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Interviewer: Can you tell me a bit about your background, your childhood, where you grew up from?

Respondent: Okay, yeah. As I've just said, I was born in Middlesex and I'm the second child, my mother had a son before me, who was just over two years older than myself. My mum and dad lived with my grandmother and my auntie, my mum's sister, so we all lived together, and my grandfather had died when my older brother was only a year old, so it was the four adults, my brother and myself. I don't actually have any particular memories from early childhood, I have...I know some things, but these are really things which my family have told me rather than memories. I guess my first real memories aren't until I'm about six or seven years old. But when I was about five or six, we moved from Middlesex down to Kent, moved into a place called Dumpton, a very pretty little area between Ramsgate and Broadstairs in the Isle of Thanet. We had a large, detached house with huge grounds and we used to raise chickens, we had this big chicken pen and I remember as a child we also captured a hare that had got into the chicken run, and so I had, rather than having a rabbit as a child, I had a hare for a long time, which was very interesting, because it wouldn't let anybody else go near it except me. But it was in that garden that I learnt how not to ride a bike, I have never been able to ride a pushbike because I became absolutely petrified of them, because every time I tried to ride a bike I would end up falling into one of the gooseberry bushes, which is not a good thing, they're incredibly prickly and painful. But we lived there for several years, about three or four years, and then we actually moved into Ramsgate, and I remember at one point, my mum's brother, my uncle and his partner, I think they were actually married, also lived with us, because my mum has two brothers as well as a sister. So I think they lived with us as well for a while.

So we then moved into Ramsgate, and came to a large four storey house, and that's when I started to be able to go to church. Prior to that, evidently I had always been nagging my mum from a very, very early age to go to church, but she wouldn't take me, and they found it really strange because they weren't churchgoers, the only time they ever went to church was for what we call hatchings, matchings and dispatchings, you know, for baptisms, funerals and weddings. So to have a child that wanted to go to church, they found very strange. But when we moved to the house in Ramsgate, in Codrington Road, the house was in the middle of a street and if you went to the end of the road and turned right, on the next corner was a little Presbyterian chapel. So I didn't have to cross a road - and I was seven or eight years old at that time, and my mum would let me then start going to the Sunday school, because she would stand on the doorstep, and she would watch me walk to the end of the road, and then at the time when I should be coming back home from church, she would be standing on the doorstep to watch me come round the corner of the road - she wouldn't even walk to the corner of the road. But that meant that I was able to start going to church, which was really important to me.

By this point in time, I had another brother, there was a six year gap between myself and my next brother, and then a little while later, my third brother came along, after another three years. So it was while we were living in that house that my father left, he left when I was 12, and at the same time as he left, my next brother down, the six year older brother, we were waiting for the ambulance to arrive because he was incredibly ill. His appendix had burst and he had peritonitis and they didn't think that he would actually survive the operation. I'm pleased to say that he did but he's never been particularly healthy, unfortunately. So life went on, with he family now, with my mum, my auntie and my grandmother in it, and my three brothers and myself. A couple of years later, we started fostering children with learning disabilities, particularly Down's Syndrome children initially. So the house was always full, always full with children, with

caring. And we got into that though through the dancing, my grandmother used to take me to do ballet and tap, and also ballroom and Latin American, which my older brother did as well for a period of time. And our dance teachers also taught dance at one of the local schools, residential schools for children with disabilities, and so we used to go along to their fundraising dances and things, and whilst there, the headmaster approached my grandmother about whether she had never thought of fostering during the school holidays, because some of the children there had nowhere to go in the school holidays. And my grandmother had been a foster carer when we lived in London, and so she said, "Yes, we'll give it a whirl," so we started having two young lads who were the same age as myself for school holidays, and then when they reached 16, they had to leave the school, they came to live with us permanently. And then other children came, some for short periods, some for longer periods, and now I have two extra brothers - one that was adopted because he came to us when he was only three, and my other brother is only a foster brother because he didn't come to us until he was nearly 18, so it was too late to adopt him. But they've both been in my family for 30-odd years, so as far as I'm concerned, they're just my brothers. So I now have five brothers, and no sisters - I don't know why my mum never wanted to adopt any girls, maybe I was enough for her. But yeah, as I say, it was always a busy household. I went to school locally and went on to the grammar school at the age of 12, 11/12, and from there, I went on to the local technical college to do some A Levels, and then went off to work.

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Interviewer: Yeah, you did talk about the interest of going to ballet and dance, did you have any other interests when you were growing up?

Respondent: Not really, things really were sort of around what I was doing with the church. The ballet dancing and all the dancing took up a huge amount of time, I mean, because I was doing, as I say, ballet, tap, ballroom and Latin American, and I actually took the ballroom and Latin American up to taking my teacher's exams to teach it myself. So up to the age of sort of 15/16, just before I started doing my exams in school, four or five nights a week were devoted to dancing. Dancing is in the family, my uncle, the youngest one of my mum's brothers, he was a ballet dancer, and he actually danced with Sadler's Wells, until he got married and his wife said being a ballet dancer was not a suitable profession for a married man, so he gave it up. And my mum was a (inaudible 00:08:38) girl, which was a bit like the Bluebird Girls, the ones that used to do the music hall and do all the high kicking and everything on stage. She travelled all over the place as a (inaudible 00:08:49) girl. Again, prior to getting married, that's actually how she met my father. So dancing was very much in the family, in the blood, if you like. And so, I used to really enjoy it. I gave up the ballet and the tap, probably when I was around 14, but I carried on with the ballroom and Latin American for some time longer, and as I say, took that to the point of taking exams to actually teach it. But apart from that, it was things to do with the church. And the presbyterian chapel that I was attending closed down when I was about 14 to build some flats on the site, it got sold off, so that's when I started attending the Baptist church, and I got into the Baptist church really by chance - I'd heard that the Baptist church had a Boys' Brigade and I thought that this would be good for my younger brothers. So I decided that I was going to take them along, which was on a Monday night. So yeah, I took my next bother down, Sean, along to the Boys' Brigade, and that particular night it happened to be absolutely pouring with rain, so by the time I got there I was pretty soaked, and the thought of then walking back home and then having to come back again in the rain to pick him up later, I thought, "This is really silly," and just, you know, "I'm just never going to dry out." So I decided I had to stay and wait, so of course, I then got involved and I ended up joining the Boys' Brigade myself, and was an officer in the Boys' Brigade for many years. I think my brothers gave up on it, but I continued with it. And so I started attending the Baptist church and started teaching Sunday school there, and remained at the Baptist church until I left for work when I was 18. I was still in that church, I used to help run the summer

programmes for a week in the summer holidays, we would do a club every day of the week, in the mornings, and I used to help run that and things.

So yeah, pretty much, what with my school studies, there wasn't really any time for anything else, it kept me very busy.

Interviewer: Yeah. What about your culture? When you were growing up, how was the culture?

Respondent: That's quite an interesting question really, because in lots of respects, I grew up very closeted. My family was really quite insular, they didn't really socialise or go out and about, and my mum certainly didn't have any friends. Her life was caring for us and the household and my grandmother, who was starting to become frailer. And my auntie went out to work but she worked shift work and I know she socialised with some of the other people from the factory where she worked. And my grandmother I know used to go to bingo. But they didn't really have a crowd of friends or anything like that. And in lots of respects, you know, it was really very old-fashioned, I mean, I would say I was really brought up by my grandmother rather than my mother, because she owned the house, she ruled the house, and what she said went. So it was a very old fashioned upbringing. And I guess it was quite typically white middle class sort of an upbringing, we weren't rich but we weren't paupers. You know, there were some issues because obviously when my father left, my mother was dependent on my grandmother financially, quite considerably, so I do remember times in school where there may have been trips or stuff was needed for a home economics class or something, and my mother really just didn't have the money to be able to pay for those things.

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So I guess my culture was really quite boring, thinking back over it. You know, we just essentially went from one day to the other, and my grandmother had quite strict Victorian morals and rules about how we should behave. We always had to walk properly upright with our shoulders back, there was no slouching, you know, our deportment was very important, and we had to speak correctly. I mean, I make people laugh now because one of her phrases was, you know, "God put a t in that word, the least you can do is sound it," you know, and things like this, and if we ever were to not pronounce a word properly or whatever. So how we spoke, how we presented ourselves was very important, and, yeah, it's interesting thinking back around those things. Public image was very important, you know, you didn't air your dirty laundry in public, whenever you were outside, you had to behave and present yourself well, and I remember that being very important.

Interviewer: So how did you feel about that?

Respondent: The majority of the time it really wasn't an issue, but at other times it was quite restricting. You know, from the point of view that I knew my friends could just bring friends home from school any time, you know, they could go out and about. I didn't have that freedom, you know, friends were not welcome, I mean, I'd have to sort of give six months' notice in advance in triplicate or something if I wanted to invite a friend back. And I didn't think I would wanted to invite a friend back because there wasn't that sort of comfortable, free atmosphere within the home to do so. So there were restrictions on that. Also there were restrictions on my going out, again, there were very strict bedtimes, and you know, where I was allowed to go, not go, very overly protective in some ways. So it was very difficult for me to socialise in the same way as my friends were. I often say that I actually went from being a child to being an adult, I didn't really have teen years, and that was for a number of reasons: one was I think, you know, with the advent of my father leaving and my brother almost dying at exactly the same time, this obviously had a huge impact on my mum, and her focus was very much around my younger brother. I mean, he was in hospital for months and months and months, and so

with her focus being on that, I really took over bringing up my youngest brother, who was only three at the time, to the point where a lot of people actually thought that he was my son, rather than my mum's, because I was never seen without him, you know, you saw me, you saw the pushchair, end of story. So I spent a lot of time caring for him and then when things settled down, that's when we started fostering, and so I would also be caring for the foster children as well. My older brother went off the rails a bit, so he was causing problems and again a lot of focus had to be put towards him. So you know, I would say I went from being a child at the age of 11, to suddenly at the age of 12 having to be an adult and take a lot more responsibility and care for my brothers and for the family, and just really get on with life.

Interviewer: So have you got any best day or worst day during your childhood?

Respondent: Best day and worst day in my childhood... Well, lots of different days are flashing through my head now. It's so difficult to pick a worst day, I mean, there were various incidents that I know I found quite difficult to cope with. My mother never really ever showed me any respect, I think is probably the best way to put it. So I never felt valued, and it wasn't just my mother either. It was a very strange situation being brought up in a household with three female adults and three male siblings, and the situation was that my grandmother absolutely idolised my older brother, he could do no wrong. It didn't matter what he did, or anything, he was perfect in her eyes. He was born prematurely and was very ill and my grandmother, so the story goes, actually wanted to adopt him from my mother, and she wanted to take him on, so that's how strongly she had bonded with my older brother. My auntie always had a thing for the youngest child, so my youngest brother was clearly her favourite, she spent a lot of time and energy on him. And my next brother down was the one that was very ill and nearly died, and so my mum's focus was very clearly around him. So I never really felt that I belonged. I always used to laugh and joke about the fact that, you know, maybe I was adopted or found on the doorstep because I was nothing like them, and I never really felt that I belonged in that family. Unfortunately I do physically resemble them, so I clearly wasn't found on the doorstep, but when it comes to personality, to likes and dislikes I really have nothing in common. And not just as a child, as we've gone through adulthood, I have nothing in common with my family, except I've inherited all their physical ailments unfortunately. But so, it was always difficult, I was never good enough.

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I don't know to this day whatever it was that I ever did wrong, or I do have an idea of what it was that was wrong. Unfortunately, I think my father always wanted a daughter, and so my mother, my grandmother and my auntie all saw that he actually favoured me, even though I didn't favour him, and consequently when he left, I then became the focus for their anger towards him. But consequently, I could never do anything good enough, and I guess one of the worst days for me was, which was also mixed in with one of the best memories - I couldn't do art O Level, which is what today's GCSE level, when I was at school, because I was doing sciences and they had this antiquated system which you either went sciences or you went arts, and because I was doing sciences, I couldn't do art. So when I went onto the technical college to do my A Levels, because I wanted my freedom around the topics I chose, I actually did art O Level in the first year of my A Levels as well, and I got a grade A, and so I was so chuffed, because I'd only spent a year on this and I got the top grade for it. And I remember being really excited about sharing this, and I shared it with them and the comment I got back from my grandmother was, "How can you possibly have got an A, your brother only got a B and he's a far better artist than you?" And so that was really painful, my older brother only did two O Levels because he actually got kicked out of school before he got to do them and things, but he later took two, and art was one of them, whereas I got several qualifications, I think seven or eight O Levels, two A Levels, intermediate maths and obviously I've then gone on and done degrees and things. But at that point in time, you know, it was obviously very, very painful that there was no celebration of my

achievement, but just a denigration of it because I couldn't possibly be better than my brother. So I guess a good and a negative one all rolled up in one in that example.

Interviewer: Did you try to push yourself hard in order to please your family?

Respondent: I think I did, but I think I was probably a...there was a pendulum swing going on, looking back, I think there were times when I just really thought, "Well, what's the point?" and didn't want to put any effort into doing anything because I knew that it would never be respected, it would never be accepted, it would just...you know, it would just never be good enough. And even if it was, it would have to be denigrated because I was not allowed to be more accomplished or better in any way, shape or form than my brother. But then there were also, there was also, like any child, you want to please your parents, you want to have the accolade from them, and so there was also those times when I, you know, I would push myself and strive harder and harder to try and do something that would receive that approval, yeah. I don't think I've achieved it yet, and I think I have given up now.

Interviewer: Could you tell me about your story of coming out? Your awareness of being LGBTQ?

Respondent: Okay, yeah. It was quite interesting, because as a young woman, I had boyfriends, and I had no knowledge or understanding that I might be a lesbian, but I think partly that was because I had no real knowledge or understanding that there was any opportunity to be anything other than heterosexual, because as I say, I'd grown up in a very old fashioned family. However, when I was doing my A Levels at college, I went out with this guy, Michael, for a while, and I think one of the reasons that we got on so well was because he was also gay, and he came out, you know, whilst we were at college and we were really good friends for a long, long time. So it wasn't that I didn't know gay people, I just never thought that...for some reason, never thought that that could possibly be me. And yet when I look back, I see that I actually did have relationships with girls that were clearly not just friendships, but never, ever associated that or linked that at all at that point in time. It wasn't until I was 23 that I realised my sexuality, and it was quite amusing really, because at this point in time, I was working at the Royal School for Deaf Children, and we all used to go this one particular nightclub in Cliftonville, and I became good friend with two deaf women who were a couple, who used to attend this club, and we would talk, and I remember one evening chatting away with them and asking them about their relationship. And I remember to this day saying to them, "Oh well, you know, it wouldn't work for me, you know, I like men." But you know, I had no issues whatsoever, I don't think I've ever been prejudiced around any area, you know, again, looking back, I've always had a very strong sense of equality and justice.

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So I certainly had no issue with it, but I just remember laughing with them and saying, "It wouldn't do for me, I like men," you know. And I think I probably said it slightly more explicitly than that, but anyway. And then literally a couple of weeks later, I'd got a friend staying with me, I was, at this point in time, I'd started doing my first degree with the Open University, and at one of the summer schools, I had met up with this woman called Sandy, and she was married with two young children, and going through a really tough time with her husband. And when we were talking, I had said to her, you know, "Don't stay with him," because he was physically abusive, I said, "Please don't stay with him just because you think you have nowhere to go. If ever you need a bolthole, you can always just come and stay with me." Well, one afternoon I got this phone call saying, "I'm on the train," and now I, at that point in time, had this little attic flat, one-bedroom attic flat that I lived in. There was a front room, a kitchen, bedroom and bathroom, and all of a sudden there was this woman and two young boys and their suitcases, about to come and live with me. So anyway, we moved things around, she moved in with me, I ended up, because the kitchen was very large, I had a single bed in



the kitchen that was mine, and her and the boys had the double bed in the bedroom. And we coped like that for several months until she sorted things out and found a place of her own and things. But we were very close, and I'm quite a tactile person, so she...so it was nothing for us to sit hugging each other or whatever, chatting away.

And this one particular night, we'd been out, and we'd come home and we were sitting and listening to music, chatting around the sofa, and she kissed me. And I remember thinking, "Wow, I've never felt like this when I've kissed a man, what is this all about?" We had both been drinking and even then, I always had to behave like a true gentleman, you know, in this case, there was no way I'm taking advantage of somebody, I don't know if this is what she really wants or whether this is the alcohol. So I said, "Look, you know, let's just leave it at that and go to bed." So in the morning, she apologised to me and I said, "You know, it's no problem at all," but I knew that this had stirred something up in me, and I thought, you know, "Is this just because it's her and we are very close friends, I love her dearly? Is it just because of our relationship that I'm feeling what I'm feeling?" It also happened that not only did I work at the deaf school, but I was also the secretary for the Thanet Social Club for the Deaf, and it was our monthly meeting on that Saturday, a couple of days later. And at the social club, there were another two women who were a couple, Jackie and Jeanie, and they were there on the Saturday night, and I had this idea that I needed to go and find out for myself whether I was attracted to women, whether this is what was missing. Because I had always known, I'd always had in the back of my mind that, you know, that things weren't right. I enjoyed the chase of, you know, of hooking a man, but then when we started to really get to know each other, I didn't want to be with him, you know, something just wasn't right. And I always thought, "Oh, it's because I haven't met Mr Right, when I meet Mr Right, I will feel differently." But I could never see myself married to a man, it just...there was always something that just didn't feel right.

But anyway, on this particular evening at the Thanet Social Club for the Deaf, Jenny and Jackie were there, and I just said to them, "Are you going to the nightclub tonight?" because I knew they used to go there and go onto this nightclub, this gay nightclub, and they said, "Yeah." I said, "Well, can I come with you?" They were a bit shocked and they said, "Oh, you're straight," and I said, "Am I?" Anyway, they let me go with them, and it was like going home. I've only had that experience a couple of times in my life, and this was the first time, you know, I was a regular at nightclubs because I loved dancing, so you know, I regularly went to nightclubs, and I never, ever felt comfortable or at home or as at ease as I did walking into this gay nightclub. And I just realised that, you know, this is what is missing. I like women, I want to be with a woman, not with a man. And I literally just in that moment just accepted, "Oh, this is the case," it was, like, "Oh, so I have this butter or that butter? Oh, I like that one, I like the salted one, not the unsalted one," whatever. It was as mundane and simple as that, I just thought, "Okay, that's the way it is."

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So literally on the Monday when I went...I wasn't working at the Deaf School now, I had moved on, I was running a day centre for people with mental health issues and learning disabilities, but I was still the secretary for the Deaf Club. And I went in on the Monday and just told my assistant and volunteers that I had been to this gay club on the Saturday night and I was a lesbian and they said, "Alright," there was, again, no big deal, no revelation, they had no issue with it at all. In fact, the young women who were volunteering for me started to flirt with me outrageously and tease me, and that was all fine. And I remember a couple of weeks later, I was in the pub with, again, Jackie and Janie, and the other two women who I had the conversation with previously saying about, "Oh no, that would not do for me, I like men," and we were all going on to the club and I said to these women, "Oh, are you coming to the club with us?" and they said, "You can't go to the club, you're straight," and I said to her, "No, no, I'm not." And

they were really surprised because of the conversation we'd had not that long before. So that was when I realised my sexuality, and when I started then going out with women, and I would say it was really a big nothing, there was no, you know, no major upheaval, you know, I just got on with my life, but now my life contained women. There were a couple of friends who questioned me about it and who didn't quite understand, but they were still my friends, so they knew it was me. But there was no major upheaval.

And I never really came out to my mum because you know, I wasn't living at home and hadn't done for a while, and my life was very separate from my family at that point, so it wasn't like they ever knew anything that was going on in my life, so this wasn't a case of keeping anything from them. And I always lived openly, so if I went home for a family do, I would take whatever partner I was living with with me, they would come to my home and, you know, I bought houses with partners and things and lived with partners, and they would come and visit the home and they would see that this was 'our bedroom', and you know, I never kept anything from them. So whilst we never, ever had the conversation, they were very aware of my sexuality. And the amazing thing is, they've never had a problem with my sexuality, they still, to this day, do not understand my faith. They find it absolutely crazy that I was ordained and, you know, committed in that way. That they don't understand; my sexuality, never, ever been an issue, which I think is quite interesting, because for a lot of people it would be the other way round. In fact, the only conversation I've ever had with my mum about my sexuality was really quite strange. It was on the phone talking one day, and my older brothers had several wives and had been divorced three times, and she was talking to him, he had actually been on the phone with his first wife...no, his second wife, and evidently his second wife had said something about my sexuality, about me being a lesbian, and my mother was telling me about that she was talking to her, "And she tried to tell me what you are, and I told her I already know." And that was it, she never used any of the words 'lesbian' or 'gay' or anything like that, she just said, you know, "She was trying to tell me what you are and I told her I already know." And that was the sum total of any conversation about my sexuality with my mum. Apart from that, it's all just been accepted, and even with my then taking on a job working at the Lesbian and Gay Christian Movement, you know, I told her it's what I'm doing, obviously I'm now on television as a professional lesbian, and she tells, you know, they tell their friends and neighbours that I'm going to be on the television, and they watch it, and it's never been an issue for them.

Interviewer: What about your siblings? How did they react, your brothers?

Respondent: I came out to my younger brother first, Sean, the one who was very ill. That was quite easy to do and it was sort of necessary because at this time, one of the things that I did with my work was I ran a sort of a youth club, but a youth club for people with learning disabilities who were over the age of 18, so the youth club really went on until they were about 65. But I can't think of another...a social club, that's a better word for it. We had the social club, it was part of the Gay Grey Clubs. And my brother volunteered and helped out with this, he would come and DJ and what have you. And I actually introduced him to his wife, the only person he ever went out with, and it's the same for her, he was the only boyfriend she ever had. She was on a school work placement with me and so I introduced them to each other, and obviously because I was out in my work, it wasn't possible for me to not be out obviously with my brother when he was coming along to be part of my working life.

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It, again, it wasn't an issue, it wasn't with my younger brother, and in fact, my youngest brother, for a long time, I think he might still maybe be bisexual, but he would come nightclubbing with me and things. So it was never an issue with him. I've never really had a conversation with my older brother, he was very aware of my sexuality. He's

never said anything, but I don't think he's particularly comfortable with it, but we've never had a conversation, so...I don't really know.

Interviewer: What about the wider community where you grew up from, and that particular time when you came out? How did they react?

Respondent: Well, I had no connections with any of the community from when I was living at home, because as I say, we didn't really have a community there. So there wasn't anybody there to tell, the only community I had were my friends and colleagues where I worked. And as I say, my friends were all very accepting, some questioned whether this was a phase I was going through or whatever. My best friend, who at that point in time had moved back down to Wales, she was perfectly accepting, she came up to stay for a weekend and went clubbing with me and I'd go down to Wales and we'd go to the gay clubs together, even when she was eight months' pregnant, we were in gay nightclubs together. So I was very blessed, very blessed that the people who I cared about really had no problems, were very, very accepting, and so as I say, very, very blessed by that. At this point in time, I wasn't regularly attending church, so I didn't have the issues with regards to my faith community. When...because when I first left the college, having done my A Levels, I wasn't able to get into the university I wanted to go to, and at that age, I didn't feel the...I was offered a place at university in London, but it would have meant finding accommodation in London, and at the age of 18, I was too nervous and too shy, I couldn't cope with living in London. I mean, even just travelling to London on my own would have been such a scary prospect. So I turned that place down, and the one which would have offered student accommodation, I didn't get into. So I went out to work and I went away to work, I went to work in a boarding school, and this meant that obviously I then couldn't attend the church that I had been attending.

And then when I was working in the Deaf School, I was working various shift work and often working on a Sunday, and so I used to just go to whatever local church had a service going at a time when I could attend. So I didn't have a faith community that I was involved with at that point in time. And then after I came out, I was aware that this would not be acceptable in a lot of faith communities, and so I then went through the years which I talk about, when I church hopped, where I never stayed in a church long enough for the awkward questions to get asked. So yeah.

Interviewer: Could you tell me about your journey of integrating your faith with your identity as LGBTQ?

Respondent: Again, this was never an issue for me. I think because I have always known God, I just do not remember a time in my life where I was not in a relationship with God. You know, I don't know where it came from, I don't know, but I just know that I have no memory of ever being separated from God, of not having that relationship. So by the time at the age of 23, I realised my sexuality, my relationship with God was so secure and you know, I'd been through all sorts of other trials and tribulations before then, and God had always been there throughout all of that. But I didn't really struggle with this, I just knew that, yeah, God loves me. And that, you know, God wants me to be all that God made me to be. And therefore, you know, if God made me to be a lesbian, and I clearly was much happier as a lesbian than as a straight person, I clearly had much better relationships as a lesbian than as a straight woman, so you know, this clearly was how God intended me to be, therefore this was not an issue for God, that this was how God wanted me to be, how God had made me to be and that, you know, I actually felt closer to God because I felt I was actually being more of who God had called me to be, by being a lesbian and being in relationships with women. So there wasn't that struggle for me, as I say, the only struggle was that I knew that not everybody had the same understanding as I did, and I didn't want to upset other people, you know, and I was attending a church, and if I knew that they wouldn't accept it, and I had got to know some of these people, I didn't want to put them in the position, you know, put the minister in a position of having to



say to me, "Oh, you know, we would like you to join the church," and I'd say, "Well actually, I'm a lesbian," and they say, "Oh no, no, you can't join the church." I didn't want to put them in that position, which is why I would move on when things started to get to that point.

[00:45:03]

So it was to protect other people from putting them in difficult positions, which was painful for me, for the fact that I could never then ever really be part of a faith community, I couldn't have that sense of belonging or that closeness, because it would then cause those difficult questions to be asked, and either... I mean, maybe there was some self-protection in that, you know, obviously nobody wants to be rejected, and you know, I didn't want to be rejected or cause somebody who I loved to have to reject me. And so it was quite a difficult time where I didn't have that support, I didn't have that community around me, I was totally dependent on the few friends that I felt close to in order to provide that.

Interviewer: What was your developing understanding of the scripture around the time that you came out?

Respondent: I don't know that I paid much attention to scripture at that point in time. I think this was something that came about much later, I think, you know, later on, I started to realise just, you know, how important my faith was, and that it wasn't something that I could just keep to myself, and do personally. Again, I think I've always known that God had a call on my life, around the age of 16/17, I toyed with the thought of going into a convent, because I thought God was calling me to the ministry in some way. But life then took other paths. But some time after I had come out, I thought, you know, "I can't keep my faith to myself, it needs to move on, it needs to be bigger." And part of that, I guess, was, well, one person that I started seeing was from a Catholic background and she was actually going out with somebody who worked for me, and had come for dinner at work with us. And during the dinner conversation, something was said about God, about religion, and I naturally defended God, not that God needs defending, but I defended faith and religion, because whilst I wasn't evangelical in my faith, I certainly would never sit back and allow it to be denigrated. And this particular person was really surprised that here was a lesbian standing up and speaking out for faith, for God, for religion. And so, you know, we got to know each other better and started going along to church, sometimes she would come along to the Baptist church with me, sometimes I'd go to the Catholic church with her, and she had children who attended the churches as well. And it was during that time that I really got closer again to God, when I really started to realise that I couldn't do my faith on my own, I needed a faith community, I needed to be able to be more open about my faith, and I needed to understand that greater. And so it was at this time that I started to really feel God calling me back again in a deep way. A few years after that - and we had been very fortunate that the Baptist church understood that we were a couple and with the children, and accepted us as part of the community, but again, we always circled around how, you know, how much we could actually be part of that community. So as I say, we were accepted and loved, but there was always something there that meant we were never fully embraced.

But a few years later, I moved back, I moved into London, and it was at this point that I heard about the Metropolitan Community Church, because I was still doing my church-hopping, I'm still feeling that I couldn't ever be anywhere properly. And I wanted that, so I found out about Metropolitan Community Church, and found that there was one in South London, and I was living in South London, and so I went along one evening and found this church. And this was the second time that I had that feeling of coming home. I walked through the doors and they met in this hall, community centre hall, it wasn't even a proper church, but I walked in and I just knew I was home, because for the first time, all of me was present. In all the churches I'd gone to, it was like I was leaving my

sexuality on the doorstep, and in so many situations where, you know, gay clubs, pubs, whatever, often my faith was left on the doorstep, never...neither of them could ever completely be that, but they were never fully integrated. But I walked into the Metropolitan Community Church in South London, which was in Brixton, in Effra Road, and walked into this church hall, all very low key, not a church hall, a community hall, and I was at home. Because I was there fully as a lesbian, and fully as a child of God, and nothing was left on the doorstep. Within six months, I had become a member, I was then on the board, because I could give all of me again, as I had done when I was at the Baptist church working for the Sunday school, and you know, in the summer clubs and everything. You know, I could give all of me again, and that's when I started to also know that God was calling me back into ministry, but that call had never gone away, I'd been given the time and space to learn about myself and who I was and what God really wanted for me, and now God was saying, you know, "Okay, now we need to take it to the next level."

[00:52:35]

And one day I was in the shower, minding my own business - at this point in time I had finished my degree in psychology and was working in the prison as a forensic psychologist, thoroughly enjoying my work, really happy to push my career forward as a psychologist, and then I'm standing in the shower, and as clearly as us having a conversation now, I heard God say to me, "It's time, you know, it's time for you to be ordained and do my work properly." I got out of the shower and I went to my partner and I said to her, "How do you fancy being a vicar's wife?" and her response was, "Do I get to make the cucumber sandwiches?" With that, I applied to go back to uni and do a degree in theology and I spoke to my minister and started the process towards being ordained. Which I then was, so I had left the prison service and left my work as a psychologist, studied, completed my training for ordination. I then, because within the Metropolitan Community Church, there is very few of our churches can actually afford a full time pastor, so in fact, a lot of us work completely pro bono as pastors within the church. So throughout the end of my training and when I was first the assistant pastor at the Metropolitan Community Church in North London, I was also working as a manager of a charity working with children with disabilities, which was great, but I really wanted to do something that was full time ministry, that really, where I could be a pastor, where I, you know, be a minister the whole time, not just part time, even though the work I was doing was very pastoral in lots of ways, working with families with children with disabilities, it wasn't, I knew that wasn't where I was supposed to continue.

And so I started looking for where God wanted me to be, whatever work I was supposed to be doing, I started looking at possible chaplaincy posts, and this sort of thing. And whilst I was doing that, I had also joined the Lesbian and Gay Christian Movement and become a member of that. I'd done that actually when I was still at uni doing my degree in theology. And through the post with the latest info and everything was an advert that they were looking for an assistant chief executive, which was a nine month post, with a view to that person then taking over as chief executive on retirement of Richard Kirker, becoming chief at the time. And everything in this job description I just tick, tick, tick, and I thought, "Well, okay." I spoke to my partner and she said, "You know, why don't you apply for it?" So I did. Not wanting it. I applied for it because somehow, I don't know, it just seemed like the right thing to do, and I was looking, and I do believe in laying out the sheet and seeing what God lands on it, you know. And so I sent this off and I remember so clearly, I had an interview for a chaplaincy post on the Wednesday, I had an interview for the LGCM post on the Thursday, both jobs said they would let me know on the Friday. And I thought, "Okay, I want the chaplaincy post, what a nice job, you go in, you say a few prayers with people, you're nice to people and you come home and you feel good about yourself, this is the sort of job I want, how wonderful, 9-5, great." But I said to God, "Okay, God, whatever job you want me to do, I will do, so make sure it's either the only one that offers me the post or it's the first one that offers

me the post, I will take whatever job offers me a post, and obviously if neither of them you want me to do, then neither will offer me a job.”

So I get a phone call and the phone call is from LGCM and they offer me the post. So I accept. I had barely put the phone down when it rang again and the chaplaincy job phoned to offer me the post. I was, like, “I can’t take it, I just accepted the other one.” And so that’s how I got to start working for LGCM as the assistant chief exec, and obviously leading up to this, I had started to have to really consider, obviously in doing my training to be ordained with the Metropolitan Community Church, I had to know about these texts. Because I’ve just realised that it was a very long winded answer to your question, which was how did I reconcile the Bible verses with being LGBTQI and Christian. And it really was at that time when I started to do my training for ordination that I had to really understand what this was all about, because if I was going to serve God, I had to know that I was serving God in the right way. So I had to look at these texts and think about them. And part of my study, because I have combined obviously my psychology and my theology, and so part of my studying was I did some research into diminishing the prejudice and discrimination and so, again, I was looking very much into the discrimination towards homosexuality as well as the discrimination on gender grounds, on race grounds, age grounds etc. And so it was during this time that I really got into the texts. And I realise that, you know what, there is not one single text in the Bible that says that God has an issue with two people of the same gender in a mutual, faithful, loving relationship. There are a few texts that talk about same sex sexual activity that is done on the grounds of lust and the use and abuse of other people, and heterosexual people having sex with people of the same gender just because they can’t control themselves. But there is nothing, nothing at all that says that it’s wrong to love.

[01:00:16]

Interviewer: Have you been questioned a lot about your sexuality and your faith?

Respondent: Oh, absolutely. It goes with the job. It’s very much part of the territory. It goes with both jobs, both as a Chief Exec of the Lesbian and Gay Christian Movement, and as a pastor within the Metropolitan Community Church, of being questioned about faith and sexuality is a daily occurrence almost. And I think it is important, because there are LGBTQI Christians out there who do struggle with what they have been told about the texts in the bible, who really struggle therefore to reconcile their faith and their sexuality, they feel they have to choose, they feel they either have to give up God or they have to give up who they are, in order to be faithful to one or the other. And of course, the reality is not that. But it’s very difficult for people, also obviously I get questioned by people who believe that homosexuality is completely wrong, and believe that I’m leading people astray, and I get questioned by people who are LGBTQI, who don’t understand why anybody would want to be part of a faith and have a belief in a God who they are told believes that they are an abomination. And so it works on both sides of the equation, in being able to point out to those people who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, queer, whatever, that actually God does still love them and they are acceptable and that that isn’t an issue, and also pointing out to people of faith that being LGBTQI is not an abomination, that God really does love us. It’s the same conversation, but just from opposite sides of the coin.

Interviewer: How do you feel when they do question you about your faith and sexuality?

Respondent: It depends on the approach of the individual. Some people are genuinely wanting to enquire, to learn, they may be struggling with the concept because of what they’ve been told, but then they may know some gay people and think, “Well, hang on, the way these people are doesn’t match up with what my church has been telling me about them.” So some people are just genuinely want to enquire and learn, and they’re really productive conversations. Some people are very aggressive, and do not want to learn,

do not want to listen, do not want to even start to think about accommodating any alternative point of view. They are right, they know the truth, and everybody else is wrong and needs to change their ways. And within the LGBTQI community, there are those who have been so hurt by religion that, again, are very aggressive and don't want a conversation, and those who are just open to it, and those who genuinely are searching and want to find a way that they can come back to their spirituality, to a relationship with God. So it really does depend on how the other person is approaching it as to how I feel about it. Sometimes I feel incredibly honoured that God is choosing me to be a catalyst to help people along that journey from either side of the spectrum. You know, very honoured and very humbled that I can be used in that way. Sometimes I feel abused, you know, when people are being very aggressive, it can feel very abusing. But there is still, underneath that, still that sense of honour and humility in the fact that whilst these people are sharing their anger at me, again, they're not doing it to somebody else who perhaps isn't so capable of taking it. And who knows, maybe behind them sharing that anger at me, they may have a new break themselves into what they are doing. And I do believe that the angriest people are those who are struggling the hardest, and this is why their anger comes across, why they become cross in that way. And so it is those people who need somebody to be available to hear them and to offer them grace and opportunities to engage with it, and perhaps even more so than those who are struggling to find an answer, because those are the people who don't even know that they're struggling, you know, they're hanging on so tightly to their belief. And again, both sides of the coin, whether it's an LGBTQI person who's hanging on that all religion is bad, and abusive and terrible and there's no way you should be Christian, or whether it's a Christian who's saying all homosexuality is bad and there's no way you can be homosexual, whichever side, I think they are the people who need love and grace more than anyone.

[01:06:05]

Interviewer: Could you tell me about how you became involved in representing and campaigning for LGBTQ issues?

Respondent: Yeah, well, I've covered that partly, I guess, in talking about how I came to work for LGCM, but I often do reflect on this, because I would never have said that I was a campaigner, you know, before I became involved with LGCM. Having said that though, when I look back, I know I've always had a strong sense of justice, and not been afraid to stand up for what I believe, and would never sit back and watch somebody else be discriminated against or abused. Right back to, you know, when I don't think I was even 13, I remember being a teenager and I remember a conversation at dinner; my family really always came together for Sunday lunch, no matter what, we all sat down at the dinner table and had Sunday lunch together, and so I must have only been 11 or 12 because my father was at the table as well. And so, you know, we were sitting at Sunday lunch as normal. Now, my grandmother was a strange commodity, and she was such a wonderful woman in so many ways, and a very strong woman, you know, been through some horrendous things and yet still survived. And she had fostered children, as I say, when we lived in London, and the children she fostered when we were living in London were all children who had been...who had come over, I think, from Jamaica, because around that time there was a lot of people were being brought in from Jamaica to fill up the jobs following on from the Second World War and we didn't have enough people to do the work that needed to be done. And so, you know, she was fostering Jamaican children and African children, no problem whatsoever, and yet my grandmother was incredibly racist, incredibly racist. And I don't know when the point changed, I don't know at what age a child had to get to before they suddenly became one of these people that my grandmother didn't accept, because she absolutely accepted all children, no matter what the colour of their skin. So it was a very strange thing with my grandmother. But I know one of the reasons that she moved from Middlesex was because of the number of Indian families that were moving into the area,

and she found that, you know, difficult to handle. So you know, very different generation, but I never quite understood this.

But I do remember that, as I say, we were at Sunday dinner and my grandmother started on at me, and I remember it as if she's standing here now saying this to me, and she says, "And don't you ever think that you're going to bring a black man home here." And as I say, I was not a particular confident young person, but I remember that I stood up at this table and I said very clearly, "If I choose to go out with or marry a black man, then I will and there is absolutely nothing you can do about it." And with that, I picked up my dinner plate and I walked out of the room as fast as I could because I knew that there was likely to be a whooping coming my way. I was out of there! But even then, even with my family, I could not sit back and accept a racist comment like that. And the ridiculous thing is that actually, later on, in my late teens, I did have a number of boyfriends who were black and took them home and my family were absolutely fine with them. As I say, it was a very strange thing that was going on, but...

And then of course, I was very heavily involved in campaigning for or fighting for rights for families with disabled kids, and things along that area, and I did work for people who were deaf, so I'd always, you know, stood up for what I believed was right, and as I say, as I said earlier, you know, I defended God, not that God needs defending, in conversation. I couldn't sit back and just let that sort of thing pass. So there's always been that element in me that felt the need to stand up for justice. But I would never have said that, you know, I'm somebody who would be on the frontline of a picket or campaigning around anything. And so when I suddenly found myself in this job at LGCM, I had to really, you know, really look at my skills and think, "Gosh, God, what are you asking of me, what have you called me to do here?" But it wasn't that difficult, because there is that passion for justice deep within. As soon as I saw anything that was happening, I couldn't help but speak out about it. You know, it has to be done. I didn't wake up one morning and think, "Oh, I'm going to be a professional lesbian and a professional Christian and I'm going to go out there and campaign," that isn't how it happened, it was just, you know, this was clearly where God wants me to be, and I just trust that God will always give me the words to say, will always give me the courage to stand up for what I believe in and for what I feel God is calling me to do, because on my own, I couldn't do it.

[01:12:31]

I was speaking recently at conference called *Taking a Chance on God*, where I was very honest and said, you know, "I'm not a public person, I'm actually quite a shy, retiring wallflower," and most people would never actually believe that of me because all they ever see is this public persona, this person who's up there preaching, up there talking, on the television, on the radio, doing all of these things. But I wanted the chaplaincy job, I wanted to sit in the background quietly where nobody knew me and work with people on a one to one basis. God saw something else. And so it's up to God to make sure that I can do the things that God wants me to do, because I can't do them off my own bat, I don't have that confidence, I don't have that elocution. Yes, I have the passion deep in my soul, and that's what God believes is to help me to do the things that need to be done. But sometimes it's very tiring.

Interviewer: How has your work impacted on you and others?

Respondent: It's very interesting, I don't know if I've ever actually thought about how it impacts, because you get so caught up with it, just doing what needs to be done, going from, you know, "Ah, this has got to be done, that's got to be done," and getting on with it, and collapsing in a heap at the end of the day. But how has it impacted? Well, I mean, clearly it's impacted on my partner because she has become part of some of the campaigning, obviously the campaigning around equal marriage, you know, she's been



on television with me and attended conferences and stuff. So this has clearly had an impact on her that certainly wasn't what she ever thought she would be involved in. And it does impact on my relationships, in that this job is very time consuming, you know, it's certainly not 9-5. It's not even as if I can say, "Well, I might be working 37 hours a week," or whatever, it's 24/7, you know, a news story can break at any point in time and I will be getting call after call after call, you know, and obviously if it breaks around the world in a different time zone, you know, I can be getting those calls at any time of day or night, and having to then respond to that.

So you know, there is that impact that I can never guarantee that we will have time away, and there have been many times I've been on holiday and I've been doing press calls, you know, media calls, sitting at the side of the pool or whatever with my partner, because I can never say I'm off. And that's the same also as a pastor, you're never really off, you never really have time when you're not working, because God's never off and if you're being called to do God's work then, you know. So it does have an impact, it has an impact, it's had an impact on my friends, I don't get to see them perhaps as often as I'd like or as often as they'd like, it has an impact in that being such a professional person, it's very rare I can go anywhere without somebody recognising me or knowing who I am, you know, there's very few places. Even the other week, I went to the cinema and I was standing in the queue to buy the tickets and the person behind me said, "Didn't I see you on television last week?" and you think, "I just want to watch a film, I don't want to be somebody who you saw on television." So it does have an impact that I have to be thinking all the time, you know, I can't just throw on a dirty old pair of joggers and pop round to the corner shop, because I don't know who I'm going to bump into, and you know, all the time when you're thinking about, "How are people perceiving me? How am I coming across? Am I going to be doing anything or saying anything that's going to have a negative impact on what it is that I'm trying to achieve?" And it's the same within any of, you know, not just obviously my private relationship, my relationship with my partner, but also on my friends' relationships and things, you know, there's always a sort of how I am in a relationship will be seen and commented on, whether it's because of me as a pastor or because of me as the Chief Exec of LGCM, or because I'm part of this campaign or that campaign. All of these things do have an impact, and a serious one on relationships. You know, my mum would like to see me more, her health is failing, things aren't good there, but they're an hour and a half/two hours' drive away, so I can't just pop in, so it's a case of when do I have at least five hours free to be able to take the trip down there so I can at least spend an hour or so with her before having to drive back. So you know, doing this type of work does have an impact on your relationships and on every other aspect of your life.

[01:18:33]

Interviewer: You've worked with disabled kids and deaf people, can you tell me why you decided to do that kind of work?

Respondent: Yeah, when I was a teenager, the line of work that I wanted to go into was speech therapy, and that's what I planned to do at university. I'm not quite sure why speech therapy was the thing for me. It might have been partly because I have had some issues with my own hearing as a young child, and obviously that affects speech, and I had quite a pronounced lisp when I was younger, which isn't quite so bad now. So I think perhaps these were the sorts of things that made me think that speech therapy would be a good profession to go into. But certainly I saw myself in some sort of caring profession, I guess. Maybe it was partly to do with the fact that my family had fostered from when I was 12 years old, or 13 years old, and therefore the focus for my family was on caring in some way. And so I guess that sort of led me along that route, and then as I say, when I left college after doing my A Levels, I really had to move out of the home, so if I wasn't moving away to uni, I had to move away somewhere, and so I was looking for a residential post. I got one as the assistant matron at a preparatory school, so again, I

was caring for children, which was something which was second nature to me because I'd been caring for children since I was 12, and obviously all my experience in Sunday school, youth groups etc., all came in useful there as well. But it wasn't satisfying enough and then, as I say, so I left there and I got the job at the Royal School for Deaf Children. And I guess that really started me off along that field because I started doing some studying around residential social work, learnt to sign, got more involved in that sort of thing. Because all the fostering that my family had done had been with children with learning disabilities, it also, I had been involved with Mencap and, so again, my next step thing was to be working with the Thanet Mencap in running the day centre. So it was just sort of a natural progression, I guess, to be working within that sort of social work/care field, but I'd always been a very good organiser/manager, so again, it was quite natural for me to move into the management side of this type of work as well as the more hands on.

And then I worked on a community health information project. I did have some time out, because I think I got to the point where there was a bit of a burnout, because when you're giving all your time, this is something which can happen if you don't take care. And so I actually left the care profession and went into financial planning, and was a financial planning advisor for years, again, running a branch of a financial planning company and did that for eight years before then actually moving back into management of domiciliary care, I also managed a home for the elderly, and continued on with my psychological training before going into becoming a forensic psychologist. And you know, after having left forensic psychology, going into theology, it seemed to be quite a natural thing to go back into the management of the care side and disability, because this had been the main field that I had knowledge of and that fitted in with working as a pastor part time as well. So you know, I guess it's been sort of quite a natural progression, but it has brought out what was, I guess, inherently in me was this need to pastor, this need to care, this need to protect, which I think are all things that God has implanted in me as part of my calling to God's ministry.

Interviewer: Apart from working with LGCM, and working with disabled kids and deaf kids, is there any other work you've undertaken, and why?

Respondent: Well, as I said, the financial planning was the main thing, eight years in that, and then there's also as a forensic psychologist. All of these things, I think, have been really useful because obviously working in financial planning meant that I then studied that, and pension provision, insurances, learnt how to read spreadsheets and accounts and everything, because they did a lot of corporate financial planning, which again has then been very, very helpful in the work that I've done since then, because the management roles that I've taken on have required me to be involved in fundraising, in budgeting. So when I look back, everything that I've done has been another step along the route to give me the knowledge, understanding and expertise that I need to be using in my work today. So it all falls into place very nicely.

[01:24:32]

Interviewer: What's your view on changes that have taken place in the church and society over the last 40 years?

Respondent: Oh, there's been some huge, huge changes. I mean, you know, during that time, well, just prior to that time of course, it was still illegal for men to be homosexual. Obviously there's been no legal restraints put upon women, but it was for men. So we had gone from a time where people were completely closeted, to a time when people can now be completely open if they so wish, in a very short period of time. And I think we sometimes forget how short a period of time that really is, for people to be able to work through and change their understanding and their perspective. You know, our life expectancy nowadays is around 80 years, so 40 years isn't even a lifetime. And yet

we've had these major, major changes going on. You know, the reality is that LGBT people have been sitting in church pews forever, but either it was ignored and not spoken about or it was unknown, you know, two women would go along and they would either be seen as sisters, or as friends, and nothing would be said, you know. Two men, it would have been more difficult, you know, they may have got away with being considered brothers, but it would have been far more difficult for men. And obviously men going into the clergy, this was often, I mean, I'm not saying they weren't called to that, but this was often a safer option for them because then they didn't have to face all the questions about, "Well why aren't you married and having a family?" you know, they could use their calling to the ministry as their reason, even if it wasn't within the Catholic church, and so they were allowed to get married. They could use that calling as, "Well, you know, I've not had any time, I've been totally devoted to my work." And so this was opportunities for people to hide in some respects. But the church has come a long way, but it's still got a long, long way to go. And I guess one of the saddest things is that initially the church was at the forefront of changing the law, offering pastoral care to the LGBT community, you know, they were part of the Wolfenden Report, in saying that homosexuality should be decriminalised etc. And the sad thing is that now, the church is lagging so behind society, it hasn't been able to keep up with the pace of the changes that have taken place, and so we now have a lot more discrimination within church than we have in society, whereas, as I say, it used to be the other way around.

I mean, you know, the issues that people are facing have also changed throughout that period of time. Whereas, you know, not fearing going to jail or losing your job or your home if people found out you were gay has now moved to, you know, "Can I get married in my church?" you know. So whilst these are all still equality issues, you know, some people would probably rightly say they're not quite such an issue of life and death as they used to be, and that's really positive. But it does mean though that in some respects, it's become harder for LGBT people to have a faith and hold onto their faith now than it was when they were having to be in the closet. You actually could find a safe space in the church as a gay person, whereas you couldn't find it in society, whereas now it's the other way around. You know, you can be totally open and out in society but have to go back into the closet when you go into the church and the church isn't a safe place. And this is why we've seen a lot of LGBT people leave the church and reject faith because of this. And also why we have seen different denominations and churches spring up, you know, I mean, Metropolitan Community Church came into existence in 1968, and, you know, less than 50 years ago, and this is because of the fact that LGBT people were being thrown out of churches and especially ministers within the church if they were discovered to be gay, they would be thrown out of the churches, not allowed to perform ministries, not allowed to do anything. You had to remain the closet to remain the church. And so it became clear back in the late 60s that there was a need for a safe place for people who were LGBT to be able to come together and to worship God and to be able to celebrate their faith and promote their faith within the LGBT community. And it's quite sad really that that had to happen, and that is still the case, you know, I believe in a God of love, a God that opened his arms on the cross to embrace everyone, the whole world, and that includes the LGBT community. And therefore, to have churches that are saying, "No, you're not welcome," to me goes completely against the gospel teaching and against a God of love. So there's some sadness for me that, you know, there has to be a Metropolitan Community Church, even though I'm a minister within that denomination.

And even with all the changes that have gone on within churches, there is still a desperate need for Metropolitan Community Churches. And for a couple of different reasons, one is that whilst there are more churches now through our welcome and accepting of LGBT people, there's very few denominations where you can say every church within that denomination will be accepting. And therefore, for somebody who is struggling to reconcile their faith and their sexuality, they're not going to want to take the risk of going along to a church that may or may not accept them, and whilst they

might accept them, how welcoming will they be, and will they be accepting enough to give them the space to work through their reconciliation or to be all that God is calling them to be within that community? Because there are churches that will accept gay people but they limit what they can do within that church, you know, they won't be allowed to run the youth group or read or celebrate communion or whatever the case may be. So for some people, knowing that they can come to a church where they are guaranteed to be able to be acceptable and to be able to bring all of themselves into that church is really important. And we do see a lot of people come through our doors that once they've achieved that, may well actually go back to the denomination that they were brought up in, or that they were in before, once they've actually been able to get themselves to that point of having that confidence and being able to do that.

[01:33:09]

So there is still the need for that. There's also, I believe, a huge need for MCC for asylum seekers, because what we're finding is that a lot of people who are seeking asylum, especially from the African and Eastern European countries, often they have had issues with their sexuality and the laws in their country because of the religious right. It has been religious people claiming authority of God's word to actually bring in these laws that will criminalise LGBT people. And therefore, taking the chance of entering a church when you've come from a country where the church has been at the forefront of discriminating against you is an incredibly risky business, and so again, to be able to go into a church that you know is safe and to start that healing journey when you have had aspects of yourself ripped apart within your own country, I think is very important. And the third reason that I think that there is still a need for MCCs is for people who don't fit into the gender binary. Whilst some churches are now accepting of lesbian, gay and bisexual people, I think churches are still struggling very hard with people who identify as trans, who are gender varying and genderfluid in some way. And therefore for people, especially those who aren't even looking to transition from one gender to another, who aren't fitting into a gender binary, but who are exploring gender in a different way, and wanting to present in a different way, they are finding it very hard to find a church that will, again, accept them and embrace them and allow them to be all of who they are. So you know, I think we've still got a long way to go, with opportunities where that aspect is concerned.

So the changes over the years have been remarkable, and across all the denominations, I mean, all the denominations are in different places, and we can't really just talk about the church, because the church isn't an institution or a body with just a thought or a way of being. It's an incredibly varied, you know, often people talk about the church meaning the Anglican church in this country, you know, the Church of England, because that's the principal church in this country. But even within the Church of England, there's huge diversity. You know, we hear that the Church of England is opposed to same sex marriage, is opposed to this, that and the other, but whilst some of perhaps the politics and some of the doctrines that the Church of England are hanging onto might seem that way, individuals within the Church of England don't necessarily think or believe in that way, and I feel that also includes clergy and bishops. So there's a lot of work to be done within the Church of England in order for them to hear the views of all the people that make up that church and they need to start rethinking some of their doctrines. With the Catholic Church, you know, we've had encyclicals come out from the Pope saying that we're morally disordered, but we now have a pope who has recently said that it's not for them to judge and a person's sexuality is a private thing and would not have an issue with a priest who was homosexual, as long as they, you know, fulfilled their vows of celibacy etc., but would not judge, you know, they would not be kicked out just for the fact that they had a homosexual orientation.

So we do see movement in all of the denominations. The Methodist Church are currently having a consultation process around whether their building should be used for same

sex marriage, so on the other hand, they are still holding on that same sex marriage is not acceptable, but they're still looking at whether they should be looking at their buildings for these ceremonies. So there's a little bit of contradiction, I think, going on in a lot of the churches at the moment because they are trying to embrace a pastoral way of being, even when they're not ready to let go perhaps of some of their older teachings and older doctrines, because what they are faced with, the reality of being in a relationship with people who identify as LGBT, and the doctrines that they're trying to hang onto aren't congruent at this point in time, and I think we're in a very interesting time in our lives within the churches, whilst they actually try to work these things through and find out how they can actually bring them together into something that's more coherent. You know, it's the same within the Baptist church and people within these denominations who are speaking out and who are trying to help the churches to move forward and be more accepting and welcoming and open.

[01:38:55]

The United Reform Church tends to leave things to the individual a lot more, and so again, we see great diversity. I know an area in London where there were two churches only three miles apart and if an LGBT person was to go along to the one church, the minister there would very lovingly and politely say, "We think you would feel more comfortable if you went down the road," because that particular church isn't welcoming of LGBT people, and yet its sister church three miles down the road absolutely is. So you know, it's a journey, it's very much a journey, and we've seen similar things, similar journeys over other issues. You know, the church went through a very similar journey with regards to slavery, we've seen the church going on this journey and is still on this journey with regards to gender, you know, the Church of England is still struggling about, having said that women can be ordained, now of course they can only be ordained to a certain level and whether or not we should let them be ordained to become bishops as well, and yet other churches have had women bishops for years and years. And obviously the Catholic Church won't even allow women to be priests.

So you know, there is still that journey still going on, and I think the LGBT journey will go on for a long, long time to come, as we start to understand more about God's love and open ourselves to actually start to become as big as God, rather than us making God smaller all the time. And I think that's what a lot of the problem is, we make God in our image, rather than us being made in God's image, and when we do that, we make God very small, very small indeed, and then ever now and again God breaks out of that little box that we put God in, and we see a breakthrough and people move further down on the journey, and then we start cramming God back into this tiny little box, and then God breaks out again and we get another revelation. And you know, I think we see this going all the time and it's just important that we all carry on on that journey, that we don't stop, you know, we don't...we don't see clearly now, you know, Paul tells us in Corinthians that we see dimly now, and only when Christ comes again will all be made clear. So none of us have the answers, and we have to learn to walk this path together to find those answers, and fighting doesn't do it, you know, we're called to be in relationship, we're called to love, and so those organisations that have set themselves up to fight against homosexuality need to find ways to be at the table with those organisations who have been set up to fight against discrimination on the grounds of homosexuality, to look at, you know, Christ gave us this law of love, how can we work together under this law, even if we believe different things, how can we work together to promote love and find a way forward that we can all continue on this journey. And so yeah, I think there's just so much more to be done, but within all denominations.

Even within the MCC, you know, even though this is a denomination that is supposed to be truly inclusive, and you know, has its main ministry within the LGBT community, the B and the T and the Q and the I are still far too silent, you know, we're still not fully



inclusive, we still struggle, you know, some gay men struggle with lesbians in the church, gays and lesbians struggle with trans people in the church. Most of us probably have no understanding of what intersex is, and what do we mean by queer? You know, if we truly are going to be inclusive, how do we embrace all of those things? And then, you know, move away from LGBTQI, you know, LGBTQI aren't LGBTQI just that, independently, LGBTQI people have mental health issues, are deaf, are of different ethnicities, different abilities and lack of abilities, and how do we embrace all of that and include all of that? Because it's only when that all comes together that we truly are the church, because the church is just the people of God, and it's only when we bring all of that together that we have the people of God.

[01:43:54]

Interviewer: Could you tell me about your hopes for the future regarding LGBTQ acceptance by society and by the church? I know you've mentioned a few, but if you've got any other hopes you can...?

Respondent: Well, my dream is that all denominations will accept all people regardless. That means that the Catholic church will have a female, disabled, black woman with three children out of wedlock as pope. Maybe I'm pushing it a bit there, but it's... You know, it's about... Jesus didn't turn anyone away, Jesus looked at the heart of each person, he looked at the heart of the Samaritan woman at the well, you know, he looked at the heart of Peter after Peter had denied him three times, he looked at the heart of everybody, he looked at the heart of Paul, who was going round killing his followers, and I just want the churches to start looking at the heart. Stop judging people by the, you know those outer things, by those labels, you know, Jesus could have judged the Samaritan woman by her label of Samaritan, by her label of woman, by her label of the fact that she'd had more than one husband, but he didn't. He related to her according to where her heart was and could see that she clearly wanted to drink of that living water. And I would just like there to be a church that looks at the heart of people, and says, "Come and drink of the living water," and you don't have to leave behind the fact that you're a Samaritan or the fact that you're a woman or the fact that you've been married more than once, because you're welcome as you are. And that would be my hope, and regardless of denomination, you know, that with denomination, it should just be there because people like to worship in different ways, that's the only reason there should be different denominations, because some people like all the bells and smells and the pomp and the ceremony, some people want the freedom where there is no structure in the service, people just do what they want, and there's something in between all of that. So the denomination should be there because it offers people different ways of expressing their love to God. But there should be no difference in the denomination about the fact that all are welcome because God sees the heart.

Interviewer: Would it be okay to arrange to take your photograph to use on the website and exhibition?

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: Thank you so much for your time. We've come to the end of our interview. And I do appreciate all you've done today.

Respondent: You're more than welcome, it's been great.

Interviewer: Okay. Are there any things I should have asked you about that I didn't?

Respondent: The only thing I think I can think of might be about, a little bit more about some of the actual campaigns that I've been involved in for LGCM that might be of interest, that have obviously impacted on the church and on people's faith. I guess the biggest one of

those is around equal marriage, the current one because marriage, unlike civil partnerships, to such an extent, does have a huge impact on the church, especially as we manage to get into law the ability to celebrate marriages within churches, and by ministers, if they are okayed to do this. And I do think that that's been a huge thing for the churches and has been a catalyst in getting the churches to really look at this again. And at the same time, it's also had a negative impact on some people within some churches, because while some people have been accepting of civil partnerships and have thought that it was right that lesbian and gay relationships should be recognised and protected by society etc., for some people of faith, they haven't really felt that it's right to call it a marriage because they completely believe that marriage is just between a man and a woman, and that, you know, this is how God ordained it, and therefore they struggle with the concept of same sex couples getting married, even though they didn't have any problem with same sex couples having civil partnerships and being fully protected. So I think, you know, this has been a big thing within churches and within people within the pews, and also, some people who would accept a civil marriage, who aren't tied up on marriage being a man and a woman, do also struggle though with marriage taking place within a church.

So all of these sorts of issues have come up with the idea of equal marriage. But one of the things that I find most distressing about the whole thing again is how the government has weighed in very strongly on the side of fundamentalist Christians, rather than on the side of liberal Christians who are in favour of it. Because whilst they have made it possible for denominations and clergy to perform marriages and to register their buildings to perform religious marriages, there were so many obstacles in the way for that to happen. For example, if a clergyperson from the Church of England wanted to perform a religious marriage and if their congregation wanted to register their building, they wouldn't be able to, because the authority has to come from the governing body, and the governing body obviously of the Church of England have said that, "No, this is not acceptable." But in a denomination that does want to do it, so for example, let's use again MCC, MCC said, "Yes, we want to do it," we register our buildings, our clergy can do it. If one of our clergy was to say, "No, I don't agree with it, I don't want to perform marriage," they would have the right not to do it. So there's lots of situations like that where there's the ability to not to perform marriage, and not to participate, not to register buildings if you don't want to, but if you're within an organisation that's opposed but you want to do it, you don't have the same freedom. And I think that's not acceptable.

[01:51:35]

And it's the same with, like, registering of buildings, if a church that owns the building wants to register their building, but they rent a room out or they rent the church out to another faith group once a month for at least an hour, that other faith group, even though they're just a tenant, has the right to stop that registration. And this sort of thing I feel is really not acceptable, but there will be things that hopefully we can do something about as time moves on. But the, you know, the campaign around equal marriage I think has been a really important one, because again, it puts LGBT relationships on the same footing as heterosexual relationships, and I think this is an important factor in making homosexuality completely acceptable within society. And also whilst, you know, I mean, there's horrendous things going on in other countries and a lot of people may say, "Well, why are you expending time and energy into getting marriage when you have civil partnerships, when there's all these other things going on in other countries?" But the fact is that all the time, there is anything in this country where there is saying that there is a difference in a negative way between, you know, the relationships between people, the same gender and opposite gender, it actually gives credence and justification to other countries to continue to discriminate against homosexuality.

So if this country is going to be a beacon and say that there is complete equality, there is complete acceptance, you know, we do not view people who are homosexual in any different way or treat them in any different way to anybody else, only when we are doing that here can we really push pressure on other countries to do the same and can really be a beacon. So I do think it's important that we continue to deal with those issues. Not to mention the fact that even with all the equality laws in this country, people are still being murdered because of their gender identity or their sexual orientation and people are still being sacked from jobs or not getting promotions because they're still finding it hard to find safe accommodation. So even with all the laws, there are these things that are still going on, you know, people still being kicked out of churches, still being excluded from being able to receive communion in their church, all these things are still happening and so we do still need to continue on with all of that side of the campaign.

The other things of course is the campaigning around all of the anti-homosexuality laws that are springing up, as I say, across Africa and Eastern Europe, and this is really important work that we're doing. I mean, LGCM has done some fantastic campaigning over the years under Richard Kirker, and I really don't believe that we would be in the position that we're in today if it hadn't have been for all of his hard work throughout those years, and I think we have an awful lot to be thankful to him for. It's made my job a lot easier because the issues aren't quite as huge as they used to be. So yeah, I'd say that that's the only thing, is to talk a little bit more about those sorts of campaigns that we've been involved in.

Interviewer: Okay, thank you again, Sharon, and may God bless you.

[End of Transcript]