

Interview with Francis and Walter

Interviewer: Shirley Andrews

n.d.

Francis: To really understand you almost have to come to see, and if you're traveling around anyway, that would be the place.

Walter: It would be interesting because it would give you a much clearer picture if you were there for a couple of days, venture out.

Q: That would be great!

F: And we're not that far.

Q: Walter and Janis did you say?

F: Francis.

Q: Francis, I'm sorry, Walter and Francis have two communal experiences, I'll just start the tape here with this. One stems from the '70's then the second one from the early '80's when they joined with the Bruderhof. So let's start, tell me about the first one, the '70's, you said you met there? Did you meet in the community?

W: Well I was a student at the Associated Mennonite Seminaries at Elkhart, Indiana, at that time. At that time, Francis was still a student here at Bethel College in Kansas, 1970. It wasn't until a year or two later that we met. In 1970, there were quite a number of college students and seminary students among the Mennonites, among three or four branches of Mennonites, I might add, who came together in that area and as we studied the heritage of the radical reformation of the 16th century: Mennonites, Amish, Presbyterians, we found ourselves really excited about what we saw happening there in the 16th century. A recovery of a kind of new life together, actually, to be able to share their daily life, and discovered a practical way to live out the teachings of Jesus. That's sort of the basis of what became Fellowship of Hope in the spring of 1970, there were nine people who came together in covenant together. We wanted to find out what it means to be followers of Jesus, of the core. We already had one hint, one kind of a covenant was that it would mean being open with each other and seeking together to find out what God's word was. We believed in the idea of consensus, all decisions that we made within the group should be made by consensus rather than simply a democratic vote. So there are two of the core ideas that our lives should focus on Jesus and that we care for one another enough to listen and discuss any questions that came up.

Q: How did it happen that you found one another? You were all going to school in the same place, did you all have seeds of discontent, you realized that your life wasn't as full as you'd hoped to and several of you then, might it have happened that way? Or how did you discover one another? Just in classes together? In talking informally?

W: Well, I suppose a lot of it happened in between classes. Yes, certainly, we discovered that none of us were happy or satisfied with the established churches, I think we all had that in common. To one degree or another we were not satisfied with the existing Mennonite churches at that time.

Interview with Francis and Walter

Interviewer: Shirley Andrews

n.d.

Q: Were they too liberal for you, were they too conservative, were they not focused in the direction which you felt was appropriate?

W: Well, I think that it was a case where we felt they weren't intentional enough about following the teachings of Jesus. We felt that most Mennonites were quite acculturated and assimilated into the broader American culture, and increasingly so. We felt like the gospel actually calls us to be a catholic culture or community, that's a term we used to use.

Q: And it was popular at that time too...

W: In a religious sense.

Q: In a religious sense.

W: To be authentically Christian means that you're both very different from the secular establishment and the religious establishment. Because in many ways, we felt that Christianity had betrayed the gospel and that's...we were sort of arrogant, I see now. But we actually felt that very strongly that Christendom was for the birds, you know, the heck with Christianity. We wanted Jesus because we sensed that there was something much more authentic about the earliest Christians described in the book of Acts, Chapter 2...

Q: Yes.

W: They were one heart and one soul, but we never knew of that. None of the churches we belonged to were of one heart and one soul. None of them had sharing napkins in common like in the Book of Acts. We thought, there is something here. There must be some spirit at work that created that kind of love and caring for one another. We were very hopeful that could be recovered, like I said, I was very arrogant in thinking that we could become such a recovery, that's sort of audacious to think that we could bring this on.

Q: And yet God chooses, sometimes, those that seem like the least.

W: so we met together frequently as a small group and hashed a lot of things out, what does it mean? Well, eventually we decided it would be good to live in the same neighborhood. We should all move to the same neighborhood, it turns out that it was a neighborhood where one of the couples had already lived in. It was a mixed neighborhood, we had African Americans, white people, we thought that would be a good setting to test these ideas out. Can we really develop this kind of a house church. Within that setting where we could also care for the people in our neighborhood, reach out.

Q: So you, oh, that's awesome. So you lived in a neighborhood rather than in one building or one structure?

W: At first, we did.

Q: At first?

W: We lived in three or four different houses I guess.

Interview with Francis and Walter

Interviewer: Shirley Andrews

n.d.

Q: So these were men and women?

W: There were three couples and three single people at first then three more single people joined us within a few months, so we were twelve, twelve disciples. See how audacious we were?

Q: Oh, I think it's marvelous.

W: We didn't have to remain twelve, but we were twelve for a while.

Q: That's the way things began, I understand, my Biblical studies help out. So, this community had a name, you mentioned that you called yourselves?

W: Yes, we accepted the name Fellowship of Hope.

Q: Fellowship of Hope. Then how did you act on your goals for pursuing your life that follows Jesus or pursuing a life that comes to know what it means to be a follower of Jesus as opposed to Christian in the church. How did that play out? How did you do that? What kinds of things? Did you do social action kind of things or was it mostly kept within your group? Did you do outreach or evangelism?

W: There was some outreach. At the beginning we felt like we had to kind of be together, we met together frequently, let's say, three or four times a week in the evening we would get together for discussions and prayer. Some one would read an inspired passage from some book that spoke about being a follower of Jesus, but I would say most of it was discussion about six months a year actually.

Q: Well, it's a good way to get to know one another as your seeing what it means to live in covenant. You were at Bethel, were you doing a similar kind of experiment while you were at Bethel?

F: Not there, in fact, I wasn't acquainted with the communal movement at all, really that I remember at Bethel. But I remember the one thing that did, sort of a beginning for me, was in the church. I was attending one of the Mennonite churches in Newton and we were studying the church and what the church means. When we discovered and looked at what the early church was like, the nature of the early church, I thought, "Wow, that's exciting. If that's what the church is then I really want to be a part of it." I wasn't feeling that that experience had been my experience at all in my growing up years, although I'm very thankful for my upbringing and background as far as the vitality of the church. I just wasn't experiencing it that much within my experience that was 1969, '70. '71. Those were the years, my experience in those years on Bethel campus, and it might not have been everybody's experience, but mine was that the people that I felt were most, that thought the most about their faith and that were really grounded in the gospel sort of stuck to that with prayer meetings and got together for bible readings and had this prayer and praise and singing and it just sort of stayed there. Then, of course it was during the Vietnam years and those people were out protesting and had their long hair and their language that I didn't quite agree with, and I really felt that it was an important part of the gospel, but I didn't see that they founded their activities in the gospel, I just felt like they would approach it in a little bit of a different way.

Q: So they were almost perverting it.

F: I just felt like they were turning people off like what you say, and it wasn't reaching out or getting the message across because of how they were trying to get it across. I'm sure there must have been people

Interview with Francis and Walter

Interviewer: Shirley Andrews

n.d.

there that were very sincere, I know there were some there. But I just felt that I couldn't identify with that movement either. It was a bit frustrating, I just thought, "Ok you have to decide you either do this or that." I didn't want to choose either one so I wasn't quite sure what to do, but as it happened, both my major professors took a leave of absence, I think my sophomore year and were going to be gone the next year or so and the replacements that came, or the one teacher I had then as a sophomore I was going to have to have again as a junior. I just felt like I wanted to change schools. It wasn't the kind of teacher I felt I was paying all this money for.

Q: I can identify with that.

F: So I transferred to Goshen College which was far away from my home and experience, but I really had been looking at the catalogue, I was really attracted to their course offerings. That's the main reason I transferred.

Q: Where is Goshen?

F: Goshen, Indiana, it's Northern Indiana. Not too far from Chicago.

Q: Is it a Mennonite University?

F: Yes. It's also a Mennonite four year college. While I was there, I think it was maybe my senior year that I met some students, who, as it turned out, were involved in Little House Church Fellowships. They were sprinkled all over the Goshen area. There must have been about five or six of them, I guess. You know, just students and some faculty who would just meet together or even live together in one house and I got in touch with one particular fellow who was, I was helping with one of the classes, I guess, and he was the instructor, a student-instructor. We had many good conversations together and I just really felt from him a deep faith and out of that faith was a call to social action to speaking to the world and seeking for justice. It just all fit together and I just thought, "Wow, it is possible!" And, as it turned out, thee, this particular fellow and others that he was associated with had a little house in Goshen, kind of on the other side of town from the college, where several students and formal students, I think they were all single people, decided they were going to pool their income and all live together in one house. I think it was, well, after I...I was in the dorm until I graduated, but then after that, I moved to this little house. I was working and pooled my income and we all shared the meals together. We had very important times of Bible study and reaching out to the neighbors. Walter was part of this community and Fellowship of Hope in Elkhart, it was sort of like a mother community. We were all these little house churches, he would just come and visit and that's where I first became acquainted with him.

Q: And you wanted to follow him to the next house?

F: Well many of these little communities, because they were composed of college students were sort of, you know, they just weren't real settled. People weren't ready to stay there for the rest of their lives. I think they sort of started disintegrating, at least the one that I was a part of, one person wanted to go on to graduate school, one person wanted to do this and one person wanted to do that. There was another girl and I and we felt all this we felt that we wanted a community. We didn't want to anything, in fact, I gave up going on to medical technology because I felt like I had to stay with this expression of the church. I felt this was where I was to give my life. So, this other friend and I, we thought, "Okay, we

Interview with Francis and Walter

Interviewer: Shirley Andrews

n.d.

don't know where we should be, but we're going to go seek the nearest community, where we should go next." We met with these folks from the Fellowship of Hope and we just decided, "Well, the house was going to be sold, we'll just move there and seek where we should go next with these folks." In our seeking together, we felt convinced that we should just stay at Fellowship of Hope. That's where I became a member. So then, that's how I got there.

Q: And so the two of you were married shortly thereafter or was it several years after that happened?

W: About a year later.

F: A year later.

Q: And then together you lived at the Fellowship of Hope?

W: For another nine years or so after we were married.

Q: Is Fellowship of Hope still going?

W: Not as a communal group, no. Some of the people moved away. I would say there's about maybe half a dozen people there who were there at the time we lived there. The common purse was eventually dissolved and the houses that we lived in were sold. I guess most of the people who had formerly lived there, in other words, the communal ownership was dissolved, we had bought ten or twelve houses in all during the time of the common purse. But that whole community was dissolved as a communal organization, that was the beginning of the congregation. Mostly Mennonites, but also other people continued to worship there and participate as a congregation. So it's not communal in the sense that it was at that time.

Q: Was it difficult to dissolve that communal purse, was there, I suspect if you own that much land and houses, you have quite a few assets, was it a situation in that those of you who were active at that moment, this may be too personal and you're certainly welcome to...

W: No, that's okay.

F: We weren't actually there.

W: We had already moved away at the time the common purse was dissolved. A lot of transition happened in this project, 1980-81, a lot of discussion went on there. One of the catalysts for that was that quite a number of seminary students attended our meetings and some of them pretty much liked what we said, they liked the close knit fellowship and caring for one another, the lively music and worship meetings, it wasn't Pentecostal, it was enjoyable, it was from the heart. But many of these students were transitional, transient people who were there for a couple years and they'd be gone. Some of them stayed longer, but for the most part, many of the guests and visitors who came on Sunday morning were transient people, but many of them also felt they were drawn to this community life. Somehow wanted to be acknowledged as full participants, as members of this fellowship, without making the long term commitment.

F: And without being involved in the full way like the communal members.

W: Without pooling all their resources. You can't have your cake and eat it too. But the leadership of the community at that time simply lacked. It's true. Not all Christians have to live in a community to be Christians. We can't define Christianity in terms of those who pool their resources in a common purse.

Interview with Francis and Walter

Interviewer: Shirley Andrews

n.d.

So they thought it was a theological bind here, saying that for us Christianity meant living in a communal church but for them it doesn't. Are they second grade Christians, or what's going on here? The ones who were hurt decided you could either be a communal member of this group or a congregational member. There was a concentric circle in the middle of the core group that lives communally and there's a larger circle which includes these transient people who want to have some commitment to this church, to attend regularly and to share their tithes or whatever. Well, they tried that for several years and we could see very quickly that something was happening in this group that was changing drastically. The whole circle of Fellowship of Hope, for one thing, the people in this larger circle complained that they were being excluded from too many things. They weren't being drawn to the center of life, like they were before. Some people before this, we tried to draw them in as much as possible. But now we had separate meetings, the communal group had one or two meetings a week primarily for the communal group and certain activities and the experiences that we shared in certain ways. The larger circle more and more felt that this was terrible, it doesn't work. Some of the communal members were not completely satisfied with the way things were going either. They wanted a bit more independence, I remember one couple said, "The common purse just doesn't fit us, we want to buy our own home and move into a separate house." All of these parenthetical messages and there had been a time between 1975 and 1980 when many of us moved together in communal households and that was the beginning that we all lived in separate houses. But we had households of 10 or 12 people, maybe two couples and several single people lived in our group in one big house together. They weren't terribly big houses but we were clusters, three or four of these clusters of extended family households and (...) extended family households with another family and us and several single people. But they felt a need to get more independent and so they did, they built a house on their own. Several other people left the common purse because we weren't serving their need for independence.

Q: Which then undermines one of the purposes for which you...Let me stop just to make sure of the mechanics, looks like it's going just fine. So then you two came to a place where you saw it was no longer meeting your expectations?

W: Yes, I think it appeared to me, it seemed like the original version of the fully integrated, how do you say, totally shared life, communal life that all aspects of your life were somehow shared and you were accountable to each other, that whole vision had been watered down as being lost. But the commitment to be here, and we even felt, a lifetime commitment, that was what we were expecting it would be. We gave up our jobs, our career, anticipation of career involvements, I was going to go to grad school but I dropped that idea. I came over and sacrificed career ambitions because I thought that here was a church community to which we wanted to devote our lives, our lifetime, to build up a new kind of church community. Jobs, careers weren't important to us, it was much more important to have ongoing relationships with people in this circle and to try to find Jesus as radically as we could.

Q: I like that phrase, "As radically as we could" that's great.

W: Well with the help of the spirit, and certainly didn't think we could do it with our own strength but we wanted to be totally dedicated to the kingdom of God and to let God's kingdom find expression in our midst by the way we cared for each other and helped one another and the way we reached out to

Interview with Francis and Walter

Interviewer: Shirley Andrews

n.d.

others in the neighborhood. At that time we did tutoring and quite a lot of other community activities, work for poor neighbors, so it was also a sense of caring the neighbors.

Q: You mentioned earlier that you were interested in a group that would reach out regardless of racial boundaries, social boundaries, etc. Did that actually play out in that way? Do you have African Americans, Hispanic Americans...

W: In that circle, I don't think we ever had members in the community. There was one couple whose husband was black, the wife was white, who became what we call intentional neighbors. They intentionally moved into our neighborhood to participate in our life together, they rented a house from us. But as far as members, they never actually became members.

Q: What kinds of things did you use to determine whether or not someone was prepared or matured into the faith enough to become a member of the inner circle, one that was committed in the covenant, you mentioned the communal purse, of course, would be one step that they would take. Were there other kinds of criteria that you used in order to assess that persons commitment and acceptance of the tenants of your faith at the time.

W: We didn't really have a list of criterion, it was more a matter of, let's say a young couple that's thinking about marriage, let's get to know them together, let's learn to do things together and share together and see if we fit together, see if we belong together. See it's more of an organic process of getting to know these new people and as they participate with us and come to our, we have communal meals once or twice a week in the evenings and a little program afterwards and lots of discussions. But it became apparent to most of these guests or intentional neighbors, it became quite apparent to them as well as the core members after a few months whether they really belonged with us. It was a mutual recognition. Wouldn't you say?

F: It was like when I changed from being in Goshin to Elkhart, it was clear in my mind I wanted to come after a couple weeks, I felt like, "I want to join here, now, here I am. This is where I'm called, there's no doubt, this is where I belong. But the rest still, they had never known me before, so they wanted to get more acquainted. So both of us were coming to a feeling that God was needing us together. Then at that point...

W: Then we celebrated, we had a special love meal, we thought, just a really nice feast, together, fairly simple, but you know, celebrative atmosphere. It was a real joy. We all felt committed to serve together with us and we felt a great joy whenever the circle could be enlarged. One of the key elements, though, would be part of the initial, to be familiar with what Jesus said in Matthew chapter 18 about "When your brother sins go and speak to him personally and see if you can win him." This whole concept of speaking openly when you see something in another person that doesn't seem quite right, when they said something that doesn't seem to be in the spirit of love, just speak openly and try to clear it up.

Acknowledge it, acknowledge one another, the commitment was that we would be open to that. If somebody came up to me with concern I would listen to that concern. If there was something in that concern that struck my heart then I need to change. That whole concept plays into this "what it means to be a member". If a person is defensive and didn't let the heavenly father into their daily, didn't let him interfere with their personality and the way they acted and the way they spent...then after all, the

Interview with Francis and Walter

Interviewer: Shirley Andrews

n.d.

person would probably leave because we expected each other to be open, honest and freely speaking what we felt and also to receive correction from others.

Q: Were you also free to discuss or to push further for a lack of better example, if I were to come to you with a concern that you felt was not valid or didn't apply, after you had heard me out with patience and working to hear what I was saying to you, would you have the freedom then to say to me, "I think you're off base, I really think maybe you're seeing this from a skewed position let me tell you where I come from..." Is that also is that kind of a dialogue?

W: Oh, yes. Yes, it really was that way. Often we'd say, "I don't think you're really seeing it for what it is. I think we had that feeling don't you Francis?"

F: Oh, yes. And if you couldn't come together then you would really feel, like we take as our example Matthew 18, where you go to your brother or sister and if you can't resolve your differences then you have someone else come in and listen and help you discern and help you come together.

Q: Did you have a spiritual head of your group that was a person...I mean, I realize you had the ultimate spiritual head, but did you have a person whose job it was to hear you and perhaps to council you and others and did you choose that person or was that person chosen by lot, did the person arise from the community and were recognized?

W: In the beginning, we didn't have to have leaders. But about two or three years after we did, we actually asked two or three people considered sort of elders. Yes, we often did talk to them for help in those situations. They were sort of a model for the convergence of our meetings, councilman's, but this matter of getting a third person to help you could be anyone. Anyone in your household that you were living in or anyone whom you trusted, but there had to be mutual respect, hopefully that was with all of the members, you could have gone to any person, it didn't need to be one of the leaders.

Q: I can envision choosing someone who would take my side.

W: Well, it usually happened pretty informally, but yeah, especially after she came in 1973, by that time we were leaning towards household situations in small groups. We still felt like 6 or 8 people offered the best interaction, so by that time we had two or three of these small groups and usually there was sort of a tribunal of each of those groups that we could go to, even though he might not be an elder, he or she could help facilitate. Or sometimes in the small group, the small groups also met at least twice a week and in that set of 6 or 8 people the differences could also be dealt with.

Q: When you lived in houses with two or so families and perhaps two or three other single persons, how did you handle the routine, day to day living chores: who cooked and cleaned, who made sure that supplies were restocked in the appropriate places, squeezing the toothpaste from the wrong spot comes to mind as being an irritation sometimes in families. How were the chores handled and were they pretty much expected along gender lines, for example, did women primarily do the cooking, and the cleaning and the laundry and the men primarily do whatever income producing...you must have had some way to produce income. You said you gave up your graduate school aspirations, but it does require money to live.

Interview with Francis and Walter

Interviewer: Shirley Andrews

n.d.

W: Most of us were employed in various jobs. Everyone except the students basically and the young mothers all were employed, the rest of us got jobs wherever we could teaching or driving a school bus.

F: But in these households we had what was called a household manager and what usually happened was that there was one person who was sort of responsible for the pastoral care, I guess.

W: That was the second person at the house.

F: Right, and it was usually a brother and then there was a household manager which was usually a sister. Not necessarily a wife, but another person who would just see to the organization of the house, you know, see that the cooking schedule was in order and the dishwashing and who would clean what and I think we washed our own clothes for our own family units.

W: But we took turns cooking family meals.

F: Pretty much the brothers took the breakfast and the sisters took the evening meal and then the noon meal, most people would go on and just eat whatever was there. But the household manager was expected to see that those everyday things were orderly and got done.

Q: Would a family with children have been in one room or more than one room? Were the children in that small household together regardless of their biological parents? For example, did that ever happen? Did you ever have couples with multiple children in the same group and were the children communal too in so much as any adult was able to intervene in their growing up process or stop them from swinging on the chandeliers I think is what I really want to say...

W: Well, usually the couple would have a separate bedroom I think we only had two children during that time and the first house we lived in had two little boys and they had their own bedroom. They were from two families. They kind of had three rooms then for children. Yes, I think there was a lot of shared childcare, a lot of the simple tasks like if they were needing help with babysitting and that sort of thing and intervening when necessary. I think the basic training and discipline of the child was relegated primarily to the child's parents.

F: But I think one thing that I feel was a bit of a weakness in that setting was that we were all just like this house, although it was much bigger with lots of bedrooms, we were just all together all the time. I think we've discovered that especially as your family gets older and grows larger to have the family unit be together just as a unit sometimes is very crucial. Especially to, especially for the father, I think to really take the lead in the family together with his wife and draw them together and really make it possible for the wife to look to her husband. In that particular setting how we were with everybody together, I mean, my husband went off to work all the time and who I saw the most being at home was the brother that worked around the fellowship and lived in the house. As far as having a close working relationship, that didn't happen much in those years and that was really unfortunate.

W: The other, the husband of the other couple, he was the pastoral leader of our household, you might say to use that term. So he was the other person who would put all the leadership for our household in transit with the household manager. His wife was employed outside, so it was sort of an unusual situation in that you had two different couples in your life and that was fine, but it wasn't good for our relationship to develop. We felt like after a while...

F: It didn't help, it got in the way or it wasn't encouraging for Walter to take responsibility for our family and I didn't look to him for advice and counsel as should be. That's where we really appreciate how things are structured now in that our family can really be a unit.

Interview with Francis and Walter

Interviewer: Shirley Andrews

n.d.

Q: How many children do you have?

F: We have six children.

Q: And they obviously aren't here or else they're very quiet.

F: They're obviously not here (laughs).

W: They're home, but another couple sort of moved in for this week while we were gone.

Q: Ah...so this is kind of a getaway for you two. Have you talked about anything other than your children back home (laughs)...

W: Sure.

Q: Well, I think couples need that from time to time and I appreciate your comments about nuclear family because I think that plays a big role in all community living experiments, those that are ongoing and those that are just beginning. It's one of those decisions that is important to make and to see how it plays out. So when did you leave the Fellowship of Hope?

F: Could I just say something?

Q: Please, please...

F: that goes into our decision to think, I mean there were all, like Walter was saying, all this change was sort of going on, and I think at one point we just sort of said, "What's going on here in the Fellowship of Hope, things are kind of moving in a direction and what did we actually commit ourselves to when we joined several years ago? What we committed ourselves to and said we wanted and wanted to give our lives to is changing and it's not there anymore. What's going on?" What goes along with that is also I think, Fellowship of Hope had had some contact with the Bruderhof community and we sang songs from them and were inspired by their witness and their life together that had been going for a while already. Walter, I mean, we, on our wedding trip we went to visit the Bruderhof communities and I think even before that Walter was always attracted to the Bruderhof communities. But I had just committed myself to Fellowship of Hope and it was sort of, that was pretty strong headed, trying to learn at least a way of talking together. I felt that I had committed myself to Fellowship of Hope, I'm not going to change, I'm here, if you want me, you're going to have to stay here. Forget about the Bruderhof, I didn't even want to think about it. That was really wrong to be that way, but that's how it was. For several years, Walter was just told, "Well, you're here at the Fellowship of Hope, with your wife, just be here, give yourself totally and just forget entertaining ideas about going anywhere else because it's just looking over the fence. The grass is greener on the other side. Face your problems in your situation and live here. Then one day, I don't know, when was it...1980 or so.

W: About 1977.

F: Yeah, we had a marriage encounter or we participated in that and part of that emphasis is you should be able to talk with your husband about anything and to really open it and if there are those subjects that are hard to talk about, write about it and share each other's writing. That was very critical at that point. I thought, that's one thing I have not wanted to talk about and we just have to face it, we just have to. As a couple we need to be united. You can't have these things in the closet that we're not going to talk about. That's just not the way to be. So, my motivation in 1982 I guess it was, was "Okay, we'll go

Interview with Francis and Walter

Interviewer: Shirley Andrews

n.d.

to the Bruderhof just to settle it, you don't really want to be there". That was the wrong way to go, but I felt that at least we have to open up the subject and go see together. So that was the beginning of the search together...Really, where are we going?

W: Those first few months we came in 1982, she kept hoping that I would become disillusioned and want to leave and I kept hoping that she would want to join the Bruderhof community.

Q: And I see it worked out that way.

F: Well it wasn't until we both gave it up. I had to give up Fellowship of Hope and all of my ideas and Walter also gave up his wanting to pull me into the Bruderhof. We both had to let go and just stand before God. We're a couple and we're going to be together the rest of our lives, now where are we going. That's where we sought in retreat and silence and prayer and sharing together, just standing before God by ourselves too, we had to really come to that each of us individually knowing and trusting that God was going to lead us to the same place because that was never a doubt that God hadn't called us together and that we were to be together the rest of our lives. So we were just seeking so we could feel like, yes, God has called us here or there or wherever. That was a very important time.

W: It took about a year and a half until the Lord had settled that question between the two of us, but we were both independently thought that we should move there and stay there.

F: I think we also have to say that we also could have done more to add to the life at Fellowship of Hope, I mean, we also, when Walter was talking about straight speaking and love, I think that's one thing that began to break down. We weren't being as open with each other and just making sure relationships were clear always and I think whenever that begins or whenever that gets started then the trust between people starts to break down and if you can't fully trust somebody you're not going to want to make decisions with somebody or it's hard to make decisions. That's, you know, we were also a part of that breakdown that I think contributed to the movement of the direction that the Fellowship went in to of dissolving their communal life.

W: That's really true, I think we contributed as much as any of the other people to this dissolution or the break down of communal life. Just in terms of unity, making decisions together, I mean one of the areas that I felt very strongly about in the late '70's is a witness for peace. At that point I was very much into what we would call resistance to atomic tests or to nuclear weapons and that sort of thing. I gained the consent of the community that I could participate in the life of peace witness at that time. Sort of like it used to be in the '60's

Q: I hope I can hear it when I go to transcribe it, I'm eager to do that, I'll send you a copy. So you went to this peace, protesting the atomic...

W: Well, what I'm trying to say is that the decision making about what I should do came from me. I had pretty much decided that I needed to do this, I wanted to do this, I felt an urgency to do it, whether or not the whole community would support it. There were other people in the community that said, "We shouldn't be doing this civil disobedience should we?" We weren't completely united about whether our peace witness should ever involve civil disobedience, for example.

Interview with Francis and Walter

Interviewer: Shirley Andrews

n.d.

Q: Jesus was a civilly disobedient type.

W: Okay, yeah, that's just an illustration of the kind of question that we didn't feel completely together on as a group. More and more different ones of us would say, "I feel I should do this, is it okay, would you let me go?" and people would say, "Okay I give my consent" but not really feel supportive of what they're doing. And that kind of attitude, I was appalled as much as anyone at that sort of decision making. Because I couldn't wait until consensus came, you know it took patience and love for my brothers and sisters to really wait. I had the urgency to do certain things, and I think others felt that too, there was quite a variety of of decisions and more and more it became a more independent way of thinking. You must be willing to seek together for a consensus and that's willing to wait until the group could come to consensus, which is a difficult thing, at least I did.

F: And that really brings down...

W: It undermined the unity of the fellowship and my intention obviously for us was that I would have much rather seen us move in the direction of a more total communal life, like community of production as well as a community of consent and common will, as we call it. Most of the other people in our fellowship were much more happy with having their own career, in general, I don't mean professional advancement, necessarily, but each person had their own job. Everybody else liked to do that, but I didn't. I wasn't the only one, there were several others who wished we could also communal work, but the leadership was never interested in going that way. So it never really developed it was just a point of tension that we didn't really come together.

Q: Do you have that now in the Bruderhof?

W: The communal work?

Q: As well as...

W: Yes.

Q: Are all of you who live there...can we talk about that I'm excited about that now moving to that because I want to know if, how many of you are there and if you all are truly of one mind, one heart, one soul and one purpose as you had hoped to become in the Fellowship of Hope so many years ago.

W: We speak now of of the Bruderhof communities?

Q: Yes, the one in which you just described.

W: Well, as we experience it, it's a pilgrimage along the way. There's a certain amount of utopia and a certain amount of perfect community living, I would n't say there's perfect unity. The problem is very clear that all of us really want to be of one heart, one mind and one soul and we'd do anything necessary to work for that.

F: And we believe that's possible and that needs to, well, it's a belief that God's spirit is moving and speaking and he doesn't tell this person one thing and this person another thing. If we're all really listening and seeking together and we wait for each other we will come to a sense of direction and commune together as a united body. That, you have to believe that's really possible or you won't have the patience to stick it out and work it through.

Interview with Francis and Walter

Interviewer: Shirley Andrews

n.d.

Q: And that's what you were talking about earlier about patience of consensus?

W: Yes.

Q: Okay, I understand more now.

W: Just for one example, the way we appoint leaders in our community is that the whole circle of adult members has a meeting that we frequently do two or three times a week when we meet for sharing together and worship and business meeting or any decisions any major decisions that need to be made. One illustration of that kind of a meeting of the community is, let's say the leadership feels like, "We really need another person to help us with this task it's getting to be too much for us," the more persons that we try to have in the leadership team. So in short, we just say if you take suggestions from the floor people will help you but what if that discussion leads in the direction of "Yes we should have this person" and you almost have consensus, but one person says, "But I feel hesitation about this, I'm just not sure whether we should have this person to do this task". The meeting would just stop. Literally, we would postpone the decision. If anyone had a reservation even if we couldn't spell it out at that moment, we would say, okay, then we just wait. You see, it's very important to us that major decisions are really made unanimously in complete unity. We can't ask someone to be a leader if we don't all fully trust that person and all feel "Yes, now is the time to ask this person to take on this position" This is an illustration here of the kind of unity that we seek for and we experience today. Complete unity in whatever administration is chosen. That's just one example. There are many other decisions that are made where we experience the same thing. If we don't immediately feel that we have it, the proposed direction, we would wait and we would give up the discussion there. But we would never take a vote or never

Q: Force the issue. Yes.

W: It must be felt it was a clear direction. That's the kind of unity that really is possible and we experience that. So anything short of that would seem to be inadequate to us.

F: We feel that that is what Jesus really calls us to in his Jesus prayer in John 17 is for the unity of the believers and only by the unity will all men know that you are my disciples, that's a real sign post to the world that something is alive and working here and if there isn't that unity here among us, then what's working? Something's missing, that's why we feel it is so important because if we're not united then we're not all listening carefully enough to the movement of the spirit. Is that what you'd say Walter?

W: Yes. Well, you know how easy it is to become (....)

Q: Well, and I was actually a little bit reluctant to say that, as a student also of human nature there are some folks who simply are more reserved and skeptical maybe, another word to describe them. And there are others who are cheerleaders in every walk of life. So I can imagine that with the multiple personalities that it does take some folks longer to be discerning about what feels as though it is the movement of the spirit within their own mind and heart.

W: Sure.

Q: How many of you are living in this particular group?

W: About 350.

Interview with Francis and Walter

Interviewer: Shirley Andrews

n.d.

Q: Do you form other communities then when you get to a, do you have a set number that when you reach that isn't that the Kuderites that do that? 200 or whatever then they form a new community down the road at least.

W: ... I would say something like 300 or 400 would be the sort of ideal or optimal size for a community. Then at a certain point, the coordinators of the community consult with each other about what to do about this. They consult frequently. The proposal may turn up at any time. We've been thinking about starting another branch. In that case it's not just one community dividing into two as it is with the more traditional Kuderites, but it's one body, really one body in two different places. You know, one circle in eight different places. So, when the decision is made to start a new community, it's very largely that people from all the other communities are drawn to this new community. The place we lived, it's been now, thirty years, two families came from one community and one from another and so on and so forth. They moved together to form one community. So it began small, as soon as there was adequate housing there would be more people.

F: They're always coming from different places depending on their gifts and the needs in the community.

Q: And probably their sense of call to do so.

W: Yes, that's a good question and the answer lies in the fact that we feel called to the total circle and so the initiative doesn't come from the individual, for the most part.

F: Wherever we're asked to live, we will gladly go and that's actually our commitment.

W: So the suggestion probably comes from the coordinator to you. The leaders of all the communities consult about whether they need to (...) They would make an addition to the circle. They would say that people of larger circles should move to another, that's what would happen. (...) So I said great, sure. That's our basic attitude, whatever the church needs or asks us to do we will do that. It's a sort of revolutionary idea I suppose.

Q: I suppose and fascinating.

W: But we're very much at home with that because we feel that there's nothing to fail in the families of the church. If someone says, "Could you wash the dishes?" (...) "Sure I'll do the dishes". (...)

F: Or if you're asked to change bedrooms with your brother and sister, well, it just works out better if you would be over here and we'd be here and we'll arrange it this way now. But as parents of the family you just organize those practical details and the children....I mean if they were just having a real struggle with it, I mean you can always raise it and hardly anybody would...But I remember there is a story about, it's one of our older couples now, but I think this couple was just about ready to be engaged and I think they were just about ready to sending the brother from England to Paraguay and he just protested, and leave his wife in England or his wife to be in England. I don't think it was known real widely.

W: It wasn't publically announced.

F: ... about this relationship. So, they you know, considered it again and I think they were both sent to Paraguay, weren't they?

W: I'm not for sure.

F: I thought that was pretty funny.

W: But he did raise an objection.

Interview with Francis and Walter

Interviewer: Shirley Andrews

n.d.

F: Oh, yeah the words were that he “protested” when they were sharing about it. So, you know there was something that you knew or were thinking about you certainly would always raise it and you could always work it through. Maybe it was just a matter of time unless they want you go, but you can wait a bit before you go. But it certainly would always be done with lots of love.

W: And foresight, I think if I had a reservation or a serious objection I would feel free to say, this is how I feel, I’m how does this fit in? The basic attitude is that you’re eager to be wherever the church community needs your help, that is a basic premise, so usually the decisions are made pretty simply and easily and then just carried out without much methods or hesitation.

Q: I want to visualize in my mind what home looks like to you with your 300 persons living in the same geographical...Do you all own multiple area, acreage for example?

W: Can you show her the picture and I’ll try to describe it.

F: That’s the Bruderhof Village, so to speak.

W: These buildings out here are apartment buildings, there could be as many as 4 or 8 families perhaps, very large apartment buildings. There is a school building here it serves all the children up to 8th grade. It has several apartments with families in it on one floor. A large dining room area here in this large building.

F: Where we eat all our noon and evening, most of our evening meals. There’s two evening meals we eat in our families.

W: There’s a communal kitchen in that building where we prepare the meals together. The building back here’s a factory, we manufacture these community playthings or equipment for schools and daycare centers, chairs, tables, all kinds of things. Most of what you see there is like a village within walking distance.

F: And in the middle here somewhere is what we call our Children’s House. Where we have our children 6 weeks old up to four years old I guess, they go there during the day, I mean there’s a break in between, we could just share the schedule I guess, but they’re there during the daytime hours and take their noon nap. But they also do come home and spend time an hour or so.

W: In the morning after breakfast about 7:30 or so I take the youngest child down to the Children’s House and she would be there from about 8:00-2:00 including lunch. She has lunch there and a nap. At 2:00 I bring her to our house and she has play time with the children at 3:00 they go back to their groups and the mothers go back to their work for another two and a half hours or so. So she would typically work about 6 1/2 hours a day in the communal group. And men work for about 9 hours a day.

Q: And the manufacture of the playthings that you told me about is that the basis of the income for the group then, do you have other...?

W: That’s the primary source of income. I would say that community playthings and that includes the other line of equipment for disabled people, children and adults, I can show you the catalogue later. It shows pictures of all the products that we make in both of these lines. So that’s the primary income is those two businesses. At our place we also have llama, a herd of llama. We’re beginning to sell a few of these llamas so that’s a small part of the income. We also have a doghouse, we raise German Shepherd dogs, and English...

F: Golden Retrievers.

Interview with Francis and Walter

Interviewer: Shirley Andrews

n.d.

W: Golden Retrievers.

Q: For sight are they trained for special needs?

W: Not especially

F: We raise the dogs from puppies on up to as soon as they can be given away or sold. Then whatever they're used for, I mean that's up to the people who buy them. We don't train them.

Q: Okay, when you mentioned those two breeds I thought they sounded very much like those who would be able for the unsighted people.

F: They are often used for that.

W: Those are smaller businesses started in recent years which are a part of the income, but this would be our primary income.

F: And we also have a publishing house and the main focus of that isn't income earning, it's more just to get to share.

Q: To get the word out.

F: Yes, outreach. What we feel like is good for all people to hear.

Q: I see a tennis court and a swimming pool, how fun!

W: That particular community was once a resort center, and so we haven't taken out the tennis court and swimming pool.

Q: No, I think I might leave it too.

F: We would more tend to have a pond for swimming.

W: And we do, even at that place they've built a bigger pond which is a lot nicer for swimming and fishing and that sort of thing.

Q: So your children are educated then through the eighth grade you said and then they go to a local...

W: To a public high school.

Q: Public high school. What fun, what fun. If memory serves me well, one of the things we talked about in classroom discussion was the fact that young people sometimes are encouraged to leave as they do in high school so that when they make their decisions to come back and remain in community it's done so with some full knowledge. Am I correct about that? With some full understanding...

W: Sure.

F: Were you studying the Bruderhof? That's just exactly what we feel.

Q: Yes. Of course. Both the Hederites and the Bruderhof. Took a couple of weeks I think of 2 ½ hours of class.

F: So you already...

Interview with Francis and Walter

Interviewer: Shirley Andrews

n.d.

Q: Just the historical kind of things. It's exciting to me to meet someone who is actually living...books are sometimes a little static. Although I must say my professor with his slides certainly has a way of bringing things to life too.

F: But he hasn't visited a Bruderhof?

Q: Oh, I'm sure he has. I'm just sure he has, I can't tell you just exactly which one or where,

F: Well, if he hasn't he definitely should.

Q: I suspect he will and has multiply. It seems to me there's an annual meeting that he attends and it seems to me that one of them is held in a Bruderhof community. I think so because he said there was a group of those who had left.

W: That was probably from the (...) Organization (...) He's probably met some of our people at those conferences.

Q: I bet so. So, life here in Pennsylvania is playing out to meet your faith goals and your ideologies as far as learning to live the way Jesus would have you live? Can you do that in this community with...I guess I'm, let me try again, sometimes it's hard for me to ask my question, I want to go around the block. Ummm...you noticed some changes in the Fellowship of Hope and so moving in a direction that became difficult for you to continue and then you found the answer in this new call, in this way, in this community? Is that a fair thing to say? You said it's not utopian, so we agree that it isn't perfect, as no human endeavor probably could be, but it matches your faithfulness and your faithful goals, is that here?

W: Well, honestly yes, it's moving in that direction. We feel like we're on a Pilgrimage toward that goal but we're deeply committed to it. But to sort of put it another way, I think the only way we could become members of the Bruderhof is to experience a real personal calling from God first of all, it wasn't just looking for the ideal community, it has to be a calling. I mean there's a lot of me that protests this community, there's a lot of me that is just egotistical and selfish. I'd really rather be individualistic (...) those aspects in my personality are very strong. I love the idea of community, but the real people (...) what I'm saying is for myself, there's a tendency to be intellectual about it and say this concept of a utopian community is what I'd like, but to really live with other people, I have to change. I guess that's what I'm trying to say. It takes both a sense of inner calming and a willingness to be transformed, to be born again, if you want to use religious words. That's the kind of inner transformation which is a lifetime experience, slowly recognizing the areas of life that still need transformation. In that sense it's a long term commitment.

Other: Walter? Walter? Telephone. (...) Well you can take it.

F: Well, I also think it's a matter of we'd feel called to live this way and it also involves a trust that all these other people really want to go and follow this same way, that we're really all heading the same direction and even though we fail and we have our own weaknesses, we can help each other along, because we're looking for the same goal, "Look here, come on, we'll pick you up and let's go on." That's part of being open with each other too. If I fail or have a struggle or something I can just share it with my sister and she could say, "I went through the same thing and here's what we're looking for" we can confess what we've done wrong and make it right and then move on. I think that's part of it's...

Interview with Francis and Walter

Interviewer: Shirley Andrews

n.d.

Q: How are your children? How did the children, can they be taught in the same way (...) I'm so fascinated by this approach that seems to work as adults, does it also work as children? Are they able to come to one another to express their concerns with receptivity in kindness and love and caring for them and have it be received in the same way? Or are kids kids every where?

F: Kids are kids everywhere.

Q: Then they need to learn that over the years.

F: Yeah, they have to work at it, there's times when a 7th or 8th grader, maybe they'll come to lunch late and you'll wonder, "Well, what did you come to lunch late for?" "Well, we had something we needed to work out" in their group, they have a little clearing session where they were being unfriendly to each other and putting each other down and just grumpy with each other and the teacher has to call them together and say "look, what are we doing here?" Just to remind them, how we want to live as children and as adults. That's really worked out in the children's community too. We all feel very much together. It's the gift of having our own teachers being members, because we're all working for the same thing, we all have the same goals, so we're in close touch with the teachers, like maybe our child is being disrespectful or isn't responding, we can get together and share about that and decide how we want to approach that with the child and most often, when the child knows, the parents are together with the teacher, they want the same thing, you might as well just hang it up, get with the program and live happier.

Q: What happens within your community when you have children with special education needs? Perhaps special physical needs? Are they able to be handled in the community or do you seek outside intervention for kids who require other things?

F: Well, I think both actually happen. You know we have, we had a high school girl who just wasn't managing the stress and business of public high school, she just couldn't, it was just too much for her. So she has, she's tutored at home with one of our teachers tutoring her in English and history and different classes, so she just doesn't attend public high school. She's just so happy and so joyful to spend half her day doing some studies, but also involved in the work in the community. There's other children, we have another girl who's probably eighth grade age now, who has a handicap, a certain condition which affects her mental abilities. And I think maybe we've had her sometimes be in our school, but also we've found that she was really helped a lot by the school, they had a special program for slow learning children, so this year and last year she went every day, she gets on a bus and goes to this school that's nearby that has a special program for children like her, but again it takes a real close walk together, the community with her teachers and just seeing what's best for her and what she's going to do next year, I'm not sure and when she's high school age, will she go to a sheltered workshop to find some work or will she stay at home to have someone work with her? She needs someone one-on-one with her. When she comes home from school we have a sister who's with her works with her and does things with her because she knows her and she knows best how to be with her behavior, so it's a combination of working at home if that's best for the child, but also to be a real help if they join other children with similar disabilities in the program at the public schools.

Interview with Francis and Walter

Interviewer: Shirley Andrews

n.d.

Q: Do you have healthcare within your community? Do you have healthcare professionals for example who live in the community who give their expertise on that line or do you have to go somewhere else for dentistry for example?

F: We've been very fortunate in these years, we encourage our young people to get trainings and as it has turned out now, we have doctors who can serve just about every community and also nurses, so we have a little clinic in each of our Bruderhofs. I think we've also encouraged our young people, some of them to get into dentistry. I think now on most of our Hafs, we have our own dentist. Like in the Hof where we live we have two doctors because they're husband and wife and several nurses and a little clinic where we take care of most of our needs, now our doctors are not specialists in different areas, they're family practice doctors so when there comes a certain point in someone's health where they're just not sure where to go next, they're ready to refer to outside doctors. They keep a good relationship with outside doctors too, so they can get their advise and ask, now what can we do next for this person? So we do both, we use the outside doctors and also try to handle the simple ear infections and colds and stuff. The normal daily things, we try to have as much as we can at home.

W: The real thing is preventative care (...)

F: And also, I think just to add, we try to take care of our people from birth to the end of their lives. Many of our Hofs, we're able to, if the pregnancy has gone well, to deliver a baby inside the Hof, it's a real precious experience, and then also at the end of a person's life, if there's really nothing more that can be done at the hospital, we just find it so wonderful if the person can be at home surrounded by brothers and sisters and be made comfortable there, to spend their last days, weeks, months, however long. But if a certain operational procedure can help the person toward healing or toward feeling more comfortable in their last days, we'll send them to the hospital for that, but we certainly would not ever keep them there until their last day. We feel like the church needs to be around them and praying for them that's what's most important that they be in peace with their maker and with the church at the very end, and it's a precious experience for all of us to really be with them in the last moments. It's a special gift to us and our children, it just means a lot.

W: You talking about Kip?

F: One of our brothers had passed away not too long ago. He had a stroke and it left him just sleeping, basically, he was very quiet, very peaceful, but the children's groups, even our little two and a half year olds, they'd come and sing to grandpa Ted and draw pictures for, his wife is still living, just pictures of the angels and just it was a very special time for the children to be with him in his last days. They all knew about Ted and he was just their friend, they could go and sing to him and make a joy to him in the (...) but then when he did pass away, our little two year old, I shared with her that Grandpa Ted had gone to be with Jesus and he wasn't with us anymore. And her response was "Yippy-yeah! That's the place to be!" It was just a real joy for her. Sure we miss him, but he was a real faithful brother and really loved Jesus and for a little child, you know, man, that's awesome, "You're gonna be with Jesus, what more could you want?" In that way you just bring that whole experience to the children, so it's very important that they see death as a victory.

Q: And as a natural part of living.

F: Birth and death are all part of life and we need to really bring that to our children.

Interview with Francis and Walter

Interviewer: Shirley Andrews

n.d.

Q: I'm not sure how to ask the next question.