

SHELVIS PONDS, JR: I've done a lot of talking, and we've talked about just space and we've talked about the committee and we've talked about the different tracks and the different seasons. I'm really excited to meet you, Tammy, and really excited to hear about your work in Durham and DurhamCares and a little bit more about what you do before I ask more questions.

TAMMY RODMAN: Well, Tammy Rodman of course, I am the Pilgrimage coordinator for DurhamCares, so I've been in this role for approximately a year now. I've been working in the community. I am an ordained pastor. Outreach has always been my thing. I didn't feel very comfortable, well I told God, I didn't want to be a pulpit pastor. I was more outreach. I liked being with the people, in the community, the real things the bible said Jesus did. He walked in the streets. So I like being in the streets. I did that for a good 20 or more years, and that's how I ended up being in this role, my community connections throughout. I've served on several boards with community organizations like InterFaith hospitality network, I was the board chair for a time period, before it connected with Genesis home. I served on the board of Urban Ministries. Homelessness, and just caring for people, has always been a passion of mine. I came to Durham to attend NCSSU many moons ago -- I won't say how long that's been -- and, y'know, some people stay, and some people leave. I left for a small period time and came back here to Durham. I raised my children here. I come from a family of preachers and teachers, so we've always been service-minded with community, and that's the way I was raised. I always was taught to be able to talk to the president of the united states as well as the wino in the corner, and still give them both the respect that they need to have as human beings. So that's the way I live my life. And just tried to do the best I could to help others. In the process, I ended up blessing myself. Sometimes you reach out to people and call yourself helping them and they end up blessing you, with a word or some act of kindness. Just love. So, that's a little bit about me. I could go on with some stuff, I'm not too good at talking about myself. You might take that out of the podcast [laughs]. I could give you my CV and let that speak for my accomplishments over the years. I've earned a doctorate degree, so I'm Dr. Reverend Tammy Rodman. When I think back over that, I look over it as sometimes you have to have certain credentials to be able to be in the space to have your voice heard. That's what I see it as. I worked very hard for it, so when it comes in handy... But out on the corner, I'm Tammy.

SP: Well it's definitely nice to meet you. Just listening to all the really good agencies that you've worked for, from Interfaith hospitality network, you mentioned Genesis home, urban ministries, and you mentioned a passion for homelessness -- and now working for DurhamCares. In light of all the agencies that you've worked for, what are some of the issues that you think Durham is facing? Some of the critical issues that you would say people in Durham really need to know that this is an issue in our community.

T: I believe homelessness is still an issue. Housing is really an issue. There may be people who are not homeless, but they're living in substandard housing. Of course, we're dealing with gentrification, now. So even in areas that used to be areas where nobody wanted to live in, people are moving in and building three to four-hundred-thousand-dollar houses right next to a

dilapidated house. That's an issue because it's pushing people who have been living on the fringes or just being able to survive through renting 00 and like i said a lot of the times the rental places have been substandard -- it's just really difficult to see people living in that space. And looking next door to see this person living in this mansion, almost. So that's one of the biggest issues. Another issue that concerns me and that's been dear to my heart is the food issues.

SP: There are food issues in Durham.

T: Right, there are food issues, there are food deserts still, especially in the east Durham area. And there are people working on it, I've worked with some people like in hunger, Durham and we just need areas where people can have access to food and good food. I see a lot of kids eating junk food. It's expensive to eat healthy, and you could say -- well, if they would just eat better, they wouldn't have to deal with diabetes, or they wouldn't have to deal with being overweight, or something like that -- but go to the grocery store and try to purchase some healthy food. Fruits and vegetables. So that is an issue as well. I think those two issues for me. There are a lot of issues out here, not just specific to Durham, but world-wide that we're dealing with. But those are two issues. And then education. I'm also one of the founding members for a charter school here in Durham, and education has always been key. To see children that lack education access; they go to school but then they don't have some of the things that they need, and they get sent home because of behavior problems. I could go on for days listing the things that I really see that are really wrong. There are young black males dying daily, caught up in violence, and young women as well, caught up in gun violence, and things like that. With the coalition for a non-violent Durham, I've done some work with them as well, and those things really have me thinking at night and praying about and meditating about. I think there's segments of people that are really trying to make an impact but when something has been broken for so long it takes a while for people to realize, one, it's broken, and then begin to look at and see why it was broken. What systemic things are in place causing the food desert, and causing the lack of education, and causing the homelessness, and the substandard housing? Look at that, and then how do we begin to dismantle and begin to rebuild or restore? It's not something that's going to happen overnight, but we have to keep pressing on that. Long story short, those are the things.

SP: Well that's excellent for me and those who are listening to rethink about education, food, homelessness and housing are serious issues in Durham. I want to talk about your identities. Particularly, you mention your servant's heart. I'm curious to know how that servant heart developed, and do you feel as though, being a person of color, that you were more primed to see these issues?

T: Yeah, I think being a person of color, of course. I grew up in a family that I said that were servants. My parents and grandparents were very outspoken people and worked hard. I was blessed to have both sets of my grandparents and some of my great-grandparents, so I knew history. People who worked hard and believed that education was key. I grew up in that area and there was no choice for me. They didn't ask me if I wanted to go to college. It was, what college are you going to? Because they knew that education was key, growing up as a black female in

the United States of America. I was always taught you've got two times smarter in order to get in the same position as some of your counterparts. I grew up with that mindset, and the servant part that just came naturally. When you see generations of feeding people and generations of bringing kids home, even when you're the teacher you bring them home and you feed them. My mother who always felt like she always had to take care of the elderly in the neighborhood. Even though she was a teacher, she gave out of her means, which was not a lot of means, in many cases, because teachers still don't make the money that they should make. All of those things lead up to me having the servant's heart. Just seeing the disparities within my community, growing up a black woman. Seeing people who just pressed and worked hard but still couldn't seem to get places or through certain doors. I was educated and ended up working for a large corporation here in Durham, but still seeing in those spaces having to fight my way for positions. Knowing and training somebody who I knew would be going to end up taking my position or another position that I was more than qualified for. So, all of those struggles, you don't want to see anybody else have to go through that sort of things and deal with those things. I think it's our responsibility when we experience things in life, I don't think they're just for us. I think they are for us to be able to reach out and help somebody else. We can get really caught up in this selfishness that goes on in the world and not reach back and try to pull someone else up. I don't think I was afforded the ability to get all the education that I've got and to be put into the positions that I've been put in just to sit on it or to selfishly gain just for myself. I can share my story, and say you can do this, too. I've had some hard times in life. I went through divorce. I've had those struggles of life, and each opportunity, when I reflect back, I was always thinking: What is the lesson am I supposed to learn out of this? I know what it's like to have to go down to Social Services -- I was like, Lord why? After all these things, I've done A, B, C, and D. Out here, I am at social services asking for some food stamps because I'm now a divorcee and I'm not making the money that I used to be making. I've still got to feed my kids, but someone would always come to me who didn't know how to navigate the system. I realized that for me to go down and learn how to navigate that system and make it work for me was for me to come back and tell this sister how to navigate that system. That whole process or purpose of what we're here to do to help someone else. I get so caught up, Shelvis, I may have even gone off the question, but when you see people just struggling, and I've always been that person who always didn't want to see someone else suffer through some of the things that I've suffered. And I've got an even deeper story that I won't go into, but I resonate with the #MeToo Movement. I've never been starving, but I've been to the point where I opened up the refrigerator and said, how am I going to feed these kids? I've had those moments, let's see, I've got this amount of money, Duke Power or rent. Even in the midst of that struggle, because of where I was with my education, I would be invited to the table. Here I am trying to figure out how to pay my bills, and I'm sitting at the table, and somehow would always be pulled to the leadership position even when I tried to come in and sit down and just be there. I'm there in the space, and before you know it, I have been put in the position to lead that board. I know that it's because I can resonate and know how it feels. I can tell somebody: it's okay, you can make it. I've been couch-surfing

before. I know what it is to couch-surf and to be trying to figure out where you're going to live next. I know what that's like. And now I'm sitting at the head of the table that determines how I can help you be able to sit at the table one day. That gives me joy. Like anybody else I like to earn some money, but If i don't earn a dime, to see somebody else come up and tell me their story and say: that word that you gave me encouraged me and this is what I'm doing now. So that's why I am with DurhamCares, because I get to do that on a regular basis. People come through and they want to know why they're in certain spaces and the issues that are around them and they don't know history, different things like that. They come to this table for pilgrimage and to be able to take them on a journey and see them grappling with themselves about their privilege. When they realize, I've been walking around here in a bubble, now what can I do? To still see people that don't have a clue and see someone else in a group trying to help them to see, or saying: I'm hurting and I've got a right to say I'm hurting right now. To help this person say, let them be in their moment right now, let them have that moment, their voice. Anyway, I hope I answered your question.

SP: I'm just grateful to be here. First of all, thank you for that. I want to hear about DurhamCares. You mention that DurhamCares lets people wrestle with their privilege and their identities, perhaps their conflicting intersectionalities, and takes them on pilgrimages. Could you share more about DurhamCares, which is an organization that you work for?

T: Exactly. The pilgrimage is a faith-based pilgrimage. We basically help people to see how their story, the story of Durham, and God's story intersect. Like I mentioned before, I came to Durham for NCSSU to get my education, that's what I thought. But, ultimately, I was probably here to do more than that. It's panned out that I'm here to do more than what I originally thought i came here to do. To broaden my ability to be able to reach out to people. So, I help people see that to the best of my ability. Or put them in the spaces, help them to hear the stories, because the journey involves going to Stagville. We go to Stagville. Some people know about Stagville, a lot of people don't know how about Stagville. Some people think that it's just to go out there and hear the slaveholder's story, but we have a docent that takes us on a journey, and she tells us as much as she can about the enslaved people's story. Of course, our documentation as a race is not as well as some of the documentation from the slaveholders, but you can piece together some things. You can read between the lines of some of the documentation. She does a wonderful job of that. She's a historian and she puts it together so that when they come on that journey -- when you go and when you stand beside quarters that were built for the slaves and you see the imprints of children and people who were making the bricks that still stand, that's a moment. When somebody said, wait a minute, this is tangible. This is real. That child's handprint, that child was leaving you a message, telling their story in the brick. We leave Stagville and we also share the story of elder Blackfeathered Jeffries, who's a Native American. He shares his story of how the trails. Even along the Stagville area, the Native Americans, of course, were here first, and so the trails along there, how his people worship. Sometimes we only believe that we can worship God in the brick building, right, and he talks about the trees and the birds and how he talks to the animals. It's all the Grandfather. He talks to the Grandfather every morning. His spirituality, and

the way he was raised, so that's a wonderful experience, and then we go on and hear more stories. The pilgrimage is being in a place. It's about encounters. It's about places. It's about stories. It's about transformation. All of those are the elements of a journey. It's an immersion where you have twenty or so people walking together, with their different voices. Hearing stories from Ms. Virginia Williams, who was part of the Royal Seven, a lot of people think the Civil Rights movement in North Carolina started in Greensboro. It didn't. It had some of its beginnings right here in Durham. To hear this eighty-year-old woman share her story as a young woman coming to Durham, they experience that and then have time to reflect on that. It is a journey. We feed the people well. We try to use local entrepreneurs, that's the criteria. So, it's not just an experience of stories and the places, we're also encountering food along the way. You just have those moments when you are either left to reflect on your own, or we have our big circle time. I explain that that came out of the native American tradition. We go to the Latino credit union. We talk about some of the issues as to why that was formed, which a lot of those things are happening now. It was formed based on the fact that a lot of the Latino people were coming here and being day-workers. They got a lot of cash on them, and they were getting robbed a lot. A lot of them weren't banked. They didn't have access. If you're not banked, you don't have access to a lot of stuff. You're left to those predatory services like the check cashing places that charge you ten percent, or three percent, or five percent. So you're working, and they're taking a thousand dollars worth of your money that you could be saving. We get that whole experience as well, and we're even broadening it. Since I've been on board, I begin to say, let's begin with Durham and make sure the pilgrimage continues to reflect Durham. So we're broadening even the piece with the Latino community now. We sat with **Samuel** and listened to his story when he was in sanctuary at CityWell. We talked to Mr. Spate now. He's one of the few families -- Joy Spate and Mr. Melvis Spate. One of the few families that's left from the Hayti community that still has a business. He talks about as he says "urban removal." When they put 147 through the black community. So they hear that story. Those are the different things that you experience on a pilgrimage. Every time I go through it personally with another group, it's different, because I have different personalities. I just walk away with a richer experience every time. Those are some of the things that the pilgrimage offers. I've been reaching out to Mayor Schewel and with some members of the county commissioners because I truly believe that in order to be a person that serves the community, you need to know the history. You need to know the context in which you're working. A lot of times, you can go out and say, well these people over here, they need this. Well, how do you know what they need if you haven't talked to them? How do you know what they're going through unless you develop a relationship with them? We begin that here with the pilgrimage, hopefully for some, and try to extend that. There have been some from the pilgrimage that I'm still in relationship with. They contact me and ask what's going on and I try to keep them abreast of all the different issues that are going on. Different events and things like that. Immigration is a hot item right now. Having been in a relationship with Samuel, and that whole thing. We're beginning to have a conversation here on immigration because a lot of people are ignorant to immigration. They were like, well he broke the law. Wait a minute, do you

know the story? Do you know what immigration is about? Do you know the truths? We want to take away the “true” vs. the “lie,” and have that conversation. Those are the things that we’re working towards being better at. Having those difficult conversations or setting it up so that people can hear stories. Stories are important. You got to hear stories.

SP: You have to hear stories. Thinking about our conversation and the conference and past persons that I’ve had the privilege to speak to, I’m seeing there’s multiple ways to create just spaces. My last question, because I feel like it’s very salient for this moment that we’ve had together, is how can stories create just space?

T: Wow.

SP: The stories we tell create just or perhaps unjust spaces. Telling the story.

T: I think when you tell the story, from my experience, it can within itself create space. When I share a story with you, for instance, and something in that resonates with you, then you desire to even know more about whatever that thing in that story peaked you. It can bring about these things. It can bring about liberation. It can make you think about: what is my purpose? What am I to be doing? It can make you look in the mirror, at yourself. Whatever things you may be struggling with, that story that I share, could be the very story that would help you desire a space. I think when we hear stories, it just does something to us. Then it’s up to us, or sometimes we may need the help of someone, maybe the person who told the story, to say, if you want to know more, let’s have a gathering. Let’s talk some more about this. That has been the case for me on several occasions. I have a story, a personal story, of some abuses as a child. Out of that, my dissertation was developed. Then, out of that dissertation, I set up opportunities where I could have other women come and share their stories. Some who never told their stories. Out of my story developed space. It just happened. It’s up to us and those of us who were touched by those stories to dig deeper, or to find places, and even set up places, yourself, if you want more. I hope that answered that. When we think about it, even from the biblical perspective, the Bible is full of stories.

SP: Constant stories.

T: It’s stories. So, it’s the story of God and God’s love for His people. That whole redemptive process, but within the story is a story. Out of the story developed other stories.

SP: And they’re messy [laughs].

T: Yeah, they’re messy. They are messy. The reality is that they’re messy. Life is messy. It is very messy and we have to decide whether we’re going to avoid the mess and live in that bubble. But eventually, even the messiness is going to come and find you. You can try to get around it, but it’ll come find you. One of the things that stood, many of the things he said, Malcolm X, I think he was referring to the crack epidemic, if I’m not mistaken. He made reference to the fact that, and this is not a direct quote, but you can sit over here and think that this issue is just for these people. But if you don’t realize how connected you are, that issue is going to come and sit

on your doorstep one day. I think it might have been after Kennedy had been shot, he said that the chickens had come home to roost and caused an uproar. But ultimately, we're interconnected. We all are. As difficult as that can be, we have got to realize that we are, and what will affect me somewhere along the way if I don't address it or deal with it or whatever I'm called to do in that space, is going to have a ripple effect. That ripple will come back on this side of the shore.

SP: Well, thank you. I'm filled. I could go on and talk with you, Tammy, for a long time about stories and just space and all the different issues in Durham that we need to talk seriously. I'm really grateful for your time.

T: Well, thank you.

SP: I'm grateful for you allowing me to come into your space and sit and hear your story. Without further ado, thank you much.

T: Thank you.