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Interviewer: Hi, this is Carol Shepherd of LGCM interviewing for the Oral History project. I'm here today with Liz Stuart. Liz, can I just confirm it's Liz not Elizabeth?

Respondent: You can call me Liz, yes. My name is Elizabeth but you can call me Liz, yeah.

Interviewer: Okay, smashing. Could you tell me a little bit about yourself maybe growing up: when, where, siblings, that kind of thing?

Respondent: Okay. I was born in Kent and brought up in Gravesend in Kent. My mother was a housewife and my father was a Trinity House Pilot, and I have one sister who is 16 years older than I am. My father was an Anglican; my mother was a Roman Catholic; so we were brought up Roman Catholics.

Interviewer: Okay. And why did Roman Catholic take precedent?

Respondent: Because that's church teaching that if you had what in those days was called a mixed marriage then the non-Catholic had to promise to bring up any children in the Roman Catholic faith.

Interviewer: Okay, thank you. And would you say you grew up with a Christian faith?

Respondent: Yes. It was just really part of me. I was part of probably the last generation to grow up in a sort of pre-Vatican 2 Catholicism. It was a very cultural Catholicism, a very colourful Catholicism - bells and smells and processions and different colours for different times of the year. I went to a Roman Catholic prep school run by Nuns. It was just part of who I was and it was incredibly important to me. My parents I suppose because it was a mixed marriage took faith seriously but they didn't take it too seriously if you get my drift. It was never oppressive. I can honestly say I never found my religion oppressive in any way whatsoever.

Interviewer: Whilst you were growing up.

Respondent: Whilst I was growing up. When I was 11 I was confirmed and in those days - I don't know if they still do it, but in those days in the Catholic Church you chose a new name when you were confirmed and I wanted to choose the name Augustine.

Interviewer: Okay.

Respondent: And this caused a bit of a to-do because I think it was unprecedented for a girl to choose a man's name and it had to go all the way up to the Bishop to be approved, but they did approve it. And I knew even in those days I wanted to be a Theologian. I was only 11 but I knew that was what I wanted to do, which is why I chose the name.

Interviewer: Okay. So, it was Augustine as in Augustine the Theologian?

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: Rather than you were born in August or wanted a boy's name?

Respondent: No; I wanted that. And, yes, so I never found it oppressive; I wasn't burdened with Catholic guilt. Some people talk about Catholic guilt; I never experienced that. My religion was always a joy to me and a strength to me and a huge part of who I was.

Interviewer: And this was in Kent?

Respondent: Yes.

[0:03:57]

Interviewer: Whereabouts?

Respondent: Gravesend.

Interviewer: Gravesend, that's right; you said that. And school was in...?

Respondent: Yes, I went to two Catholic schools and then when I was 13 I went to a non-religious grammar school.

Interviewer: Okay. And how was that in comparison?

Respondent: Well, it was strange having been in two schools that had religion at their heart to be in one that didn't have religion at its heart but nevertheless the good thing about it was that it had a very strong RE department and I was able to study RE academically at O Level and then A Level, and that was a great joy to me. And then I went on and studied it at university.

Interviewer: Okay. When were you aware of having a sexual identity and what your sexual identity was?

Respondent: It's hard to pinpoint that I suppose. Teenage I suppose, yeah; 13, 14; something like that, yeah. It didn't cause me any problems whatsoever; I never considered the possibility it might be wrong or sinful.

Interviewer: And was it talked about church?

Respondent: No.

Interviewer: So, it's not that you heard a message from the front that led you?

Respondent: No. I mean in so far as people talked about it at all, which generally speaking they didn't, it would've been talked about in negative ways. But it seemed to me that what my faith taught me was that Christianity was about love, it was about inclusion, and it was about not behaving in ways expected of society. I think the good thing about Catholicism is that - and I know this is looking back on it now, I wouldn't have been able to articulate this at the time - but it is quite queer in the sense that you have Priests dressed in odd ways and you call these male celibate people, "Father", and I was used to calling female celibate people, "Mother", and, "Sister", and these people were regarded as being holy people and they weren't part of families in the traditional sense of the term. You weren't just presented with a sort of nuclear family as the ideal; there are other models. And I think it's that that influenced me more than any sort of societal or, indeed, ecclesiastical condemnation of homosexuality. I mean in those days people just didn't talk about it. It's not that you heard condemnations, it's just that -

Interviewer: Silence.

Respondent: Yeah, silence; and you kind of knew instinctively not to bring it up.

Interviewer: Okay. And did you identify as lesbian or bisexual?

Respondent: I'm not sure I would've put a label on it to start off with, but certainly by the time I became an adult I would've identified as lesbian yeah.

Interviewer: Okay. So, we've talked about you growing up and school and your feeling at ease within the Catholic Church; you went on to university, which was...?

Respondent: Oxford.

[0:08:05]

Interviewer: Oxford; which college were you at?

Respondent: I was at two colleges. I did my undergraduate at Jesus College and then I did my Doctorate at St. Hugh's College.

Interviewer: Okay. And how was that, how was the Oxford experience?

Respondent: Well, I loved Oxford; I absolutely adored Oxford mainly because I was able to just do Theology, which was the great passion in my life. By the time I got to Oxford things were changing in society as a whole. I think people were beginning to talk more about sexuality.

Interviewer: What year was that roughly?

Respondent: The early eighties. And there were societies for gay people at Oxford and it was generally more visible I suppose. And there were various things going on in society as a whole to make lesbian and gay people more visible. So, Oxford is a place of freedom, a place where you could certainly be yourself; there wasn't any problem with that.

Interviewer: And were you in relationships at that time?

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: With women?

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: Okay. And would you say you were openly gay at university or did you still have to watch your step a bit? How was it?

Respondent: You couldn't be as open as you can be now that's for sure, but it wasn't a completely closeted existence either. I suppose it was known amongst friends, but it's not something that you would've brought up with your Tutors or anything like that. I'm not sure how sympathetic the university would have been to those sorts of issues at all. But it wasn't oppressive but it wasn't a completely open environment either.

Interviewer: Okay. You said that there were more and more gay and lesbian groups and organisations and I believe you were quite heavily involved with LGCM?

Respondent: Yes. I became so, yeah; really heavily involved, yeah.

Interviewer: When was that? What year?

Respondent: That was around 1988.

Interviewer: Right, okay, so the Section 28 era or round about then. What were you involved in prior to that? Were you involved in other groups or organisations?

Respondent: Quest, the Roman Catholic group, I was involved with. I was very busy doing my Doctorate; I didn't get involved in groups before I'd finished my Doctorate, but I was very aware of things going on. I was very aware of LGCM being thrown out of St. Botolphs. It was a horrible time to be gay at that time. You had the beginnings of the AIDS crisis and that brought out rampant homophobia, really frightening levels of homophobia, and you had Section 28 and all that agenda going on. It was horrible. Young people today wouldn't believe how horrible it was. And once I'd finished my Doctorate and started teaching I wanted to get involved at that time. I was having to teach Liberation Theology and became very interested in Liberation Theology. And through that became convinced that it's important to do something, it's important to stand up, and if God is on the side of the oppressed then it's important to say that.

[0:12:26]

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: And to take any risks you have to take to witness to that fact. So, that's why I became very heavily involved in LGCM.

Interviewer: Okay. Going back to that you got involved with Quest obviously growing up you didn't feel that there was any sense of conflict between your Catholic faith and your sexuality; I guess by virtue of being involved with Quest you were now aware that there was a conflict between the church?

Respondent: Well, yes, obviously. The Catholic Church started making statements that were very negative.

Interviewer: What prompted that? I'm a bit ignorant about Catholic Church history.

Respondent: Well, in the late seventies - you'll have to forgive me because my memory is not that good and I'm sort of out of it a bit, but in the late seventies the Catholic Church had made an official statement about homosexuality which wasn't entirely positive but it wasn't entirely negative either. But then in the eighties it became really negative and intrinsic disorder and all of that kind of language.

Interviewer: Yeah; and the AIDS crisis.

Respondent: And then the AIDS crisis didn't help.

Interviewer: Yeah. Could you just give me a little bit more on your experience of living as an adult through the AIDS crisis because I was 17 and I just remember the horrible adverts?

Respondent: Okay. The best analogy I can give you is... and I've never lived through a war as it were but I imagine it was like living through a war in that you would see somebody one week and they'd be dead the next.

Interviewer: Oh, gosh; okay. And they were friends of yours?

Respondent: Yeah. I lost a lot of friends. And again where the war analogy I think is appropriate is these were often young men, beautiful young men, lovely young men, taken in their prime of their lives. It was tragic on all kinds of levels. I knew somebody who worked with people who were dying and said that often people weren't getting food in hospitals and so on because the trays of food were left outside the door because people were too frightened to go near. In the early days it was horrendous. And people were too ill to get out of bed to go and get the food so they just weren't getting food. I was friends with a woman called Jean White who was Pastor of a Metropolitan Community Church in

London, a fantastic woman, and in the very early days it could be hard to get Undertakers to take the bodies of those that died with AIDS. And she used to triple bag bodies on her dining room table and take them to a crematorium herself, in the very early days.

Interviewer: My goodness; in her own car sort of thing?

Respondent: Yeah. There was huge amounts of fear initially. I mean the fear continued but you can't overestimate the huge amount of fear to begin with because nobody was quite sure what was causing it and what was happening. And people just died before your eyes. And it was horrible. And I have to say that the people who were most impressive in many ways during that time was the Salvation Army - not known for their particularly enlightened views on homosexuality - but they took a decision that this wasn't a time to make moral judgments, this was a time to be with people who needed them. So, a lot of the first funerals were taken by Salvation Army Officers because they were the people who would do them and they were the people who would visit the wards. And they don't get the credit they deserve for that I think. There was a particular chap in London called Captain Travis something - I can't remember his second name; Smith I think - who was absolutely terrific at caring for people who were dying. So, it was grim; it was really grim. But the positive thing about it was that I think a lot of people were very impressed by the way that partners cared for their loved ones and in a way that did change a lot of minds about gay couples. So, there was some positivity that came out of it.

[0:18:00]

Interviewer: Did you find positivity within the church or what was your experience of, let's say, believers and then maybe the general public's attitude towards HIV / AIDS?

Respondent: I think it was variable amongst both groups of people. I was involved in the setting up of a drop-in centre for people with HIV in Plymouth, which I looked up the other day; it's still going actually, called the Eddiston Centre, it's now called the Eddiston Trust. And the initial group of people that were involved in founding that included a Vicar and so there was fantastic work done by people like Father Bill Kirkpatrick, Bernard Lynch in New York, and so on. So, it was varied I think. On the one hand you had some Christian people who were just throwing themselves into it to help and were fantastic, and on the other hand you had people who were exploiting it in a way as a sign of God's judgment or whatever.

Interviewer: Yeah. I had a conversation like that with my mother. It was, "Clearly the wrath of God", and I thought, "Well, the lesbians aren't having penetrative sex".

Respondent: Indeed.

Interviewer: Yeah, okay. And then Section 28, the AIDS crisis, prompted you - and your Liberation Theology teaching - that it wasn't enough to sit back, you needed to be involved, and that prompted you joining LGCM; was that still GCM at that point?

Respondent: No, it was LGCM.

Interviewer: It was LGCM. And tell me about your experiences there.

Respondent: Oh, I thought it was wonderful. I still think it's wonderful.

Interviewer: Was that the Richard Kirker era?

Respondent: Yeah. And he was a force of nature was Richard that's for sure. A bit of a Marmite sort of character: you either loved him or hated him, and I loved him. It was just a wonderful thing LGCM; it was a safe space, it provided great pastoral support for people, and most importantly of all it was a campaigning organisation, it was out to change things. And Richard very quickly got me involved in, I suppose, theological projects and there was very little Theology done by then by people about gay people. And Richard saw there was a need for this and very quickly got me involved, indeed got me writing commissions and so on.

Interviewer: So, formats that that took: writing; also did you so speaking?

Respondent: I did a lot of speaking, yeah.

Interviewer: And what would be the subjects of your talks for example? I mean what would the title be?

Respondent: Well, just a lot of stuff on, I suppose, doing Theology from the basis of lesbian and gay experience as opposed to doing Theology from a perspective of heterosexual experience and what that would mean. And the crucial thing that Richard did was get me the contract to write, "Daring to Speak Love's Name".

[0:21:53]

Interviewer: That's your prayer book you wrote wasn't it?

Respondent: Yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah, I've read about that. And what year was that?

Respondent: That was 1990 that he got me the contract I think. And so SBCK commissioned me to write that and it was about to go to print when the Archbishop of Canterbury at the time, George Carey, who was the Chair I think of SBCK - he was certainly on the board - ordered that it be stopped from publication.

Interviewer: And had he actually seen it?

Respondent: I don't think so, no. And I think that they just expected me to take that, "Okay, fine"; and I was not going to take that. I mean that struck me as outrageous. It wasn't a great tome advocating this, that, and the other; it was a prayer book, you know? And so I fought against it or at least I exposed what was happening, and that caused a huge wave of publicity.

Interviewer: Okay. To what extent was the publicity?

Respondent: I think I was in every newspaper, every British newspaper; I was on the News, I was on various documentary chat shows and things like that. I can't tell you how much; it was huge.

Interviewer: What sorts of headlines did they write?

Respondent: Oh, "Archbishop bans book", that kind of thing. And I think it was quite important because I think lots of people who previously hadn't been associated as it were with being pro-gay came out in support of the book because it is an outrage to stop a prayer book being published.

Interviewer: It was presumably not going to be pornographic in any way?

Respondent: No. It was just a prayer book. And the idea of gay people doing things for gay people became established I think. And eventually it was published by Penguin, which I was very grateful for, and sold out very quickly.

Interviewer: When was it published?

Respondent: It was published in 1992.

Interviewer: Okay.

Respondent: And as part of the launch we had a launch in Westminster Hall, a Methodist place, which again caused a lot of controversy because as part of it we did a blessing of couples and they were going to pull out of that, Westminster Hall were going to pull out, but we managed it. But it was huge; it was absolutely huge.

Interviewer: Were you famous really?

Respondent: Yes, I was. People would stop me on the street and things like that, and write me hate letters. That defines what it means to be famous, yes.

Interviewer: "All publicity", and all that.

[0:25:15]

Respondent: Well, it was quite hard to bear but, yes, it was big news. I tell you how big it was: you know the programme Have I Got News for You?

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: And they have in the background -

Interviewer: Headlines and pictures.

Respondent: Yeah. I was one of those headlines for ages.

Interviewer: Oh, were you? I think people aspire to that though.

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: Was it the Daily Mail?

Respondent: I can't remember if it was the Daily Mail; it might have been the News of the World or something like that. But, yes, so that really started for me a career as a lesbian Theologian I suppose and I got lots of book contracts on the back of that I suppose.

Interviewer: And you wrote, "Just Good Friends".

Respondent: I've written ten books, yeah.

Interviewer: Do you want to talk a little bit about that? I've read some of them. I've read, "The Queer Religion", one; that's really useful for my Doctorate studies.

Respondent: Yes, so all my books really are about trying to do Theology from the basis of lesbian and gay experience and then I shifted my own position slightly to a more queer stance because I suppose I came to distrust a bit identity politics and the whole notion of a stable identity and so moved to a more queer perspective that actually gender and

sexuality is not stable and that actually that's a good thing. And that actually what Christianity offers is a vision of a community in which gender and sexuality has no status at all, and that seems to me to be really liberating. So, yes, I think I got to that position by the time I stopped writing on these issues in a major way. But, yes, I suppose I was in right at the beginning of the emergence of lesbian and gay Theology and queer Theology, and that was really exciting and really interesting to be involved in.

Interviewer: Does that impact on your relationships or family?

Respondent: No; no, not at all. I think my family were always slightly perplexed as to what I was up to but there was never any question of them, not supporting me or whatever. I suppose a couple of times I've become quite near to being sacked over it in the early days because of course in those days there was no protection under the law. It was quite legitimate to sack somebody for being gay. And I had a couple of close shaves but lots of support as well; but, no, not in terms of my family at all. My parents both served in the war - my father was a naval Officer and my mother as an Ambulance Driver - and I think they had a strong sense that they fought for freedom and even if they might disagree with what you were doing they still felt you had a right to do it. So, I was very lucky in that regard I have to say.

Interviewer: Okay; yeah, that's really good. LGCM: you became heavily involved because Richard could see what you could offer; you became a Trustee didn't you?

Respondent: Yes, I was for a while yeah.

[0:29:13]

Interviewer: Yeah. What was that like?

Respondent: It was always quite tense partly because there was never enough money or there was never enough... there was quite a lot of money in those days but there was never... because we were employing Richard there was always tension over whether we'd have enough money to pay him and there was always quite a strong voice in the membership that was arguing that we couldn't afford a full-time employee and so periodically there would be this massive sort of row about whether we should make Richard redundant or not. There were always some tensions over the direction of LGCM; some people thought it was too militant, some people thought it wasn't militant enough, some people thought it was too Anglican.

Interviewer: And where were you?

Respondent: I thought it was too Anglican. I thought Richard was worth every penny and more actually. I didn't think it was militant at all but I did think it was too Anglican. There were huge debates going on in the Methodist Church and the URC Church and of course in the Roman Catholic Church things were just getting worse and worse and worse, and although there were caucuses for all those things that did terrific amounts of work the major resources - which I suppose was Richard - weren't focussed on any of those things, they were just focussed on the Church of England. Now there were horrendous things going on in the Church of England as well of course but I did sometimes think more attention should've been given to the other areas. So, it was hard to get Richard to go to a press conference that involved another church for example and that kind of thing.

Interviewer: Did someone else then or did it just not happen?

Respondent: Well, the person leading the relevant caucus would go I suppose, yeah. But I remember having a row with him about something to do with the Catholic Church; I had to make



him go, but yeah. But it was always quite tense. We set up the Institute, as it was then, for the Study of Christianity and Sexuality and there was some tension around that because I think some people thought that it had been set up to be the charitable arm of LGCM whereas other people thought that it had a stronger independent identity. And so there was always tension around that which eventually led to it becoming a completely separate organisation. So, it was disputatious always.

Interviewer: Yeah. Was there friction between gay men and lesbian women or not really? What were the ratios and things like that?

Respondent: Well, LGCM was pretty heavily male but there were more women involved in LGCM than in other lesbian and gay groups I've been involved in. And, no, I wouldn't have said there was tension; no. Not that I can remember particularly, no.

Interviewer: Okay. And was it exclusively lesbian and gay at that time or was there a bisexual contingent?

Respondent: No, there were some bisexual people; absolutely.

Interviewer: Male and female identified?

Respondent: Yeah. In fact some of the most long-standing members when I joined were bisexual or identified as bisexual.

Interviewer: Okay. And did they feel that their voices were heard?

Respondent: I don't know. It wasn't until quite later on, for example, that there was a clear bisexual presence at conference with a bisexual sort of group meeting. I think it would be fair to say that during the eighties and nineties there wasn't much attention given to bisexuality as a separate thing, no.

[0:34:07]

Interviewer: Yeah, okay. So, how long were you involved with LGCM?

Respondent: Well, I'm still a member. But I became less sort of centrally involved I suppose from the beginning of the 2000s.

Interviewer: Okay. Was that work commitments or -?

Respondent: Lots of different things; it's hard to keep up that level of energy and, yes, my work was changing. Yeah, it was just harder to give that amount of time. But I've never ever ceased to be a member; it's been too important in my life and I went a lot and I believe passionately in it. So, I've never ever ceased to be a member.

Interviewer: Yeah, that's fantastic. Obviously there have been a lot of changes in LGCM and we've relocated out of London; what are your thoughts about having a presence in London? Do you have any thoughts around that or it doesn't really affect you?

Respondent: I think the difficult for LGCM is that... when I was most heavily involved in it things were bad, things were really bad; they were bad in the churches and they were bad in society. And I cannot believe how things have changed in society. I cannot believe it. If you'd told me in 1986 or 1987 that by 2015 we'd have gay marriage in this country I'd have laughed at you. You couldn't believe it; just couldn't believe it. But things have changed in society as a whole and beyond my comprehension really. Things are still difficult in the churches but churches are affected by society no doubt so the battles

aren't as clear. Now occasionally there are clear battles like the Jeremy... what's his name?

Interviewer: Pemberton.

Respondent: Pemberton, yeah; that's a clear battle. But the churches - even the Roman Catholic Church now it's gone sort of softer and that's more difficult to fight. It's just not quite as clear what the battle lines are anymore. And I think the general view on the part of almost everybody would be that we are now in a sort of war of attrition with regards to the churches; the churches are just going to have to get with the programme, you know? And eventually it'll just happen. And I think that that just makes LGCM's positioning difficult and people are going to say, "Well, what is it for?" and, "What's the point of belonging to it?" and so on and so forth.

Interviewer: What's your take on - this is more a personal interest but I've been to a number of LGBT groups in London and some of them are very lovely but they would seem to be mimicking church services and I personally don't want to go back to that kind of traditional way of doing church. And LGCM has still got that more activist campaigning side to it that the other groups don't seem to need to have.

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: There was a question in there somewhere.

Respondent: It depends what you want, doesn't it, really?

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: I think that LGCM was set up to try and change things so that's its core mission; it should continue to try and change things. I think there is a place for other types of groups that provide church for people who otherwise wouldn't engage with church. So, yeah, but the reason why I loved LGCM was because it was active and it was unapologetic. I mean it really was unapologetic, and that was quite unusual in those days. And that's what got a lot of people's backs up of course but that's why I loved it.

[0:39:38]

Interviewer: Yeah. I have a view that the church middle ground will go; it will be extreme fundamentalism or it will just go with society; do you think that it will be totally untenable fairly soon for the mainstream churches to carry on in that position where they are where they... all the, "Love the sinner; don't quite like the sin", stuff?

Respondent: Yes, I do. I think it's hard for the churches to resist what is going on in wider society. From a theological perspective you could say the Holy Spirit is speaking through wider society trying to teach the church.

Interviewer: Yeah; I think through Barack Obama, and Jodie Foster coming out, and all these things that are going on in the world.

Respondent: Yeah. Britain doesn't have much of a traditional of extreme Christian fundamentalism; there always will be some but I think even in the evangelical world there is change on this whole matter and I do think it's just a matter of time really. What AIDS did teach me though is that things can change for the worse as well as for the better. Pre-the AIDS pandemic there was a period when things looked like they were getting better and then AIDS came along and got a lot worse. So, I think it's important not to take it all for granted. But it's just hard, if not impossible, I would say for the churches to continue to

take some of the lines they have in the face of the reality of the lives of lesbian and gay people. So, yes, I think everybody knows really it's only a matter of time.

Interviewer: Do you think it might even come to full-on religious wars maybe in the States for example?

Respondent: No. No, I don't think so. The States is a bit nuts when it comes to religion but I don't think so because in the States what the vast majority of people value more is the secular... the fact that religion is not enshrined in the state. Even somebody like Ronald Regan really valued that. And I think most people when push comes to shove would want to uphold that rather than anything else.

Interviewer: Okay; so, freedom of speech, democracy.

Respondent: Yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah, okay. I'm always struck about the gay marriage thing that it feels to me that straight people within the church are okay with it if it's gay marriage where there's a commitment in the relationship, monogamous etc. What do you think - this is a very difficult question but -

Respondent: Okay, I am intrigued.

Interviewer: What do you think the church is going to do about Trans and bi people and polyamorous people?

Respondent: Yeah. I think the whole transsexuality thing is the next big thing. Now in the nineties I was actually on an official group in the Church of England that was looking at the whole issue of transsexuality and I was quite struck by how everybody on that group was reasonably sympathetic to the whole issue. I think myself that I just find it fascinating that all of a sudden there are lots of television programmes about transsexuality. I must have watched at least three in the past week actually.

Interviewer: There are lots about children aren't there attending school as well, yeah.

Respondent: Yeah; lots about children. In the past month I've met two people whose children have decided to transition gender and so on and so forth. I find it fascinating as a phenomena; what causes that as a phenomena. And I haven't got answers for that but I'm just saying I find it fascinating. I also find it slightly depressing I have to say watching some of those television programmes because it seems to me that - and obviously I want to absolutely support people's life choices etc. but it does seem to me that what lies behind a lot of this is very hard notions of gender that I would want to challenge; what it means to be a man and what it means to be a woman.

[0:45:34]

Interviewer: Yeah. I think that's the thing that always strikes me when they do show programmes about transsexuals and especially with the children: they seem to go for the pink and the fairy ones and I'm thinking, "I'm a cis-gender female and I've never grown up wanting to be ultra girly", and there's something... yeah.

Respondent: Yeah. That really strikes me, yeah. I think if Christianity has anything to preach on this it is that gender is not real like that. But it is becoming a cultural phenomenon therefore Theology is going to have to respond and the church is going to have to respond. I suspect churches will respond quite sympathetically myself.

Interviewer: It's been my experience that if you can find medical scientific reasons generally I find that Christians with fervent beliefs can get their heads around that, but when it's more fluid...

Respondent: Yeah. Again: depressing. I mean I don't take an essentialist view of homosexuality at all; I don't believe in gay genes and the like. I want to work towards a world in which you fall in love with who you fall in love with and that people can feel at least that they have the possibility of falling in love with people of any gender.

Interviewer: Yeah. So, going back to the whole identity politics thing do you think there's an inherent human need that most people have for some kind of closure, some kind of, "Right, that's who I am"?

Respondent: Yes, of course because it gives you a sense of where you are in the pecking order and your place in the world and so on and so forth. But St Paul: "In Christ there is not male and female; slave or free; no Jew or Greek". Well, they were the clear identity politics of the day and he's saying, "Look, that doesn't exist in the church". And it strikes me that that's a really radical message actually and we've got to be careful about just buying into the identity politics of a particular era.

Interviewer: Okay.

Respondent: So, when my mother was growing up in Liverpool there were very clear identity politics around Catholic and Protestant and that determined whether it was safe to go out on a particular day or not. Now we've moved beyond that in this country and my hope is that we can move in a similar way in terms of gender and sexual identity politics.

Interviewer: Yeah, okay.

Respondent: So, somebody saying, "I was brought up a Catholic but I've become a Protestant", nobody bats an eyelid; it doesn't matter. Actually lots of people would refuse to identify in that way now and it strikes me that that's what we should be aiming for.

Interviewer: And would you say that's reflected in your academic work?

Respondent: Absolutely; yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah, okay. So, tell me a little bit about your work at Winchester. Obviously you are a Deputy Vice Chancellor.

Respondent: Yes. So, I came here in 1998 as their first Professor of Theology and then in 2005 I became the Director of Research, and then in 2008 I became Deputy Vice Chancellor.

Interviewer: Okay. And what does that entail? I'm a bit ignorant.

Respondent: Well, it's the Deputy Head of the university so there are two of us and we are responsible for the operational management of the university.

[0:50:03]

Interviewer: Okay. And is it a welcoming environment here for LGBT people?

Respondent: Yeah; absolutely it is.

Interviewer: Is there any conflict between that Christian heritage of the university?

Respondent: Well, there could be but there isn't because luckily the Vice Chancellor, the boss, and I are very like-minded on this. She is also a deeply committed Christian and for both of us being welcoming to people -

Interviewer: Is that Joy?

Respondent: Yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah; because she came along to the Hampshire Pride and did the opening talk, yeah.

Respondent: Oh, did she? Yeah. Being welcoming to people who have LGBTI identity is an expression of our Christian heritage.

Interviewer: Yeah. Is that written into any of the statutes of the university, in the equality and diversity?

Respondent: It's written into lots of documents. But because we are a Church of England university for example and because the current Bishop of Winchester... it takes a slightly different view, for example, in the gay marriage thing; we can't have gay marriages in the chapel. Our Dean of Chapel would love to do them but we can't do them at the moment.

Interviewer: Right, okay.

Respondent: But we have (Inaudible 0:51:35) which has a chapel that was deconsecrated so we can use that. But, no, we fly the rainbow flag; we flew it for a week when gay marriage became law; and we fly it during Pride time. We recently had a diversity week and we lit up some of the buildings with the rainbow colours. Yeah, we are absolutely committed to... we're a Stonewall Diversity Champion.

Interviewer: Okay, yeah. And do you have involvement in the church anymore or where do you worship locally?

Respondent: I left the Roman Catholic Church and I became a Liberal Catholic; I became a member of the Liberal Catholic Church.

Interviewer: Okay. And when was that?

Respondent: 2001.

Interviewer: 2001, okay. And where do you worship? Do you worship in a church or...?

Respondent: No.

Interviewer: No.

Respondent: There are so few of us. We get together occasionally. We're getting together next week.

Interviewer: Is that national?

Respondent: Yeah; it's national and international.

[0:52:49]

Interviewer: Okay. And what's your take on the Pope?

Respondent: I think the Pope is great. I love the Pope. I think what we're seeing now is probably a battle between the Pope and large section of the (inaudible 0:53:16) over the direction of the Roman Catholic Church.

Interviewer: He seems to go forward two steps and then dragged back one and a half.

Respondent: I mean the pressure that he must be under must be extreme. He's not very good on the woman issue; he doesn't seem very enlightened on issues to do with women. But on gay issues I get the impression that... well, he's just changed the tone completely and made it possible for other Bishops to speak out in favour in a way that has not been possible for the past 20 years or so. So, obviously everybody would like him to go further and quicker and so on and so forth, but just changing the tone makes a hell of a lot of difference. And we'll see; we'll see what comes out of this synod on the family. I think he might still surprise people. But the change in tone is significant. It's inconceivable that Pope John Paul the Second or Ratzinger would have allowed himself to be filmed greeting a gay couple as Pope Francis was in New York; it's inconceivable. So, I think he's really good; that change of tone is really important. The Roman Catholic Church when it changes can change really quickly because it's not democratic.

Interviewer: Okay. It works both ways, but yeah.

Respondent: So, the advantage of that is that it can change almost overnight in a way that perhaps the Church of England can't.

Interviewer: Yeah. It has to have PCC meetings.

Respondent: Yeah; endless debates and so on and so forth. So, you know, Pope Francis may yet pull off something really surprising.

Interviewer: Yeah, okay. I'm nearly up to an hour and I know you're very busy. Is there anything major that you think we haven't covered that you think would be appropriate to mention?

Respondent: I think that what bothers me a lot at the moment is that there is a whole generation of people now dying; we've lost recently Jim Cotter, Derek... what was his name? He only died a couple of weeks ago. He used to run the LGC in Bristol all the time; Derek...

Interviewer: I can look that up.

Respondent: Yeah; Ken Leitch, who was really involved in St Botolphs and LGCM. This whole generation of people dying who risked a lot. And I'm worried that we haven't done enough to honour them and that we should be doing more to honour those who risked so much. And I've talked to Tracey about this and I hope that she will do something about it because people shouldn't go to their graves without some appreciation.

Interviewer: Yeah. I think it's on her heart from the last board meeting; I got that impression. And obviously this project is about getting those stories from people because we're obviously very aware that a lot of the pioneering people have passed on or are very elderly and infirm, and obviously you are not in that category but -

Respondent: I don't know; approaching.

Interviewer: But that is very much on our heart as a Board of Trustees, yeah.

Respondent: Good.

[0:57:20]

Interviewer: Okay, well, we've done 57 minutes so that's fantastic. Thank you so much.

Respondent: No problem. I hope it all recorded.

[End of Transcript]