



## Oral History Starter Kit

This kit was compiled to provide sample forms and templates for oral history projects. Forms can be altered depending on the project or interviewee. The Consent Form is required to be used for all MRW deposits to a United Church of Canada Archives. The sample questions are specific to the MRW project but should be tailored to the interviewee’s experience. Most of the information in this kit is taken from best practices. For further information, contact your Conference Archivist or consult the oral history resources at the end of this kit.

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## **Components of a Successful Oral History Program**

### **Before the Interview**

- Produce a target group of interviewees and identify a clear theme. Having names enables enough contact time in advance to do background research on your subject and tailor interview questions.
- Send Introductory Letters and Biographical Information Forms to members of the target group.
- Create files for each oral history participant; accumulate any photos or clippings.
- Test recording equipment and ensure any questions about operation are answered. If possible, practise interviewing family/friends in advance to become comfortable.

### **Day of Interview**

- Set a time in advance; secure a quiet space where you won't be disturbed.
- Ensure that recording equipment is in working condition and set up in advance.
- Have interviewee sign Oral History Consent and Release Form giving permission for the recording.
- Provide refreshments.
- Average an hour for the first interview. If it does not work out, you can end it quickly and politely. If an hour is not enough, you can take a break and resume or reschedule a follow-up interview.
- Give your interviewee time to answer questions at her own speed. Try to refrain from "guiding" her answers.

### **Post-Interview**

- As soon as possible, review audio files and label them appropriately.
- When time permits, transcribe the audio file.
- Mail a copy to the interviewee and allow her to add corrections or more detail; annotations will be added to transcripts.
- When transcripts are finalized, ensure legal documentation is sufficient for access and use.
- Publicize!

## **Introductory Letter/E-mail**

### **Sent to interviewee to schedule an interview**

Date:

Dear \_\_\_\_\_

I am contacting you on behalf of the Making Room for Women Program at The United Church of Canada Archives. The Archives is collecting oral history interviews with women who have held leadership positions in the church or have actively worked and participated in The United Church of Canada.

The goals of this program are to address the scarcity of women's records and stories held in the archives and to encourage women to donate their records and provide their stories for future generations. As a volunteer interviewer, I would like to invite you to share your story by sitting down with me to talk about your contributions to The United Church of Canada.

I am enclosing with this letter a brochure about the program for more information along with a biographical information form. If you are interested, please fill out the form and contact me by phone or e-mail to set up a time and place that is convenient for you.

I hope to hear back from you regardless of your answer. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely yours,

\_\_\_\_\_

Contact Info:

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## **Biographical Information Form**

**Included with introductory letter and collected before interview**

Name:

Address:

Birthplace:

Profession:

Maiden name:

Involvement in the church (please list dates if possible):

Committees:

Associations:

Paid positions:

Other:

Are you currently an active member of a congregation? If so, which one?

What would you say was your most fulfilling project or work within the church?

## Suggested Questions for Oral History Interviews

**Verbal agreement: Start the interview by introducing yourself and the interviewee, state the time and place of the interview, and introduce the general purpose of collecting the oral history. Then ask the interviewee to give her permission for the interview to proceed.**

**Sample intro:** My name is Helen Troy, and the date is January 26, 2010. I am interviewing Jane Smith as part of the Making Room for Women Program at The United Church of Canada Archives. Jane, do I have your permission to proceed with this interview?

*Whether all questions are used or different ones are asked will depend on what happens in the interview. Adapt these suggestions as necessary based on your background research and discussions with the interviewee.*

- Tell me a bit about your early life: your family, your community, and your participation in the church.
- Can you remember an early defining moment that made you aware of gender inequality?
- What about your education? What contributed to your vocational choices? Who were your role models?
- Have you worked outside the home for pay? If so, what and where, and what roles did you play?
- What led to your decisions about volunteer involvements?
- What leadership responsibilities have you carried in the church—in your congregation and in other church courts? What about ecumenical activities?
- What were the important issues, joys, and challenges in your life? Is there a project or work that you have done that you are especially proud of?
- What have you been most passionate about in your adult years?
- What effect has your class/race/sexual orientation had on your life? On your participation in the church?
- What leisure activities have enriched your life?
- What is important to you about your life now?
- What direction do you hope the church will take in the future?
- Is there anything I've missed that you would like to tell me about?

## Oral History Consent and Release Form

### Signed on day of interview

I have been informed that the purpose of this project is to record the experiences of women involved in the United Church of Canada. These recordings will become part of the archival collection of the Making Room for Women at the Archives at the United Church Archives, where they will be accessible to the public. This oral history initiative is part of a larger project to preserve the records—documents, ephemera, images and sound—of women in the United Church in all their diversity.



I have been informed that the interview will take one to two hours and that I may withdraw at any time. A subsequent interview may be scheduled by mutual agreement. The interview may be recorded digitally, by tape recorder, or by other means, audio or video, at the mutual agreement of the interviewee and interviewer. I will be given a copy of the full transcript of the interview if one is completed.

I \_\_\_\_\_ hereby agree that the recording and transcript thereof conducted on (date) \_\_\_\_\_ at (location) \_\_\_\_\_

will become the property of The United Church of Canada Archives.

Subject to any restrictions initialled below, I further grant, transfer, and convey absolutely unto the United Church Archives any copyright which I may now have or may hereafter acquire in the said recording and transcript thereof, including the right to reproduce, edit, print, exhibit, and make them available online, in whole or in part.

I recognize and acknowledge that the United Church Archives shall be entitled to administer the archives in accordance with generally accepted principles of document conservation, which may include the destruction of certain documents and the conservation of all or part of the said archives by means of mechanical, photographic, and computerized process.

RESTRICTIONS (please initial)

\_\_\_\_\_ None                      Or

\_\_\_\_\_ The recording and transcript thereof will be closed to researchers for \_\_\_\_ years. During this period, they may be used only with my written permission.

\_\_\_\_\_ The recording and transcript thereof may be used only (specify restrictions and time period during which they apply) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

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Unless otherwise indicated, I understand that any conditions initialled above apply only during my lifetime or for a maximum of 50 years, whichever comes first.

I will notify Making Room for Women through the United Church Archives at the address below of any changes to my contact information. (This will ensure you are contacted for any necessary permissions.)

The United Church Archives  
3250 Bloor St. West, Suite 300  
Toronto, ON M8X 2Y4  
Tel: 416-231-7680, ext. 3123  
Toll-free: 1-800-268-3781, ext. 3123  
Fax: 416-231-3103, attn: Archives

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Interviewee

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Interviewer

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Date

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Archivist

Date (received in archives)

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## Equipment for Oral History

### **Recording**

Audacity software: <http://audacity.sourceforge.net/> Free at time of writing

Audacity® is free, open source software for recording and editing sounds. It is available for Mac OS X, Microsoft Windows, GNU/Linux, and other operating systems. It requires a laptop to install the software and a good-quality built-in microphone or an external microphone.

Roland R-09HR digital voice recorder:

<http://www.rolandus.com/products/productdetails.php?ProductId=960> approx. \$435

Professional, high-definition digital voice recorder with built-in mics, Automatic Gain Control (AGC) and easy file storage and transfer via SD or SDHC card. Also capable of A/D conversion. This model is currently being used by MRW at The United Church of Canada General Council and Ontario Conference Archives and is available for borrowing.

Olympus digital voice recorders:

[http://www.olympuscanada.com/cpg\\_section/cpg\\_voicerecorders.asp?section=digital](http://www.olympuscanada.com/cpg_section/cpg_voicerecorders.asp?section=digital) approx. \$170–\$350

Olympus sells many models of DVRs at different price ranges.

### **Transcribing**

Express Scribe: <http://www.nch.com.au/scribe/> Free at time of writing

Express Scribe is free professional audio player software for PC, Mac, or Linux designed to assist in transcribing audio recordings. It can be controlled using the keyboard, or a foot pedal can be purchased for about \$80.

Olympus AS-2400 PC Transcription Kit:

[http://www.olympuscanada.com/cpg\\_section/product.asp?product=1434](http://www.olympuscanada.com/cpg_section/product.asp?product=1434) approx. \$230

Includes foot pedal and headset; can be used with voice recognition software.

## Thank-You Letter

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Dear \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for participating in an oral history interview for the Making Room for Woman oral history program. The information you gave in your interview was very helpful and will be kept as part of the permanent collection in The United Church of Canada Archives (*specify Conference Archives*).

A review copy of transcript will be sent to you when completed—when looking it over, please make sure all proper names are spelled correctly and that the transcriber has accurately typed what you said. Return your transcript with corrections or additions to the ARCHIVES at the address below. They will review the corrected transcript, make the necessary changes, and send you a final copy to thank you for participating in this project.

Thank you again for your time and your story. If you have any questions please feel free to contact the Archives of The United Church of Canada or the Making Room for Women Committee.

Sincerely yours,

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Interviewer)

Send corrected transcript to:

The United Church of Canada Archives  
Making Room for Women  
3250 Bloor St. West, Suite 300  
Toronto, ON M8X 2Y4  
Contact: 1-800-268-3781 or 416-231-7680, ext. 3123  
[archives@united-church.ca](mailto:archives@united-church.ca)

*(Adjust contact info for Conference archives)*



## Oral History Transcript

Interviewee: Jane Smith

Interviewed by: Helen Troy

Date of Interview:

Date of Transcription:

Transcribed by:

Auditor of Transcription:

### Time Log

0.01 HT: My name is Helen Troy, and the date is \_\_\_\_\_. I am interviewing Jane Smith as part of the Making Room for Women program at The United Church of Canada Archives. Jane, do I have your permission to proceed with this interview?

JS: Yes you do, Helen.

HT: Thank you. As you know, Jane, the goal of this program is to encourage women in roles of leadership or who have greatly contributed to the United Church to share their records, stories, and experiences with the world. To start, I'd like to ask you to tell me when and where you were born, followed by a description of how you grew up.

0.03 JS:



## Oral History Recording Summary

Interviewee:

Interviewed by:

Date of Interview:

Date of Transcription:

Transcribed by:

Auditor of Transcription:

Time Log (minutes)	Description of Content
0.0	Beginning of interview. Introduction, permission. Information about early life.
5.0	Personal background. Early recollections of gender issues.
10.0	Description of church associations and committees served. Differences between church in Canada and Jamaica.
15.0	Racism in the church, Ethnic Ministries.

## Oral History Interview Deposit Form

Interviewee:

Interviewer's Name:

Address:

Date of Interview:

Place of Interview:

Length of Interview:

Interview Format (please circle):

Digital file (mp3 or wav)

CD

Cassette

Other:

\_\_\_\_\_

(size of file)

\_\_\_\_\_

(# of discs)

\_\_\_\_\_

(# of tapes)

\_\_\_\_\_

MRW Oral History Consent Form signed:      Y/N      Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Restrictions:

Interview summary by: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Transcribed by: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Transcript reviewed by interviewee:      Y/N      Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Final copy produced by: \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Notes:

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## Oral History Resources Consulted

### **Publications**

Baum, Willa K, *Transcribing and Editing Oral History* (Nashville, TN: American Association for State and Local History, 1991).

Mercier, Laurie, and Madeline Buckendorf, *Using Oral History in Community History Projects* (Carlisle, PA: Oral History Association, Dickinson College, 1992).

Powers, Willow Roberts, *Transcription Techniques for the Spoken Word* (Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2005).

Ritchie, Donald, *Doing Oral History: A Practical Guide*, 2nd ed. (New York: Twayne, 2003).

Ritchie, Donald, ed., *Oral History Evaluation Guidelines* (Los Angeles: Oral History Association, 1992).

Sommer, Barbara W., and Mary Kay Quinlan, *The Oral History Manual* (Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2002).

### **Online Resources**

The Bancroft Library at University of California, Berkeley: Suffragists Oral History Project <http://bancroft.berkeley.edu/ROHO/projects/suffragist/>. [Accessed December 2010]. This site doesn't have audio clips but provides full transcripts of interviews.

Heritage Community Foundation, Youth Source: Oral History Websites [http://www.youthsource.ab.ca/teacher\\_resources/oral\\_websites.html](http://www.youthsource.ab.ca/teacher_resources/oral_websites.html) [Accessed December 2010]. A compilation of links to resources on performing oral history, transcribing, and uses of oral history (youth oriented but still handy).

Museum of London: London's Voices <http://www.museumoflondon.org.uk/archive/londonsvoices/default.asp> [Accessed December 2010]. Of particular interest is the exhibit "Women Talk."

### **Oral History Associations**

Canadian Oral History Association <http://www.canoha.ca/>. Has a fantastic resource list.

Oral History Association (Dickinson College, PA) <http://www.oralhistory.org>. Includes a publications list and an evaluation guide.