

[0:00:00]

Interviewer: Today's date is Wednesday the 13th of January 2016. The interviewer is Carol Shepherd; can you tell me your name please?

Respondent: Christopher Wardale.

Interviewer: And could you spell your name please?

Respondent: Wardale.

Interviewer: Thank you. Can I ask for your date and place of birth?

Respondent: 11/07/46; Stokesley in North Yorkshire.

Interviewer: Today's interview is being recorded at -

Respondent: 24 Beach Croft, Kenton Road, Newcastle upon Tyne.

Interviewer: For the Christian Voices Coming out project. Okay, Chris, I wonder if you could begin by telling me about where you grew up, any siblings, what your parents did, and that kind of thing.

Respondent: A single child; brought up on the North Yorkshire coast in a tiny Victorian seaside resort called Salton by the Sea. Father run a bus company and mother was a Teacher. I did a sort of fairly ordinary schooling in my young years. Much to everybody's surprise I passed the 11+ and went to the grammar school which for the next seven years I absolutely loathed, then went off to university and got a degree in Fine Arts and went and restored medieval stained glass in York minster. I finally realised that the vocation that had been lurking around for a lot of years... when I got to the age of 30 thinking if I wasn't going to do it it was going to be too late, went off and tested it and much to my surprise, and I think God's, ended up with a dog collar on.

Interviewer: Is that the Anglican Church?

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: Okay. Did you have brothers and sisters?

Respondent: No.

Interviewer: So, you're an only child?

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: Okay. Would you say you had a living faith when you were a child?

Respondent: I had a church faith. Church became the place I went to. I was never very good at things like youth clubs and cubs, scouts, things like that; they weren't really for me at all. But church was great because there were things to do and I started serving at a remarkably early age and got involved with all the myriad bits of things that there are to do in a church vestry. And that became as well my little club. That was the place I went to and nobody seemed to mind very much. Nobody complained. So, it was alright. And I spent quite a lot of time there and got to know people very well. And I was always

better with adults really than I was with other children. I seemed to relate much better to them.

Interviewer: Yeah. Do you think this was because you're an only child?

[0:03:29]

Respondent: I can't really answer that question because I never knew what it was like to have brothers and sisters. I may have been a very different person or there again I may not have been, so I don't know really.

Interviewer: Okay. When did you first become aware of your sexuality and a sexual identity?

Respondent: It was somewhere during school, secondary school. As everybody else got terribly interested in girls I got terribly interested in drama.

Interviewer: Drama the subject, not being a diva?

Respondent: Drama the subject. Yes, not being a diva. Oh, I could be a diva. And then it began to dawn on me and I think as always happens with adolescence you think you're the only one in the world and nobody else would - no, they'd all have a fit and faint and all the rest of it. So, I don't think I ever did anything about my sexuality apart from having discovered what a hand could do and what pleasure it could give. I never really did anything about sexuality until I went to university and came here to Newcastle, which was only 60 miles away but was an entirely different place. It was a foreign land. You crossed three major rivers and you came to a place where they spoke a foreign language, and they did things differently. And suddenly you could be almost who you wanted to be.

Interviewer: Did it have that big city feel then?

Respondent: Yes, it did. Well, for me it was a big city although it was actually a very small city. But it had the feeling of a big city. There were three theatres and umpteen cinemas and there was music and there were things to do, and there were pubs galore, and there was a gay pub - in fact there were two in those days - which were all a bit secretive, and in some ways that made it even more interesting. Whereas now it's dead boring because there are so many gay pubs and nobody gives a toss really, and it's mostly full of straight people because certainly straight women feel much safer in a gay pub than if they go anywhere else, especially in Newcastle on a Friday night.

Interviewer: What did you do at university?

Respondent: Fine Art.

Interviewer: Oh yes, the stained glass; yeah, that's right. And did you get involved in Gay Society and things like that?

Respondent: Oh, there wasn't a Gay Society. Oh, nothing like a Gay Society no. I mean the one place you couldn't be gay was the university because either the medics or the agriculture students would beat you up. You could be gay in town, that was alright; but within that particular group... But this was the middle sixties and although we were all wearing flowers in our hair - in the day when we had hair - and all the rest of it being gay was still thought of something very suspicious and all the rest of it.

Interviewer: And it was still illegal.

Respondent: And still very illegal.

Interviewer: Yeah. So, what were you involved in at university as well as your Fine Art degree?

Respondent: Very little; very little in fact. I didn't do politics; I took one look at the Christian Union and realised that they thought the Bible was literally true and there really had been two people called Adam and Eve, and realised that really wasn't for me. I began to discover that there were lots of other ways of doing Christianity than just the one I'd been brought up with at home, which had been very middle of the church. But in the city centre itself you could go from extreme Protestant Church of England to extreme high-church Church of England and this became fascinating, this became absolutely fascinating as I began to find and made friends in the churches. I had made friends at university but they were people I worked with rather than people I went out drinking with. I did a lot of work in the Theatre Royal moving scenery which filled in a couple of years and then started working at the old Repartee Company. I purely by chance met the guy who was the then Designer and he was looking for somebody to paint scenery so I went and painted scenery. So, weekends were taken up kind of working really. So, it wasn't a terribly social university life. It was a very busy university life but not a particularly social one.

[0:08:36]

Interviewer: So, relationships were they happening?

Respondent: They were friendships and there were anonymous sexual connections until my final year when I did meet someone purely by chance. I spilled a pot of paint over him when we were painting the set for Murder in the Cathedral, which seems ironic in a way. And he was very cross. I was very apologetic and we went and had a drink afterwards and that turned into a... although it was only, as it were, a one to one for the last six months before I moved and went off to work in York we were always friends, and indeed I did his funeral a couple of years ago. We never stopped being friends.

Interviewer: So, you discovered your calling and you went off and got a dog collar as you put it.

Respondent: I went off a got a dog collar.

Interviewer: During that time did you reconcile your faith with your sexuality and publicly or privately or...?

Respondent: By the late sixties things had relaxed amazingly. There was a very large gay community in York where I was living and it wasn't just all squeezed into one particular pub. I got involved in a lot of theatre companies and there again I was doing scenery for them and I was doing acting for them, so life became much more social. And I made a lot of long-standing friends both sexual and otherwise in those eight years. And there was much more a feeling - yes, you had to watch your back; you didn't exactly walk down the street burning your Calvin Klein's - not that they'd been invented in those days - but there was much more a feeling of coming out and frankly nobody cared anymore.

Interviewer: Okay.

Respondent: And of course it had bothered me, all of this I suppose, getting ordained and, "Oh God, the church (inaudible 0:11:03)" and when would the question come, "Was I gay?" because I was; I was 30, I wasn't married; it was quite clear I wasn't married and had never had particularly close women friends, although I had a lot of women friends. And nobody ever asked the question, ever.

Interviewer: Okay.

Respondent: Every time I went for an interview with anyone I thought, "This is going to be the one; this is going to be it. Am I going to be honest or am I not going to be honest?" I had come out at work and most people I got friendly with didn't care whether I'd formally come out, and it didn't bother anyone. But I went through the whole process of selection even at the formal interview, the two or three days you go away on what in those days was called an Abum, and nobody asked the question. There was a lady from the Mother's Union who sort of said, "I realise you are single, Mister Wardale; you'll wonder why there's an ironing board here, show me how you iron a shirt", so I did and she said, "That's a very interesting way of ironing a shirt; who taught you how to iron?" I said, "My mother", and she said, "How did you do the collar?" So, I showed her how to do the collar and she said, "That's a much better way than I do it. Show me how to do it", so I taught her how to re-iron. And we talked about drama; she wanted a play for the Mother's Union for Christmas so I told her to do one. And then there was an interview; we talked all about cricket, about which I knew absolutely nothing, and the Evangelical asked me, "You are walking along the street and someone has a car accident; what would you tell the person who has been run over, what would you tell them about the cross?" to which I said, "I wouldn't actually tell them anything; I would do it", and them - if they were serious and it was quite clear they were dying - "Did they want to make their confession and would they like a blessing?" I mean tell them about the cross; I'd make the sign of the cross. This had never dawned on them apparently.

[0:13:29]

Interviewer: Good grief; this is fascinating.

Respondent: So, I went away thinking, "I've ballsed that up; I really have ballsed that up", because nobody really talked about God, apart from the (inaudible 0:13:42). And much to my surprise the thing was I'd been accepted.

Interviewer: I mean do you think they knew but they just deliberately didn't ask you because then they weren't forcing you into a decision?

Respondent: Yes, they knew but those were the days - it was rather like Bill Clinton's thing about the army: everybody knows but nobody says anything. And it was very much the gentlemanly way that the Church of England decided on the people they felt they wanted.

Interviewer: So, do you think they would've treated another gay ordained that they maybe thought weren't as gifted as you are differently?

Respondent: Yes, that would be the excuse. I think it was the excuse because there were other people who were gay and I rang around and they'd been rejected because there were questions about their sexuality.

Interviewer: So, they deliberately didn't ask you because they wanted you.

Respondent: Yeah. And I now know that in retrospect.

Interviewer: Yeah, but at the time -

Respondent: But at the time it all seemed very strange.

Interviewer: Yeah. So, you were accepted and did your initial training; where did you train?

Respondent: I went off to Mirfield; to the Monastery at Mirfield.

Interviewer: Where is that exactly?

Respondent: Outside Huddersfield in West Yorkshire.

Interviewer: Okay.

Respondent: High church; very much the Catholic end of Benedictine monastery, so there was all that sort of discipline of living really as a monk; the college was in the grounds. You lived and worshipped with the Brothers. And of course I was much older than everybody else because everyone else was going still in those days after university at 21 or 22. So, I was getting on for ten years older than anybody else and it was the first year that they'd had more than one or two mature students, as we were called. So, you did the course in two years by essay rather than three years by exams. You did exactly as much work but you did it in two years instead of three. But there were half a dozen of us and we'd run businesses, we'd seen life and all the rest of it. And in many ways we had quite an influence on the place because we asked questions. We kind of laughed at the Ethics Teacher and said, "Have you ever been in a gay pub? Have you actually been in a prison?" because there was someone who had been a Prison Warder. So, we took him here and we took to the gay club in Huddersfield where he seemed to enjoy himself rather more than I thought he was going to, but never mind. And there again we stayed friends for lots and lots of years and he finally became a Bishop and was happily married with children and all the rest of it. But there was never the great worry of having to sort myself out and come to terms with all this thing. I'd done the biblical thing; I'd thought through all of that. But every time I kind of asked God the question, "So, what about this?" the answer had never come down, "No". But there again the answer never came down, "Yes", either. But there was never a turning away or was the whole business of the vocation I felt simply part of my own delusions. And all the way through it seemed to work. And indeed when it came to ordination apart from one little hiccup where I thought I was going to the diocese of York but ended up in the diocese of Durham. It all went alright and the earth didn't move and the cathedral didn't fall down, no hands were placed upon me.

[0:17:57]

Interviewer: No darkness, no black curtains.

Respondent: Not at all. And in that sense it was kind of worryingly ordinary. Yes, there were there the crises and there always are in those things, but it wasn't necessarily about the sexuality.

Interviewer: So, you then started a curacy.

Respondent: A curacy. It was still the days when you had to do six years as a Curate, a three years and a three years, but because I was that bit older I did four years in one place and then went off and got a place of my own, which was just south of the river from here in a place called Beldon Colliery and Pit Village. The pit had closed and I got instituted on the second day of the Miners' strike so you were kind of in the middle of it. They had had 13 years of my predecessor who they loathed and in many ways I could have been a gorilla with two hands behind my back and they would've welcomed me, and it was wonderful to suddenly find yourself in the middle of a community in a real community crisis, and there was no money and there was no food and it kind of makes today's austerity look positively generous. It really was awful; just watch the film of Billy Elliot and it's where people are having Christmas dinner on beans on toast. I knew those people. And they burnt the piano. But the generosity: if you had a tin of beans you shared it with somebody.

Interviewer: I grew up in south wales so when I was a teenager it was on the news in Wales the whole time so I'm quite aware of it. I bet you wished you could've dragged your Ethics Teacher there and said, "Look".

Respondent: Absolutely. I did drag my then Bishop who had been Professor of Theology at Leeds - Michael David Jenkins - who turned out to be absolutely wonderful. He turned out to be the liberal that Margaret Thatcher agreed to because he stood with the Miners at the pit gates. He came and talked to people. He read something in the paper that I'd released, that there was a family, there were three children and one pair of shoes so the children only got to school one day every third day, they took turns. "This is true", I said; "Do you want to come and meet them?" He said, "I'm in the car". (Inaudible 0:20:38). I took some sandwiches around. And he'd never been on a council estate in his life and it just opened his eyes. And by that time I'd met Malcolm and we were relatively discrete but there were other gay men in Beldon Colliery and it was alright because he was so and so's lad. He was a nice lad and he played rugby and he had his whippets and he grew his leeks and all the rest of it, so he was nice. And the only time it really hit me, hit both of us, was having spent eight years there and it was just after the... there had been one or two peculiarities in the general synod in 1988 where it was kind of a serious suggestion that anyone who knew themselves to be gay should resign their orders. And although it didn't pass it was a strongly felt thing. And that was the moment where it kind of really hit me. And having gone through this fairly easy stage of minor crises this was a real major crisis and I spent all night in church. And I really didn't know what to do and I rang David Jenkins up and I said, "Do you want my resignation?" so he laughed and he said, "Don't be so bloody stupid. For goodness sake I sat through all that. Don't be so bloody stupid; grow up". So, I duly did. I then moved to another parish which was next door where I'd served as a curacy in Darlington: a huge great church, a small cathedral; the church was very middle class and very suburban - tree-lined suburbia, which is not really my cup of tea at all. And it was quite clear a lot of people remembered me, but the people then largely in charge hadn't known me. And it was quite clear when I went to meet the PCC that I was not the easy pushover that they'd been used to. So, they dug around to see if they could find any objections; of course: "Gay"; straight in. So, we were outed in the press. And the world went crazy for about a week. And we invented the little tag that we've always kept to: we're middle class, we're middle-aged, and we're as boring as Hell. So, within the days the tabloids gave up and then other bits of the press starting taking us seriously because we'd talked about the gay issue; he was still heavily involved with the LGCM, I'd become attached to LGCM through him. We'd been mentoring other people who were having trouble about their sexuality and their vocations and things like that. We'd started a group for the younger gay clergy who by the late 1990s were feeling particularly threatened after all of the business of the Lambeth Conference of 1998, see big pictures of Richard Kirk and LGCM and the Bishop of Nigeria and all the rest of it. And that really kind of floored both of us because, yes, we'd helped each other people through with it but it had never happened to us before, and that really was quite a surprise.

[0:24:36]

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: But the net result was that I could walk down the street not having to be schizophrenic anymore because everybody knew and Darlington didn't mind. And if Darlington didn't care and were pretty safe... and I could actually walk down the street with my head up high and I no longer had to have half a glance behind me as to who was listening to whatever I was saying. And in the end it was awful when it happened but that kind of outing thing was an amazingly releasing thing and I think in many ways made my Ministry not more honest in a way but much more outward looking.

Interviewer: Did you end up in that church then?

Respondent: Yeah. The people who had organised the coup all left. But there were only 6 of them out of a congregation of 150. And I was told afterwards that they were very grateful to me because they'd been pains in the bum. So, I thought (inaudible 0:25:49) really. So, I then spent 14 years there and became... I mean I was always fond of Richard Kirk although he was really Malcom's friend, but became my friend as well. Richard had this wonderful way of networking; he knew everybody, he knew absolutely everybody. And whenever he had need of you he'd ring you up. And after 1998 the number of Anglican clergy who were prepared to put their head over the parapet got less and less and less; everybody got very frightened again. I mean the banging of the closet door and the rattling of the chains on the inside became extraordinary again just when you thought everything was moving along and coming out. And there were two of us who were prepared to talk to the press, one in East London and me in Darlington so whenever anybody wanted a gay comment it was me or Michael in East London. Michael then got frightened off by Richard Chartres because he was the Priest in charge and Richard Chartres told him quite firmly that if he ever spoke to the press again on the gay issue he would have no job. So, it ended up as being me. So, there were endless articles about this and that and comments and all the rest of it. Then I got a Bishop; when David Jenkins had retired a new Bishop arrived who we discovered had been in court for having sex in a public toilet with a man. He was evangelical, happily married with several children, but he was outed by the News of the World. He had a big clergy meeting in Auckland Castle saying, "Do you want me as your Bishop or not?" and I stood up and said, "On behalf of the gay clergy of this diocese, of which there are not 44 members of us, we welcome you; we all know what you are going through". And the man was so embarrassed because I don't think he'd ever spoken to a gay person; he wasn't gay, he really wasn't gay. He'd come off for having sex. And he was horrified by anyone who was out and wasn't guilty and hadn't sort of publicly repented and all the rest of it. And by that time I had for several years been on the Bishops' Council, the central grouping of the diocese between laity and clergy and the senior staff, and everyone respected what I had to say and Michael Turnbull just didn't understand any of this because I was this strange person who seemed to be like a perfectly ordinary human being, and it got worse. George Carey was still Archbishop, who was homophobic.

Interviewer: Yeah.

[0:29:11]

Respondent: And I got dragged to one side after a Bishops' Council and he said, "I need a pastoral conversation", which normally meant he had a problem with somebody else and, "Would I sort it out?"

Interviewer: Okay.

Respondent: But this one was, "I'm giving you a sabbatical" - sabbaticals were very common in those days - "In public it's a pat on the head, 'Well done, lad; good and faithful servant and you're ready for (inaudible 0:29:35) right age'" and all the rest of it. "Between you and me I'm giving you three months' salary to go and find another job, which will have nothing whatsoever to do with the Church of England because you are an embarrassment to us all. I have tried to do everything I can to get you out of your living and legally I can't, but I really don't want to work with you anymore so you will come back after three months and send me a letter of resignation". "Gee, thanks", I thought. So, I went and had a ball. Everybody else did serious things for sabbaticals; they went and studied, I went and had a ball. I really enjoyed myself. I came back and wrote him a letter that in my sabbatical in my trekking around Cappadocia God and I had reconnected in a very new and real and positive way and I was not resigning. He was

furious. He couldn't do anything about it because this was only a conversation between him and me; nobody else knew about it. He was furious and tried very hard - he tried everything that he could. He wouldn't give me a new job; I wasn't allowed a licence in a new place. And the thing was that if I desired to stay I couldn't move, I was on a black list; and I wasn't, that was an absolute lie. I was stuck where I was and I thought, "Hmm", but Curates kept coming and I kept thinking, "How strange it is I am this person who is not fit to stand in front of people, talk to people, take their weddings, funerals, baptise the children, and all the rest of it but I can train Curates. (Inaudible 0:31:29) they are very vulnerable people and you are trusting me". And I was very good at training Curates I must admit. I enjoyed training Curates. Michael Turnbull retired and then Mister Wright came, Tom Wright, who should never have been a Bishop. As somebody rather cruelly said, "He's not so much Bishop of Durham as the Author in Residence who is mostly in absentia", which was true. He had no interest in the diocese at all and indeed was homophobic - and his wife certainly was. And by that time I didn't care anymore and I just told him what I thought.

Interviewer: What year was this?

Respondent: He came in in 2003 and he really was just awful. And when civil partnerships and we decided we would have ours on the first day, December the 21st 2005, to celebrate our tenth anniversary not in the diocese of Durham but here in Newcastle where the then Bishop had done the, "I wish them well but I don't know anything about it", line.

Interviewer: Okay.

Respondent: We had it done not in a parish church but in a chapel-of-ease, which is kind of called St. Thomas's in the town centre, which although it doesn't have the same sort of connections or responsibilities as a parish church it's a chapel and an Anglican chapel and had belonged to a hospital. And Tom couldn't do anything. We were dragged before him and he sort of said how embarrassed he had been by it and he had been publicly embarrassed about what had been in the press and all the rest of it and threatened to sack me and all the rest of it, and I smiled sweetly and sort of said - it was the line of, "Do you not realise the harm you two will do to my national and international reputation?" to which both of us without looking at each other closed our notebooks and sort of said, "This isn't about us at all is it? It's all about you sulking". And he never spoke to me again. The next year I was going to be 60; I was coming to the end of training one particular Curate and we'd had a very good time, and I thought, "I'm never going to get another one and I shall just hang around for the next five years; I might as well retire now", so I did. I retired at 60.

Interviewer: In 2005.

[0:34:27]

Respondent: We bought this flat - Malcolm bought this flat in the late 1980s so this was home because he was working in Newcastle and commuted up and down. I commuted to Newcastle and he commuted to Durham. So, we had somewhere to go; home was set up. We moved north into the diocese of Newcastle, which a lot of people from Durham had already started doing. The tidal drift became like a tidal wave of people moving north, and they were the gay clergy and the ones who were rather more liberal and all the rest of it so I knew lots of people. And crossing the bridge beside the church-house was like a little place that smelt of fresh air with a Bishop who remembered your name and your partner's name even when you were totally out of context; you would find him in the market: "How is Malcolm? Give him my regards", this was a new world which I had not had since before when David Jenkins had retired. And I have spent the last 10

years... how did I ever find time to run the parish? I mean it's just been great because I have rediscovered all the things that I always believed I had been ordained to do instead of having to sit at a desk managing other people's ministries. So, I actually have - I did have in fact - the ministry of my own and was made very welcome in so doing.

Interviewer: Yeah. And what sorts of things are you doing now for example?

Respondent: Oh, I rush around taking services where there are vacancies and people are sick or on holiday, they want a (overspeaking 0:36:17) preacher.

Interviewer: Yeah, like a kind of -

Respondent: It's like a Locum.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: I've attached myself to a big church in Jesmond where the Vicar has just gone off to be the new Bishop of Grantham so the ones of us who were left our diaries have filled up remarkably, so they've been very busy in church. So, life is very busy.

Interviewer: At least you're doing all the fun bits of it without -

Respondent: So, I'm doing all the fun bits. And I don't have to sit on committees anymore and I don't have to organise anything anymore. I go in, strut my stuff, and they are very nice people as you drink the Anglican coffee, and come home. And it's great and you get paid for it.

Interviewer: Wonderful.

Respondent: You receive nicely; you get paid for it. So, yes, it was quite a shock retiring at 60 but I couldn't have worked with Tom Wright any longer. It wouldn't have been... because I knew what would've happened; I would've simply slid into a depression quite frankly. And it was having Linda, that particular Curate, around because she was very (inaudible 0:37:36) and I thought, "Life is just going to be awful without her; it's all going to be very lonely again so I might as well go and enjoy myself", and so I did and have done. I'm sorry, that's a very long and roundabout story.

Interviewer: No, not at all. How would you describe yourself?

Respondent: Astrologically I'm Cancer so I'm supposed to be sort of solid and dull, unmoving, and I suppose in many ways I am. I'm Yorkshire; I like life eating bran. I'm much more adaptable in my latter age than I think I was for the rest of my life but I'm an outgoing sort of guy, I get on with people, I like people. I like talking to people; I like listening to people.

Interviewer: Yeah. What terminology are you happy with to be described as? Do you like being called a gay man, a queer?

[0:38:57]

Respondent: Oh, all those terms. I think the one and only time I had a standing ovation at the end of a sermon was at LGCM in Newcastle not long after and it was when Stonewall brought out that thing about, "Lots of people are homosexuals, get over it", thing on the buses and it was the anniversary of my ordination, and I preached on, "I was ordained as a gay man because I was called as a gay man", so I ended up with, "I'm a Priest, I'm a poof;

get over it", and they stood up and clapped. That's never happened before and I have to say it's never happened since.

Interviewer: (Inaudible 0:39:46) a red t-shirt with -

Respondent: Well, sort of yes; "I'm a poof Priest". But it doesn't bother me anymore whether anybody... I am who I am, and I happily talk about him and also, "I've got to go home; the other half is waiting", "Oh, how is she?" "It's a he". And nobody faints anymore. Mister Holloway and all the rest of it at Jesmond Parish Church and all those things that they get involved in, and there's a deeply anti-gay because the Bible tells them to be, but that's a church that's kind of removed itself from all the systems. It simply runs its own show and we have nothing to do with it. You always used to get into arguments on the radio and in the end we said there was no point in it because they either got David Holloway, there was another guy down by the river who was the other evangelical who was anti-everything, to do radio interviews; and I said there was no point because they simply trotted out the same stuff over and over again whereas we were moving on, we were relating to the world. It was just, "The Bible says, therefore it is wrong". And they were pointless interviews.

Interviewer: I mean I think one of the frustrations certainly for me is that they are willing to be challenging and questioning and theologically rigorous about other issues but when it comes to sexuality it's almost a kind of infantile unwillingness to apply the same rigour to that as they would to other areas.

Respondent: Quite. And they will ask you all the questions but will not answer any of the questions except quote the Bible.

Interviewer: Yeah. And I'm sure they have mixed fabric clothing on eating -

Respondent: Precisely. I did point that out to one of them once but... he was obviously wearing a cotton polyester shirt.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: And was on his third marriage.

Interviewer: What would be your proudest achievements in your life so far?

Respondent: Professionally?

Interviewer: Anything you like.

Respondent: Professionally: training seven Curates - six and a half really, but we'll call it seven - and then setting people off on them in the street; giving them a base and helping them to find themselves. Personally: finding him and living 31 years with him.

Interviewer: It's a long time.

Respondent: And we look at each other and think, "What did we ever see in each other?" but we're still together where we started out. And of that I am deeply proud.

Interviewer: It's a big achievement.

[0:42:55]

Respondent: As we watch friends and family: they marry, they divorce; they marry, they divorce. All my first cousins are on at least their third marriage.

Interviewer: What makes your relationship work so well?

Respondent: I think because we remain independent people who are in a relationship and we know the boundaries where if he is off busy with his committees and things like that all those are important in his diary and I don't argue about it, and he does the same with me. And in that sense we respect each other's diaries, and we always have done. We are two individuals but in fact we are together; professionally we are two individuals but personally we are a couple. And I think that was why the civil partnership was so important, much more than the marriage business.

Interviewer: Have you done the marriage business?

Respondent: No, because if I marry I will have my licence to officiate removed.

Interviewer: Of course, yeah.

Respondent: And they haven't sorted the pensions out yet, they've all gone very quiet. So, it was the civil partnership and it was all business to do with kinship and all that, those for us were the important bits; that we were recognised as a couple and we were next of kin. Now we're both... he's a single child as well. And we were well into our sixties before the last parents died so we did remarkably well.

Interviewer: And you've got a cruise coming up?

Respondent: We've got a cruise coming up on Monday. Yes, this is kind of... we have no one to leave it to so we're spending the inheritance.

Interviewer: You could leave it to Battersea Dogs' Home or something. I think I'd rather go on a cruise though.

Respondent: I think LGCM if it still exists when we die will benefit quite well from it.

Interviewer: Okay. I won't bump you off as a Trustee.

Respondent: No, you are fine. Yes, various churches and charities will do very nicely indeed.

Interviewer: Well, LGCM has really picked up again so I hope we'll still be around. Okay, if you could think of any things that we haven't touched on that for you have been significant either in your walk with God or LGBT rights or...?

Respondent: The great disappointment I think was having watched him - well, we met in 1984; now LGCM was eight years old already, it was forming, it was emerging, it was struggling. And to watch it grow, to watch it become a real force in nature of just not making all things gay respectable but making them possible, and other people linking into LGCM and seeing LGCM as really one of the things, and how that moved on and was accelerating all the way through the nineties until 1998 where kind of everything collapsed again. And all the evangelicals were being, "Oh, we must have meaningful conversations but we must go back to the beginning", and instead of moving forward we were going backwards. And the last ten or so years has a real feel, certainly in the church, that we've been going backwards rather than forwards.

Interviewer: So, the 1998 Lambeth was clearly entirely pivotal in all that?

[0:47:03]

Respondent: Yes, I think it was because the gay issue took over which wasn't really on the agenda, and it caused the schism about which they... as we talk they are sitting down about Lambeth at the very same moment.

Interviewer: Yeah. I find it quite ironically amusing that David Bowie dying... the part of his life, a professed bisexual man, stole the headlines away. It was kind of like when Diana died the day that Mother Theresa died; it was that feeling of... I don't know. To me it felt ironic and vaguely amusing.

Respondent: Yeah. But I think the one disappointment is that the whole gay thing has moved on but there have been those bits of society which have very carefully decided not to move it on, particularly in the church of all denominations apart from the URCs and some other more fringe ones; even the Methodists have moved on amazingly. But the Anglican Church and the Roman Church seems to have just got stuck with this and it's become a problem. Rather than recognising that gay people are a huge asset we've become a problem and somehow they've kind of got to put up with us.

Interviewer: They're just, "Damn, it refuses to go away".

Respondent: "Oh, dammit, it refuses to go; and why can't these people go and live on an island?"

Interviewer: What do you see as the future of the Church of England? To me it just feels like there can't be a middle ground anymore. You have to be LGBT-affirming or you have to be -

Respondent: Or you are not; you can't ignore it anymore.

Interviewer: You can't fudge it anymore.

Respondent: I think the thing that's surprised the Roman Church and Anglican Church was that the vast majority of people who call themselves members of those churches approved of same-sex marriage. And in the latter year there was an interview about the referendum on same-sex marriage in Ireland and someone deeply academic said, "Whoever would have thought it would've been homosexuality which united the Republic of Ireland?" in such a strongly Catholic country. And I think that's why both the Roman Church and the Anglican Church begin to realise that they have moved as institutions onto the edge of society and they are not in the middle of them anymore, and they have to rediscover them because suddenly they realised it's other things as well that they haven't taken on or they've seen as a problem. Now the Anglican Church also had the thing of, "Whatever the world did the Anglican Church would take 30 years to take it on", like abortion, divorce.

Interviewer: It's a bit like hairstyles in Swansea when I grew up.

Respondent: I said in 1992 - I did this seminar at the University of Newcastle which there was David Holloway and then there was the other guy from down by the river, whose name I've instantly forgotten, and I was talking about marriage and saying, "Marriage will change; marriage is not necessarily going to be one to one for life, it may be an on-going contract. It may still be one to one but it may not always be man and woman", to which they jumped up and said that, "The Bible says", and all the rest of it, and said, "Well, we have divorce and what does the Bible say about divorce?" "But, well, it's wrong because the Bible says; this is the ultimate... you can't argue against the Bible." They said, "Will you see same sex-marriage...? When will it...?" And I said, "It will happen in my lifetime; it won't go any further than that." And ten years earlier than I thought it was going to be. And why the Hell was it David Cameron who pushed it? Why did the

Tories push it through? Of all the things that the Tories... to push through so quickly and so unpreparedly... what on earth motivated them to do it? I can't imagine. Anyway that's another life. But I think it's the way that the two major churches have quite deliberately from the inside manoeuvred themselves onto the edges rather than being in the middle, and I think that's my real professional - and, indeed, gay - disappointment was the fact that in the last almost 20 years we've gone backwards rather than forwards.

[0:51:58]

Interviewer: Yeah. Would you say the Church of England is bordering on being seen as almost disreputable by swathes of society?

Respondent: I think it's not so much... if it was disreputable it would be noticed. I believe just unnecessary.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: It sees itself as unnecessary. You don't have to get married in a church anymore; you don't have to do all those social things like having a child baptised or you don't have to have a clergyperson for a funeral anymore. And there are all these very nice little things and it's nice to go to a carol service and things like that, but what's it for? And the Romans are finding much the same thing.

Interviewer: Yeah. Okay, I've got a few more minutes left. Thinking about all the prominent people who have now changed their tack and come out in favour of same-sex relationships - thinking of Steve Chalk, Rob Bell, in America, Vicky Beaching etc. - do you feel that there's almost a move of the spirit happening in society in the church?

Respondent: I've never been terribly comfortable with phrases like, "A move of the spirit"; it's just not my language and it's never been particularly part of my tradition as such. I'm too old-fashioned Anglican. On the one hand I hope it is something like that - now I'm being Anglican see: "On the one hand" - if that's what is I am delighted even if I don't quite understand what that might mean. On the other hand - my cynical grumpy old man hand - says that it's amazing how convenient the churches can be when they can spot an audience, and rather like Politicians suddenly found the influence and the power of the pink vote and the pink Pound. And is this institutions realising that there is a huge amount of their congregations always have been gay and they really want to do something about either keeping them or winning some more of them. And then put all these things that, "Of course you can't get ordained and you can't do this and you can't do that", which is why of course I think in all these managed conversations we've had about sexuality all the papers have nothing to do with any conversations with gay people. I got invited to go on behalf of this diocese - we were away, we'd already booked in for a conference so I couldn't go - but the people who did it and lots of people - Colin Cowes and all the rest of it - of course argue that gay people wouldn't go to it because if you outed yourself evangelicals would report you to your Bishop. So, there was still that level of fear. On the one hand you want them in the pews but we're still really good enough to have hands on it almost. Though I think that is changing and I am surprised by just in that sense how liberal and non-contentious Justin Welby has been on the gay issue and, indeed, is muttering things about, "Our history with the gay issue is a disgrace", and things like that. So, maybe things are turning. For America the church is a business as much as any other business I fear. And I think that's the great strength of having two, as it were, established churches - although I don't think the Anglican one really is established - but having two churches which are, as it were, very much at the heart of a nation, which is where they should be in dealing with absolutely everybody but in fact have both, for internal rows, have become apparent to the centre that they don't belong anymore. And it will be very hard to win them back. And it won't

just be gay people to win back to win anybody back because have realised you can actually live without them.

Interviewer: Yeah. I have three children, two of them are teenagers, and that is complete anathema to them as teenagers that identify as straight but fully supportive of friends who are LGBT, and just have no ideas why anyone would want to be involved.

Respondent: Yes. We still have friends – both straight friends and gay friends – and the great objection is not that we are gay but that we are Christian; that's the thing they find really repellent.

Interviewer: Yeah. That's far more disreputable these days.

Respondent: It's most disreputable; and to be a Priest. "Good God", sort of. You find yourself introduced: "Now have you met Christopher? He's a Vicar you know but he's quite nice".

[0:57:42]

Interviewer: It's almost that, "I'm a Christian with a proviso that..." – I've talked about this with a few people that because of the connotations of saying you're a Christian in society these days you find yourself prefacing it in some way.

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: And I am someone that will say, "I am a left-wing Guardian-reading Christian", because I so don't want anyone to think I'm fundamentalist. And that's sad really.

Respondent: Yes. If we have a prophetic voice it's Giles Fraser. I don't always agree with him but he is like John the Baptist and he says things which I don't think you supposed to agree or disagree but he just sort of wakes you up. It's a pity he's moved to a Friday rather than Saturday but never mind.

Interviewer: Just to close: if you were having a headstone made up for yourself what three adjectives would you have on it to describe yourself?

Respondent: Oh, heavens; oh, good gracious?

Interviewer: That? "Good gracious."

Respondent: "Good gracious." "I told you I was ill." I really don't know because that's the one thing I won't do, I won't write my headstone. But I think if I was to leave instructions – I've never even thought of that, no. I wouldn't know. I really wouldn't. I hope it would be somebody at my funeral will say, "Despite everything he was really quite a nice guy".

Interviewer: "Despite everything." Thank you very much for your time, Chris. I really appreciate it.

Respondent: My pleasure. What I was going to ask you is: the project you were talking about, what is the project and what it's for and what are you going to do with all this information you are gathering?

[End of Transcript]