

[0:00:00]

Interviewer: If you could start, Cecilia, by telling me a little bit about your childhood; where, when, siblings, parents?

Respondent: I am the sixth of seven children. My parents are very leisurely and we've had 24 years between the eldest and the youngest. I was brought up Catholic and very active in the Catholic Church growing up. We were one of the big parish families in Sheffield. And I loved church; we had a really fantastic parish Priest called Father Putman, and I was part of the youth group, I read on the altar. And of course in those days I couldn't serve on the altar because it was only Altar Boys and certainly, as is now, no chance of becoming a Priest although from very early on that's what I felt called to do, so interesting. But I went all the way through the Catholic education system and that equips you very well in lots of different ways. I was with someone else who was brought up Catholic the other day and we were talking about going on retreat, and that's something that you do from being very young; you have retreat days.

Interviewer: I didn't know that.

Respondent: Yeah. So, that notion of having spiritual discipline, of taking time to be with God, all those sorts of things, those are all good things that I learnt from being brought up Catholic.

Interviewer: So, it feels to me that you had a very clear living faith as a child?

Respondent: Yes, absolutely. And I can remember we'd have assembly and all of that, and I can remember seeing a dead blackbird and wanting to say to the Head Teacher, "Could we pray for the blackbird that's died?" My Teacher catching me and asking me where I was going because I was heading to the front, and I explained and she said, "Well, maybe we could just pray for it together", just she and I. But, yes, God has always been there.

Interviewer: Okay, great. So, involvement in church: you said you were involved with the youth group.

Respondent: Yes, very much so. And the parish was very vibrant, there were lots of things that you could do, but also going to Catholic school you have the opportunity to... there was a chapel; there would've been services on a regular basis. And certainly when I was older we would take assemblies; we would have to craft assemblies. I can't remember now but probably sixth form. So, again, that whole idea of thinking about scripture reading or the time of year that we were at and having to articulate that in front of a group of people, that was all part of what we did at school.

Interviewer: Okay; so, all the kinds of public speaking skills?

Respondent: Yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah, fantastic. At what point did you have a sense of a sexual identity and what was that?

Respondent: Oh, primary school. I was falling in love with girls from very early on I know.

Interviewer: And primary school as in what age roughly?

Respondent: 10, 11.

Interviewer: Okay.

Respondent: Yes, very clear. I can remember saying to one girl when we were playing netball, "If I was a boy I would marry you". And so I was very clear about that. I came out to my parents when I was about 13 and there were other things going on in the house that I wasn't aware of, being 13, so my timing wasn't very good. But that was it and at the time both parents were very upset, and there was talk of taking me to the Doctor but that never materialised. And it never got spoken of until much later on. My father had died by then and my mother and I had a conversation about it once, and I took home one girlfriend who actually then became my first life partner; we had a blessing.

[0:04:16]

Interviewer: And what age were you then?

Respondent: I was in my early 20s by then. But I thought that she and I were going to be together forever and took her home, and didn't really talk to my mum about that but one of my brothers came to the little blessing that we had; my siblings have all been supportive so that's been fine. And, yeah, it's interesting how times change. So, Monica, who was... I'm a widow, Monica died four years ago; but when we had our civil partnership that was a very public affair and family members that could come came, and it was wonderful. My eldest sister was saying how she'd explained it to one of her grandchildren who was asking what it was and, "Had she explained it right?" which of course she had. And so life has just changed a huge amount in my lifetime, which is fascinating.

Interviewer: Yeah, it has. Going back: what language did you use to come out to your parents?

Respondent: I said I thought I might be homosexual.

Interviewer: Oh, okay; quite formal.

Respondent: Yes. And I don't know where I'd picked that up from but one of my sisters in law was a Psychiatric Nurse and I'd started off talking about it with her because I felt like she might have been a safe person to talk to about it. I can't remember ever hearing it condemned in church or talked about in church. Clearly I picked up very strongly the message that this was not a good thing and that I was going to go to Hell or nothing good would come of my life. But I really don't know how I picked up that information other than whether it was just the culture or what you heard in the playground or that kind of thing. So, I hear other people talking about sermons they heard in church and that sort of thing and I never heard it in church, I never recall hearing it in church at all. But I knew it wasn't good and I knew it was problematic. And so I talked to my sister in law about it and then got into some kind of argument with my mother and it came out in the context of the argument. So, it wasn't like, "Please sit down, I have something to tell you". So, it wasn't great.

Interviewer: What did your parents do job-wise? Did we cover that at the start?

Respondent: No. My father was an Export Manager for a toolmaking company in Sheffield, the city of steel. And my mum brought all of us.

Interviewer: Yeah; the whole gang of you.

Respondent: That's right, yeah; exactly. My mother was very bright. In other circumstances she would've gone to university and those sorts of things but, you know, the time my parents were brought up they both left school when they were 14, both served in the Second World War, and got married during the war and then started this family. So, my mother was very bright; had a great love of literature. And I think a lot of my wordiness

comes from my mum. My dad was quite a quiet man and quite... he was quite quiet, quite gentle. My mother definitely ruled the roost at home. So, you didn't always know what my father thought about things really.

Interviewer: Okay. And where are they from originally?

Respondent: From Sheffield.

Interviewer: They are from Sheffield as well.

[0:08:35]

Respondent: Yeah.

Interviewer: Okay. So, you came out to your parents as a teenager and you remained involved in church stuff?

Respondent: Yes, all the way through. I was very involved at school and I contemplated becoming a Nun. I was taught by the Notre Dame Sisters and used to go and see Sister Patricia when I was in sixth form about my vocation and all of that. And then I went to university to Liverpool to study Geology and I came out at university as in started going to the Gay Society and all of that, and was still really struggling with sexuality and spirituality and I went to see the Catholic Chaplain who told me that, "Kleptomaniacs couldn't help it either but it didn't make it right", so that was helpful.

Interviewer: I haven't heard that one before.

Respondent: He gave me this rather bizarre leaflet which was first of all was about homosexuals and then it was all about how some homosexuals had drink problems but that meant that they were more like... other people had drink problems and other homosexuals, and some homosexuals abused drugs but that meant they were more like other people who abused drugs. I suppose it was trying to be positive in that just because you were a homosexual you didn't necessarily have all these character flaws, but in terms of me wasn't very helpful. So, I kept plodding on and we had the annual fisticuffs with the Christian Union about whether you could be gay and Christian and I ended up co-Chairing the Gay Society with my friend Chris Tulapi. Then I moved to Bath to do Teacher training and I was still going to Mass and still going to Confession and saying, "I am confessing this but I am not confessing it because it's just who I am", and the Priest there was very understanding and that was the one that gave my partner at the time and I the blessing, and it was done on the understanding that if the Bishop ever saw the liturgy it was a blessing between friends, but for us it was a marriage as far as we could make it.

Interviewer: That's really quite courageous.

Respondent: Yeah. So, it was very private and we didn't tell people.

Interviewer: Where did it happen?

Respondent: In our home, yeah.

Interviewer: Wow.

Respondent: And then we discovered Metropolitan Community Church and we used to be part of a social group down in the southwest called Gay West which was big, it had about 200 members, and we used to do all sorts of different activities. We had gone down to Bournemouth for a weekend, my partner and I, and picked up a leaflet about this

mysterious church that was founded in and reaching beyond the lesbian and gay, bisexual, and transgender community. And so we invited the Pastor of the Bournemouth Church to come and talk to Gay West as one of the social activities. And we couldn't actually be there for the talk but afterwards Reverend Frank Scott got back in touch with us and said there had been quite a lot of interest and he thought there was the possibility of starting a church in Bath. So, he came up and we had discussions and we had a little service in our lounge and people came. And so we were supported by MCC Bournemouth to start Living Springs MCC in Bath which is still going, it's still a church in Bath. And so we co-led that for quite a while. The fantastic thing about Metropolitan Community Church is a huge amount of lay empowerment and lay involvement, so there were all sorts of things that you could do. And for me it was fantastic because I started serving on different committees within the structure and we have our own training programme for clergy so I did some of the teaching on that, and gradually was elected to a paid position where I was responsible for serving our congregations in Europe so I did that for several years. And then we had a restructuring, as all great organisations do, and then I was elected to become an Elder, which is like the spiritual leaders of our denomination. So, my full title is Reverend Elder Eggleston. And I served our congregations in Europe and in Africa as well; so, that was the area that I was responsible for. So, all in all I did that for nine years and during that time was when I answered my call to ordination because the fantastic thing about MCC is you could become Moderator, which is the global leader of the whole denomination, and be a lay person; there's no requirement on you to be clergy because they are looking at experience and qualities. But during that time I finally answered my call to ordination, which had been lurking forever but I just hadn't answered it.

[0:14:19]

Interviewer: Since you were a child really.

Respondent: That's right. And so I trained for ordination and was ordained while I was an Elder, and then I stepped down from being an Elder and then came to serve as Pastor here in Northern Lights MCC. So, I've been here about nine years.

Interviewer: Okay.

Respondent: Yeah, so interesting times really.

Interviewer: So, what's the timescale? What age were you when you had the group in your home that then became...?

Respondent: I was probably about 26, 27, something like that, yeah.

Interviewer: Right, okay; yeah. And what year were you ordained? I'm just trying to get an idea of timescales.

Respondent: I've been ordained for about 14 years I think but I can't remember.

Interviewer: Okay. And when you were involved in Africa was in more LGBT-affirming countries of Africa or was that South Africa or...?

Respondent: Yeah. At that stage we had four congregations in South Africa and we had one congregation in Nigeria and an emerging congregation in Nigeria, but also it meant that if anybody made enquiries about MCC from anywhere in Africa then they were directed to me. So, at different times you would get enquiries. And they were genuine enquiries often but they were asking for things that we couldn't provide because as a denomination we have limited resources like any denomination. So, I used to go to South Africa once or twice a year and spend a weekend at each of the four

congregations and provide training and support and that sort of thing, and then I'd keep in regular contact with them throughout the year through email etc.

Interviewer: Yeah. Talk to me about being involved in a church congregation in Newcastle. What are your links with other churches? Clearly you share a building with URC, is it Methodist as well?

Respondent: St. James URC has hosted several different congregations while I've been here. So, at the moment there is us and there is St. James's congregation, there's a Chinese Christian student fellowship; but there has been a Korean church and a French-speaking African church, the Russian orthodox met here for a while, the traditional Anglicans met here for a little while. So, the Elders of St. James's have a very positive attitude towards encouraging other congregations to meet and use the building. I am currently the Chair of Newcastle City Centre Churches Together and we've just had the clergy breakfast here; we have a clergy breakfast once a month. So, when I first came here the church had a profile within the city but it wasn't very high just because of the time and they'd had lay pastoral leaders before but they hadn't had a clergyperson, and that just means I've got the time to do things that if you are already in paid secular work and doing church work on top you just don't have the time. Generally the churches that we work with are very affirming because we wouldn't be able to work with them otherwise. There are some churches in the city that would not be affirming of our ministry; Jesmond Parish Church is one of the leading voices that would take a more traditional view of what family life can be. Interestingly we have referrals from within Jesmond Parish Church; we've had two. So, someone at Jesmond Parish Church knows we exist.

[0:18:10]

Interviewer: Okay.

Respondent: So, that's interesting for us. But when I first got here there was a discussion in the community; they'd had some funding to do some research about what they might want to do about Pride because they had had Pride but it had fallen away a little. So, I went to this community meeting and there were loads of groups there, I was really impressed, but there was genuine fear from about half the people about having a Pride parade; they genuinely were fearful of this, and it was fascinating to me because I'd been working in South Africa and places where violence and homophobia is still rife. I'd had colleagues who were working in Eastern Europe and Russia and were being arrested etc. And here we were in northeast England and people were afraid. But it was agreed that there would be a Pride parade and there would be a community festival. And it's just gone from strength to strength and it's really big now. I think it's one of the biggest Prides that is free entry and there are like 30,000 to 40,000 people there. And I've led the Pride parade twice, I've spoken on the Pride stage; the last two years the church has done a Pride vigil at the end, a candlelit vigil at the end of Pride, and that's been very significant as a community event because it's an opportunity to remember our history, it's also an opportunity to remember those people that we've lost. And for this Pride committee they've lost two committee members, so for them it's a remembrance of colleagues that have died. Both times have been surprising deaths, unexpected deaths. So, it performs quite a valuable function I think. We have a presence in the family zone because we have a family service here once a month so that's great and we're part of that team. So, we're very integrated into all of that. We have a brilliant radio station here called Pride Radio which you can hear on the internet all of the time, but it gets community FM licence in July so we have a paid advert on there that goes out on the hour. So, our profile in the city is quite high now and we bill ourselves as the church for our community and that's what we offer. And I speak at the AIDS vigil; if we have a Holocaust memorial event I'll often speak at that. I do training around what the Bible does actually say for sexual health workers and other people. So, our profile has got much better in the city I think and in the region generally people know that we exist and

that we are a resource. It was interesting this morning at the clergy breakfast: there's a new member of staff at the cathedral and she was talking about what they might do for pride but she didn't want to clash with what we were doing, which is fantastic, so it's that whole idea of collaborative working. Next to where the Pride parade starts in a church, St. Thomas's, and they flew the rainbow flag and again it was wonderful for people to be able to see that, and because I was starting the parade I drew attention to that and let people know that God loves them. And our t-shirts: every year we have a different designed t-shirt and this year it said, "God loves you", and then we were handing out badges and stickers. We handed out 1,000 stickers that said, "God made me fabulous", on them. So, the congregation is quite diverse in age and in background. We're not too diverse ethnically but we're not bad; a large number of people that are involved in ministry and a very friendly, welcoming, embracing congregation really.

Interviewer: So, how many members do you have? It sounds like you are so integrated within the community and within other churches it's almost relevant.

Respondent: MCC has a formal membership process so we formally have at the moment about 40 members. And on a Sunday we get about 35 in worship.

Interviewer: Yeah. Is that adults?

Respondent: Yeah. The family service runs once a month and we get between 10 and 20 people at that including children. And I would say that our congregation size is about 65, but at the carol service there were 81 people which was fantastic. So, if everybody turned up who considers themselves to be part of the church community there would be about 80 people. But I would say if you were calculating who comes over a month - because people travel and they've got shifts and things, you don't get the same people each Sunday - so, I would say our congregation size is about 65 yeah.

[0:23:52]

Interviewer: Yeah, okay.

Respondent: And people come from all sorts of different church traditions.

Interviewer: Yeah. Do you have the full range of LGBT or do you have more of one sector?

Respondent: No, we have straight people, and people who identify on the whole spectrum I think. More recently we have more people who identify as Trans or gender-fluid. And certainly with the things like gender-fluid I think some of that is just having the vocabulary to articulate how you feel about yourself or how you identify you know?

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: But certainly we are seen as a safe place for Trans folk to come. We've struggled in the past to get students, we've just not been somehow able to access students; but the last couple of years we've got quite a little influx of students, which is great because we sit right in the middle of the Northumbria University campus and we're not far from Newcastle University; so, we've got students from both campuses.

Interviewer: Do you actually go into the universities on... bun fights and stuff?

Respondent: Well, this is one the challenges; we haven't been able to do that and some of that is having the right people in our congregation to do that, and some of it is the universities have their own policies around that. One of the Anglican Chaplains was explaining to me at Newcastle University that they'd had some difficulty with some other churches whose evangelising methods perhaps weren't very appropriate or they weren't -

Interviewer: Subtle.

Respondent: So, they'd made the decision that no churches were allowed on campus during Fresher's week etc. So, we haven't done any formal work through that. But there's a website called Fusion now; we're registered on that and that's for students who are moving away from home and want to find a church, but also it's that subtle irony really: there's the whole internet and social media but actually we put a poster outside the church and we find that's very effective because students are walking up and down the precinct and they see it. So, there are different ways of finding people. But when I first came here you would have one family who would have children and then they would leave because it was a Sunday evening service and that just wouldn't work especially with younger children. And then it's a combination of things, one of which is the advent of gay adoption becoming much more straightforward and more people wanting to have children, and also just some people in our congregation who came as young people maturing and being ready to have children. So, now we have several families and in fact we picked up another family from Pride this year just gone. So, that's pretty amazing and wonderful really.

Interviewer: Yeah. I find it very encouraging because that's personally the thing that has been a bit off-putting for me. I mean there is nothing where I am to be honest. It's a bit of a dark hole with LGBT-affirming stuff. But, no, that's fantastic. Clearly there have been massive changes in society and also in the church in the last 40 years; could you maybe tell me some of the things that you have seen change and the things that have maybe surprised you the most?

Respondent: I think one of the things that's surprised me the most is sadly how far there is yet to come.

Interviewer: Okay.

[0:27:54]

Respondent: I went down to London to a network gathering of women leaders and these were Christian women from all sorts of walks of life and sorts of traditions, and to hear some of the young women talk about it being a male-only leadership team and how they couldn't get their voices heard at all and the woman's place still being in the home... So, I was really quite shocked about that sort of thing. So, to come out as lesbian and gay in that sort of environment I would imagine is quite shocking. And I follow Diverse Church on Twitter, which is a group for young LGBT Christians, and hearing some of those stories you just think, "Oh my goodness". For all the wonderful things that have happened there are still ways to go in certain churches. So, being able to hear clergy colleagues from all sorts of different denominations be affirming - the letter that went to the Primates and the Dean of Newcastle Cathedral had signed that -

Interviewer: Did he? Brilliant; yeah.

Respondent: And to have that conversation with Anglican clergy about flying the rainbow flag and what they might do for Pride those sorts of conversations are very heartening. When I first started doing blessings for same-sex couples often they would be tiny because there were so many people that they couldn't tell, or there would be lots of friends but not many family, that sort of thing; and now we have legal marriage. And, like I said, my wife died about four years ago but to be able to say, "My wife", what an extraordinary thing and when Monica died to be accorded all those rights because we were in a civil partnership. And a straight friend who we were in the same Carers' group together her and her partner had been together as long as Monica and I had and for

very sensible reasons they weren't married, and she had a terrible time sorting out his affairs. So, those sorts of things are just quite amazing. I think the number of people who are willing to say, "This theology that we used to believe we don't anymore", or, "This doctrine that we used to believe" - that's more accurate - "We don't anymore and we're sorry for the harm that it's caused". We have huge conferences once every three years and the last one was in Chicago and -

Interviewer: What is, "We", MCC?

Respondent: MCC, yeah. It's like the synod; it's called General Conference. It happens once every three years and the last one was in Chicago. And Pride was on so we marched in Pride, which was fantastic, but the Marin Foundation was there and they just had big signs saying, "We are sorry".

Interviewer: Wow.

Respondent: And so from having Fred Phelps at congregations picketing and doing things to have Christians who are willing to say, "We are sorry for the harm that we've done". And people were so thrilled to see them and were glad to see them. And there were still people there who were saying, "You're going to Hell", but overwhelmingly there's this sea-change which is just fantastic. So, all of that is really wonderful to know about. And I think it's that funny mixture though observing other denominations where the hierarchy is saying one thing but the local parish is saying quite another. So, I had a couple of come to see me; they are in an Anglican church in the city which is part of inclusive churches; they are out as a couple, very engaged in the church, very welcome in the church; there are other gay people in that congregation who are equally supported and affirmed, but they couldn't get married in their church. So, half the congregation - the Choir, the Choir Master, the Organist, and the clergy - came here and I officiated at their wedding because the Priest in charge did not want to go against the will of the Bishop, which is appropriate to the obedience of the authority that you are under, and it also meant that he could not serve his congregation. So, the congregation all rocked up and I did their wedding. So, those sorts of things are sad because it's not... I understand it, and also it's about at some point there needs to be a recognition and a shift and a change.

Interviewer: Yeah; which leads me on neatly to my next question. The Church of England, obviously the established church; how do you see that panning out? How do you see the future of the Church of England?

[0:33:36]

Respondent: Well, I think when Rowan Williams came into position that would've been the time to make a seismic shift because people knew that he was more liberal in his views and yet he was given the position. So, that would've been the time to do it. I think that Justin Welby is being very pragmatic and I think there will be a division of the church or looser ties within the broad scheme of things because if I was in that room I'm very firm in my belief that God made me and God loves me and my sexuality is a gift from God, and so I wouldn't want to be shifting my position and I am sure that those who hold the completely opposite view to me are sincere and trusting in God and faith in their position. I don't think they are bad Christians because they don't believe the same as me. And so all I can see is that two different bodies will emerge.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: And Ruth Hunt wrote a very interesting article because she said, "That's bad news for LGBT people because that means there will be no protection in some countries and in some places for LGBT people". What I think it also means though is a lot of people can



stop hiding and they can start living their lives properly where there is freedom because at the moment, for example what's going on where clergy are not allowed to marry: what I feel about that is first of all it's ridiculous, but secondly I feel really strongly that you can't take away a legal right from someone who doesn't belong to your organisation. So, if I was an Anglican Priest and I loved and lived with a person who was not an Anglican but they are still having to live under Anglican rules. You are denying them a legal right of the land to marry. And I think that is untenable really.

Interviewer: Yeah. And I guess for me the recent guy in Winchester diocese, obviously where I live, he was PTO-removed because he married his partner, and you think, "What message are you giving out that, 'I'm showing commitment and honesty towards someone', but we'd rather you didn't", basically.

Respondent: That's right.

Interviewer: Yeah. To me it seems there can't be a middle ground anymore; you're either affirming or you're not. I can't see we can have this fudge anymore.

Respondent: No.

Interviewer: So, in a way there is inevitably going to be a split.

Respondent: Yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah. Thinking back the last few years - I mean this is probably my personal view but it seems to me there's a move of the spirit when you have a US President who is very LGBT-affirming leading figures in - well, Jodie Foster coming out at the Oscars, Steve Chalk, Rob Bell, Vicky Beaching - prominent Christian figures in media coming out as affirming or coming out; do you see that as a sign of God affirming us as people and the move of the spirit towards greater inclusion?

Respondent: Yes. I think it takes great courage in these circumstances when you have such a high profile to do something like that because you are not only risking your own life but especially someone like Steve Chalk, who is a church Pastor, then there are implications for your congregation etc. Yes, so I think it's fantastic. Nancy Wilson, who is our Moderator, read one of the lessons at President Obama's inauguration church service.

Interviewer: Oh, did she?

Respondent: Yeah. So, that also speaks to his desire to show what it is to be a fully-inclusive nation and to be an inclusive church. So, I think it is a powerful movement of the Holy Spirit. And I wonder if God has just finally lost patience? Is there something about, "Now it really is time"? But all of these journeys take tiny steps. Each one of our own coming out stories is a journey in itself and it continues because we keep having to come out. So, there is something about more and more people being willing to take that journey and being able to be more outspoken about it, and you just get to the point where there is a tipping point where there are just enough people for this to start to be a non-issue.

[0:39:07]

Interviewer: Yeah. It feels to me that there are more people on the whole inside which is leading to more people feeling able to publish books and to speak out publicly.

Respondent: And the other bit of it is that for a vast majority of the population church is completely irrelevant. So, it really doesn't matter what you are talking about because it doesn't impinge on people's lives. You think about the Catholic teaching on using non-natural means of contraception and I think if you went into any Catholic parish you would find

some people who absolutely adhere to the church's teaching, but there are many couples who do not. And so there is a mismatch between the lives of people and the doctrine that traditional churches can espouse and it's actually making those gaps for them. My mother used to say – and she would know – she's say, "The Priests go on and on about sex but when you've had a full day at work or looking after children and then you're worried about you haven't got enough money to make ends meet the last thing you're thinking about..." So, I think some of it is that what the church has to say becomes irrelevant. So, these people who are coming out who are mainstream Christians and Christians of influence what they say is important but they are only being able to do that because society has changed and so for so many other people this is just a non-issue. So, although it feels massive for us for a lot of places it's just not. I think that's interesting. I started my working life as a Teacher and one of the reasons I left was Section 28, and that was vitriolic. And I worked in an education authority that didn't have sexual orientation as part of its equal opportunities policy. And I went into a school recently and there was just stonewall stuff all over the place and, "Some people are gay; get over it", and all of this stuff just on the school walls just like all the other stuff that was on the school walls. And for me that was extraordinary.

Interviewer: Interestingly my son is 16 and at his school there is nothing anywhere. But he said to me the other day, "I don't get it all this LGBT stuff; I don't get it". He's like, "So what?" And I said, "Yeah, but that is the point we're trying to make".

Respondent: That's right.

Interviewer: Yeah; that's really interesting. What would you say are the things you feel most proud of that you've done in faith?

Respondent: Well, I think just being me; and that's a rare privilege that I've had in my life is to be me. So many people have to hide some of themselves; so, they make the choice to be out as gay or out as Christian but somehow can't make those two meet. I've been tremendously privileged to serve in a denomination that absolutely encourages me fully as a woman, as a lesbian, as a layperson and as a clergyperson; that's been extraordinary.

Interviewer: It feels to me that from an early age you felt entirely comfortable in your own skin?

Respondent: Well, I knew who I was. I wouldn't have said, to be honest, I was entirely comfortable about it but I knew who I was. And I think probably by the time I was in my late-20s I was comfortable. Because one of the things about when you are brought up in any church and then you shift to a different church is you have to re-think some of the things that you've been taught and whether it's true or not. And being brought up Catholic you have a whole set of doctrines which you then sift through and guilt is a big part of being a good Catholic, guilt about anything, so actually working through all of that and then the role of women etc. So, I think there is that point in your life where you really do accept yourself but I think I've always known who I am and I've had the luxury of being able to live that out. I also am very proud of what we've achieved in the city because we are the church for our community. People do know who we are and they may not come on a Sunday but if they need us they know where we are, and that feels great. And just every time you could go somewhere and show people the love of God for them as queer people or queer allies and for them to feel it, that's just fantastic; just fantastic. I did a wedding here and talking to people in the line up afterwards and this woman was saying, "I felt really uncomfortable about coming to church because I thought I would be judged but you are quite user-friendly, aren't you?"

[0:44:51]

Interviewer: Excellent.

Respondent: And I thought that was very good feedback. So, that's it: the fact that you can just help people to know that God made them and God loves them and that they are welcome in God's house is a really important thing to be able to offer.

Interviewer: Yeah. I'm very envious if I'm honest because, yeah, when I think of MCC the only MCCs I've heard of in this country are north London because I know Sharon and Northern Lights; and I've heard of it and I couldn't tell you what the other ones are. So, living 400 miles, 300 miles, away I had heard of MCC Northern Lights, so it speaks for itself.

Respondent: Wonderful.

Interviewer: Yeah. This is kind of slightly personal but it is relevant to this: as a bisexual person I sometimes feel when I go to LGBT events that it says, "B", in the title but I don't understand how to fit in and it feels to me that if you are in a lesbian or a male gay couple to a certain extent you can be transparent about who you are, but where you have an extended family and children involved, a husband of the opposite sex, it's less easy to be out or to feel at home within the LGBT faith community. And from a personal point of view when I've gone to LGBT faith events it's been lovely and wonderful but I've not really felt very part of it, and I wondered how MCC handled maybe people who are in mixed orientation marriages or that kind of area because to me that's almost the next thing.

Respondent: Yeah. I think your observation about being in or being out about it is the challenge because I live in this topsy-turvy world where if a man and a woman come into the church by and large it is assumed by much of the congregation that that is a gay man being accompanied by a straight female friend or brother and sister or whatever; the first conclusion isn't, "It's a married couple". Similarly if two women walk in together the assumption is, "That's a lesbian couple", rather than, "It could be two friends or two sisters or what have you", you know?

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: There have been people within the congregation who have identified as bisexual and have been very open about that regardless of the gender of their partner and that has been very helpful that they have been able to articulate their sexuality because that enables the congregation and me to understand more about that particular dynamic because if people don't talk about it and don't identify then it can be more difficult to talk about it. We ran a worship team called Queer up North and we took different Bible passages and -

Interviewer: It's better than, "Grim up North", isn't it?

Respondent: That's it, yes; Queer up North. And I preached on David and David as a bisexual.

Interviewer: Yeah. I mean to me he's metrosexual, bisexual; very much like David Beckham - it's something about the name. But I mean I'm doing a Doctorate in holistic identity for bisexual people and part of my beef is that pro-LGBT biblical exegesis they always focus in on David the gay man and Ruth the lesbian woman. And to me David's behaviour if you're turned on by a woman sunbathing naked on a rooftop you're unlikely to be entirely homosexual. So, I'm encouraged that you are saying that because for me we need to have the same degree of integrity about grey areas.

[0:49:15]

Respondent: Yeah. And that's what I was talking about because I was talking about me falling in love with Boy George before I knew that Boy George was a man. And about the furore of Tom Robinson who was this gay icon certainly when I was coming out and growing up and then married a woman. And the furore that surrounded him was he was deserting the cause. And that's absolutely it; you could interpret David as having raped that woman because it doesn't say anywhere that she consented. So, again, how many gay men go around raping women if they are gay men? So, yes, it's actually seeing those things and celebrating all that there is to find about human sexuality. And the other thing: when I'm running workshops I talk about the George Clooney test because I would see myself as 100% lesbian, but if I was stuck on a desert island with the most appalling unattractive vicious vitriolic woman in the world and George Clooney would I end up having a relationship with George Clooney as opposed to this really horrible revolting woman? So, there is like the spectrum of human sexuality is a lot broader than we give it credit for I think. And I think there is still a lot of work to be done in educating people around bisexuality because there's the whole thing of, "Well, you're promiscuous", or, "You can't make your mind up", or all of those myths that go around with it.

Interviewer: Yeah. And that's kind of what I'm trying to do really; that's my little contribution. It's very specific but there's a gap in the market so to speak, so yeah.

Respondent: Exactly.

Interviewer: How would you describe yourself?

Respondent: Oh, as a dyke. I love the word, "Dyke". I was talking to a friend who is older than me. The new vocabulary and the new way of describing gender and things is very interesting to me and I haven't quite got my head around all of it yet, but I like, "Dyke", because when I'm with women who are very womanly as in how society expects women to be I'm definitely not like that and yet I'm not a man. And so for me I feel I fit in this middle space between the two so I can relate to both groups but I don't belong specifically to either group. I'm definitely a woman in that I don't have any gender dysphoria around my body; my body is my body and obviously if I am taller and slimmer and a bit more flat-chested I would be more androgynous-looking I think. I would like a more boyish figure but God didn't give me one of those. And I think there's a real strength in the word, "Dyke", and I am a strong woman. That's my space in the world and I think as I have got older I understand that better and I enjoy that, which I think is just something that comes with age. So, yes, I would definitely say... and now I am an old dyke as well so that pleases me too.

Interviewer: Not older; better. "I'm a better dyke." Do you feel comfortable describing yourself as a Christian?

Respondent: Yes sometimes. Sitting here with my clergy collar on I think it's something I've become more passionate about as I have been able to articulate more clearly what my faith means to me. And for me my faith is about changing the world and making it a better place and bringing a little bit of heaven on earth. And I have also become more comfortable with apologising for what the church has done to our people because that's a really important thing for people to hear and for people to hear it from someone wearing the collar because to them it doesn't really matter where in the spectrum of, "The", church I sit. If someone has been hurt by, "The", church I'm part of it. So, to be able to say, "Yes, the church did you wrong and I am sorry and I will do what I can to show you that that's not what God wants for you". So, I think for me that's been a real breakthrough in my faith journey I suppose. I've always been clear that I'm a Christian and clear that I'm a person of faith and I've always been ribbed very slightly for it in different workplaces. So, it's always been part of who I am. I think going out into the world and being very clear with people about it is something that I've done a lot more here because I'm out in the community more. I think my previous ministry roles have

been working within the church context; so, you are working within the church structure to support churches and Pastors to go and do that stuff, whereas here I am on the front line. And I can remember quite a pivotal moment probably two or three years in: we used to have an LGBT workers' network so anyone who worked within the LGBT community professionally could come to these meetings and so you would have the LGBT Trade Union Rep for the Fire Service or the Community Liaison Police Officer – a wide range of different people would come to these meetings – and I was quite new to the city so they were useful for me for networking. And it was agreed that we would start moving around and have the meetings in different people's offices so we could get to see physically where their projects were etc. And I said we'd have one here. And there was a woman who works in one of the other projects in the city who I knew was quite anti-church and so I didn't think she'd come; I didn't think she'd come in the building. But to actually sit there with these people and have to articulate why my faith was important in this context of what we did was a church was really quite a moment. And I can remember being very nervous and being very sincere in what I said but also wanting not to sound too preachy and all of those sorts of things. And it's really interesting because this person that I was worried about we now work really closely together and we are good friends, and I said to her one time, "It seems to me that I've moved from being the church leader to being a community leader", she said, "Yes, you have", and I said, "Well, how has that happened?" She said, "Well, people didn't like the church Cecilia very much but they liked the social action Cecilia and once they discovered the social action Cecilia they didn't care about the church Cecilia". And I think that's a really important message for any Christian: people don't care. There's a phrase isn't there? "You don't know what you know until you know that they know that you care." And it's very much that; so, the fact that I had been out in the city and the church has been very visible in really supporting the work of other organisations and really standing up against homophobia and transphobia and really supporting people who are affected by HIV and AIDS, working with refugees, all manner of things; and for me that's what my Christian is about, it's not about making people stand on a soapbox and declare Jesus is their Lord and saviour; it's about changing the world. And I might do it in Jesus's name but I don't need to tell everybody else I'm doing it for that reason.

[0:58:30]

Interviewer: Yeah; fantastic. Okay, I'll draw to a close now. Thank you very much for your time, Cecilia.

Respondent: Not at all; it's been a pleasure.

[End of Transcript]