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Interviewer: So, Martin, I'd love to begin with just to talk a little bit about your background, kind of hand the ball immediately over to you and just hear a little bit about your childhood, where you grew up and any sort of faith or church background that was part of that childhood.

Respondent: I grew up in the Isle of Wight at Cowes. Very happy family background. Both parents are Christian. I grew up in Cowes Baptist Church. I was baptised at the age of 15. And one thing that happened in my childhood is my father died when I was 11. But I one brother. So very happy background. I went to grammar school, as it was in those days. We used to look forward to holidays in the summer. Quite interested in football. Support Southampton Football Club. Had very typical interests, nothing that special.

Interviewer: And what about any church involvement or that kind of thing?

Respondent: Well yeah, as I say, I was baptised at the age of 15. I became the Secretary of the Young People's Fellowship at about 16. I always took an interest in youth activities at the church. Then when I went away to university I got involved in the Baptist Students Federation and also in my college we had a group called the Christian Community which brought together... I was at London University, a small college there, Westfield College, and we had a group called the Christian Community which brought all the denominations together, and at that time liberal and conservative Christians, brought them all together. So a particular concern of mine, I suppose, early on was Christian unity but also from an evangelical perspective.

Interviewer: And did that tie in with any particular involvement with the LGBT community, or...?

Respondent: I was at university in 1969. My awareness of LGBT was the fact that my college was very close to Hampstead Heath and I knew that the rugby club beat up queers, as gay people were called at the time. I didn't really, I suppose, identify myself as gay at that time but, you know, it's that sort of... It was only very early days of gay people being out of the closet so nothing more at that particular point.

Interviewer: And then what was the journey from that? And talk as much or as little about this as you want to but what was the journey that you went on to the point that you're at now, I guess is what I'd like to ask?

Respondent: Yes, what happened was that I was engaged to a Christian girl from home. Engagement came to an end while I was at college. I suppose I questioned my sexuality at the time but not all that much. I moved on to move to Hitchin in Hertfordshire and joined the Baptist Church there. Realised I was probably transgender, which is slightly confusing as I'm gay now - well, still potentially transgender - but I met a woman who was sympathetic to my need to cross-dress and we got married. We carried on for 20 years of marriage and we had children. As the children grew up my ability to cross-dress ended and so for no reason that we had anyone else but the marriage came to an end, and it was at that point that I had to face my issues about my sexuality,

I started on the journey to a sex change but my two boys found that unacceptable so I'm rather glad now that I didn't follow that up, but at the same time knew that I was then not attracted to women and it wouldn't be fair to start another relationship with a woman. So I started going along to Christian gay groups. I went to LGCM and the Evangelical Fellowship of Lesbian and Gay Christians and at an LGCM annual meeting I met up with other Baptists and we decided that we needed a corpus for Baptist gay Christians which was the root of the group now called Affirm. So in 2000, I think it was,

we called a meeting of Baptists who are willing to support a new organisation of Baptists affirming Lesbian and Gay Christians. We'd met another group of Baptists, a group of Baptist ministers, who had written in the Baptist Times they wanted to support lesbian and gay Baptists and the two groups of us got together and formed what now has become Affirm. Initially it was the Network of Baptist Affirming Lesbian and Gay Christians. So that's really what started me off as being active and being out.

[00:05:39] In terms of my own church, I knew I had to be honest with people because they'd known me for 20 or 30 years and so I chose an opportunity when we had a prayer meeting to pray for lesbian and gay Christians. Much to my surprise, instead of being condemned, several people thanked me. And I then talked to one particular elderly member of the congregation who actually came out to me and said it had been a huge issue in his life that he'd had to hide his sexuality. He was married and very faithful to his wife but it had been something that had caused me huge anxiety in his life. So that gave me the confidence then in 2001... (Pause) In 2001 I went as a delegate for my church to the Baptist Assembly in Blackpool and at that Assembly they had decided to talk about difficult issues, of which one was someone's sexuality. So there were about 2,000 delegates at the Assembly. And my minister had been very supportive and he was actually at the Assembly. And we had a session where we talked in buzz(?) groups about the issue and as it was introduced one of the ministers introducing it, by the sound of it, seemed to be sympathetic to LGBT people and said, "Please be careful because there'll be people here whose sons or daughters are lesbian or gay". And my minister then, as we went back to a plenary session, put up his hand and said, "There'll be people here who are themselves lesbian or gay and I hope they have the courage to speak". So this was in 2001. I put my hand up and came out to 2,000 people, which was a little bit scary.

Interviewer: And very courageous.

Respondent: It was a roving microphone so people couldn't necessarily see who it was.

Interviewer: Sure.

Respondent: But the thing that followed from that, which was the most remarkable thing and the thing that made me feel that God had put me there for a purpose... I had been told that there was a really lovely person that I ought to meet who was also going to be at the Assembly, he had said he was a Baptist minister down in the West Country and he had said to his deacon, "If God intends us to meet he'll arrange it". So even though I'd put a notice on the noticeboard this person who is now my husband was there but ignored my notice on the noticeboard. I went off after that particular session - it was a morning session - went off to lunch and then to a workshop in the afternoon, and I was then walking along the seafront in Blackpool, nobody else around, with my badge as a delegate to the conference, and as I walked passed a particular hotel who should come out of the hotel but the person I was supposed to meet. So, needless to say, we didn't get to the next workshop. We went and sat in one of the shelters there and looked out at the sea and shared a little bit about ourselves and I invited Ian to come and stay. And, what is it, 15 years later we're together, we've been civil partners for the last eight years, very, very happy, and we just feel that God brought us together for that particular reason. And we've been sharing our story... We shall we sharing it tomorrow at an event in Cardiff for Baptists who are interested, looking to find ways in which we can through our story help to enable people to understand what it is really like to be LGBT rather than what their view might be, given the sort of prejudices that have been around, certainly all my life.

Interviewer: So obviously this has been a journey that has been very personal and it has led to changes in your life in terms of your civil partnership and the journey that you've been on is huge if you look back to where you started to where you are now. And you

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mentioned a couple of people or at least one person particularly who when you were praying in church said that he really appreciated that and that had impacted him. Through the work of Affirm or just by yours and Ian's relationship and you talking about that have you noted or marked any other conversations or times in which you feel that people have been impacted by your witness, that there has been movement, their journey has continued?

Respondent: One particular landmark... As I say, 2001 was when Affirm was founded. The Baptist Assembly - I think it was 2013 - decided to talk about the issue as a whole Assembly and Affirm had arranged a workshop with the support of the Baptist Union on the day before that, and the way the plenary session at the Assembly was structured on that occasion was to introduce with words of scripture where the... It was actually the Principal of the Northern Baptist Learning Community now introduced it by saying, "What does the Bible say about loving same-sex partnerships?" and then there was silence. So in his view it's open for us to use the Bible, the things that are said in various different ways; nothing's said directly about same-sex partnerships but it's for us to look at it again. And that started a conversation - it's the one that we're continuing tomorrow.

[00:11:56] But one of the things that's very interesting, somebody came up to me at that morning session at the Assembly and she'd been to the workshop the day before and she said, "Well my church is very conservative but we decided that one of us had to go to that workshop". It was packed actually, there was about 150 people at the workshop. These workshops don't tend to be that well packed. But she said, "This is one our church felt was important. I didn't want to go but I had to go and I'm so pleased I went because I now want you to come and talk at my church". Sadly, that invitation never came and one of the difficulties is of course we know that there's a lot of work still to be done in... And it's, as one person described it, one heart at a time, people actually have to engage with it themselves and really open their eyes because there is just so much... People were brought up... Now, if I go back to when I was first thinking about my sexuality before I got married, I was quite determined not to be queer, you know, my experience of queers was people getting beaten up on Hampstead Heath or people who are perhaps the people caught out. And one thing I've learnt is that it isn't anything goes that LGBT people (inaudible 00:13:20) the church, it's the same sort of moral compass that everyone needs to help them move to be the best that we can be through our lives, and that's just as true for gay people as straight people. Or to put it another way, Paul says, "It's better to marry than burn with passion". And that's why I think gay people getting married is a darn good idea if that's the right thing for them, but it's not compulsory. I think people need... Each of us needs to live our own life under the Holy Spirit as Christians, if we seek to be Christians, and that's just so important.

Interviewer: So you touched a little there on marriage and obviously we've seen over the last five years or so - or slightly longer - huge reforms, especially in the UK and in a lot of other sort of Western countries, huge reform around marriage laws, what are your views on changes like that and similar changes that have occurred within the Church and within society over the last 40 years since LGCM began? This is a project investigating the history of LGCM too. Over the period of history that LGCM has been around for what's your opinion on the changes that have occurred in the Church and in society?

Respondent: I think it was important that we had civil partnerships first because the most... The thing that came out to me most, I suppose, as I've gone through this journey is that if the issue in the Church was racism you'd be able to look around and see black people; when the issue is one of sexuality you look round and you see nothing, we're invisible. And I've written a paper, as you know, called The Elephant in the Church and because we're invisible, when people in the church are faced with the idea of accepting LGBT people they don't know what they're looking for. One of them thinks it's, you know, gay people are going to invade the Church; no, we're already there in the Church but they don't realise that. And other people think, "Well it's anything goes, it's a matter of

carrying out all sorts of awful sexual sins". And another thing I've learnt in my time is that sexuality is a wonderful servant but a terrible master, and we all know that in various different ways sexuality can be used to hurt people enormously in all sorts of different ways. It's about finding the way in which we seek to follow Christ in our relationships, it's about how we do it. So in terms of the different things that have gone on, as I say, I think civil partnership was important because we were then visible. And then I think I am in favour of equal marriage but I think marriage has got an awful lot of baggage to it in all sorts of ways, some of which are positive, some negative, and you've almost got to unpack all that baggage before people will accept equal marriage. So we're still civil partners, we haven't married, although I refer to Ian as my husband. So, you know, it's still complicated. (Laughs)

Incidentally, talking about marriage, I ought to say in terms of my children and my ex-wife, I was with my ex-wife yesterday... We run a credit union and she's the Secretary, I'm the President. She's one of my closest friends. We share parenting our children and all of our children are still very close to both of us. So that's something I'm very, very fortunate, I'm well aware of that, and many gay people are not as fortunate in that situation. But they accept Ian and, you know, Ian's very special to my children.

Interviewer: Wonderful. Thank you. So just if we go back a little bit, you mentioned Affirm and you mentioned tomorrow and what's going to be happening just north of Cardiff tomorrow on 5th March 2016, do you want to talk a little about what Affirm is doing in that context and what Affirm hopes to achieve through these days and future hopes of Affirm?

[00:17:54]

Respondent: We fairly on were fortunate that the leadership of the Baptist Union was fairly clued up in terms of understanding the issues. They weren't necessarily with us but the General Secretary, David Coffey, was very aware of what the issues were about sexuality and was willing to engage with Affirm. Largely, that was thanks to Ian who had helped in the early days of David Coffey's General Secretary-ship to understand the issues and they produced a document called Making Moral Choices in our Relationships which included a chapter on homosexuality. So there was that background. So Affirm built on that and we kept chipping away, wanting a stall at the Assembly and a workshop; we worked on that for about 10 years before it actually happened. But we were directed into the way(?), very sensibly, into focusing on pastoral support because what that the Baptist minister particularly needed was how to deal with LGBT people and a lot of Baptist ministers we knew were very inadequate in that area. So we were moved in that direction. So pastorally that was a way in to the understanding by ministers. And so one of the focuses of that workshop was about looking at good pastoral support.

Now, that started that conversation. So the two things, I suppose, Affirm is doing... two strands, if you like... one, is in continuing that conversation so that we continue to encourage people more conservative to engage with us, to understand what it is and gradually to move people on that journey to at least acceptance around theological integrity, if not to full affirming. So there's that carrying that conversation on. The other side of it, on the pastoral side, is that a lot of people... I say 'a lot', you know, not huge numbers, but we do from time to time get Baptists who want to know "Where can I go to a church that is affirming?" So we have been writing to a number of churches - about 20 now - who say that they are fully affirming and therefore would welcome LGBT people on an affirming basis to their worship, become members and so on. Now, as a number of those churches are now registered for equal marriage, we are also aware that some of them in certain areas are feeling under pressure from their associations, so in the autumn this year we're organising a conference to ask churches what support they would like from us and if we can help to bring churches together to give mutual support to those. And we're also aware that things are going on in the Baptist denomination. There is a Council meeting this month where they will be looking again

at the churches... They came to a position two years ago that they agreed that churches where the church agreed could ask their minister to perform a civil partnership or to undertake a marriage, provided the church is agreed, which is very much according to Baptist ecclesiology. And so this is something that we're very... We're keeping in touch. We still have good contacts with some of the leading people in the Baptist Union and we are seeking to support them in any way we can.

Interviewer: Fantastic. Thank you. Is there anything in sort of the last 10 minutes or so, particularly regarding your campaigning or your representation of LGBT issues, is there anything you feel that I should have asked, anything else that you want to add?

Respondent: I think perhaps the other thing to mention is that we do work very closely with a number of other similar groups. Ian and I are both, well, longstanding members of LGCM of course, also of the Evangelical Fellowship for Lesbian and Gay Christians, and more recently... And Jeremy Marks is a very active member of Affirm of well through his group, Courage. When that came to an end people from Courage set up a group called Two:23 and we both go along to their meetings regularly. So they now meet in a Baptist church in London. The other group I should mention is Accepting Evangelicals which is an internet group that many of us are members of. I happen to be one of the trustees of that as a Baptist and that's an (inaudible 00:22:51) group seeking to take forward some of the same issues. So work together very closely with these organisations in a multi-denominational way. And of course there are those of us who still consider ourselves as Evangelicals and are not prepared to see the name 'Evangelical' being grabbed by those who are very narrow in a way that when the term 'Evangelical' was first coined it's very much against the spirit of that, I would argue.

Interviewer: Thank you. Could you tell me a little about your hopes for the future regarding LGBT acceptance in society and in church?

[00:23:39]

Respondent: As far as society is concerned, I'm also somewhat involved in the political scene as in I'm very active in the Labour Party and the Co-operative Party, and as such I'm also very interested and very concerned about the political future and I believe in many ways the country is at a crossroads and society is at a crossroads and there may be difficult times ahead. The only reason I say that is because I believe that it's only through the continued support of good people and despite a very negative mass media that we will keep our democracy. I fear for the future, in other words. And I think we need to be very aware that in difficult times if society's looking for scapegoats, gay people and LGBT can become scapegoats. My hope for society is that we don't go that way, my fear is that there are dangerous times ahead. As far as the Church is concerned, I believe, provided we continue to seek to engage with the more conservative elements in the Church... There are some that will never change, it will be generations before they change, but I think we are at a tipping point when the Church in general will be much more accepting, certainly in this country. But I think we as LGBT people need to value the Church because I believe when the Church does believe something it believes it much more strongly against society and if there are difficult times in society I believe LGBT people will need the Church to support us against those who might want to see us scapegoats.

Interviewer: Thank you. Is there anything else that you wanted to mention or talk about? It's fine if there isn't.

Respondent: I think I can leave it there.

Interviewer: Okay. Brilliant.

Respondent: I hope I haven't rambled too much.

Interviewer: No, not at all. Well thank you very, very much, Martin - very much appreciated.

[End of transcript]