meeting.

60.01 We also were involved in a drug rehabilitation programme; we had a farm out as Sofala. It was another group that we were associated with but we haven't – but so they're changes. But eventually – we thought we would do all sorts of things and John Jones who's the founder of the ministry is a visionary and so he had lots of great ideas – but eventually we've come to the conclusion that what we're doing now is what we should be doing and which is just to reach out to people with the van, run a Sunday meeting and basically refer people who need other services to other agencies, rather than trying to do everything ourselves because it's impossible.

**SA: And I noticed too also you describe yourself as front-line ministry.**

EC: M'mm.

**SA: Is that because that's where you - - -**

EC: Front-line ministry, yes, we believe that that's what we do. If you're a Christian church, you're sitting there, waiting for people to come through your doors, O.K, but we believe that you go out to where to where the people are and so that's what we do; that's why we call

ourselves a front-line ministry because we go out to where the people are at. And many of these people you won't find in a church but when they come to our Sunday meetings - for example, many people would like, many people who are Christians or who are seeking would like to have communion and maybe they've had a Catholic background or they've had an Anglican background but they would like to have communion but if they go to a church they don't either feel comfortable or the church may not allow them to take communion. So that's one thing that they do when they come to us.

62.03

Another thing, homeless people, if you've been homeless for a while you feel you don't belong anywhere. You know, you see people, you know, walking around the city in their pinstripe suits or the ladies with their stockings and their coats and they're looking very smart and they just don't – or they'll go into a building and they just feel that they don't belong. So it's important that a ministry like us helps them to feel that they belong, so when they come to our Sunday meetings that they feel when they walk in that they belong, that there are people there that care for them, it doesn't matter how they look or what their background might be. And, yes, that's important. So it's a matter of building a community, it's about building a community of people who, you know, and as they're volunteers have empathy for marginalised people and homeless people and people who may not dress the way others in the community may dress but that they feel that they're loved and they're accepted and that they belong somewhere.

**SA: And you were saying before too about the consistency of the services too.**

EC: Yes, being consistent is very, very important, yes, so we're always there. There's only, as I mentioned before, there's only a few times in the whole of the year that we aren't around, so that's important.

**SA: And also too you talk about friendship evangelism. I think we've probably pretty much covered it but if you could kind of just give us a - - -**

EC: Well, it's about connecting with people, it's about them – many of these people on the streets, they don't trust. I mean, if you're a homeless person living on the streets you get your stuff stolen and so therefore you – and you've been let down by so many people over the years, so therefore you don't trust anybody.

64.15

So it's a matter of connecting with people, being consistent, seeing you there regularly, knowing that you're not there to rip them off and so you build their trust and then they'll start sharing with you. And these people will share so many amazing things about their life that they probably may not have shared with another individual but they've shared with you because they trust you. So it's a matter of –

friendship evangelism, it's about being their friend and helping them, giving them coffee or something to eat and building that relationship.

**SA: So is that the – because there's lots of different evangelisms – so is that particular to Jesus Cares?**

EC: Yes, I mean you might go to a shopping centre and you'll see people handing out tracts and they're wanting to share about God and that's quite legitimate but what we believe is that we want to share about God but we want to build relationships with people and we want to help them where we can with the basic things of life.

**SA: So that's the point of difference?**

EC: That's the point of difference, I think, yes. But being their friend, not just being there to give out tracts or not just there to say "Oh, well, I've shared the gospel with somebody and therefore I can mark this up in my little sheet" but it's about being genuine about your friendship, genuine about our engaging with them, being consistent about it and we hope that we can build trust with them and build a relationship with them that makes a difference in their life and in ours as well because we get so much – as I mentioned earlier, we wouldn't do this if we didn't get something back and we've met some amazing people.

66.18 I met a homeless man this morning who was just a lovely man. He didn't have any anger about him, he'd been on the streets for a long time but he was just a lovely, genuine man and so we meet some lovely people. They may not have lots of money but they are lovely people, they're probably a lot more genuine and the other thing is that these people, you know, when you see them that's what you see. There's no façade about them, they are genuine and they'll tell you exactly how they feel or what their situation is and, yes, they won't cover themselves up in some sort of invisible blanket.

**SA: So you feel like you can engage with them and connect with them?**

EC: You can engage, you can engage with them and connect with them.

**SA: So why in the city of Sydney area?**

EC: We started in the city of Sydney area, that's where John Jones' vision was: that was the kids in the city of Sydney and that's where we came and that's where we've stayed. We have, as I mentioned, we've got a ministry out at Blacktown but basically that's where God called us and he hasn't called us back out of here, so that's where we're here.

**SA: O.K. So that's - - -**

EC: He hasn't told us to go anywhere else so we're here. You know, Jesus said "The poor will always be with you", all right, so until there's a time when there isn't one poor person on the streets of Sydney but I, you know, think that'll be a while, it'll be a while before that happens.

68.10 **SA: So how has the work with Jesus Cares changed your life?**

EC: Well, dramatically because I grew up in a Christian home, I trained as an accountant, I had a high pressure job, four kids, three foster kids - my wife has a heart for foster children so that's really her ministry that came into our lives but that enriched our lives - so it's changed my life because I would be a totally different person if I hadn't been involved in Jesus Cares ministry. I've learnt about all sorts of people as I live in a northern suburb of Sydney where we don't sort of see a lot of this sort of stuff, so I've learnt a lot about - we also had a lady called Sam who we picked off the streets some years ago who came to us and who was a prostitute and a drug addict and she lived with us for a number of years, went to bible college. And we've lost touch with her over probably the last five years but she taught us so much. You know, she had a few issues and we went to visit her in gaol but she had lots of other friends that we connected with. So both my wife and I have learnt heaps about that life that we never would have experienced, so I think that we are richer people because of it, yes.

70.04 **SA: So you must come across some very, very interesting characters over your years.**

EC: Yes.

**SA: Can you share any stories or is it not O.K. to talk about?**

EC: Yes, no, no, sure. We've met a lot of people over the years - Sam was one of them - and there was another lady who had a child and because she was involved with drugs her child actually was addicted as well and then what happened was she went to gaol for three months and so the child was looked after by her parents during the week but at the weekend my wife and I looked after that child. I used to pick her up on a Friday afternoon and we used to then drop her back at the grandparents' on a Sunday night - we did that for about three months. And of course we had to take her to hospital, you know, and so that child is now fully grown.

**SA: Do you have contact with that child?**

EC: I haven't had contact with that child but I have had some contact with the mother, yes, over that period of time. So that's one instance. Sam was another one where she came to live with us for a long time. And over the years there's been numbers of people. There was a whole bunch of guys who were at the Domain carpark and I guess over, you know, twelve months or eighteen months' period they all

got saved, probably ten of them, and they used to start coming to our Sunday meeting and that was pretty good. I've met people who had a near death experience.

72.01 EC: One guy who was a businessman, he was on the streets. Now, when you go on the streets it means that you've really – if you live on the streets it means that you've lost all contact with family or friends; there's nobody who you know that will help you through your issues. And so this guy, you know, died and came back to life and he was heading to hell and so he quickly became a Christian after that because he could see that he was going down the wrong pathways. There was a young girl who overdosed on drugs up at Kings Cross and we rang the ambulance and the ambulance came – like, they administer their magic drug – and after she came to she shared how she was having this out of body experience and she was actually above, she could see the ambulance people working on her body, you know, and she was terrified, you know, and so that was an interesting experience.

**SA: So did she -?**

EC: No, I think she just – no, I can't say that she accepted the Lord right there and then and I don't think I ever saw her again but, you know, it just shows you that, you know, just when you die there is a life after death. In her case she could see it.

**SA: So you believe that?**

EC: Oh, absolutely, yes.

**SA: I've kind of – I think I've - - -**

EC: I think you've done it.

**SA: Yes. I mean, I'm sure there's a million and one things that we should be talking about.**

EC: You can always ring me up.

74.01 **SA: But it'd be good to have them recorded. Can you think of anything else that we should be talking about in terms of the history of the organisation and the beliefs of the organisation?**

EC: No, it's fairly simple, isn't it?

**SA: So where to for Jesus Cares?**

EC: Well, I'm in my sixties now, O.K. What I would like to think, that the ministry continues on and that people come that are younger than me that have got more – I mean, we tried to – we've been to lots of other



churches in lots of other places that we would like to motivate people to do the sort of ministry that we do because the ministry is very simple. I mean, Blacktown ministry, for example, just started at Blacktown Station by having a table and some food on it and that was a ministry. So it doesn't take much to start one and to reach out to people. So, you know, in many parts of New South Wales and Australia and the world, you know, you could start a ministry like Jesus Cares by opening a coffee shop or by having a food table; you don't need much investment. What you do need is consistency, you need to be consistent and be prepared to do it even when things are very, very quiet and nothing much is happening because, you know, eventually it will touch people's lives, you know. So, yes, so I guess it's motivating others to continue on with the work but also motivating others to start other work in other parts of Sydney and other parts of New South Wales, Australia and the world.

76.00 **SA: So Jesus Cares is not international, obviously, it doesn't have international - - -**

EC: No, it's an incorporated association incorporated within New South Wales. So it's a legal entity but that's it.

**SA: All right. Well, look, thank you, Elwyn, so much for your time today and it's been a great in. Thank you.**

EC: Thank you.

**Interview ends**