



In collaboration with
Gregory Boston,
Pastor of Union Town Church of Christ, Piney Woods Free Union

Date: March 26, 2023

Interviewer(s): Amanda Ostuni & Lillian Thomas

05:00	Gregory Boston	I am Gregory Boston. [Edward] Gregory Boston, the Pastor of Union Town Church of Christ, a disciple of Christ. I preach every Sunday here, full-time ministry here. I took my dad’s place after he passed away about 6,7 years ago, I became the present pastor as I am now.
00:25	Amanda Ostuni	Was that something you always wanted to do?
00:28	Gregory Boston	It’s in me. It was in me, yeah, along with all the stuff that I’m doing. That’s what you want me tell a little bit about?
00:36	Amanda Ostuni	Yeah!
00:38	Gregory Boston	[inaudible] Mississippi State. And I also went to Grand Canyon [University] and got my two Masters at Grand Canyon. I am a principal at a middle school, on the city council for [the town of __ ?] and president of the NAACP in Washington County. So, I wear a whole lot of hats.

00:53	Amanda Ostuni	How do you manage all that?
00:56	Gregory Boston	I love people and I just do it. I just do it. But you gotta always make time for family.
01:01	Amanda Ostuni	What were those degrees?
01:03	Gregory Boston	My undergrad was business administration, concentration in management but then I went back and got my certification in special ed. Then from there I went to Grand Canyon University and got my Master's in Administration, and also in Biblical Studies.
01:18	Amanda Ostuni	What made you pursue those interests?
01:20	Gregory Boston	Well, the only way I could become a principal, I had to get that Administration Master's, and then I wanted to better myself as a pastor, so that's why I went and got my Master's in biblical studies.
01:30	Amanda Ostuni	What was your experience like in high school here that influenced that direction?
01:36	Gregory Boston	Well, I went to Plymouth High School and I always was a people person and I always loved to help people. And that's something—my father was that big role model for me and he was Pastor of the Year for over 38 years.
01:51	Amanda Ostuni	How far is that school from [Piney Woods]? Is it in the community?
01:56	Gregory Boston	It's in Washington County. This is Martin County, that's in Washington County.
02:02	Lillian Thomas	Do you mind taking us through your family history? I know that you brought up a little bit, your family in relation to this community...

02:11	Gregory Boston	Okay, well basically, my dad is from this community. His father was Sam Boston, and he used to go to church here when he was comin' up. Matta' fact, one day I went into the kitchen and we've got like historical pictures and I saw little [Sidney?] in that congregation. He was not a pastor or preacher then—he was comin' to church at that time. He came her and pastored a church in [UNCLEAR] About 10 minutes—about 5 minutes away from here, and then he got a call to come here and pastor. So, he pastored two churches at the same time, 'cause both churches are connected. So this community and [UNCLEAR-GODDARD? DARDEN] are family.
02:51	Lillian Thomas	Somebody was explaining to us how this church has spearheaded 16 other churches...can you tell us about that?
02:59	Gregory Boston	Right. And my father was the bishop of [UNSURE] all of those 16 churches for over 37 years.
03:07	Lillian Thomas	So how did those 16 churches come about?
03:09	Gregory Boston	Well, this is, as far as I know, this is the mother church, but again it's a lot more information that I don't know that I can't tell y'all, but a lotta 'em branched right from here, so you got 'em from [Maneo?] to [you have a little in Washington?], Martin County, from Martin County to even Virginia, you have churches in Virginia too. There's one of the churches in Virginia my brother pastored, [UNCLEAR] Church of Christ in Virginia Beach.
03:37	Amanda Ostuni	What does it mean to your family to have played a role in bringing something from this community out into a larger space?
03:46	Gregory Boston	It mean a lot, because I believe in outreach. I believe in reaching—I don't—when I say community, I just don't consider this is just the community, I also consider everywhere I go as the community. So it mean a lot to my family.

04:04	Amanda Ostuni	How does that pastoral—how does that role—what does that mean in terms of your responsibility to the community and how the community sees your family.
04:14	Gregory Boston	Well, I'm hoping they see my family as productive. Because being a pastor is more than preachin' behind the pulpit. Right now, we have [outreach in] the church. One of the outreach is our missionaries. We try to go around helpin' people that is in need and send our ministry out there to try to help one another. We just partnered with one that's out in Washington, basically seeking a need to help the communities, bringing resources together. And yesterday we had a Community Fun Day, Pastor reverend Edward Moore, he's in charge of their program, and I came on as a member of that about a month ago. And we had an awesome time yesterday out in Little Washington, where people went and got free haircuts—see my haircut? But the barbers that cut hair, they wanted to—they don't get paid for it, it's all about offering your skills to people. Then you had car washes, then you had financial wellness, and different things like that. The key is tryin' to help people be better citizens.
05:15	Amanda Ostuni	How do you see the dynamic of the church and the Piney Woods community in—how important is that to people here?
05:29	Gregory Boston	Here in Piney Woods, the church is the background of this community and that's basically where everybody went, here—majority of everybody went here to this church here, and this church is the background—the back—the heart of the community.
05:46	Janelle James	This church is actually the mother church of the denomination of the Disciples of Christ Church. Of course, it was not at this particular location, it was up the street from where it is now, but this is where the Disciples of Christ Church actually, all the Disciples of Christ—African American Disciples of Christ Churches sprang from this church.
06:14	Gregory Boston	[inaudible] We're not a denomination. Listen to me carefully, we're not a denomination. There are other churches and denominations they consider themselves—that we are a living organism church. You can't

		join it, you gotta be born into it, so I wanna make that absolutely clear. Even ever since my father been preachin' here, we preach the denominations being split. We are a living organism—the church that Christ have founded with his own blood. I just wanna make that clear. Amen
06:46	Amanda Ostuni	What are some other important parts about your childhood growing up here, in the community—or sorry you didn't grow up here.
06:56	Gregory Boston	Well, I didn't grow up here. I grew up in North Virginia. We moved down here when I was around 12. But I went to church here every Sunday when my father served pastorship here for over 30-something years, I went to church here. And it was a pleasure because people would treat you with dignity and respect. They was like a mom, dad to ya here when you come to church, and it just—you have a family coming here, just a loving family.
07:26	Amanda Ostuni	How did you—when you came here what kind of surprised you, did you think that it was very different from what you had known growing up?
07:37	Gregory Boston	Well, I didn't know about—to be honest witchya I didn' know I had cousins that were White, I didn't know it. When I walked into church I looked and I was like, 'who are these'—I've got nothin' against White and Black but I didn' know we had White cousins.
07:50	Janelle James	You didn't know you had White people in your family, and you came here and you started thinkin' like 'wait a minute, who is everyone?'—
07:56	Gregory Boston	I didn't know.
07:58	Lillian Thomas	So what are the racial dynamics in—
08:01	Greogry Boston	She probably can help ya with that one.

08:02	Janelle James	Well, OK, so down through the generations of David Boston, who is the father of Piney Woods. Now I can't speak directly 'cause I can't go any further back than Sam Boston on him. I got to shake the tree and do some rattlin' around to find out who Sam's daddy really was and how he connects to David Boston. But just wit' my mom and my dad, [RUPERT CORDON?] was my mother's father—was my grandfather. His dad was [Abraham Lincoln Gordon]. Abraham Lincoln [Gordon] was married to [Virginia Carolina Pearce]. [Virginia Carolina Pearce] was a mulatto. [RUPERT]—Abraham came from William [Cordon]. When you get past William—William was married to [Harriett Anne Boston], which is David Boston's daughter, one of David's daughters. Okay, so, beyond William—William's father is Zachariah [Cordon]. Zacharia [Cordon] is only 60s in [Fulton County]. And he's also a mulatto. So they're in on the [Cordon] side, I can tell you a couple times where there were White people in the family. On the James side of the family, I can go back as far as Ebenezer James, and I know you all probably know the history of Ebenezer James in [Buster's book—William Barber's book??] and beyond Ebenezer James we cannot exactly connect him to a Benjamin James up in the islands of Martin County but we think that he is related to that James. I can't tell you exactly where White folks are on that side, but they are somewhere around in that connection of the family. So the [Pearces] have Caucasian people intermingled in to, the Smiths have Caucasian people intermingled in, so we're in every shade, hue color, in between from very, very fair to very, very dark to blonde hair, blue eyes to—every kind of iteration that you can imagine that's how the gene pool is.
10:59	Gregory Boston	What's the rapper's name—singer's name that's our cousin?
11:04	Janelle James	Heavy D?
11:05	Gregory Boston	Heavy D! Yup Heavy D.
11:08	Janelle James	He was a Boston.

11:10	Gregory Boston	Yup, a Boston. Now I learned that from his friend [unclear chatter to Janelle James] what's their last name?... cause she and his mama were real tight.
11:23	Janelle James	They're Bostons. We've got some of that Boston clan up in New York.
11:28	Gregory Boston	If I could find the information, 'cause we usually have the Boston family reunion here. And I do have some new information about the tree that go farther than wit' my granddaddy. It go farther 'cause our father connects with him [points to someone off camera]
11:43	Janelle James	Well, if you found that connection, you can find a connection with me—
11:49	Gregory Boston	Imma find an extra copy of it. And I'll get a copy to Mr. Barber, too. 'Cause I do have it. I think I got it from our cousin [Vera Brown?] when we had a family reunion in town.
11:59	Janelle James	I'm sure you did. Yeah, because I remember when your father came here, I remember [__ sayin'?] 'he's our folks! I went and I found—went all the way to Virginia and I found him. This man is our'—talkin' about [Gregory's dad]—'this man is our folks and we gonna have our folks come preach to us.'
12:21	Amanda Ostuni	Is all of this knowledge about the family tree based on just like you passing it to him—is it all community-based, or did you learn about this formally at all?
12:30	Janelle James	No there wasn't a class that was taught. This is stuff that has been come down through the generations of people tellin' me, oh 'you know so and so and so is such and such...' and after you hear it long enough, it's just like when you go to church and you hear sermons; if you hear scriptures long enough, they will stick with you, and you will know the 23 rd Psalm when somebody tell you it's the 23 rd Psalm, it's the same thing with family relations. When you hear about these people in your families, after a while as you get older and get to know more folks, it becomes common knowledge. Cousin Gladys, who is our cousin with

		a house down there in Plymouth and everything, that is—I [inaudible...top of my head?] [Ruben Pettiford?] and Nancy James, and Nancy James was Grandpa Joe’s—one of Grandpa Joe’s sisters. And so—’cause I always remember [mom saying] ‘cousin Gladys is our cousin,’ [and I’d say] ‘but mama, how?’ [and she’d say] ‘I don’t know, but she’s your cousin.’ But as I gotten older, I come to learn her mother was Grandpa Joe’s sister, so that’s how cousin Gladys is actually my cousin.
14:04	Gregory Boston	And that—and tell her, their house is underground railroad.
14:07	Janelle James	Oh yeah, it was part of the underground railroad, and they’ve been tryin’ to work to get that house established on the underground railroad as well...and everythin’.
14:18	Amanda Ostuni	And you learned all this family history when you got here [Gregory]. How did that influence your path moving forward?
14:29	Gregory Boston	I will say that Piney Wood—bein’ in the town of Piney Woods helped made me what I am today, with different cousins that you meet, that you talk wit’ and build a relationship with people, that helped shape me as a young man today. Of course, I do wear a lot of hats, as you know, but I love to do what I do, I love it.
14:54	Janelle James	But it’s also through these people that you been comin’ up with cause even [??INAUDIBLE person name Uncle Mill?] sat on the city council, and where does this one sit right now?
15:05	Gregory Boston	On the city council. That’s right. Cousin [XX], that’s right.
15:10	Janelle James	And but because you saw him do that, Greg got to thinkin’ well you know what, he did it, why can’t I do it, too?
15:16	Gregory Boston	And he also got a park named after him, too. Yup, that’s right.

15:23	Janelle James	Just to see other family members sitting in positions and you come up and aspire to do certain things.
15:31	Gregory Boston	And just like my baby sister, she's an attorney in [XX] and who inspired her was her cousin Billy Bob and he was her mentor, and she went to Central Law School, now she's the paid attorney for [Lincoln University].
15:49	Amanda Ostuni	And what's your family network currently in terms of who's here, who's not—in terms of who's in the Piney Woods community or who has moved out at this point?
16:00	Gregory Boston	Family network?
16:02	Amanda Ostuni	What are your current roots? You live here and your sister doesn't?
16:11	Gregory Boston	Well, I live in Washington County. My sister stays in [TOWN]. Other than that, rest of them's cousins, rest of them cousins that stays here.
16:24	Lillian Thomas	It seems like a lot of people have family who live in New York—
16:27	Gregory Boston	Yeah, I have a brother—my brother stays—I have a baby brother who stays in D.C./Maryland, and then my other brother he's a pastor of [XX] Church of Christ in Virginia Beach, and my other brother he's in Chesterfield, Virginia, and then my other sister, she's in Plymouth. So two sisters in Plymouth.
16:46	Janelle James	So bits and pieces of this community are strewn everywhere. Literally, everywhere. You can be in the darndest places, and somebody will walk up to you and say 'hey, you from Piney Woods,' and they will just look at you and know, if they never been here, and they know these people they'll look at you and say 'I know, didn't your mama, your grandmama, or your aunt or great aunt, did you know—' and they'll trace the family tree. And my niece, I've always told her, 'wherever you go,' I said, 'whatever you do,' I said 'if you find someone [XXX]' I said 'the first thing you need to do is ask them who

		<p>they mama and daddy is.’ I said, ‘because you don’t know who you gonna meet, and you’ll walk right into your own folks and not know that it’s your own people and everything.’ So that’s the first thing you-[inaudible] ‘who’s your mom and dad, where you come from?’ I said ‘if they say anything about Piney Woods,’ I said ‘James kids, Smith,[name], [Cordon], Boston,’ I said ‘any of them names,’ I said ‘stay [away?], them your folks, those are your people.’ I had that happen to a cousin who was at a party in D.C. She and another relative, and they spotted each other from across the room and began to talk and the next day I got this telephone call, and they said ‘I met so and so and I want to know, are we close?’ and I said ‘you real close—no!’</p>
18:30	Amanda Ostuni	<p>Is there a story that is your favorite—when you do come across people and you’re talking about the community and your experience here, is there a story you love to tell the most about your—the part of your childhood that you were here for?</p>
18:43	Gregory Boston	<p>Well, part of my childhood—I remember comin’ up, a lot of people moved had away but we were very tight, kids my age, we had plenty of youth here at this church back then. And the things that we—[occasionally?] bible school, bible study, we just had a great time. So [constantly playin’ together, constantly takin’ trips together] right here at this church here. Like I said, when my father just first came here, I just began gettin’ to know my people and it was just a pleasure of learnin’ your cousins and your aunts and your uncles and different ones like that, and you then becomin’ close with them. Never thought as a little boy, that I’d become pastor of church here, I never—never in my mind.</p>
19:33	Janelle James	<p>That never come to you?</p>
19:35	Gregory Boston	<p>No, not in my mind. Just like it crossed my mind bein’ a student—comin’ up I never thought I’d be the principal or the [XX] high school, never thought about it. But you never know where life gonna take you.</p>

19:49	Amanda Ostuni	What is your—what is the Piney Woods Free Union mean to you in terms of its legacy and what do you want people to know about it when you do go out and see these other communities?
20:03	Gregory Boston	I want Piney Woods to be one of the—a community that’s on the move. It has so much rich history here, and one of the reasons I wanted to do this video here is to [fuel?] the community, so we can build different types of programs, resources. My dad a long time ago, he looked at this land and he saw that he wanted an elder home to be put in here but the water in the sewers did not—the land wasn’t pe—so some of the things that we wanna try to do for the community, from the church, because what make up the church?—the people that make up the church. And then we rich with Indian background, we all Indians back here, so we rich with that culture, here. I just want it to be a little small town that people can come and visit and learn so much, of history.
21:02	Janelle James	This lasted 200 years, long after we gonna be—we want Piney Woods to still be here, and for people to still be walking and sayin’ ‘you know that our people’s been owning this land for over 200 years and they kept the land no matter what, they never sold the land, they kept the land, those before them kept the land and we been tryin’ to keep the land as well.’
21:28	Gregory Boston	Amen.
21:28	Amanda Ostuni	A lot of people we’ve talked to were involved in farming. What was your relationship to the physical land?
21:38	Gregory Boston	I don’t have any relationship to farming here. That—I [inaudible] dealing with cabbage and trees and stuff like that, that’s the only time I ever worked for a farm, but as far as Piney Woods, I never worked on a farm before...
21:57	Lillian Thomas	Someone told us earlier that Piney Woods and the community—there was no slavery or, what was the history of that?

22:09	Janelle James	Piney Woods was settled by free people of color, Black people and White people, but Piney Woods had no slavery, there were no slaves here. And as I was telling someone earlier this afternoon, there's a creek that runs behind this church back in the woods, that's [Welch's?] Creek, that creek runs out to Roanoke River. There were free people of color here. Now I don't have any documents to prove it, but during the time of slavery, when Ebenezer James fought as an espionage spy during the Civil War, he was a free person of color fighting. When David Boston came here and bought this land—he's the father of Piney Woods, now—he had fought in the War of 1812, that's where he got all his money, he was a free person of color. All these people were free. And down through the ages, people would have, free people of color and Indians and Whites were here, but it is my belief—like I said, I don't have any documents, I have not seen any documents, I would love to find the documents—but it is my sole belief that this place, because they were—this was known as “Free Union,” that's why it was called “Free Union,” it is my belief that this was also a station on the Underground Railroad. I can't prove it, but if I were a person who had been enslaved and I was running to freedom and tryin' to find a place to hide until I could get to the Roanoke River so I could catch a ship to the North, this would be the perfect place to come up in, because you got a lotta people of color walkin' round and there's so many places to hide, how can you tell if somebody's a slave or not a slave just by looking? [inaudible] already free, so this would be the perfect kind of place to be, so I believe this was a station stop.
24:22	Amanda Ostuni	That's very cool. You [Gregory] said you couldn't imagine becoming involved in the church here originally. What about Piney Woods in particular made you feel like this made sense for you?
24:57	Gregory Boston	Well, I always as a young man, once I graduated, I wanted to move, go to a bigger city. That was always on my mind, so I never really thought about be comin' back here and doing what I'm doing now but it's not my will—I'm a preacher man, it's his will, so that's why I'm where I'm supposed to be.
25:23	Amanda Ostuni	Is there anything else that you want to—[to Lillian] I don't know if you had other questions, but otherwise—[to Gregory] anything

		else you want to say about your life here and your relationship to Piney Woods, or just growing up?
25:35	Gregory Boston	As the pastor and Shepard of the Union Town Church of Christ I really want this community to flourish. I want it to grow. And in order to do that, you have to [get God?] first. And so as my role as pastor, not just preaching, but out here to be a resource and that's why I'm so happy about you guys, what y'all guys are doing, and what we are doing with my missionary department, having resources to bring into Piney Woods. Do I see this over here just being this here? No, I see houses—senior citizen houses, I see a rec, I see a track that people could come and do exercises and do things like that, I see growth here. And I see people comin' from all over to come and visit Piney Woods and see the rich history that's here. That's what I see, so long as I'm here, Imma do what I can to make this thing happen.
26:39	Amanda Ostuni	What are you personally most proud of that you've done in your life so far in the community or outside of the community?
26:45	Gregory Boston	Serving people. Serving people. I love serving people. You look at my job, what I'm doing—from assistant principal at the middle school, to city council, to the NAACP, I love to serve. And it's not about me being a leader, it's about me being a server, that's what it's all about.
27:06	Amanda Ostuni	Thank you.