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## Doug Saunders interview for a Wright State University History Course

Celeste Trejo

Doug Saunders

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## Profile

Narrator Name: Doug Saunders  
Interviewee: Doug Saunders  
Author: Celeste Trejo  
Date of Interview: February 14, 2011

Subject: Edgewood Baptist Center  
Key Words: Tutoring, Inner city mission, Southern Baptist Convention

For: Examining the History of Civic Engagement and Community Service in the Miami Valley, HST 485, Dr. Marjorie Mclellan, Winter 2011

Doug Saunders was born July 17, 1969 in Hamilton, Ohio. He is the Pastor/Director of Edgewood Baptist Center. Doug is married to Molly Roberson Saunders and has two children, a son and a daughter. Doug studied at Clear Creek Baptist Bible College and graduated in 2001 at the age of 33. Doug pastored a church in Kentucky from 1999-2001. Then, he worked as a mission coordinator at Edgewood Baptist Church in Trenton, Ohio from 2001-2004. Between 2004 and 2006, he started a Community Church in Trenton, Ohio where he was pastor. He began working at the Edgewood Baptist Center in Dayton, Ohio in 2006 and currently serves as their director.

The interview took place at the Greater Dayton Association of Baptists in Dayton, Ohio. We did the interview in a conference room on the afternoon of Monday, February 14, 2011.

Doug Saunders has been directing the Edgewood Baptist Center in west Dayton since 2006. The center is a community center that provides clothing, food, and educational needs to the people of the community. He and his wife work as a team to facilitate the needs of the community.

I feel that Doug Saunders was worth interviewing for a variety of reasons. The ministry he runs is a safe haven for many inner-city children and offers multiple services to help improve their quality of life. The community center also offers a food pantry, hot meals, clothing and educational needs for the people in this community. The greatest moment I have taken away from his interview has been a recognition of the desire and determination it took Doug Saunders and his family to work in a culture that is completely out of their comfort zone. I have a newfound respect for missionaries and their resolve to abandon the normalcy of their own origins in order to minister to those in need and follow what they believe to be a higher calling.

## **Oral History Interview**

### **Name of the Project**

**Name of the project director: Marjorie McLellan, Department of Urban Affairs and Geography, Wright State University**

### **Archives or repository**

**Interviewee/narrator name: Doug Saunders**

**Interviewer name: Celeste Trejo**

**Others present: None**

**Place: Greater Dayton Association of Baptists conference room, Dayton, Ohio**

**Date: Monday, February 14, 2011 at 3:15 pm**

**Length of recording: 56:27**

**Original format: flipcam**

**Notes: The following interview took place in a conference room of an office building. Although the door was closed, there are very few moments where other conversations can be heard through background noise.**

**Key words: community service, inner city missions, Baptist**

**Indexed by Celeste Trejo**

## **Index**

**0:00:00-00:23 Introduction to the recording.  
Information listed above.**

**0:00:23-03:30 Introduction to Community Service  
Doug Saunders worked in a missions organization at a church in Trenton, Ohio. He and his wife began working as volunteers in 1995. He was raised to value helping others in need, but his desire to make it a career developed in college. He worked on staff at Edgewood Baptist Church from 2000-2004 as the organizer for missions.  
keywords: volunteer, Baptist, community service**

**0:03:30-0:05:06 Childhood  
Saunders was born and raised in Hamilton, Ohio. He was one of five children. His father passed away when Doug was six-years-old. His mother had to start working in order to support their family. The community and church aided their family in many ways. His mother also instilled that their family help others.**

**0:05:06-0:08:10 Community Involvement and Changes Over Time  
Community involvement began with a desire to meet a basic need. Over time, his desire has progressed to meeting more specific needs to help those in the community to better themselves by providing education, clothing, food and substance abuse needs.**

**keywords: substance abuse, education**



**0:08:10-0:10:28 Preparation and Focus of Ministry**

Saunders began college with the goal of becoming a pastor. With only three semesters left, he changed his major to missions. He felt a strong desire to “help somebody in the field” rather than sit “in a meeting”. However, he feels that missions work has taken a toll on him.

keywords: continued education

**0:10:29- 0:15:26 Challenges and Successes in the Field**

Saunders has found the cultural differences to be his greatest barrier. He was raised in a white, southern environment and has had to learn the new culture of a community of various minorities. He finds making connections through past experiences the greatest barrier. He enjoys the challenges, though because it has given him new experiences to grow from.

While cultural challenges will continue, Saunders finds satisfaction through his Christian spiritual journey.

keywords: culture barriers

**0:15:27- 0:17:21 Effects of the Ministry on the Community**

The Edgewood Baptist Center works with various organizations ranging from religious denominations to community service agencies. Saunders’s main goal is to let the community know that the center belongs to the community and that all are welcome.

**0:17:22-0:21:27 Effect of the Ministry on His Family**

Saunders and his wife, Molly, work together to run the ministry. It has had a great effect on their marriage because it is “bigger than” themselves. Their daughter goes to Sinclair Community College and helps at the Edgewood Center through tutoring and teaching younger students. Saunders refers to it as their “greatest family event”.

**0:21:28-0:23:00 Motivations**

The motivation of Doug Saunders has always been spiritual. He feels that the best way to tell others about his faith is by working next to others as opposed to “preaching at them”. He feels he can do this by providing services for others in need.

**0:23:01- 0:24:00 The Call to Edgewood Baptist Center**

Saunders was the pastor of a church start in Trenton, Ohio when he was called by the Greater Dayton Association of Baptists with an offer to run the center. After six months, he decided to take the job.

**0:24:01- 0:25:00 Effects of the Move on the Family**

Saunders’s oldest son had just graduated high school when the family moved and did not mind. Saunders’s daughter was in the eighth grade and upset about the move. The family vowed that wherever they moved, their daughter would start and finish at the same high school. They kept their promise and she graduated from West Carrollton High School.

**0:25:01- 0:26:00 Lessons Learned**

Saunders feels that the main lesson he has learned is to help others. Others are always in need and everyone has something to give.

**0:26:01- 0:28:10 Adolescence**

Living in poverty helped prepare Saunders to minister to others by seeing deacons from his church help his family. He feels that God always provided for his family through miracles. He feels that helping others was a value established in him from his family.

**0:28:01-0:29:28 Extended Family Involvement in Community Service**

Two of Saunders’s siblings passed away in their thirties. His surviving sister worked as a volunteer at his church in Trenton, but her involvement dwindled when he left. He fears that her involvement was based in him rather than serving God. His surviving brother is not currently involved in community service.



**0:29:29-0:38:21 Events in Saunders Life That He Feels Have Most Molded His Ministry**

Saunders feels that marriage and growing up in a small, close community has aided him in his ministry. He had no desire to excel in high school. During his early twenties, he struggled with alcohol abuse. In his mid-twenties, he felt a calling from God to minister to others. He turned from his rebellious ways and followed his calling. He was accepted to a Christian college and graduated with a degree in missions at 33 years of age.

He feels that his early years have aided in his connection with the Edgewood community by providing an understanding of poverty. He also is able to connect to people who are struggling with substance abuse.

**0:38:22- 0:43:21 Molly Saunders and Her Support of Doug Saunders**

Doug and Molly Saunders were married at nineteen years of age. He cherishes Molly and her support of him through his rebellious years. She also was willing to leave her family to go to Kentucky with Doug while he completed his college degree. Doug feels that God brought them back to Ohio to minister to reward Molly's selflessness.

**0:43:22- 0:45:34 Progression of Ministries**

Upon graduating, Doug and Molly went back to Trenton, Ohio to minister at their home church- Edgewood Baptist Church. They were then called to Dayton, Ohio to work at the Edgewood Baptist Center. Though the names are the same, they are completely unrelated organizations. The confusion caused a delay in Doug's approval by the North American Mission Board.

keywords: missions

**0:45:35-0:49:43 Cultural Differences Between Previous Ministries and Edgewood Baptist Center**

The culture at the Trenton church was very familiar to Saunders. It was a white, suburban community. He and his family had anxieties about the culture shock of living with the people in the urban community of Dayton. They were very quiet in the beginning until they learned the culture a little more and found ways to relate to the people of Dayton.

keywords: cultural differences

**0:49:45-0:52:43 Services Provided Through the Edgewood Baptist Center**

The center is open daily and provides many needs to the community. Doug and his family are there during all open hours. Doug works very closely with soup kitchens and provides clothing for people referred by the soup kitchen. They also provide religious services based on a Southern Baptist doctrine. The food pantry draws more homeless people than the church services draw. The center has also become a facility used by the community members to discuss issues in the community.

keywords: soup kitchen, Southern Baptist doctrine

**0:52:44- 0:55:41 Future Goals for the Edgewood Center**

Saunders would like to see a substance abuse program started. He is starting a "next step" program that provides a safe environment for community members who have struggled with substance abuse in the past. He also would like to continue working with the children and youth of the community to reach their educational goals.

keywords: substance abuse, education

**0:55:42- 0:56:26 Final Thoughts**

The main lesson Doug feels he has learned is that it's "not about [himself]".

## **Oral History Interview**

### **Name of the Project**

**Name of the project director: Marjorie McLellan, Department of Urban Affairs and Geography, Wright State University**

**Paul Lawrence Dunbar Library Archives at Wright State University**

**Interviewee/narrator name: Doug Saunders**

**Interviewer name: Celeste Trejo**

**Place: Greater Dayton Association of Baptists, Dayton, Ohio**

**Date: February 14, 2011**

**Length of recording: 56:27**

**Original format: flipcam**

**Notes: The following interview took place in a conference room of an office building. Although the door was closed, there are very few moments where other conversations can be heard through background noise.**

**Transcribed by Celeste Trejo**

### **Interview transcript**

**TREJO:** My name is Celeste Trejo and this is an interview with Doug Saunders, director of the Edgewood Baptist Center in Dayton, Ohio. We are conducting the interview at the Greater Dayton Association of Baptists at 3:15 on a Monday, February 14, 2011.

**TREJO:** How did you get involved with community issues or community service?

**SAUNDERS:** (pause) In Trenton, Ohio I served in a church where we had a ministerial association where we had all denominations coming together and we pulled our resources to have a food bank and our church. I was put in charge with the food pantry in our ministerial association. So whenever somebody would come to one of the churches, they were sent to us because we was the ones who had the food. But all the churches helped and worked together with that. Uh, that's where I think it started and that's where I got my, I learned the trade. Just meeting needs in that area. Just having people come to you, just sitting down with them and understanding that, you know, they needed help and we were able to help, to meet that need.

**TREJO:** When was that?

**SAUNDERS:** Um, I started at Edgewood [Baptist Church] in '91 Um, probably, uh, '95 I was called to the ministry and in '97 I went to school. I went to Clear Creek Baptist Bible College and graduated. Well, I came back to Edgewood on, to work on staff in 2000. So 2000's when that work would've taken place and it went from about 2000 to 2004.

**TREJO:** So, before then, did you have any other experiences with any community service other than Trenton?

**SAUNDERS:** Just volunteer. Uh, you know we would volunteer for work days in the city or we would help families in need. You know, we were just brought up that way. You know, when people were in need, we went and helped. People came and helped when we were in need.

**TREJO:** Who's "we"? Is that you and your wife?



**SAUNDERS:** Well, no. Growing up my family. You know, uh, whenever somebody in our community would be you know needing help, we would go and help. And, uh, the church members were always in our house. You know whenever we needed. And we were trying to help. So, we were kinda raised to help one another. And then when I got older, my wife and I would volunteer where we could at the church or if we heard another church was doing something we would volunteer and it just kinda grew from that. But in college I think is when I just- the seriousness of maybe wanting to pursue this as a career. Of community and helping in the community and things like that was just established.

**TREJO:** Can you tell me a little about your childhood and your family? You've told me a little about being helped and helping others.

**SAUNDERS:** Um, I was born and raised in Hamilton, Ohio and my father passed away when I was six years old. He was sick and he passed away. So, I had two older brothers, an older sister and a younger sister and so a lot fell on my mother. And she went from a housewife to working two, sometimes three, jobs to keep the family together. Keep us in clothes and food. So there was a lot of help that was needed. So we went to a good church. We lived in a good neighborhood that looked out for each other. I had a lot of moms I guess and I know that because most of the moms there corrected me in one form or the other. So it was a good community to live in and we looked out for one another and we helped. And I think it was just that atmosphere of growing up like that where you just – to help somebody you've got to get your eyes off yourself. And it doesn't matter where you're at. Whether you're in the church, whether you're in the world, wherever you're at. If you get your eyes off yourself and look around, you'll see needs that need to be met.

**TREJO:** Right. Can you tell me about your involvement in community life and how it's changed or if it's progressed in one certain area. Maybe things you've learned throughout your involvement?

**SAUNDERS:** (pause) Restate the question.

**TREJO:** Sure. Can you tell me about your involvement in community life and how it's changed over time. If it's progressed or maybe focused in a certain area. Or if you feel like it's been more broadened.

**SAUNDERS:** Yeah. As our involvement goes in the community. When I first was doing it, I was doing it just because there was a need. And, and that was the driving force of- there's just a need and I wanted to help take care of that need. Uh, where it's progressed is- I still want to meet the need, but I want to get to know the person and, and just to, you know, see where they're at. And to help in any way that I can. Not just on meeting that need, but a , a bigger tangle in their life. Some of the things, and I don't know if this is really answering the question, but, some of the things that we're doing now is during our food pantry, we'll come down and we sit down with 'em and we'll find out where they're at. And we'll go and try to go further. If there's education that needs to be added to or if there's education that hasn't taken place in their life, we try to fit them to a program or point them in the direction that if they don't have a GED, they can get the GED.

**TREJO:** So this is for adults or...?

**SAUNDERS:** This is for adults, kids, youth- anybody we come across. And we deal with a lot of adults. Um, uh...we're recognizing right now that there is a lot of, just a lot of hurting out there with substance abuse. And substance abuse can be anything. It could be drugs, alcohol. It could be overeating. It could be sexual addictions. It could be anything. It's substance abuse. So, we're trying to get into helping in this substance area of just giving people choices and understanding that a lot of the times when people are wanting to get freed from an area of their life- when they go through a program to get clean or to get- they don't have somewhere to go. They have to go right back into the same atmosphere it was that got them in trouble to begin with. So we're trying to give them an alternative to where if we can establish a housing and a program. Not to force things on them, but just to give them another choice. To give them tools to... and again. It goes back to do they need help with life skills? Do they need help with education? Do they need help with clothing or interviews or things to that nature we try to help out.



**TREJO:** You said you were focused more in college. What was it particularly in college? Was there some kind of preparation there or did you end up going into a major that was going to....

**SAUNDERS:** I spent- well, I went to a Bible college. So, the focus was I was going into the ministry. So, this college was geared to train preachers. And that's where I was at. And I went all the way through and I had three semesters left and I felt the need that I needed to change that major. And I stopped going from the pastoral track to a missions track so I crammed all of the missions that I could into three semesters and I graduated with a missions degree instead of a pastoral degree. And, um, I love pastors....I just don't have their heart. I have a heart for missions and I want to do those types of things. And, uh, you know, we just try to meet needs in people's lives. We've got a clothing trailer that we- we'll move around all over Dayton. Just if somebody needs clothes, you know, we give them away to them with the ability to just be, you know, able to say that 'there's people here who care about you'.

**TREJO:** You said that your heart was more towards mission than more towards pasturing. How do you feel like that's different?

**SAUNDERS:** It's stronger. You know, I still – I love to do the missions part of things. I don't know if this fits in the interview. I would still rather go out and help somebody out on the field than sit in a meeting with (laughs)- I just want to be involved. I want to help. One day, I'm sure that I'll probably get back into pasturing because the missions type work is young man's life. And it's getting- catching up with me. But, uh, I like, I like the missions.

**TREJO:** Okay, what are some of the obstacles or frustrations or even disappointments or challenges that, um, you've encountered during your work? If you could even think of specific stories...?

**SAUNDERS:** Yeah....(pauses and takes deep breath)...Helping people is difficult at times. Um, you want to help. You want to just do the best you can. And sometimes it's difficult. And sometimes there's so much of a need that you just can't get it all and in my case and this was real, when we went to the west side of Dayton. And you can hear by the accent that I'm white, southern...you know. And I'm going to an African-American community and culture that I do not know or understand. Now it's been a great experience in the sense that I've gotten to know a new culture and I've gotten to become to love a lot of... a lot of people that I didn't know and that's been great. And learning a new culture and that thing. However, um, learning a new culture is difficult and it brings about a different....the differences of way you was brought up. The different mindset of, uh, of just experiences and culture. Um, you know, and those things. So those have been difficult times to try to connect. Because if you don't have the same experiences, I can't look across at one of my African-American brothers and connect with him and understand when he says, "my great-great-grandfather was a slave". I can't connect with that. But, uh, so I don't have the same experiences is what I mean. So you have to find those things that where you can connect to build a friendship. To build that working relationship together. So, those are some of the difficult things, you know, with growing up with the different experience in culture. Sometimes it's hard to find the things to make them grow.

**TREJO:** Right. Can you think of a specific time or a specific obstacle maybe that you've encountered even in relation to that?

**SAUNDERS:** As in...?

**TREJO:** Maybe even just a story that you have of a specific person maybe...that there was a challenge where you guys weren't really seeing eye-to-eye or you were trying to minister in a way and it possible just wasn't going through?

**SAUNDERS:** Uh, you know, I think you, you just sometimes you just don't connect with people you know. And sometimes, just people don't connect, you know? Even then, I think there's respect that needs to be...you know...and decency needs to be demonstrated. It's just, sometimes, I don't think I have a specific thing, just sometimes you don't connect and, you know, to where the atmosphere is not there.



**TREJO:** Looking back, what do you see as some of your most satisfying contributions or accomplishments?

**SAUNDERS:** I think some of the most satisfying things is sold out to my savior. That I could, uh, that I could serve in a way to....to....that would be meaningful. I want to lay down at night and know that....and believe that there was something tangible in that day that was worth while. Um, so....(pause)...can you repeat the question? I'm sorry...

**TREJO:** Sure. No problem. Looking back, what do you see as some of your most satisfying contributions or accomplishments?

**SAUNDERS:** Ok, yeah....um, I...the most satisfying or encouragement and tangible things are the things that I've invested in myself....I mean invested myself into. I could tell you all the stories about how we've been able to....our food pantry, our clothing house, education, of the hot meals on Wednesday, the youth trips that we've done, the youth activities, the children's activities, the adult studies and work that we've done. But the most I guess satisfying things have....things that I've just poured myself into and made that type of contribution to, you know, to what we was working on.

**TREJO:** Okay. What has been the relationship between your work and your community service? I guess yours is hand-in-hand.

**SAUNDERS:** A lot of it has been great. We're working with other agencies, you know, to expand our efforts and to cover a wider area and even more needs. We work with all of the agencies around us. Even if we don't have the same...uh....idealogy...ideaology...

**TREJO:** Ideologies?

**SAUNDERS:** Ideologies...yeah, we still work together and we help with one another and things that we can work on together. Um, we work with the House of Bread. They're just, like a soup kitchen and we help them. We help with the Gospel Mission that does a wide range of things and we coordinate with them. We deal with Catholic Social Services. They have a wide range of community services as well as we do. The Women's... Women's....uh Care Center or Women's Pregnancy Center. We just try to coordinate with all of them so I would say that's a good way of how all that kinda works hand-in-hand. Us and the community. One of the things that we, uh, err, me as the director is I try to let our community know that I get to be the director of the Edgewood Baptist Center. It's not that I....you know....it's mine. It's a privilege for me to be able to be there. But I try to let them know that this center is theirs and it's the community's. And we want them to come in and invest in it and make this center what, what they desire it to be. And, uh, so that's some of the ways we work hand-in-hand with...

**TREJO:** Ok. What has been the impact of your involvement with the community center on your family?

**SAUNDERS:** Ah, it's been great. Uh, getting to do this side-by-side with my wife. Molly and I have been married twenty-seven years and this is the closest we've been just because of, I think, we're just working together with this and we're getting to pour ourselves into this work and it's something bigger than ourselves and it's not for us and I think that's what makes this the biggest difference. My daughter is at Sinclair now...and...(his cell phone rang so we paused) ...I'm so sorry....repeat the question?

**TREJO:** What has been the impact of your involvement with the community center on your family?

**SAUNDERS:** My wife and I are...we're closer than ever. We get along better than ever and it's because we get to work in this together. It's even bigger than ourselves. Our daughter's involved as well. She comes in and teaches the children and is involved in our ministry and in our work there. She goes to school here locally, so she's able to give back and you know, for some of the education and things. Our son, he... he was already kinda out of the house before we came to this position, but this right here has been our strongest family event. That where- it's just kinda came together where we were able to ...to where my



wife's schedule and my schedule and our daughter's schedule works together where we can work together on this. So it's had a big impact on our family.

**TREJO:** What's your wife's role been in the Edgewood Center?

**SAUNDERS:** Officially, she's the secretary, but that's part-time. But there's no such thing as part-time when you're in the community organizing things. She does a...she does a weight-loss class. Kind of a study, you know, to where it's a Bible study but also a weight loss/exercise thing that's at the community. Um, she does-we do- a couple of weeks in the summertime....kind of a style of a vacation Bible school but it's some of it more than that because we focus a little bit more on the educational side of things and just trying to help the kids in our neighborhood. Uh, we...we do tutoring. We coordinate with colleges and students that's going into that area to where they can come over, sit down with our kids and to give them experience in what they're learning and teaching but also give them the opportunity to give back as well. So, my wife's very involved with the kids and those types...those types of areas.

**TREJO:** And you said your daughter works more with the education and that tutoring....

**SAUNDERS:** Yeah, she works with the tutoring. With the uh,- she'll teach Sunday mornings, you know, with the little ones and things. And then, um, on Wednesdays when she's able to come- she works- but when she's able to come she helps out downstairs with the kids and things. So, um, she just plugs in wherever we're in need and as much as a college kid can do, so, you understand.

**TREJO:** So, have you and your wife had other experiences like this with a community center or other ministries that you've been involved in that has helped you to prepare for this or have you worked separately and now come together?

**SAUNDERS:** Yeah...yeah...it was more separately we were able to do, just our schedules didn't allow us to do it this close together like we have been here. We've been at this type of work for probably fifteen years, but never at the point where we are now. Um, so, it's just exciting to be able to do it now...together.

**TREJO:** How have your motivations for engagement of service changed over time? You said a little bit about how the focus has changed...but have your motivations changed? I know you said back in college you wanted to be a pastor and then you realized your heart was changing. Has that changed or progressed in any way?

**SAUNDERS:** Um...the motivation has always been the same...and the motivation has always been to share my witness or share my testimony of what has taken place in my life. What Christ has done for me, I want to share that with people and the best way I know to do that is not to stand up and preach to them, but to come alongside them and let them understand that I'm...I'm right there with them and I understand and this in another...this is a...a...this is what happened to me and I'm able to share that. That's the motivation. The focus on how we get to the motivation, changes or anything...but the message is always the same and...so...yeah. I come with a slanted view of...I'm here serving Christ so that's where my viewpoint's going to go. The motivation's always been that for everything that I do...may I have the ability...may I have the chance...may I have the honor of sharing Christ with somebody.

**TREJO:** How did you end up at the Edgewood Center?

**SAUNDERS:** I was involved at a church start. I was pasturing a church start...and...um...I got a call. Somebody referred me to the Edgewood Center or the Greater Dayton Baptist Association and they called and said, you know, "we've got a position we'd like to talk to you about". And I was reluctant at first because I was happy with what I was doing.

**TREJO:** What was it that you were doing?

**SAUNDERS:** I was pastoring a church start and ...I was playing golf in Tennessee. You know, I just took a little break, me and a friend, playing golf and they called me and said, "we want to talk to you". So, when



I got back in town, we just got together and we started talking and I'd say, six months later, you know, it just kinda took place.

**TREJO:** Wow. How did your family feel about moving?

**SAUNDERS:** Uh...the kids were not happy at first. Um...they were not happy. Our son had just graduated from Edgewood High School [in Trenton, Ohio], so we knew he was out of school and he wasn't going to college right at the time so...he said, "it's fine", you know. Our daughter was just finishing eighth grade and...so...she was very upset. Leaving her friends and everything and...though we made the decision to move and...but it was important for us, that, what school that she started in high school that she would finish in high school. So, we moved and she started West Carrollton High School in the ninth grade and she graduated West Carrollton High School so, we were happy for that to happen and...that's about it. Yeah.

**TREJO:** What lessons do you carry away from your involvement in community service? It could be from the Edgewood Center or from other organizations you've worked with up to this point.

**SAUNDERS:** What lessons? I think...help somebody. I mean, it's important to me and it's important that I do those things. Uh...just help people. You know, there's people out there that need help and I think God put us here to help one another. So...

**TREJO:** Are there any topics that you'd like to return to or say anything else about so far?

**SAUNDERS:** No. I don't think so.

**TREJO:** Can you tell me about your experiences as an adolescent or as a young adult. Are there any particular stories? You said that your dad passed away when you were six? Is there any time between that time and when you were called to the ministry that was just kind of one of those eye-opening moments of helping people or other people helping you?

**SAUNDERS:** Well, we..we were poor. We grew up in...um...my father passed away and it was five siblings. I mean, me and four siblings and, uh, so it was, it was , it was rough. And, uh, I sometimes say I lost both parents because I lost my father and my mother went out of the house to have to go to work. And that's just the way it was. And, uh, we...we were okay, you know, but that was a lot. Um, I grew up with seeing...seeing deacons of our church...seeing leaders of the church in our home helping us and those types of things. Call it fate, call it luck, call it God...I like to call it God, but money was tight and, uh, we grew up finding twenty-dollar bills in our driveways and in our backyards and, uh, you know....just those types of things, you know. I guess the miracle of life was something we saw all the time. Um, so I think the atmosphere of learning to help people, because we were getting help was just established in us. And we were a giving family, even though we didn't have much. We would give, if somebody needed, uh, but I think the eye-opening was just (pause)...wow...that's a tough one. You know what...can we come back to that? Cause I'm having trouble with just the thought of something....

**TREJO:** Sure.....Are any of your brothers or sisters who were raised all in the same environment...are they involved in community services right now or are they doing other things?

**SAUNDERS:** I'm sad to say, no. There has been some tragedy in them. My brother was thirty-four years old, walking down the hallway of his home had an aneurism and died. My little sister, was diagnosed with juvenile diabetes. Had a very hard time with it. She passed away when she was thirty-seven and, uh, so, now it's just my older brother and my older sister. And my older sister was involved with us when we was doing the church start, but when we left and came to Dayton, she kinda...she kinda stopped with the things. So, sad to say, I think her involvement was more attached to me than it was to God, which was heart-breaking, you know. And, my brother, now he's my oldest brother, and uh, he goes to church every now-and-then, but no. He's not involved.

**TREJO:** What are the most interesting or compelling programs or events that you feel like you've been involved with. That could be the Edgewood Center or anything leading up to that.



**SAUNDERS:** Um, no doubt, marriage for twenty seven years is a classroom... with kids. It's, uh, it's always eventful. Uh, growing up in a small community..that...where everybody kinda knows one another and looks out and there's a close unity in a small school like that. In our graduating class we had ninety six and we were one of the bigger graduating classes in that school. So, there was just a closeness. (pause) I keep losing my train of thought. Read the question again.

**TREJO:** What are the most interesting or compelling programs or events that you feel like you've been involved with?

**SAUNDERS:** Yeah, I...I...it's gonna have to be school. When I went to college. And I, I was not planning on going to college. I didn't take school very seriously. I only cared about two things in school- in high school. Sports and girls and I wasn't very good in neither one of them, but I worked hard with all of them and, uh, but college wasn't in my plans and, uh, but after I was called to the ministry, the Lord kinda got ahold of me and said, uh, "you need more...more education" and, uh, I argued with God. I said, "God, did you see my GPA in school?" He laughed. But I went to college. It took me a little bit longer than most. I went five years and got my bachelor's degree and, uh, so that was...that was a major accomplishment in my life. And then, really, what I'm doing right now. I'm amazed everyday of, just to see the people that we come in contact with and...and just to see the...the atmosphere that's at the center to where it's, it's not us, but- and I guess here's, here's maybe answering the question, maybe it's not. Maybe I'm just chasing a bunch of rabbits. (Pause). Our outlook on what we do is we are called to provide a platform for those that are called to do missions can come and do missions. So we provide the atmosphere and then we allow the people to come and do it. So, I, that's probably the greatest achievement or the greatest, you know, thing that I guess we've been able to do.

**TREJO:** Can you explain your call? When you felt like there was a call for you to come and do some kind of a ministry..?

**SAUNDERS:** Here in Dayton?

**TREJO:** No...you said you went through high school, so did you start college later than...?

**SAUNDERS:** I was thirty-three.

**TREJO:** Oh, ok. So, then what happened between those years...graduating high school and then...?

**SAUNDERS:** Wow...wow. Well, I was...I was raised in church. And raised in a Southern Baptist church where my mother took us and made sure we were there and we were taught the "Golden Rule" of...of be nice, be kind, you know look out for others and things. And then, I surrendered to the Lord at nineteen. Asked Jesus into my life and make him savior of my life. And, uh, just had a spell from about when I was twenty-one to about, I was about twenty-four, of, uh, I just....just ran. I was rebellious. I was....hard-nosed....hard-necked. You know, just...I wasn't thinking....just...I wasn't thinking of anything and I was very much in the world and....I, I like to joke. It's not a joke, but the only way I can get through it is, uh, I was a very good drunk, and uh I worked hard at it....and to be good at it (laughs)...and, uh....but, you know just went through *that* and had a eye-opening experience of realizing that this path I'm on really is not going to end well. And, uh, so it made me realize that I had a whole lot to lose. And, so I got it straightened out...I got, you know, to where I wasn't acting silly and, uh, just...went back to start seeking again what, what I felt like I needed to....what I needed to be doing. And, uh, after about a year of that or so,....I started realizing that there was something pulling me, you know, into the area of service and....after struggling with that....struggling with that....and very much.. fearful of that- surrendered to it and said ok. And, uh, and that was when I was twenty-five and uh.... surrendered to the call of ministry. Began preaching right away. And, uh...that doesn't mean I'm a good preacher, just means that you know it was put in me so I do it to the best of my ability and... I can honestly say of living both lives, I am much happier with this one (smiles) than I am with the other one. And, uh, and what I just try to do is I just try to be real and just, I'm not trying to be something that I'm not. I'm not trying to put up a façade of "I've always been" or "I'm not holy". You know, I, I still struggle, you know? I mess it up before I get up out of bed everyday, but, uh... you know I just try to do better yesterday, I mean today than I did yesterday. So,



that's...that's my calling in a nutshell. It's just...(pauses)...I believe we're all called to be a part of something bigger than ourselves.

**TREJO:** How do you feel those years play a part in what you're doing and some of the people you encounter at the Edgewood Center?

**SAUNDERS:** I think one of the ways it's helped me in connecting with the people at the Edgewood Center is because it is a high poverty location and neighborhood and community, I guess. So, I'm able to connect with them whether they're black, white, Hispanic, or whatever. I'm able to connect with them because I grew up poor or, not without a whole lot. So, I'm able to connect with them in that sense in of I understand, you know? And...I'm able to connect and I think let people know that, "hey. We're here to help without making you feel like you're not worthy of anything" Um, some people are just down and they need help up and they don't need criticized or judged. They just need a hand. So, I'm able to I think do that with understanding....you know? I was there and, uh, and I'm not all the way out of it, but I understand where they're coming from. So, that part has helped me a great deal in the....in the connecting with them of poverty or anything like that. The other part of....of running from God....I'm able to connect as well. Cuz I see a lot of people that are just miserable because of...they're just running. And, so I'm able to just come alongside and say, "hey, you know brother...I've been there" and, you know, all I do is, is I just encourage them and let them know that we're here and we...we don't get caught up in the clothes. We don't get caught up in the...in the system. We don't get caught up in the things...we're just here and we just want you to know that you're welcome. That...that this is here for you and if you want to come...you'll be welcome here and it's your choice. And, um, so I think those are ways that have helped me to be able to just, to reach out and genuinely reach out and be real about it and meet it, you know, meet somewhere where they're at where they understand. There's got to be a connection or...or they're not, you know- if they don't think they can trust you or they don't feel a connection to you, they're not going to give you the opportunity.

**TREJO:** How has your wife played a role in the....was she there during the early times or did you get married after you were called?

**SAUNDERS:** She was there.

**TREJO:** So, she was there whole time?

**SAUNDERS:** We was there. We were married at nineteen. I would not....I would not recommend that to anybody. (laughs) I would not, but we made it. It's been....next to....next to my Lord Jesus Christ, my wife Molly is the greatest thing in my life to this day....and I still can't look at her without...like I looked at her twenty-seven years ago. And, uh, she's just a remarkable lady. Uh, I'm blessed. But, yes, she was there through all of it and she stuck through it...even through the bonehead stuff of...I'm, I'm grateful that I didn't do anything real stupid. Um, you know I wasn't unfaithful, I wasn't those, but I caused a lot of grief, though, with the drinking and the partying and things. Um, took advantage of her quite a bit in those years, those early years. So, I thank God that she stuck it out...stuck through and ...uh...so yeah, she was there. She was there....

**TREJO:** What was her reaction like when she saw the change and once you started changing? Was there a lot of disbelief or gratefulness?

**SAUNDERS:** Oh no...she was...it was gratefulness. Oh, yes...she really liked the change. She embraced it very much and she was very grateful of the changes that was going on in my life of...(pause)...I don't think any, any wife wants her husband coming home, you know, boozed up every night. And that's what I was to her for a lot...for a few years. And, uh, when I stopped that, she was very grateful and it helped our relationship greatly and....so, uh...so yeah...she was very grateful. There wasn't a whole lot of disbelief....she was very grateful.



**TREJO:** So, if you could give me a timeline- you lost your father at six. You grew up in a poor environment-people help you, you helping people. At nineteen you accepted Christ. The first part of that- twenty-one through twenty-four/twenty-five were the rough years. Now, twenty-five through thirty-three..?

**SAUNDERS:** School.

**TREJO:** Just school?

**SAUNDERS:** Yeah, well I was twenty-seven. I went to school and, uh I went to Clear Creek Baptist Bible College. We moved. And, if this could give you the character of my wife....I married into a family that her and her mother was very close. There was not a day that went by they didn't talk. There was never two days that went by where they didn't see one another and here...and her mother was not happy with me when I was going through that [his years of drinking and partying] but Molly hung in there and then after, you know, the things started changing and we, we, we began getting closer with God and our walk became closer and then we understood the call upon our lives....uh...we both realized that we was gonna be sent down to Kentucky to go to school and, uh, the character of my wife (pause). She was gonna be moving four and a half hours away from her mother. And she, you know, very very close. She never, she never made it hard. She never made it difficult. She was never resentful, at least to my knowledge, of, of, towards me of...we just moved so far away that (pause). I'm not saying there wasn't some tearful nights, but she never made it...hard or anything. Her mom had a hard time with- SHE ended up moving down to Kentucky so she could be close to her daughter, but, but Molly never. And, I, you know what? I believe in fate in some ways. Uh, we got to come back to Ohio to minister and to serve and I think it was because of her [Molly]. I think she honored God in following...following me down there to go to school and supported me and, and helped me to get through school that I think God said, "because of your faithfulness, I'm sending you back home." I don't think it had much to do with me at all, you know? So, I think she's just a special lady.

**TREJO:** So, you graduated at thirty-three? What was your first ministry after graduation?

**SAUNDERS:** I went back home to my home church in 2000 and I started school in '97. I pastored a church in Kentucky from 99 to 2001 and then, I left there- I resigned that church- and accepted a call at my home church to be on staff as minister of missions. And, uh, and in that involvement was...doing missions within the church, but also doing missions in the community. And, uh, so through that- doing work out in the community and things- is where the church start came. And, so from 2001 to 2004 we were in the missions part of Edgewood Baptist Church. This is confusing....Edgewood Baptist Church in Trenton, Ohio. And then we started a church called Community of where I pastored from 2004 to 2006 and, uh, and then I accepted a call to come to Dayton to be the director of the Edgewood Baptist Center in 2006, where I am still today.

**TREJO:** So, did you have any say in the Edgewood Baptist Center's name or was it just a coincidence?

**SAUNDERS:** No, it was just, no. The Edgewood Baptist Center has been called that since, I guess since it started in the sixties I guess. It's on Edgewood Avenue, so...that almost held up my appointment at the North American Mission Board. They said, "Well, you're already on the field" and I said, "no I'm not" (laughs) They said, "Yeah you are" and I said, "No I'm not" so it took a little time to get worked through.

**TREJO:** What was the name of the first church that you were ministering in at Trenton?

**SAUNDERS:** Edgewood Baptist Church....and now I'm serving at the Edgewood Baptist Center on Edgewood Avenue in Dayton, Ohio....it's confusing.

**TREJO:** Yeah! So, at the Trenton church, was the demographic similar or was it completely different?

**SAUNDERS:** Mmm (shakes head no)...completely different. Completely different. It was probably...(pauses)...middle income, low-middle income. (pauses in thought). Yeah

**TREJO:** Was it the same racial demographic or was that different?



**SAUNDERS:** No...no all Caucasian. You know, guys I went to school with, guys I played sports with...against and everything like that...just...you know? No...and that's why when I came to Edgewood Baptist Center, there was some anxieties. And I don't believe I'm a prejudice person, but still you being, just being thrust into another culture- another community....it's ....it's kinda scary. And, you know, so we took the first little bit of just being very quiet and listening and just, you know, learning. You know the language is different. The...the experiences are different. The motivations are different. Everything is different, you know, because it's a different culture. It's a different experience. It's a different growing up experience for...um...you know, so you, you do have the, you do have some same experiences that connect you. Like, this group or this group- they both like football. You gonna have something to talk about. If you don't grow, you're gonna end up not talking along, but at least it engages the conversation. Um, so, my family and I had- just had to be quiet for a little bit and...learn, you know, kinda what the conversation was (laughs). And, so, but, it's been fun. It has been very, it's been a lot of fun learning a new culture.

**TREJO:** How long did it take before you started becoming a lot more vocal?

**SAUNDERS:** Still at it. Still at it. And I think it's- I don't know why, but there's a certain amount of distrust, you know, when people are first introduced or...and it may be across the whole United States or, I don't know. But, I don't mean to be cynical, but it's, um, until...until you get past that initial awkwardness of the first, you know, there's just some stand-offish and, you know (pauses) you know...so...and it goes both ways. It could be that, this African-American person has had a bad experience with, with a white (pauses) and a white may have had a bad experience with an African-American and...those still exist. I'm trying to be very careful, without trying to sound confron-, you know, confrontational. Those things exist and they're real. So, you just kinda have to walk slowly and just be patient. And my finding has been if I can be real and if I'm real and just say, "hey, you know, I'm just here and let's...let's talk". We get to where we get to in an area where we can talk and then we can grow and get to know each other. I have made some very good friends. Um, you know, in the black community. I've made some very friends that I call brothers, that we've become that close. Um, I can honestly say that, as far as a church goes...as far as a community goes- my wife and I have not been loved in the manner that we are right now (smiles). And I think it's because we've been there for five years and they're starting to realize that, um, we're just, we're just there. Just trying to help and just trying to...just to be whatever we can do to help people out.

**TREJO:** What are your hours?

**SAUNDERS:** We are open every Monday from 9:30-11:30 for a food pantry, clothing house.

**TREJO:** 9:30 A.M.?

**SAUNDERS:** 9:30 A.M. to 11:30 A.M. and then, after lunch, I'm back in there and then I'll take referrals. You know if somebody comes in or if somebody calls. I get calls from other community agencies. One of the ways we work with the House of Bread. The House of Bread, they have food, but they don't have clothing. Somebody comes over, they have lunch. You know, it may be somebody homeless. It may be somebody something. They'll call and say, "hey after lunch can we send somebody over? They're kinda needing something." And I'll say, "yeah". And so they'll come over and I'll let them into our clothing house and they're able to get a change of clothes or something or maybe even to wash some of the stuff that they need. Um, you know so that's just ways we've been able to help out and things. So that's every Monday. And Tuesday, we're open from about 9 to 4. Wednesday, um, we usually don't go in until around 11 or 12 because then after we go in, we're usually there 'til about nine o'clock at night and then Thursday about 9 to 4. Friday, I'm off. And then Saturday we're there about 9 to 2 and then Sunday, we have, just, a Sunday school. We have church and those types of activities.

**TREJO:** You're drawing people from that community. I know there's an apartment complex over there, but do you see a lot of homeless people or is it more of just the people in the housing?

**SAUNDERS:** No. We do see more of the homeless during our food pantry than we do in our church service. I don't know why that is, but, you know. I don't know, but not a whole lot. Every once in a great



while we'll see somebody come in and sit down, but not, not too much. Now we will have, you know, quite a few during our pantry hours and, you know, things like that.

**TREJO:** Have you seen people in the community not only being ministered to, but ministering to others? Has that turned over in a different way?

**SAUNDERS:** Oh yeah. Yeah, tonight we're gonna have a group that's holding community meetings in the building and that's one of the things we were excited about to where the people could come in and start using the facility for, uh, for their meetings and their things like that. To where it helps us to be connected to the community. And what they're coming in to talk about, they're talking about issues that are in the community. And they'll have, maybe a police officer come in and talk about some events or something or anything like that. Or, uh, they'll do a community clean-up. You know, they'll do that once a year. So, they'll use those things for community resources.

**TREJO:** Where do you see, hopefully, this going? If your most absolute dreams were to come true, where do you see this ministry going when you end up exiting it?

**SAUNDERS:** I would love to see us get involved in the substance part of things even more. And what I mean by that, is we're trying to establish a next step program. And what I mean is when people are...um...and I can say this with confidence because I was in this area of...when your in substance abuse, when you're in it long enough, you get tired of it enough you want out of it and sometimes you need help and there's help out there. There's agencies and there's programs and things and you can go and get the help. Where I'd like to see us get into is the next step. When they complete that, instead of having to go back into the environment that got them in trouble, that we could provide an atmosphere to where they could come and continue on in that safe atmosphere, but for us to be able to start focusing, really focusing on some areas that's going to help them go to the next level of making better decisions and giving them the tools through education, through resources, through...just plugging them in where we can. And then, maybe we start a substance class, you know? Where people can come and talk and maybe get some counselors in there that could sit down with them, you know, just sometimes people need to talk. And, uh, so I'd love to see that type of ministry continue and, we're very...we're real involved right now with our, with our children and youth of making specific, specific areas of improvement in education, reading, math, science. Some of these things I can't do, but I know resources that are there. Students, like yourself, they can come and be a part of that. It thrilled my heart. One of our youth that struggled a little bit, but he...he just called and said, "I passed everything. I'm graduating". And man, that just, it was like my own son had called me and I thought, man that was just so wonderful. So we just celebrated that with him and let him know that we was proud of him. And hoping that that could carry on. That that one could be that spark that would encourage that next one to work a little bit harder to achieve. I think that's where I hope to be.

**TREJO:** What lessons do you carry away?

**SAUNDERS:** (long pause) This is gonna sound very cliché. (pause) But it's not about me. I think that's the biggest one I can say. That it's not about me, you...it's pretty simple. (laughs).

**TREJO:** Well I think it's a pretty good lesson. Well, thank you very much. I appreciate it so much.



## **Glossary**

**Edgewood Baptist Center:** an inner-city mission center in the west side of Dayton, Ohio. It is supported by the Greater Dayton Association of Baptists.

**Edgewood Baptist Church:** a church located in Trenton, Ohio. No relation to the Edgewood Baptist Center in Dayton, Ohio.

**North American Mission Board:** An organization that assists Southern Baptists in the United States, Canada and their territories through a North American strategy for sharing Christ through starting churches and sending missionaries.

**House of Bread:** A 501 (c) (3) non-profit Community Kitchen established in 1983, serving predominately the inner-city residents of Dayton, Ohio.