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Interviewer: This is Coming Out project.

So, Colin, can you tell me a little bit about your growing up as a young gay man? And I'm particularly interested about the impact of the church on your sense of self.

Colin: I was born, so, I was born just as the war was finishing. I was conceived during the war. Lived in a rising lower middle class family I suppose. Terraced house on the grid in Wimbledon Park.

My parents had been married in church and had been involved in church when they were younger but weren't actually going to church when I arrived on the scene. But I was sent to kindergarten Sunday school when I was three years old and I remember being taken by some woman at the bottom of the road. It was a kindergarten. And then moved up to real Sunday school when I was five in the church and moved up through the classes.

And I was a good boy. And I was one of those really yucky people who wanted his stamp book full at the end of the year, and it pretty much, I think, always was. And we were, boys were on one side, girls were on the other. The senior girls class was taught in the Lady Chapel. And this was a big Edwardian bottle green glass church. And I always thought that was a kind of a magical taboo place. And I remember thinking that maybe God or somebody lived under the altar because that was the only hidden place that I couldn't quite see what happened there. So, I quite a magical view of God.

And when I was 11 there was a new incumbent. Peter Hand had arrived, who initiated for my age group a class in the other church hall. So, I was with him for a year. And he, as I later discovered, was gay, but believed that it was sinful and absolutely to be suppressed.

And my mother was quite neurotic, depressed, had had a breakdown when she was pregnant with my brother when I was three and a half. Was hospitalised for six months before he was born. I remember collecting my brother from hospital with my father and she was then returned to the psychiatric hospital for another six months. So, she was out of my life for a year. So, looking back now, I can see that there were quite searing things going on in the family and in my life that I effectively erased from my memory. I don't remember much of what I was like before the age of five. We didn't go on holiday. My mother was agoraphobic. She felt very unsafe going on public transport, didn't go public transport. So, it was quite a circumscribed world. And church was a big part of it, therefore.

My grandfather went to church. My grandmother died when I was 12. I was confirmed when I was 12 and became a server and became Peter Hands Saturday morning mass, 7.30am mass server in the aforementioned Lady Chapel. And it was a quite a compressed space, two steps. And there I was at the beginning saying the preparation and kneeling right next to him and absolutely terrify that I might make a mistake and not get every move right.

Interviewer: So, this is mid-50s kind of?

Colin: That was 57.

Interviewer: So, it's sort of Ladybird book religion almost.

Colin: Yeah, absolutely, yeah.

Interviewer: All right.

Colin: And okay, he announced the following year that he was leaving. And he wasn't just leaving to go to another parish in the UK. He was leaving to go to Thursday Island in the Torres Straits, Northern Australia. Yeah.

[0:04:00]

Interviewer: It's a long way to go.

Colin: Absolute isolation, yeah, to run a training college for lay people. A Church of England Church, an Anglican training college. And the night before he left, he, Friday evening, he asked Miss Gates, the parish worker and me to the vicarage to give us mementos. Me, as a 13-year-old, yeah. And he gave me a crucifix, which I've still got, and his collection of railway tickets because he knew I was crazy on trains. And I don't know what he gave her. But I mean, you know, looking back now, it seemed an extraordinary thing that he would have invited me out of the whole congregation along with her on the night before he was about to leave. And then on the Saturday morning, I went and served him for the time. And I was overwhelmed with emotion. I remember walking home and just pouring tears all the way. I don't think I understood my feelings back then, but I was clearly absolutely devastated at the loss of this man who had visited home quite a lot. He was musical, he played duets with my mother and brother. He was quite wickedly naughty. He had sparkling eyes that just communicated a lot. He was fearless. He preached. Yeah?

Interviewer: Were you in love?

Colin: Not at all. No. Well, no, I wasn't. No. I think I knew that I had met somebody in him who was incredibly healthy and profound and safe. Yes? And had qualities about him that I was meeting him in nobody else in my life. And it's only as I say that now that I guess therefore in an unconscious way, he was also profoundly significant in the end in my becoming a priest. Yeah, I don't think I'd kind of actually made that link until now.

Interviewer: Right.

Colin: So, there was he. He was followed by a guy who was fat and single and slobbish and had a fat slobbish housekeeper and they used to kick the dog downstairs and things like that. And he was apoplectically angry sometimes. And so, if he felt the choristers weren't responding he would storm down and scream hymns at the top of his voice at us. And yeah, you know, not a good model, no.

Interviewer: So, not a healthy role model.

Colin: And then a curate arrived when I was 16, fresh from Cambridge. But also fresh from induction in the Churchill(?) movement. And yeah, radical thinking about, yeah, liturgy and so on. So, I got an early and quite detailed introduction to the change that was just beginning in the church that led towards Series 1 and 2 and 3 and all of that. And I remember us having an experimental Eucharist at the front of the nave on one evening occasion -

Interviewer: With the nave altar?

Colin: With the naval altar and across, yeah, facing the people. Yeah? So, I was also, thanks to that church, introduced early on, right. So, then to fit into that, my sexuality, all right, because these things run in parallel and they're easier to tell, yeah. Well, some dovetailing is needed.

So, in my last year at primary school when I was 11, nearly 12, a boy arrived called Ian Seaton, who was blonde and willowy from another school, I can't think where he came from. And I was completely infatuated with him. I couldn't have identified what it was, but I was besotted, emotionally, absolutely hooked on him. And we then went to separate secondary schools. I went to Raynes Park, he went to Tiffin's. And my birthday was in September, and I wanted him to come to my birthday party. I don't know how I knew where he lived because he lived right up at the top of Wimbledon Hill. But I got my father, and I was a very shy person, I got my father to drive me up to his house, knocked at the door and invited him to my birthday party and he came and he brought me a dinky toy that disappointed me. And we sat and played with my model railway and he went off home and I never ever saw him again in my life. But I knew, because I began to process that experience, that I would, in fact, that in the experience, that I fancied guys in the same way as other guys were beginning to fancy girls and that that was going to be with me forever.

[0:08:37]

Interviewer: And you're conscious of that even at...?

Colin: Absolutely. Yeah. I remember thinking it. Yeah, this is who I am.

Interviewer: And in the 1950s, were there are no gay role models?

Colin: No. Apart from the camp ones on television.

Interviewer: So, what was that like?

Colin: Maybe that was a bit later.

Interviewer: I think that's probably later.

Colin: Oh well, Frankie Howerd was around.

Interviewer: Oh, that's true.

Colin: You know, he was doing stuff in Educating Archie and...

Interviewer: But was Frankie Howerd gay or was he just traditional English camp?

Colin: I think it's, I don't know at what age, but somewhere I knew that this was related to me and I didn't like it. I did not want to be a camp, limp-wristed person like them. But indeed, but they were the only role models, identifiable people there were. Except then, of course, going back to church a bit later, I wasn't confirmed by him, but Mervyn Stockwood must have arrived pretty soon afterwards.

Interviewer: Oh yes, the famous Mervyn Stockwood.

Colin: And I knew perfectly well fairly early on that met Mervyn was gay. No idea how that permeated into my knowledge, but it did. And by the time I was in my mid to late teens, I knew perfectly well that Southwark was a diocese in which there were many gay clergy and that it was clearly perfectly okay for gay people to be part of the church, but it was

never talked about. I think there must have been an awareness that one of the scout leaders was probably gay. I mean, I certainly fancied choir boys of my age. And there was quite a lot of playing around at school. So, that I wasn't, it wasn't that there wasn't any sexual activity, but there was never for me any serious sexual activity until I was way older, into my 30s. Yeah.

Interviewer: Okay.

Colin: So, and I was quite diffident. And yet clearly I've got this other side of me, which is still very present, that can be quite naughty and flirtatious and knows how to use my personality to help my way through life. So that I was elected to the PCC when I was 18, was quite influential there. There was a proposal to build a new church hall. I didn't like the architect they chose and he was a friend of my family. So, I went around and individually lobbied all the PCC members and got it to vote, it defeated what the vicar really wanted.

Interviewer: Gosh!

[0:11:01]

Colin: I know.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Colin: So, it was like that. It went politicking. Again, it was totally intuitive. Yeah.

Interviewer: Right.

Colin: But I was acutely depressed. Something had happened when I was 16,17 that had got me very withdrawn and depressed and I was in the sixth form at school. I couldn't see the point of taking it seriously and studying. So, I failed all my A levels first time around. Was then sent to Kingston College of Further Education. And I wanted to be an architect. I was keen on buildings. I'd already applied to Kingston Poly for a place and had got a place. So, and that was held open for me. So, I went to KCFE, retook three subjects and passed one, passed geography. And then due to a friend who was the City Librarian in Gloucester, he found me a place with a firm of architects in Stroud. So, I went and lived in Gloucester and worked for a year with the architects in Stroud and was going to retake two subjects but in the end I started doing art and got A level art. And that was enough to get me into Kingston.

Interviewer: So, you went from school and Kingston, from Gloucester to Kingston to study architecture?

Colin: Yes.

Interviewer: You didn't go into ministry straightaway?

Colin: No, I went to study architecture.

Interviewer: Okay.

Colin: And I think in part, because it's a seven year course, and it kicked having to grow into adulthood and to getting a job and life into the long grass for a long period, for a long time. But I also enjoyed architecture and of course, you know, all my fees were paid. It was a much less intensive course than it is nowadays, much more on the art side rather than on the mechanics of buildings side.

In the first week, we were divided into groups of five. So, there was me and a woman my age and three other guys. It wasn't until 15 years later that I discovered that two of the other guys were gay. And we worked together closely all through that first year and then for the following two years. None of us ever twigged that the others were gay. Ever talked about it. I know. So, I think that's a sign of how invisible gay people who were not of the camp variety were back then. And the impact that had on me was I never, ever found other gay people. I was always infatuated with people who were very sexually and physically attracted to me, but in the end, were not really gay but gave a lot of themselves to me. They were really good friendships through my 20s and one in particular.

So, there was a lot of emotional frustration of not being emotionally, sexually satisfied, not meeting somebody with whom I could form that kind of intimate relationship. And it didn't happen until actually my last year at theological college when I was 32. That's when that's the first step.

Interviewer: By today's standards, that's enormously...

Colin: Incredibly late, yeah. I didn't have a conversation openly with somebody about being gay until my mother took in a lodger when I was 27. And we were both safe enough in circumstances that we could talk about it and did and became friends. And we're still friends actually.

Interviewer: And presumably that was also partly because people were aware that being gay was something dangerous, and therefore you wouldn't want to reveal and expose yourself to the possibilities of blackmail and misunderstanding and trouble.

[0:14:54]

Colin: Yeah. But something happened to me earlier which I knew that if I made public would have a devastating effect on the other person and on me. I knew that I would be in the public eye and that I would be deeply humiliated. So, there were enormous self-preservation reasons for keeping my sexuality secret. And developing, it wasn't necessarily a forced persona, but a kind of the person I wanted to be seen as an accepted as. Yeah.

Interviewer: And in the church in Southwark in the 60s, although there was a well-known gay subculture, presumably this entirely under the wire and unspoken.

Colin: Yes. I just knew it was there, but I never knew personally anybody. It was a very, my world was still really quite a small world. I lived, I still lived in the same house and we moved by then up to a slightly bigger house near Wimbledon. But I just travelled there to college and back and home to church. You know, that really was most of my world.

Interviewer: So, and how did vocation come out of the process? You said you finished at certain...?

Colin: So, I fancied somebody like crazy in my first three years at Kingston Poly. And he wasn't responding to me and I thought, "Okay, I'll punish him by indeed going and training as a priest and leaving". So, I got in touch with the DDO, Derek Tasker, who was gay. And I think maybe I did know was gay. Yes. When I was 22, when I came back from having my first year in Stroud, the parish had contacted the diocese and youth and children's group and they were giving us help in forming a youth group. And I then got involved in diocesan activities in some schools and began to meet people in the diocese. So, I suspect that the children's youth officer was probably a lesbian actually. And I got to

meet Derek through them. And I got to meet, actually, I did then. I'm thinking of another person I won't name here, but who was absolutely gay.

Interviewer: Right. Absolutely gay.

Colin: You know, yes. Broadcast on Radio 2 sometimes.

Interviewer: Right. Still? No. Okay.

Colin: I'm not sure he does anymore. No. Does a lot of cruises at the cruises(?) now.

So, I went to see Derek and being wise over(?) the years said, "Well, my advice to you is to go away, finish your architectural training, qualify, and then come back and see me and see where we go from there. But it would be very good if you had professional training before you enter the church".

So, I did that. I went to away, qualified. And for the first time left home properly.

Interviewer: At 32?

Colin: No, 28.

Interviewer: 28?

Colin: 28, yeah. I know. You know, I lived away from home for the two years in Gloucester, but actually that was the first time I really abandoned home. Got a job in Basingstoke with a private architect. Moved down there. Found a basement flat right in the centre of Basingstoke, a five minute walk from work. The office was in a wing of the church hall right next to the parish church above the parish office. It was the first year of the formation of the team ministry. There was an interregnum. The curate was gay. And it was a fantastic, buzzy environment. It was wonderful. And it was church like I had never experienced it before but dreamed of it then and dream of it now, to be honest. You know, well, it's not so different from here probably, but back then.

[0:18:59]

So, there were a team of seven, all quirky, exotic, creative, intelligent, playful. Yeah. And they met for a team meeting weekly. There was a Eucharist in the middle of the day. I went to the Eucharist and I think I actually even began going to the team meeting towards the end of my time there.

So, that was a fantastic induction into what church could be like. And how free you could be to be yourself and do your own thing liturgically in terms of parish ministry. Yeah. They ran a Saturday event for kids, which they threw the parish church open and they invited people from the television, was it Play...? One of the television programmes down. So, there were visual arts, there was drama, drawing and painting and stuff. But the whole church building was turned over to it. Wow.

Yes. okay. So, and the rector, who was appointed and that arrived, was quite a sober and is still a great friend. And he must have picked up that something in me had thought about ordination. So, halfway through my three years there, he said, "Look, what about it? Are you or are you not going to think about being ordained?" So, I went away and thought about it. And I think I knew the answer was going to be yes.

But the reason was that, and really the reason was, if you can't beat, join them. I was so frustrated at the impotence of being a layperson and flowing with energy and ideas and

in deep involvement. But I knew that in the end I wasn't going to be able to form the kind of parish and congregation and so on, you know. I intuitively, yeah.

So, I went and met the bishop and that was okay. And then I went and met the diocesan panel in which I remember some retired colonel asking me, "If in the fullness of time, Mr Coward, this committee should see its way to recommending you for ordination, where would you like to serve your title?" And I remember thinking, "What a stupid question," and in as nice a way as possible said, "I haven't a clue actually at the moment. I have no idea".

But anyway, so, that was fine. And then, and I was recommended for training. Yeah, I went to residential Adam(?), whatever it was back then. Wondered whether I was going to be asked about my sexuality. You know, it was there in my consciousness all the way through. I wasn't. I think I intuited it was there somehow in the background of questions or whatever, but that actually people really weren't interested in it. The church wasn't interested in whether it was gay or not.

Interviewer: And that was your feeling of the time. So, this is, what, mid-60s?

Colin: Yeah, that would have been, let me think, 55, 65, 73?

Interviewer: Okay. 73. So, early 70s. And so, people were aware of your sexuality, but they weren't actually interested in it as an issue?

Colin: Yeah, absolutely not. Not remotely. Very deliberately not interested in it. Very deliberately, not asking questions.

Interviewer: And that would have been my experience in the mid-80s as well.

Colin: Gosh. Yeah. When things had begun to change.

Interviewer: Yeah, begun to change, but yeah.

Colin: Yeah. So, having been accepted I must have been seeing the Winchester DDO who I can't remember at all interestingly now. But I went back to Derek Tasker who visited every college every year. So, had firsthand information. And he said, having run through those that he thought were worth looking at, and I would recommend that you should consider Westcott House as your first choice. And I thought, "Westcott? I'm not a Westcott person". You know, I didn't see myself as, yeah, you know, it was a college for the high flyers and bishops. Absolutely. And I guess I actually was quite flattered that Derek thought that that is where I should go.

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And he said, you know, "So, I think I want you to apply to Westcott and make clear that that's the only college you're going to apply to initially, and I will write to Mark Santa and tell him that he ought to accept you.

So, I turned up for an overnight interview process at Westcott and was just bowled over by it, you know, like emotionally now I can still kind of remember vividly. It was one of the best experiences of my life. And the guest master, Stephen Peters, who was just very slightly older than me, he said, "There'll be an envelope for you on the notice board when you get into the lodge with your name on it and instructions and so on and I'll meet you sometime the next day for a coffee and so on".

But there it was with green writing on it in a flourish and I thought, "Okay". And then yeah, was hosted by various people who all said, Mark Satchell, he's very intimidating and he's like this, you're real leaders, what do you think...? And then (inaudible 0:24:21) who was the chaplain, was, yeah, who would kind of sit under a table and put a cushion on his head and really wacky and so. And then there was another guy.

Interviewer: It was the early 70s, after all.

Colin: It was the early 70s. So, I kind of went into each of them thinking, "Oh heck". And each interview was just wonderful. I had a great time with Mark and I thought, "Gosh, I'm not so out of this world as I just thought I was". Yeah. And I was accepted at Wescott. And for me it was wonderful.

Interviewer: Three years?

Colin: I was supposed to do three but it got reduced to two and a term. I was supposed to do, yeah, whatever I was supposed to do, but academically I just wasn't committed to it.

Interviewer: Okay.

Colin: And then Mervyn Stockwood arrived towards the end of my second year looking for somebody to replace the curate who'd just walked out of his parish. So, it was agreed and I would do one extra term to mop up the pastoral stuff.

Interviewer: You wouldn't be allowed to do that no, would you?

Colin: And was ordained - I know - in December and then did a short curacy or short, yeah, and was then priested in September. Yeah.

Interviewer: Gosh.

Colin: I know.

Interviewer: All in the year. And you served your curacy where?

Colin: St George's, Camberwell.

Interviewer: Oh okay, I know St George's. Yeah, indeed. I was at the Elephant and Castle.

Colin: Oh of course. Yes, oh of course. Which is adjoining, yeah. There's nothing in-between it. No. So, okay, so, I arrive at... yeah, so we... I don't think there's anything crucial missed out so far.

[0:26:01]

Interviewer: No, that's right. But it's interesting that your experience of being a gay person in the church, actually in wider society, is that it's known and acknowledged and slightly risky, but there's nothing... in the way that people, it's focused on in the way that is these days in the church didn't really exist in the church in the 60s and 70s. It wasn't an issue.

Colin: Yeah.

Interviewer: And presumably as society, so being gay had been decriminalised in 68? Was it 68 or...?

Colin: 67.

Interviewer: 67. And society's actually was beginning to change, although slowly.

Colin: Yeah. When I was 22.

Interviewer: 22. So, growing up and maturing as a man at a time when that was all beginning to be flexible and more fluid in society. And in the church where it wasn't so interested in that as an issue.

Colin: Yeah. And more adult about it all then actually. But actually, there are two more things that I need to mention. One is that, of course, Southwark was the home of South Bank religion and Nick Stacey was at Woolwich, John Robinson was Bishop of Woolwich. So, and the cathedral had this extraordinary evening programme of, Sunday evening programme of events, Sunday Nights in Southwark, with all drama and arts and music and so on going on. So, I absolutely knew that radical theology was healthy and fine and in Southwark terms, orthodox. Yeah?

Interviewer: Right, yeah.

Colin: And I read Honest to God when it was first published and sort of thought what a relief to, I can believe what I really believe. So, I was always non-orthodox in terms of theology. Yeah? And yes. And what I really didn't realise of course was the rest of the Church of England wasn't necessarily quite like this.

Interviewer: No. Clearly not.

Colin: So, and all I had was the diocese of Southwark and Basingstoke team ministry. And where I'd lived in Matson in Gloucester, which was also, he was very radical and was involving the congregation in liturgy back then in the late 60s in a way that it took the church another 10 or 20 years to catch up with really and was presiding across the table and inviting lay people to come and join him at the altar for the Eucharistic prayer and yeah.

Interviewer: Okay. Which still doesn't happen very much even now.

Colin: No, absolutely not, no. So, actually I learned a lot from him about how you can actually route what you really believe about the inclusive nature of a ministry in parish life Sunday by Sunday, and that's always been really important to me.

Interviewer: So, after you've done your curacy, where did you go?

Colin: So, hang on. So, actually back to back to Westcott. Westcott was the most gay friendly place I had ever encountered in my life.

Interviewer: Oh, you said you'd fallen in love with somebody, didn't you?

[0:28:57]

Colin: Yeah, I did. It was, yeah, yeah. But, it was open, adult, safe, easy. It wasn't a big issue that there were lots of gay people in training. Yeah. People were just getting on with being who they were. And Mark and the other staff really helped with that. And at the end of my first year then staff was joined by Rowan Williams who also contributed to this absolute normative healthy environment.

So, Wescott was ordaining or sending to be ordained gay people who had been formed in that mature, healthy culture, and I was very lucky because I went back to Southwark, yeah, to the same culture. So, and in Camberwell Deanery then there were probably 15

people of my age or less. But we met together once a month on a Friday evening for a meal. So, there was this fantastic support network.

Interviewer: I was going to say, that doesn't exist now.

Colin: Now, no, no. There were more clergy, of course, but also, yeah, they were... it was such a, you know? As I look back at it now, I had such good experiences.

Interviewer: Sounds like a golden age.

Colin: Yeah, really nourishing and nurturing. Whereas I remember at PTO in the chapter, the old Chapter House at Southwark, and with this sort of, you would probably have been there if you'd been in my period. These black clad, tightly laced up brigade sitting in the back, nudging and giggling amongst themselves because half of them were closeted gays. And it just felt so incredibly unhealthy.

Interviewer: Well, that still existed in Southwark when I was there in the early 90s.

Colin: Did it? Yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah, and that certainly existed when I got there in the early 90s.

Colin: Yeah. So, that was, but those were the kind of the two sets in a way in the Church, weren't they then, that either you were uptight and there were obviously evangelicals, but I didn't know about them then. Yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Colin: So, then Peter Selby, I don't know, when did he come? No, maybe after Keith. So, Keith Sutton was the Bishop of Kingston then, and he had been a principal of Ridley when I was at Westcott. So, I got to know Keith well before I arrived in Southwark. And Keith was looking to fill a vacancy at St Faith's, Wandsworth, which was, oh yes. You should know my predecessor. Yeah. Okay. It was a story about him anyway. So, because it was potentially in the school rebuilding programme, there was an awful Victorian school with open air toilets. The church had been demolished ten years previously. They were worshipping in the school hall. And when I looked at it and I went. I can't quite think why I did. I'd always had dreams as an architect.

Interviewer: Of building your own church?

Colin: Yeah, well, no, or of arriving to this glorious service of, yeah. What are they called? Inductions? Yeah.

Interviewer: Licensing.

Colin: Licensing. Yeah. You know, and this wonderful church with a fantastic organ, my brother's an organist, you know? Yeah, right. Camberwell, they were worshipping in the school hall. St Faith's they were worshipping in the school hall. I never had it. But it did mean that three years in it got put into this school building programme and I'd inherited a designer, an architect that I didn't like and went and talked to the diocese, and they agreed that we could reinterview and look for potentially a new architect.

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And it was a complex thing because it was a school, church, adult education institute and youth club. So, they all had separate architects. Plus, the Iliia, sorry, they were

separate client bodies plus Ilia plus it was both the diocesan board of education plus the diocese itself in terms of church buildings. Yeah, so there were seven different - oh and then the PCC, yeah, seven different client bodies.

And I got, we invited four architects to come and effectively audition, to come and present to the PCC their work, which was rare. I mean, I think it still could be quite rare actually that clients bother to do that. So, they could see the quality of the work they were being offered and they unanimously chose, affirmed that I knew well, that was really well-known for its radical modern church buildings, and Maguire & Murray. And the diocesan, the board of education didn't like them because they'd never built a big school. They'd done add-on classrooms and so on. So, for a year this war ensued in which the PCC under, you know, they were absolutely with me. They were not going to be fobbed off with somebody crap. And in the end we were offered somebody who was deemed to be neutral, who turned out to be brilliant, actually. And so, yeah, the design. And I had a lot of input into the design of the church. I'd sat down and worked out what kind of budget we've got because initially it was just a kind of a hole off the side of the school hall. But we actually built pretty much a self-contained church in the end, kept budget back, out of sight of the diocese, and commissioned a pipe organ, stained glass, designed furniture. You know, all the treasure folks, you know? Yeah. Actually, the whole of it. It was a beautiful space. And one of the best things, the most satisfying things I've ever done really.

And then I, having completed it because they then often want to move you on. And I wanted to enjoy it. I didn't want to be moved on. So, I resisted.

Right now, the story gets a bit complicated at this point and I can't think what year it was the building was finished, but anyway, while I was there. And we did things that I find quite unusual for me. In fact, we looked around for what else we could do that would enhance the life of the congregation and that we were going to enjoy doing. And it was another dream goal, in a way. Then it would, the church was St Faith's. So, I did a bit of research, I guess, and discovered that St Faith was in Aquitaine in Southern France and that her reliquary and remains were still held in Conque in a fantastic Romanesque church there that was on the Compostela pilgrimage route, okay, with still with the pilgrimage hostel next to it. So, we organised a week's pilgrimage for 30 of us, half black, half white, the youngest was a baby girl, a black baby girl of 18 months. The oldest was a white woman of 83 who had never been abroad in her life before.

Interviewer: It's so common in South London at the time. It really was. Yeah, absolutely.

Colin: Yeah. So, we drove in two cars and a minibus, and it was just an extraordinary time. It was fantastic. I mean, just fantastic. I know like, gee, it was such a good life back then. What the church does nowadays in my experience is just so timid and dull and...

So, we did that. And then they wanted more. So, then I organised with them three successive parish holidays in this country over the following three years. But yeah, and we had a great time. We used to go to Wales and Cornwall and yeah, you know, it was, and it was a smallish congregation, 60 or 70 people. But I really, really enjoyed my ministry there.

Interviewer: So, why did you leave?

Colin: Okay. So, I'd been in counselling and therapy already for quite a long time and had gradually graduated from one kind of therapy to another, to group therapy. And then realised that there was deep rooted stuff in me that I was very disembodied. I was disconnected from my emotions and that all the stuff I'd done up until then in therapy

hadn't actually kind of broken through the barrier. So, as many people do, I decided I needed to train as a psychotherapist.

[0:37:20]

Interviewer: It always happens, it's always the way, just always the way.

Colin: And the diocese were by then looking, so they wanted, when I left, to make the post a half time post. And the gay chaplain of Queen Mary's Hospital was looking for a half time assistant at that time. So, all of this fitted together and I volunteered myself to go half time and became half time chaplain and started the psychotherapy training and persuaded the diocese to give me a grant to do it. And initially carried on living in the vicarage. So, I didn't need to look for anywhere. So, I was doing all of those things at once over a period of two or three years. And Niall, the chaplain, was the... he was running the clergy consultation at that time.

(Overspeaking)

Interviewer: Explain what clergy consultation is.

Colin: Right. So, the clergy consultation was founded just a bit after LGCM and was then the Lesbian and Gay Clergy Consultation having been initially at the Gay Clergy Consultation before women were ordained, which was a group of LGBTI clergy in the Church of England who met twice a year for a day in central London and at its maximum it had something like 600 members.

Interviewer: Oh, that's huge.

Colin: It was huge. Yeah. In Malcolm Johnson's earlier period, yeah, it was huge. And so, meetings were often 80 or 90 people. And they would invite significant people, but also then occasionally DDOs, bishops. It was totally confidential. There was a very sort of a secretive induction route into it. So, I'd already been to meetings but lapsed. But I went then back with Niall and on the way up in the car he announced to me that he was going to resign at that meeting. And something in me said, "I don't know, Colin, but I think you might be being called to volunteer yourself for this". And I have never, ever been an activist, a campaigner, open, in my life before. But I did volunteer, but nobody else did, so I became the convener of the consultation.

Interviewer: Okay, so this is the beginning of a journey?

Colin: This is the beginning. Okay, and actually then, so that was (inaudible 0:40:02), it must all be around 1991, 92. I was then -

(Overspeaking)

Interviewer: Just after I'd been ordained.

Colin: Right, yeah. I'd been seeing a guy, a black American model, who was just a few years younger than me, who... oh, he was a difficult person, a very difficult person, but I was absolutely hooked. Three or four months after we met, he discovered that he was HIV positive. And in 1991 he died. And I was devastated. So, emotionally I was, yeah, I was.... and that same period, it was the first half of 91, I was involved in the group that was organising in the Diocese of Southwark a residential conference for the diocese at Caister. That, okay, Jack Cox Bond came and spoke at the conference and out of his presence, a group, including me, decided to create a support network for LGBT people in the diocese.

Interviewer: So, I would have been in Southwark. I was in Southwark 90 to 94.

Colin: Were you really?

[0:41:09]

Interviewer: Yes.

Colin: And were you not at Caister then?

Interviewer: I don't remember it at all.

Colin: It probably wasn't very high profile, if you were, the meeting wasn't that high profile advertised, I suspect. Gosh, how funny.

Interviewer: I don't remember it at all.

Colin: Wow.

Interviewer: But I have a notoriously poor memory, shockingly bad memory, but I think we all went, must have all gone through it.

Colin: I think we did yeah.

Interviewer: So, I must have been there.

Colin: But you don't remember going? With the Jack Bond(?) because they wouldn't give, make him the keynote speaker. They'd put him in a secondary venue and he was really pissed off with it. But of course, it was absolutely heaving with people to the point of people having to stand at windows to him.

Interviewer: So, I was so not engaged in sort of that kind of church politics then that I would have had no idea.

Colin: You wouldn't have avoided it like the plague?

Interviewer: Yes, I would avoid it like the plague. And I was a buttoned up Anglo Catholic.

Colin: Yeah, gosh, you have come on along. We both have.

(Laughter)

Interviewer: A very long way.

Colin: So, back in the 90s, that group began to meet. And I was part of the steering committee. We were meeting at a Vicarage, oh, in Vauxhall. And the guy I think after the second meeting he went on a holiday to Australia, to the Great Barrier Reef, and was killed in a surfing or another underwater thingy accident. Yeah. Which left the group homeless. So, I think it was probably then that it moved its venue to St Faith's, to my church. So, it met at St Faith's from then on.

And became part of the vision for what became Changing Attitude. So, that was 91. 1995 I was meeting and reading quite a lot with my spiritual director, (inaudible 0:43:00) Patrick. You know, I was caught. And musing that there was a void in the church of conversation across difference. You know, there was this one set of people

who were gay and living reasonably happily and present in the church, but invisibly, and another group who knew nothing about them. And because then that was by then post-Higdon and post-issues in human sexuality and so on. So, there were the beginnings of A) the conversation and of an anti-gay movement quite strongly.

Interviewer: Yeah, the homophobia was really beginning to develop.

Colin: Yeah. So, but then I was wondering, I guess I had my therapy training, where's the conversation going that might lead to some kind of resolution of this radical difference? And talked with them about it and talking about people and he clearly wasn't. So, out of that Bill and I decided that it would be right to launch something new, specifically to do that. And I knew that the LGCM and Richard Kirker might well be upset by it. And indeed -

[0:44:08]

(Overspeaking)

Interviewer: And indeed, he was.

Colin: - very pleased. So, actually that decision was probably one of the things which began to cause ripples of disruption, because it affected the consultation as well. In the end I spent some time organising a, oh what's it called when you have a... a constitution. Because there was no constitution, there was no way of electing people and deciding who was on the committee or who the convener was going to be.

So, we organised a constitution and the first result of that was that somebody else got elected in my place as the convener which was Steven (inaudible 0:44:46). Which was fine, and it was really healthy. Very good. But I mean, so I was quite influential I guess in beginning to put in place new models of how we were in the church. And so Changing Attitude initially, what did I do? Oh, I was, people were saying you need to meet this bishop, you need to meet that bishop. And I wrote to various bishops out of the blue, and everyone that I wrote who agreed to meet me. I can't quite imagine that happening nowadays.

Interviewer: No, absolutely wouldn't happen at all.

Colin: No, it wouldn't, would it? So, St Albans met me, Richard Harris, Oxford, met me.

Interviewer: I probably organised the meeting because I was...

Colin: Well, indeed. When I got to Saint Albans thinking I was just going to meet the bishop, he'd actually got other senior members of staff in to meet me as well to talk about it -

(Overspeaking)

Interviewer: Okay. So, this was 95, 96, 97?

Colin: Yes. Yeah. Probably, yeah.

Interviewer: So, almost certainly cause I was Bishop Richard's chaplain from 94 to 98.

Colin: Wow, God.

Interviewer: Almost certainly arranged for a meeting place. Yeah.

Colin: How bizarre. But I remember I met him at his club in London and we then, I don't know why, it must have been a nice day, we went and walked round the lake in St James's Park. And we must have walked around it three or four times and I was thinking, "This is just, what am I doing talking to this senior bishop?" You know, it's the side of Buckingham Palace about sexuality and gay people in the church. This is astonishing.

So, that was one of the first things that I did for Changing Attitude. But then, and this was a chance thing. I was worshipping, because I'd by then left the parish. I'd got enough alternative funding to resign from the parish, was still doing the chaplaincy work, I was earning some money through psychotherapy and then got seed funding for Changing Attitude. So, in the end I ran down the psychotherapy practice.

[0:46:40]

Interviewer: Because that's one of the things, I wanted to ask is how you end up leaving the parish and what was...?

Colin: Yeah. Well, let's think. You see, I was in the parish for 14 years. Okay, yeah, so, let's go back to being in the parish. I knew I didn't want to go into another parish job. I just couldn't stand the births, marriages, deaths. Yeah. The pastoral ministry was not me. I loved the deeply personal nature of what we did together at the friendships and of cultivating people who were theoretically literate, who thought about things and expansive in their imagination of what it meant to be a Christian and who felt free of the kind of, yeah, the taboos and the guilts in redemption theology.

Interviewer: But most parish ministry is not that, is it? Most parish is pretty much standard.

Colin: No, it's not. It's also yeah, but I mean, I was able to do a lot of that stuff, I suppose. And they were really interested in it, and it was very mixed, numbers of African people from various parts of Africa. Nigerians I remember, Ghanaians, Kenyans, Ugandans, yeah. And I couldn't see why that couldn't be a normative model across the church, and yet I knew what a, you know, it would take me 14 years of us, because it was a mutual thing, to get to that point. I didn't want to go and have to begin all over again from scratch.

Interviewer: Yeah, I understand that.

Colin: Plus, on the other side, there was clearly something very positive going on inside me that was moving me to do something new. And I'm not somebody who has visitations or visions and I'm not into magical thinking. You know, my experience of God is very absolutely nonconcrete and yeah. And I had to learn to trust and give myself to the fact that there is ultimate, profound truth, goodness, energy, love, wisdom, beauty, glory. Yeah. That is more real than anything else. Truly more real. But just has to be given to. You have to trust it. Yeah. But the more that you open yourself to it and give yourself to it, the more it becomes real and almost tangible. Yeah, I think tangible.

Interviewer: You're a good Platonist, aren't you, really? You are a good Platonist.

Colin: Yeah, probably. Yes, I've got very good on the philosophy stuff, but I mean, yes. So, I agreed that I would resign having been working part-time. And I needed therefore to look for somewhere else to move. And there were people in the congregation, one of them was the manager of the trust that included the Chelsea and Westminster hospital. So, he was been really quite good. He'd been a government senior civil servant before that, I remember he gave me £1,000 towards the mortgage deposit. It was extraordinary.

Interviewer: Oh wow, very kind.

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Colin: Yeah. It really was. So, I managed to get enough of a deposit together for a really nice ex-council property overlooking the All England Lawn Tennis Club in Southfields. It was fantastic, south facing, terrace. Just...

And moved and worked as a psychotherapist and masseur there. That was integral to the psychotherapy. And began to develop Changing Attitude from there. And worshipped, actually was the adjoining to my childhood parish. I worshipped there quite a bit where the then parish priest, Bertrand Olivier, was transforming. I mean, he was actually doing what I'd done at St Faith's. Yeah, completely reorganised the layout of the church and it was in the sort of, he gradually made it more and more in the round and, yeah, it was really exciting. So, there was, you know, it was amazing to see my own parish, my childhood parish church being transformed in a way I would never have imagined. And beginning to form contacts with people at the senior level around the church with bishops and so on, and being valued and welcomed. But in a way that process making me as much as it was me doing something in the church.

[0:51:22]

Interviewer: So, this is the mid-90s and into the early noughties, isn't it?

Colin: Yes. Well, and so the key thing is then is 97, the year of preparation for the Lambeth Conference in 98 really. And I turned up at Southwark Cathedral a bit late one Sunday morning to be told as I walked through the door, "It's full, but I think there are a couple of seats close to the front if you want to go there," and I was with my then partner. So, I said, "Yeah, fine". So, we were shown to the seats in the front and in fact it was the row behind four rows of purple and it was the final planning meeting in London for the Lambeth Conference of the planning committee and all the bishops were there that morning and Rowan was preaching. I looked at the thing, "Oh, wow, Rowan's preaching. Great".

And we got to the Gloria and the congregation sat while the Gloria was sung. And so, we sat down. And around me individuals, about eight individuals, stood up and walked to the front and unfurled banners. And it was OutRage! protesting at the Church of England's refusal to meet Richard Kirker and LGCM and you know?

Interviewer: I remember hearing this happening, yes.

Colin: Yeah, yeah. And I was sitting there thinking, "What? What? What's this?"

Interviewer: Okay. Hey, I'm Anglican.

Colin: Yeah. And at the end, then Colin Slee stood up and he was great. And he said, "You're really welcome. I'm glad that you're here this morning and thank you for demonstrating in that way. And I invite you to return to your seats now so that we can continue the service". And one of them then spoke and said, "We are here to protest against the refusal of the duh, duh, duh, duh, to meet LGCM". And so, and I was on the LGCM board at that stage, so I stood up, I think, and God, what? I stood up and at that point caught Jeffrey Thompson out of the corner of my eye walking down because he was also at the board there. And I said, "I just wish to dissociate myself from what has been said. I am a member of the board of LGCM," and you know.

Interviewer: Oh, my goodness.

Colin: Slightly, I know. Whatever. Did I say that? Yeah, I think I did actually. I mean, the guy who said it, he had been really antagonistic and he was very, very hostile and negative.

Interviewer: Right.

Colin: You know, and I said and we are still hoping to meet and looking forward because we want to get... So, and at the end of the service I then got into a series of conversations and introductions going up the scale of people from around the communion which ended up with Jonathan Coolidge Inganni, the Archbishop of Cape Town, who was responsible for the subsection that was going to be dealing with sexuality who was looking for somebody who wasn't Richard Kirker to come and meet and talk to the bishops.

So, we had a conversation. He must have decided fairly quickly that I seemed to be a much safer person than Richard. So, I went back up to town the following morning and met him and there was another bishop in there from the group, and had a conversation and said, you know, yeah, I would be very happy to do it but only if it was a group that came and we worked together and presented as a group.

So, I then began to get people together and I think I must have been to a general convention once in the States by then, so I'd met the Integrity crowd and got them involved. So, we met every two months at St Martin in the Fields on a weekday evening and began to formulate a plan of action.

Interviewer: You're almost an accidental activist, aren't you?

[0:54:48]

Colin: Oh, absolutely, totally, totally, yeah. I didn't plan any of it.

Interviewer: That should be the name of your autobiography, The Accidental Activist. You should definitely...

Colin: That's a pretty good plan, yeah, very good. So, and we got to Lambeth. We were supposed to be meeting the group right at the beginning when they first met and John hadn't told them in advance that he'd extended this invitation and that we were actually, had been -

(Overspeaking)

Interviewer: Oh, my goodness.

Colin: They refused to meet.

Interviewer: Of course.

Colin: We never met them. We organised an alternative campus meeting and so on. But I was there for three weeks. So, I'd got to know from the inside for the first time the communion. And many of the people who were going to become key in the... so, it wasn't, it was Richard who got his hands, you know, the demon cast out by the Nigerians.

Interviewer: Ah, yes, okay, okay.

Colin: But I was there in the hall for the debate on Resolution 110. Yeah. And saw George Carey in action and the incredibly poisonous atmosphere. You know, this real outpouring of foul, vitriolic, anti-gay stuff in the communion. And the Integrity people came so we got to work alongside them.

So, we had a changing group of people there. We rented two properties. So, there must have been 15 people present all the way through the three weeks of the conference. So, out of that, and we produced a newsletter afterwards I think. So, that, out of that evolved and from the Southern network, Changing Attitude diocesan groups, Changing Attitude newsletter, campaigning role and a deepening involvement both in this country and around the communion. And I worked out knowing that conservatives were turning up at communion meetings and at generals, I just started turning up for General Synod before I worked out that actually if we had a stall I could then get a badge and I could be there legitimately. And then from that that we needed to be at communion meetings as well. So Changing Attitude started paying for me to go to primates' meetings and Anglican consultative council meetings.

Interviewer: And were you given access?

Colin: As much as any other media person was. They registered me as a media. Yeah. And it was very valuable in that for the first time there was somebody blogging and writing about the experience from not quite the inside, but from the scene in a way that had been entirely conservative reportage up until then. So, yeah, I mean, I can see talking about it, but I was quite influential in changing the whole dynamic of what was going on in the context of increasing homophobia and anti-gay -

(Overspeaking)

Interviewer: Yes, because at the same time, the church had lost entirely that sort of open freedom that you and I had both experienced in the 80s and early 90s, and it was kind of getting worse and more and more antagonistic and difficult for gay and lesbian clergy.

Colin: Yeah, yeah. And with the Church of England near post issues in 91 and then standard issues more -

[0:58:24]

(Overspeaking)

Interviewer: (Inaudible 0:58:24) Yeah.

Colin: Yeah. And then, yeah, the Jeffrey John -

Interviewer: Yeah, debacle in 98. 98, 99.

Colin: No, that was a bit later. It was early 2000, was it 2001? Gene Robinson was 2003. He only came just after it. I think Jeffrey was 2001. Yeah. And I went to general - oh, maybe that was the first time I went, 2003. I went and was there for Gene Robinson's confirmation, and so on, and yeah.

Interviewer: Where he had to wear a bulletproof -

Colin: Vest, absolutely.

Interviewer: And they had doctors laid on in case he was assassinated. Somebody tried to kill him.

Colin: Yeah, yeah.

Interviewer: I only discovered that last year.

Colin: And I was around him a lot of the time and I didn't know any of that then. So, I was put in the firing line, yes.

Interviewer: Yeah. And people were scared about it. They were all worried it was going off.

Colin: I mean, the level of tension was huge. But also, very exciting. And to discover the vibrancy of the Episcopal Church, this convention hall, they had three adjoining convention halls. One for the clergy and laity complication, one for the exhibition and one for worship. So, each morning, a thousand people with these, and there's an Episcopal Church sort of an arts group. So, before the service and then during communion, these images would be projected onto the wall behind the altar, just beautiful, changing images from, yeah, art. And just fantastic liturgy and music and passion absolutely. You know, like I wasn't meeting in England. Yeah. There's absolute conviction that we are about something which is life changing and transformative.

Interviewer: And actually, you hear it when you hear Episcopal bishops speak in a way that you don't hear, I think, in English Bishop speaking. There's an intimacy to their faith and the straightforwardness, which is very American, but actually hugely refreshing. Yes, I agree.

Colin: So, and since then, it's a funny kind of business, because what happened next. 2003, and we're now 2015, so that's 12 years, what on Earth has gone on in the last 12 years? It's been attrition, depression, growing anger. Again, because in civil society, bit by bit, life has been absolutely transformed from 97 to that Labour government election onwards which began the whole legal process of transformation. And in the church resistance, worse and worse practice and culture and attitudes that has now become intolerable and that is kind of, isn't it, condensing 12 years of horror.

Interviewer: So, one of the things I've always thought about you is you've tried to work very carefully with the bishops, the Church of England, by having good, friendly conversations, treating them with great respect trying to work on the inside. But I've always been slightly suspicious of that because there's a way in which the hierarchy can use that to neutralise the power of protest by drawing somebody in and making you feel part of a special network. Do you think that that programme of working with the bishops, having those conversations with the bishops, has been as fruitful as you would want it to have been? Or looking back on it now, do you think more challenge and more Kirker-esque behaviour would have been better?

[1:02:30]

Colin: Well, it was quite helpful, of course, that Richard was there and LGCM because we could have good guy, bad guy. But I don't think we were, as your language kind of, the bishops were initiating it and drawing us into their world. Actually, we were initiating contact most of the time and indeed allowing them then to set tone and context. I wasn't being provocative. We weren't in encounters with them. But we knew where we stood and we were very clear about what our agenda was and what our judgement was on their language and behaviour and attitudes. Yeah?

And in a way, because two years ago we had a series of meetings in confidence with bishops that we'd asked for and that we'd set the agenda for, and it meant that they learned a considerable amount from us and experientially from us because it wasn't just me. It was always two or three other trustees with me. And that we had learned a lot about them, that they then knew we knew. Yeah? So, they had made themselves vulnerable to some degree knowing that we were very absolutely hot on maintaining confidentiality. But nevertheless, we saw into their world.

And I think, I mean, I guess I already knew what they were like. You know, I have a lot of respect for the quality of people who are our bishops on the one side and believe as a Christian and as a humanist and, you know, that their identity, their selfhood, needs to be affirmed and valued as much as any other human being's self who does.

But I also, and this feeling has grown stronger as the years have passed, also feel very, very angry and think a lot about what can be done and especially now, and we might come to that at the end, what can I do in retirement given the reputation that I have that I might be in a position to do something that nobody else can.

Interviewer: Do?

Colin: Yeah.

Interviewer: Because I was having a conversation this morning with somebody else and this person was on the conservative wing of the church in reform. And we both agreed with each other that the culture of the Church of England is deeply dishonest and unhealthy because there is no honesty, public honesty, openness about what the Church of England is actually like in terms of the number of gay clergy, gay bishops, people in relationships, the actual life of parishes. And the reform person I was talking to was actually wanting the church to go down the line of being like this is our official doctrine, let's enforce it. Whereas clearly that is never going to happen.

Colin: They're terrified. Well, they actually do not want to do it, no.

Interviewer: They don't, do they? But actually, the other side of that, which of course, which is being, let's be honest and open about what's actually happening in the Church of England and what we're actually doing is far too terrifying because then it negates the sort of public statements which they feel they have to make because of the Anglican communion worldwide, because of the ultra conservatives in the Church of England who are small in number but very loud in voice. And so, one of the questions is where do we go from here now in a culture which is deeply dysfunctional and dishonest? And unhealthy. And in which everybody is frightened and angry. So, the liberals are frightened and angry because it's our very being that's being denied and the conservatives are frightened and angry because it's their fundamental belief that is being denied. And the bishops, poor lambs, are in the middle being honest to nobody, not even themselves.

Colin: Yeah, and deeply compromised. Yeah. Okay, so, before we get there, there's one more key ingredient that I need to bring in. All right? So, which is that I've realised eventually that really I'm a contemplative and I -

Interviewer: Right. You'd look great in a wimple, Colin.

[1:07:16]

Colin: Thank you. I really didn't know and it is only in more recent years that I've twigged actually that is what I am. And I've always wanted to be sexual and to live with somebody and to be involved in an intimate relationship. But I think there's been an equal always wanted to be contemplative and on my own and quiet. So, at Westcott the expectation was that you were in silence in chapel six days out of seven for half an hour before the morning office. And I had never, I'd been accepted for ordination training by then, I had never had a personal prayer life.

Interviewer: Right, very Anglican.

Colin: (Laughter)

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Interviewer: First thing I do when I anybody comes to me about their faith, I always sit down and teach them to pray before I teach them anything else, I teach them to pray. This is what you have to do and this is what, these tools to pray, before everything else.

Colin: So, I was saying in the office and so I started and I had no idea what was happening in the silence of what I was supposed to be doing or looking for. I mean, I must have had some clues because Mark ran a spirituality class for the first year But I knew it was an essential ingredient of who I was, and then once I got into therapy and so on, it became integral to the kind of therapy training I was doing, which was quite Eastern or influenced and Gestalt and so on. And some of the others in training were quite airy fairy and dream work and birthing and all of that stuff. Yeah, which was my absolutely as well. So, and I have continued to commit myself to science. But its content, its quality has changed radically over the time, the years I've been meditating.

So, that the way I've worked in Changing Attitude and the way I and what I'm then going to talk about, what I might do now is integral to my contemplative interior holistic energy self and that what I think we generically are about in life or should be leading people into, and certainly what any faith community and church is a whole person integration, creating healthy people, people who nourish themselves food wise, healthily, whose pattern of life is healthy, who have a healthy interior life, who give themselves to beauty, to creativity, to healthy relationships. And who learn about these processes, how it is that you catch hold of the damaging, wounded, reactive, dualistic tendencies that we all have.

Interviewer: This is so contemporary Christianity, you do realise? Absolutely not.

Colin: I do absolutely. I know, I know. All right. But it's the only salvation ultimately.

(Overspeaking)

Interviewer: Yeah. And actually -

Colin: You know? Whatever realm you're working in or whatever you're doing, it's got to be about this stuff.

Interviewer: Yeah. And of course, it's what works for people and therefore our society is desperate for, but not what the church currently is able to deliver at all.

Colin: No, not at all. And it... do you know John Lee? No? Who was, I think he's just retired because he's got cancer. He was the clergy appointments officer. And he was the guy who ran, he's a psychotherapist by background as well as a priest. And he was the guy who ran the clergy psychotherapy. So, the church has in it, and in John's case has had very much at its centre people of great wisdom about how -

(Overspeaking)

[1:11:46]

Interviewer: Do you know Bo Stevenson as well?

Colin: I know the name.

Interviewer: Yeah. He's a Jungian psychotherapist. He's the same, yeah.

Colin: So, in my latter years in Changing Attitude, I have been blogging about from the perspective of how do we change things in a way that comes from a healthy integrated core but then that tells the truth of the church and brings to the church the shocking abusive ignorance which now marks the culture of the Church of England, yeah? This incredible blindness not just to do... but is it blindness? Because, you know, we are each (inaudible 1:12:30) who've got children that we met, you know, but don't your children tell you? Yeah, they all say, "Dad, you're crazy. You have no idea what, you know?" They know it from -

Interviewer: From their kids.

Colin: But they're also... and I try, I've talked to some, I've edgily talked some about it, but not very much, about their spirituality and how they pray and what kind of, whether they engage in silence and what they do in the silence or find in the silence. And what kind of interior world they have in their relationship with God. What they think God is like actually, you know? Where their God is and they know in their heart and guts and soul genuinely unconditional infinite absolute, self-giving love. Nothing can separate you from the love of God in Jesus Christ, life or death or anything. It's all creation. Is that Bishop, what you really believe and experience and know to be true for yourself? And I have eventually kind of, yeah, my body knows that to be true. That seems to be incredibly important. Does your body know this stuff? Do you feel it? Does your heart know it? Does it cry, melt or whatever? When it's, yeah, when you expect... I've been writing about the death of, Till Death Us Do Part. Warren Mitchell. Yeah? And I saw him years ago at the National Theatre as Wily Loman, in Death of a Salesman. It's the only time I've ever been aware that I've been in a theatre audience, and suddenly everybody around me was weeping tears. How do we, as a church, bring people to the point of tears where something so meltingly beautiful is going on? That breaks through all the defences, (inaudible 1:14:33) defences, yours and mine, yeah?

We have to melt this crazy dualistic, which they think the conversations are about and so on. And so, on the healthy side of how change is achieved, meet some of us or whatever, okay, has to teach the church, find out how to discover this, to be integral to the way the church has to become if it's to overcome its conflict. There's no other way, which is as true of Islam or ISIS and all of, you know, of any conflict? Yeah?

Interviewer: Well, if the church is going to survive.

Colin: If it's going to survive. But it's got to know that spirituality is about something much less dogmatic and rule bound and conformist to all things it's lived with and thought, you know, thinks it's about than it actually is about. Because God is way bigger than that and way, you know, and is immersed in all of creation. And every human life and every fibre and vibration.

Interviewer: And that would be the similar journey that I would say I've been on in the last five to ten years. And I'm a good Anglo Catholic, buttoned up to the nines, and it has to be done in a particular way. And much less interested in that and much more interested in that sense of being open to God. And trying to be healthy and not forcing yourself into a particular mould, because that's what a particular book says. Personally, I find a lot of the attitudes to scripture that are being used to beat gay people at the moment and they're profoundly idealistic and unhelpful.

Colin: And the ignorance of history that this stuff was stupid 150 years ago, let alone 50, let alone honest to God, let alone the last 10, 20, 30 years. And there is and in the holistic realm, there's so much exploration, writing and some of it has been wacky and drug related and cranky Californian and all of that. Yeah, okay, okay, okay. And shelves in bookshops full of stuff, which actually are just bollocks. But there are also people with

the most profound exploration of boundary crossing and exploring deep personal experience and changed lives and openness to God's extraordinary creative love.

[1:17:12]

Interviewer: So, one of the last things I wanted to ask you was where do you see yourself now? You've retired from Changing Attitude. You blogged once about how your body was reacting to being out of this sort of toxic, poisonous atmosphere of the church. You've been ill, haven't you? And I suspect that's part of it, isn't, it's your body just going bleurgh, I've had enough.

Colin: Yeah, it feels like it's related to that. The shit.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah. So, the challenge then of course is you're still a member of the Church of England and committed to it. You're still passionate about justice for LGBTI people in the church. What's next?

Colin: The thing inside me still seems to be making me passionate. It's sort of that weird me, not me. I'm not making proactive decisions. I'm just discovering that thing inside me is still at work. So, my spiritual director is still Henry says don't do anything for a year -

(Overspeaking)

Interviewer: Fine. Yeah.

Colin: - on one side. Then there's the voice. So, yeah, for three months I was exhausted. I didn't feel well. My belly was really unsettled. I feel a whole lot better now. My energy is returning and my clarity. I couldn't make sense of things. So, I want to start blogging again. I want to set up my own either blog or website without any commitment that I'm going to be regular or whatever, but when the spirit moves me, I will write something. And I want to integrate activism with spirituality and contemplation.

Interviewer: Spiritual director?

Colin: No, not called to that. What me?

Interviewer: Yes.

Colin: No. No, no, no, absolutely no. I mean one person has come see me and might want to come and see me again once her spiritual director retires when I haven't committed myself to seeing her. No, no, no, no. Playing with my garden railway. Just mooching through the day, enjoying my garden. Just changing my dynamic with life to give myself time to actually just enjoy the person in front of me. Beauty. Exhibitions. Pictures. Just stop. Which I've never done in my life and just gaze at them. See what effect it has on me.

(Overspeaking)

Interviewer: Very bad at stopping, aren't we? Terrible at stopping.

Colin: Awful, yeah. So, I'm doing a lot more slow walking, gazing. I'll go out of an evening and just watch the sunset rather than, yeah.

Interviewer: Hopefully with a glass of wine.

Colin: Yes. So, what I, right, and what I'm thinking about is that I also want to write with an edge. I want to begin to say to the church and to describe the church, my own experience of integrating spirituality, sexuality, campaigning, contemplation, silence, stillness inner life, yeah. And to begin to write what the church now looks like to me, which is abusive. It's shockingly, scandalously ignorant of spiritual depth and interiority. It's not that there aren't people across the Church of England, but they're so invisible to the church. That's part of the problem we're up against, and they will be invisible to Synod. You know, and it'll have these outrageously awful liturgies and so on. I mean just shit crap stuff. Yeah? You know on the -

[1:21:15]

(Overspeaking)

Interviewer: I look forward to experiencing it

Colin: Fuck, oh God, I've never been. And there's something else. Right, and let it become what it becomes. Absolutely trust that there is something more potent than any of the church crap flowing through creation, through globally around the world. Yeah? In which God is awakening human consciousness to much more profound spirituality than the stuff the church has on offer, yeah? In its official guise.

Interviewer: Yeah. No, I completely get that. I completely get that. I absolutely get that.

Colin: And yeah, so that's what I want to do and I don't quite yet know, but it's increasingly coming to focus in my mind.

Interviewer: So, what would you say, I mean, I see a lot of young people who are thinking about being ordained. In fact, somebody this morning. I'd only said, I was teaching how to pray. One of the first things I was doing, recently come to faith, I taught him how to pray. He's been very serious about it. And I'd said to him in that conversation, "Have you ever thought about what your ministry will be as you go forward. Have a think about that". And he's come back saying, well, he's thinking he might want to be ordained. Now he's a straight man, wife and kids.

Colin: So, he hasn't got that problem, at least, yeah.

Interviewer: But one of the real questions is what would you say to a young gay or lesbian person who is feeling a calling to ministry in the contemporary Church of England? I am not sure I'd be able to say to anybody or with any degree of honesty go ahead and do this without having to qualify it with a, "You are going to get badly hurt and abused by the institution. You need to think very, very carefully whether you want that or whether you might not be able to exercise a ministry in a way outside of the church". What would you say?

Colin: It's helpful to hear you say that first because it's got me to think about it. So, you know, I think clever remarks like I'd want to be non-directive. (Laughter) But that I think I would want to treat them as an adult capable of making their own adult decision and set out those options for the person. So, okay, I think you would be joining an institution which is extremely unhealthy, very toxic and in which you might find it really hard to be the kind of person you might dream of being. But also, if there is genuinely something going on inside you, then that has to be respected and trusted, and it might be that despite that you are being drawn in to ministry in the church. And you just have to talk to people, listen to yourself very carefully and be aware that you're presented with the conflict, which might be extremely painful, and that might mean it's quite short-term. You might not be in it for life. If you do, decide to be ordained.

Interviewer: And actually, as we spoke earlier, I can also hear you saying that to me in the middle of ministry and feeling as I do about the way the church is behaving and the way the church I think is incapable of changing. And where that leaves people like me in the midst of ministry, capable, committed, good at what we do, but looking at an institution to which we feel increasingly less attached.

Colin: Yeah, yeah. The church is full of extraordinary people with great depth and intelligence and integrity and competence and goodness. But they are, it takes me back to the conversation we were having before the thing got rolling about competence and so on and parish ministry and what it's like. I haven't got a licence for a PTO. My bishop still won't give me a PTO because I'm in a civil partnership and I made it very clear that it was a sexual relationship. I actually had been sent out of the blue by the safeguarding office for the diocese the CRM form because he's discovered that my mine's out of date. And I've had one or two conversations both with myself and other people as to whether or not I want to fill it in and submit it, whether I really want, which would mean I would have to go back to Nick and say, "Will you or will you not give me a PTO?" We're just to start an interregnum. So, there's a kind of another reason for doing it. But I hadn't been to church for seven weeks until last Sunday when I thought there's somebody that I really like talking with. I went and the church is basically angry worship. Makes me angry. The incompetence of sermons. The incompetence of the language of intercessions. The shocking choice of hymns. You know, it comes as a whole package. Yeah. But the absence of silence, of anything. It's just so badly done.

[1:26:21]

Interviewer: But this is back to the beginning of your ministry, isn't it?

Colin: Absolutely. Absolutely. Yeah.

Interviewer: This is absolutely the beginning of your ministry when you thought I want to do this sector.

Colin: I intuited this stuff. Yeah. Back then I knew it and I could, you know? So, and actually it started with a liturgy that somebody had photocopied from a prayer book from German, Evangelical sisterhood, which was awful. And afterwards I discovered that others in the congregation were looking across at me to see whether I was saying the responses to see whether or not it received my (inaudible 1:26:57) -

(Overspeaking)

Interviewer: Oh okay.

Colin: All right? But what I was thinking was -

[Doorbell]

Do you need to...?

Interviewer: Hang on, hang on, let's pause and then we'll come back.

[Pause]

... having a conversation about the current state of the Church of England and its leadership, whether we think that it's capable of meeting the challenge of the age and

what it might look like in fairly short order. Whether it can actually reimagine itself. What do you think?

Colin: The challenge of the age. So, as I see it, we are living at a time of extraordinary evolution and change such as has never been before. You know, awareness, research, consciousness of the scale of the creation in which we live.

Interviewer: And the threats to it, massively threatened.

Colin: And the threats to it and the potentials as well. And that in my interest set of sexuality and spirituality, the most extraordinary global changes in relation for lesbian and gay people, transgender, intersex, you know, it grows and grows. And for the younger generation in the West, the ease with which they live with fluidity nowadays. And on the one, so, all right, this is the work, this is the creation in which we are living of extraordinary imaginative possible change, exponential change in the way that we imagine what it is to be human, to be sexual, to be gendered. All of which is actually deeply authentic and healthy, whereas traditionalists, the conservatives in the church almost certainly judge much of this as being ungodly, evil, all of that stuff. And we live at a time when there has been an unfolding of awareness of what it means for a human being to be spiritual, to be a healthy, integrated, flowing, alive, energised, what it means to be all those things. And that any human being could be like that. We all have the potential. And that my vision is that any group of people, national, international organisation, working with spirituality is going to have to learn its way into understanding that and working with that as its vision. Whether it's Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, Judaism, Islam, yeah, every institution has got to, even if it continues to be quite institutionalised in its pattern of life, it has got to understand that every human being is potentially innately spiritual and full of the depth of God's presence and love.

[1:30:17]

Interviewer: But wouldn't the church claimed that it knows that anyway?

Colin: It would claim it, and clearly through his teaching and theology and practice, it absolutely, absolutely gives the lie to it. Yeah? To the point that is incredibly unhealthy, deeply damaging to individual lives that makes clergy and bishops incompetent, truly incompetent as spiritual teachers and leaders. And I think I feel called to begin to write about this in a much more radical way and to say, because I'm sure that most of them would be able to see it, this is what a healthy human spiritual life looks like to me. This is what the church is actually practising and the church is going to die or just fade away in its own current entity. And I have no doubt that new things will be born from it, but it might not be church as the church thinks it has a right to exist forever thanks to Jesus.

Interviewer: And in in our lifetime, we've seen the collapse of the Church of England. Certainly, when I was ordained 25 years ago, the vast majority of the population of this country would have identified as Church of England, even if they didn't attend. What has been very noticeable in the last ten years has the complete collapse of that cultural assumption of Anglicanism and that people who would previously just simply have said Church of England are now not saying Church of England. They're saying nothing. And I wonder whether the Church of England has anything to say to those people. Or whether we're more interested in that ever decreasing minority who are self-identified, conservative and narrow.

Colin: It's interested in saying things to those people because it thinks they're going to buy what it's got to say. They're not at all interested in what the church has got to say. The

dynamic is that people are simply not interested in what the church peddles in terms of practice and involvement and spiritual, you know, yeah, congregational spiritual love.

(Overspeaking)

Interviewer: I would agree.

Colin: They're just not interested. And I sit next to people in church sometimes when I'm a stranger and ask the person next to me why they're there. And nobody ever gives a positive answer. They don't really know why they're there or what they believe. They're just because -

(Overspeaking)

Interviewer: Just they always have been.

Collin: Yeah, habitual or whatever. Yeah. So, there's a void at the centre of Church of England life. People do not really know why they belong, why they're there, what it's for any longer I don't think.

Interviewer: And the answer, the artificial giving is giving, is reform and renewal, which is partly more of the same. Let's ordain a whole bunch of more new people. Let's increase the number of ordained clergy. Let's go for growth.

Colin: Go for growth. Yeah. But it cannot possibly work because it's based on, it's rootless. There is no understanding of what it is that people are rejecting and they are actively rejecting it. But they're just sort of modifying and offering more of the same.

[1:33:33]

Interviewer: Yeah, and it's based on that anecdotal evidence thing, isn't it, which has been ripped apart by absolutely everybody saying none of this is actually true, you're just making it up.

Colin: There's something else from the notes we haven't talked about which is the Anglican Communion and the international dimension of this. I've been to Africa a number of times and have got firsthand experience of what this proclaimed African Christianity is like, which, you know, and the fact that maybe they're going to come and missionise us in the West because we've lost it. Well, it's a different sort of corruption there to ours, but it is nevertheless, you know, a false Christianity as much as ours has become a false Christianity, which is partly signs and miracles and wonders, you know, and if you come to church God is going to bless you, and if you learn how to pray the right way, and if you commit yourself in the right way, there's going to be, yeah, he's going to make you rich. You're going to be, yeah, absolutely.

It's awful. There's nothing that I would recognise as really being particularly Christian about what is manifest there, apart from the breadth of pastoral care and relationships and involvement of people in communities. Those things. But those are no longer enough for Christianity to survive anywhere in the world. People are looking for something different, aren't they? I mean, intuitively they know there's something here which has to be much more core to their experience of life and to who they are. That's what people are searching for.

And I think they're discerning whether they're finding it in new age stuff and alternatives as much as they are in church. But there is a growing network of people, and they're there in Christianity in the Church of England as elsewhere who do know about this

stuff. You do. I do. Who are searching and longing for change. Eventually that energy will flow. I think it will naturally tip the scales in the end.

Interviewer: The question is whether it flows it in in the Church of England or whether the Church of England as an institution is going to slowly tie itself up in homophobic doctrinal knots.

Colin: No, I think I see it changing already because I meet more and more people who know that what we have is rubbish and who are seeking something of great depth and profundity. And authenticity. And so, this rolling wave will gradually roll out across the church and one day the bishops will wake up except it will evolve over a length of time, and discover that it's just changed around them. Yeah, I don't think there's going to be a great moment of transformation. They will just discover that what they thought they were presiding over doesn't exist any longer at all.

Interviewer: Well, that's actually true already, isn't it? They think they're presiding over a church, which actually for the most part, ignores them.

Colin: Yeah. It's faithless. You know, and I, in the past, I was the last person to talk about faith and trust in God, and so on. Actually, I think it is. Profoundly faith is, I think, what the Archbishop is doing and what's going at Lambeth Palace is profoundly lacking trust in God that actually if only they opened their innate sense, their intuition, that subtle feeling this, they would see God doing extraordinary beautiful things all over the place, around the globe, just none of it happens to be where the church thinks it ought to be.

Interviewer: Okay.

Colin: That's a good place to stop.

Interviewer: That's a great place to stop. Thank you, Colin, thank you very much. Let's have a cup of tea.

[End of Transcript]