

**LGBT Center of Central PA History Project
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Title: LGBT Oral History: Eva O'Diam

Date: April 6, 2015

Location: LGBT Oral History – O'Diam, Eva - 088

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Interviewee: **Eva O’Diam**

Interviewer: Mallory Slusser

Date of Interview: April 6th 2015

Location of Interview: The home of Eva O’Diam in Harrisburg, PA

Transcriber: Karin Carthins

Proofreader: Sara Tyberg (Sept. 2015)

Abstract:

Eva O’Diam was born in Dayton, Ohio in 1953 to her mother, a school teacher, and her father, an engineer. Growing up in conservative, rural Ohio, Eva lost her father at the age of 12 and moved to Covington, Ohio where she graduated from high school. At Manchester College, where she earned a degree in sociology, Eva was interested in ministry but grew disillusioned with the church during her last year of college and became a probation officer in Wabash, Indiana. About 18 months later, a Church of the Brethren pastor influenced Eva to return to the ministry, and she has since worked at various positions in pastoring, alternative ministry, and HIV/AIDS assistance. She currently lives in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania with her partner of 23 years, Mary Kelly, and is looking for work as a pastor again. In this interview, Eva discusses her slow personal journey to accept her sexual orientation, the challenge to make her Metropolitan Community Church [MCC] more inclusive of racial, sexual, and ability minorities, as well as her nephew’s unfortunate death that united her family and church community. Regarding LGBT issues, Eva is optimistic for the future but admits that the LGBT community needs to adopt a broader focus, be more inclusive, and address growing challenges for older adults.

[Technical/Audio Difficulties until 42 seconds in]

MS: Alright, my name is Mallory Slusser and today is April 6th 2015. I am interviewing Eva O’Diam at her home in Harrisburg, PA, for the oral history project of the LGBT Center of Central PA. Eva, is it okay for me to ask you a few questions regarding your involvement in the LGBT movement?

EO: Yes.

MS: All right. Could you please state your name and that you are willing to be interviewed.

EO: My name is Eva O’Diam, and I am willing to be interviewed.

MS: All right, and then... you can go ahead and sign this consent form... right there on the top. [grabs pen from interviewer and looks over consent form]

EO: On the top. Here?

MS: Yes.

EO: You want where it says signature though right?

MS: Mhmm.

EO: [hands form back to interviewee]

MS: All right. I'll take the pen. [clears throat] If at any time you want the recording to be stopped, just let us know, and we'll do that. And if there's any questions that you don't wanna answer, just let us know and we'll move on.

EO: Okay.

MS: All right so... first question: [flips through notes] could you please tell us a little about where and when you were born.

EO: I was born in Ohio... in 1953. At the time, we were living in New Carlisle, and I was born in Dayton, Ohio in the hospital. Grandview Hospital. I was born to—into a family where I have—I had one brother and f—three sisters, and I have to stop and think here. My brother's no longer living.

MS: Okay.

EO: But my sisters are living. And my parents are not living.

MS: Okay.

EO: ...any longer.

MS: How long did you live there?

EO: I think we moved when I was about five.

MS: Okay.

EO: We moved to a little town called Pleasant Hill, Ohio. And we lived there until I was the—somewhere between my—it was in the middle of my freshman year in high school, and then we moved five miles and moved to Covington, Ohio. So, I've always been in the Dayton Area. I was—I grew up in the Dayton Area, grew up in the country. Little small towns, farm until I was a sophomore in high school. And we moved into a neighboring town off the farm.

MS: All right. And can you tell us a little bit about, like, the schools you went to?

EO: [laughs] Well, let's put it this way. One of the schools I went to in Pleasant Hill, Ohio—I went there through—until my sophomore year—they still have all 13 grades in one building.

MS: Oh my gosh.

EO: And, yeah, see! [laughs] With younger people that's usually the reaction. So to this day, there's still 13 grades in one building. There's a very small town, very rural. We were known for

the monument in the middle of the town, where on foggy nights it would be bad accidents. ‘Cause people would run into the monument. So, they finally put lights around it. It’s a small enough town in Ohio—this, this gives you wonderful history research on it—they no longer have a bank in this town. Last time I was there, because there was a bank robbery, and someone was shot, and so they closed down the only bank in town. So it—last time I was there, which was years ago now, it was a real issue for the mayor in the town... what to do with all these senior citizens who—the closest place they could—they had the bank was five miles into the little town where I lived when I graduated from high school. But—and it’s a close enough community that, even though I didn’t graduate from there, there were three of us in our class that did not graduate, who moved before our senior year, but we still get invited back to the reunions, so... so, I kinda get invited back to the reunions from two high schools in Ohio. Pleasant Hill and Covington. [laughs]

MS: Are they ever on the same day?

EO: I’ve never been back to one.

MS: Oh. [laughs]

EO: I always—it’s been a little scary for me thinking about going back actually. Someday I will. But this was a little town that I remember the stories growing up, that even when a black doctor came to set up a practice, he literally got ran out of town. And—and I remember being part of the... a youth group at my church, and there was an African-American young man who came in to hang out with us, and they... the family that he would stay with would get death threats, because they were being hospitable to an African-American man. So as a lesbian... I’ve not been real sure I wanted to go back and visit. [laughs] However, I do know of—I now know of three of us who are gay and lesbian who came from that little small town. But, I don’t know whether they go back and visit or not. I finally came out to my classmates, after which I never heard from any of them except for one. But [laughs] so... ya know. There, there’s just not a lot of... of incentive for me to go back in.

MS: Yeah, no rush.

EO: I mean that place... [laughs] Someday, who knows.

MS: And, so—and so I’m guessing your family with you as you moved around. What was your family life like, just growing up and everything?

EO: I grew up in a small, conservative family. Very much involved in the church. There was no smoking, no drinking. Mom was a school teacher. My dad worked for Dayton Power and Light, so he was an engineer for them. He was a farmer by hobby. We didn’t have a big enough farm that he could make a living off of it, so he had to work, and he loved his farming, and he loved his cars. So, he was always buying cars and fixing them up. So, when we bought the farm in Pleasant Hill, he built himself a five-car garage. So, one of the cars was his workshop, the other four were—[throws up her hand] he always had cars that he’d come home from work with and he’d fix them up and then set them in the side yard and sell them, and that was his hobby, and he

loved the farming, and he couldn't—I only remember about two family vacations ever going on, because number one: we couldn't afford them, number two: you couldn't get Dad off the farm. So, and then he died when I was about—I guess I was 12 when he died. And that's when we ended up having to move off the farm. My brother bought the farm. And he moved in, and we moved out to a nearby town... and that town—my high school class was twice the size. I went from a class of 40 to a class of 70. But, I miss the farm, and I was—I loved the country. I loved helping my dad around the farm, and that kinda thing and... but I had good friends at the other school, too. But mom was always real concerned that we would turn out right. She used to lose a lot of sleep over whether or not we would—But I mean I ever took up with drugs, I never—but she's so worried though.

MS: Well you said your brother bought the farm, how much older than you was he?

EO: He was eight years older.

MS: Eight years older, okay.

EO: I had a brother who was eight years older, a sister seven years older, a sister four years older. Then there was me. Then I had a sister 13 months younger than I.

MS: Oh my gosh. So it's all spaced out and then like...

EO: And I always joke I was my mom's answer to depression, because she lost the baby between my sister, four years older than I, and there was another in between she and I. And mom got real depressed and then she ended up having me. And I was the answer to my mom's depression so.

MS: [giggles] Well, that's a good way of looking at it. All right, and then you said you had a partner? How long have you guys been together?

EO: We've been together 23 years. Her name is Mary Kelly. Mary has her own interesting story. It has nothing to do with Central Pennsylvania, but she comes from a family where all the children are gay and lesbian. So, she has three gay brothers.

MS: Wow.

EO: And, she was the one that was supposedly was [uses air quotes] “normal” [laughs] ‘cause her brothers always knew they were gay. And so she was the only one that got married. She got married and had three sons. And stayed with her husband for 25 years. And then realized that she was not in love with him... and that what really—and what she really did was love women. And so she ended up—Mary has her own fascinating story. She thought growing up in the family she grew up in, she thought suicide was preferable over divorce. Which her parents never would've agreed to—agreed with but, that's just kind of—I mean she's 16 years older than I am, so it's a different generation, and they looked at things a lot differently. But she eventually got her divorce, and she was with—she was with another partner for about, I think... let's see... eight years or so—six or eight years before we met, and then we've been together for 23.

MS: Is she the only partner you've ever had?

EO: —Soon to be 24.

MS: Wow.

EO: No. I had a couple of short relationships. I was older when I came out. I was already out of college, in seminary, and had pastored for about six years. And—seven years, I guess. Before I came to terms with the fact that I was lesbian. And then I had two year and a half relationships before Mary. So, she was my third lesbian relationship.

MS: Third times a charm.

EO: There ya go. But I did not get married before that so... and I was glad she had the kids. That's exactly how I wanted to raise kids. I had a partner who did it [laughs] And I get to enjoy them and the grandkids.

MS: Yeah and the puppies.

EO: The puppy is ours, so. This is the third dog we've had, so...

MS: All right, and what made you decided to become a pastor?

EO: That was long before any of the sexuality stuff. I was actually—I was actually in college. I went to Manchester College [Indiana]. Which is a Church of the Brethren College like Elizabethtown. And I had grown up in the Church of the Brethren. We joined the Church of the Brethren when I was about three, I guess, or so. So, the Church of the Brethren is all I ever really knew. Went to Church of the Brethren College, and I just had a very—I had a very specific calling to the ministry. I was real active in the youth group and that kind of thing. I was always active in the church and particularly during the time of the Vietnam War, I was always—Church of the Brethren is a—is a—one of the five historic peace churches, so I was very moved by that. So, I was out campaigning for politicians who were standing on peace platforms and that kind of thing, and if I hadn't had a family that kind of reigned tight on kids, I probably would've been out to protest and all kinds of things. But I was never allowed to do those kinds of things. So... so I had—in the youth group, I had preached—when they had youth Sunday, I was the one that they picked. They'd say, "You preach." And—and so we'd center our service around that kind of stuff. My little sister and I, we used to hold worship services at the holidays for our families at home, and I used to do really goofy sermons and that kind of thing, but... she played the piano, so she played the piano, and we'd take an offering plate. We usually got lint from pockets in the offering plate, you know. That was my brother's and sister's idea of going along with us. And so finally, I prayed and prayed about it, and... and one day, I was part of a Bible study at college and I said, "I don't know if I believe in this stuff where you ask God for a sign." But I said, I'm gonna do it anyhow. So I said, "Okay God, if you really want me to go into the ministry, you need to—you need to have someone say this particular passage to me at the end of Matthew: "Go and make disciples of all the nations." And, and I thought that was probably petty safe, because it

was a Bible study on Romans, so weren't should be dealing with Matthew at all. And so we went to the Bible study, and it went off just like it was supposed to and we all got up and got ready to leave. And the guy who led the Bible study, his name was Doug, and Doug says, "Well, no everybody, sit back down. I have one other thing to share with ya." And we all sit back down. And he got the Bible out, and he read the exact passage that I had prayed about before I went there. And I said, "What am I supposed to do with this? Nobody's going to believe this. So, I went to my pastor, and I said this is what's happened. And he says, "Well, I think you're calling to the ministry, and you better make good on what it is you said." So, I ended up getting licensed to the ministry at that point. I held that license for a couple of years. My last year in college I became very disillusioned with the church, and there was a real conservative group on campus, and they got involved with the Gideons [International], and I saw them trying to push Bibles at people, and I said, "That—that's not what the church—I don't want anything to do with any part of it if that's what the church is about." So, like a lot of college students, I backed away from the church and said, "Nope, this isn't me." And gave up my license for ministry, and it stayed that way until I was out of college for about a year and a half. And started working in—I was working in Wabash, Indiana, as a probation officer.

MS: Oh wow.

EO: 'Cause my degree was in sociology. They didn't have social work majors back then.

MS: That's what I'm studying.

EO: They were just starting that. So, my degree was in sociology and my emphasis was in criminal justice.

MS: Same.

EO: And I was a probation officer. And did that for a year and a half. In the process, I wasn't attending the church anymore or anything like that. But I met a Church of the Brethren Pastor. And if had needed a home for a runaway, all I had to do was call this Pastor, and somebody in the congregation would offer me a home.

MS: Oh, wow.

EO: And so I thought, "Well, that was kind of strange." And so I sat down, and I talked to Phyllis several times, and Phyllis said, "Eh, you really need to come check us out sometime." I said, "Yeah, right, okay." And she'd send me these letters about the newest Sunday school that they were having, what they were studying, "No need to read it ahead of time, just come, and we read it together, and we talk about it." And so finally one day I said, "Okay, I'm gonna get her off my back. I'm gonna go try it one time. And that's it." And I went, and I fell in love with the church. It was what I thought church always should be. They ministered to each other and that left the pastor free to minister to the community. She knew every prostitute in town, she knew the mayor who didn't come to our church. She just made it a point to know who he was, who the prostitutes were, who, who—who people were in town. And she ministered to the community, and the people in the church ministered to each other. And I said, "This is what the church is

about? Okay.” And she’s the one who got me to rethink my call to ministry. And she thought it was pretty clear that I should be headed that direction. And so I—I took a weeks vacation from my job as a probation officer. I said “Okay!” I said—I was gonna get this off my back too. I said, “I’m gonna go—I’m gonna go talk to my family about it, and I just wanna talk to some friends about what they think if I would do this.” And—and she said, “Well that fine. As long as the last day of your vacation, you have an interview at the seminary.” And I said, “Okay, well, we’ll set it up. Doesn’t mean I’m gonna say yes. But I’ll set it up that way.” So I went and talked to my family, and they said, “Well, if that’s what you wanna do, then go do it.” And my family and I... we—we—I always knew I was different growing up than family. I had no concept as to why. I mean sexuality was not something you talked about in my family, and I didn’t know—the little small town I grew up in, I’d never heard the word gay or lesbian. I had not even heard the word fag. I never heard any of that until I went to college, and then I was I was aware that there were people on campus who were different, and... but I never really... I never really out any of it together. They were talking about those things on campus now, like they—we were talking about racism and things like that, but we weren’t talking about sexuality or those kinds of things. So, my family said, “Sure, if that’s what you wanna do, go for it” and everything. Even my brother. My brother never agreed with anything I ever wanted to do with my life. And so the last day, I had my interview, and they called me a week later and said you’re in. And this was in August and classes started in September. So, I put in my resignation as a probation officer and called my brother, and I said, “Well, they said yes so I resigned today, and I’m off for seminary.” And he said, “Are you crazy?” And—and—and that’s when I knew that God let me hear exactly what I needed to hear in order to make the decision. And I did. And my ministry has been very varied. I have not pastored the whole time. I pastored in the Church of the Brethren. Then I did alternative ministry in federal military prisons nationwide, and—did that for three years, and I came back to pastoring in Metropolitan Community Church [MCC], and then I took a break for another six years and did work with HIV here in the Harrisburg area. And then, I’ve now gone back into ministry, but I’ve gone back into ministry with the United Church of Christ. So, [laughs] that’s the long and the short of that one.

MS: All right. Okay, so you said you had a bunch of different roles just besides pastoring.

EO: That’s right.

MS: A lot of what you can find, just Google searching you, talks about your involvement with the Metropolitan Community Church. So, what kind of drew you to that specific?

EO: The fact that I was lesbian. [laughs]

MS: So that was after you had come out?

EO: I... I went through seminary and never dealt with the fact that I was lesbian. I pastored in California, and while I was in Southern California, I pastored to the Long Beach Church of the Brethren. And while I was there, I represented the Church of the Brethren on the Southern California Ecumenical Council. And one of the things that happened when I served on that council was Metropolitan Community Church came looking for membership in that group. And all these mainline churches said, “If you let them in, we’re leaving,” and I looked to this group of

people and I said, “Who are you?” [laughs] And they said, “You’ve never heard of Metropolitan Community Church?” I said, “No, who are you?” And they said, “Well, we’re a Christian church that has primary ministry to the gay and lesbian community.” I said, “Oh!” I said, “You know the Church of the Brethren’s talking about that right now. I guess I need to do some studying on this and figure out what I believe about it.” So, independent of dealing with myself or anything else, I did. I studied the issue. That’s when the Church of the Brethren, like a lot of denominations, was first bringing their papers on homosexuality and talking about it and having these dialogues at conferences and that kinda thing. And I needed to figure out what it is I believed about it. And I came out after studying the Bible, and these people had given me things to read on both sides. They didn’t just wanna give me one side. They gave me both sides. And I came out saying, the Bible doesn’t condemn homosexuality. And that began my relationship—actually, they—when I wanted to learn more, they put me in touch with the MCC pastor in Long Beach. His name was Dusty Pruitt, and Dusty and I used to meet once a month for lunch. And she taught me about MCC and what the Bible said and didn’t say, and we had great discussions, and... I ended up leaving there coming to Baltimore [Maryland] to the Dundalk Church of the Brethren, and one of the things they asked me in my interview was, “Well, how do you deal with gay and lesbian people?” I said, “I deal with them the way I deal with anyone else,” because they had lesbians that they knew were part of the congregation, and they wanted to know how some—how an incoming pastor would deal with that issue. No problem. And so I did. I pastored to a number of people who were lesbian in that congregation, and as a part of that, I learned to know the pastor at the MCC in Baltimore. There was a women pastoring there at the time. Her name was Jennie Boyd Bull. And Jennie—when one of my—one of the couples in my church called me and said, “Could you marry us?” My answer then was, “Well I could,” I said, “but if you want it to be here in the church, we’re going to have to take it in front of counsel, and I’m not sure how that would go. And if you... if you really wanna have a service that’s really gonna be inclusive of everybody and be what it is you really want it to be,” I said, “I’d really recommend going to MCC.” And so I said, “I’ll find out the pastor’s name and everything for ya.” So I found out the pastor’s name and—and I met with Jenny and talked to her a bit and gave the information of the couple in my church. And that just started my relationship with—with that church. And I’d go there and worship every once in a while on a Sunday afternoon. They worshipped on Sunday afternoons, and so I’d do my service in the morning, and then I’d go over to the church just to see what was happening, and I hadn’t experienced one of their services before, and so I went to experience their service. And in the midst of all of this, a relationship I had that I had refused to label whether it was a lesbian relationship or not— every time I raised that question with the person in the relationship she said, “No, no, no, no.” I said, “Okay.” I—I—I always had a thing against labels and so in high school—and so—I mean it seems dumb now, but I mean, I refused to put my name on the Honor Roll. And my mom would always get mad. She’d come home and say, “I went to get my hair done at the hair—at the—at the beauty parlor, and they said your name wasn’t on the Honor Roll.” And I said, “No, I didn’t turn it in. I don’t have to have my name written down somewhere to know that I did well.” And she says, “Yeah, but they all asked me about it.” And I said, “I don’t care.” So, I was always fighting labels like that. So, when she said no, I said, “I don’t really care what it’s called.” I knew it was meeting my intimacy needs at the moment. We were together as often as we possibly could be. We were sexually active together, but if it wasn’t going to be called that, then I didn’t care. Until the day she announced to me that she was getting married. And then I went into a very deep depression. And I was fortunate enough to be a part of a clergy group, a fellowship group. And they saw my depression,

and they said, “Eva, you really need to get some help for that.” And I was really blessed, they didn’t ask me any questions, they just said “You need to get some help,” and I said, “I don’t know a therapist.” And they said—the one person in the group said, “Well, ya know, I’m gonna suggest this person that he’s been my teacher, not my therapist, but I just have that sense that he’d be a really, really good therapist,” and so they put me in touch with him, and so I started seeing him and over—I guess I saw him for about six months about the depression, and he kept saying, “Eva, we need to talk about your sexuality sometime,” and I said, “Yeah, yeah, yeah sometime, not now.” [laughs] And—and meanwhile, people at the congregation—I was just convinced I hadn’t found the right man, ya know, and people at the congregation—so I joined—what did I join? Matchmaker International.

MS: Oh God.

EO: And so I was having these matchmaker dates and then coming to the church and preaching. And they’d say, “Well, who’d ya see this week?” And so I’d tell them about who I met. None of it ever felt natural or anything like that. And at about that time, I had to go back to Ohio. There had been—I had involved in a church camp. I was on fulltime staff at Church of the Brethren Camp in Southern Ohio for four years, during the summers, while I was in college. And then the first summer when I was—right when I graduated from seminary, I was back on staff down there. And there were four of us on that staff who were very, very close. One of them was this person who I’d had the relationship with who got married. And... we... we’d always joked about the one who was the oldest. We said, “When you put in 25 years in this camp, we’re gonna throw you a big reunion.” So I was called and said, “It’s 25 years this summer, are we gonna do the reunion we promised we were gonna do?” And I said, “Ohhhhhhh okay. We said we were gonna do it, so let’s do it.” So, we planned whole thing, sent out the invitations. I arrived early because I was the only one who wasn’t married at that point. So, I could arrive early and make sure everything was setup and everything. There was a person in the office that I had known for several years and she said, “Well, whatcha doing for supper tonight?” And I said, [shrugs] “I don’t know.” She said, “Well, why don’t you come over to my place, and I’ll get some pizza.” I said, “Okay.” She says, “You’ve never seen my place.” She had worked in the office down there for several years. And so I had known who she was, but we had never really had in depth conversations or anything. So, I get to her house that night, and I walk in, and then I hear this music. I said, “What? What’s that music that’s playing?” She said, “Well, don’t cha know about women’s music?” And I said, “What’s women’s music?” She says, “Weeeeell, it’s music written by women who love women.” And I said, “Oh,” I said, “that’s neat.” I said, “Tell me some of the artists.” So, I was writing, I was madly writing down these—these artists’ names and stuff, and I said, “Ya know, I wanna tell some women back in my congregation about this.” I said, “They’ll be real interested to learn about this.” And so as the weekend went on the long and the short of it is this person ended up coming out to me. And we had one conversation late Saturday night when everyone else had gone to bed. We were the only two left that were upstairs in the dining room in the light of the fish tank. And—

MS: Ambiance. [Laughing]

EO: And then she—and were sitting there talking. She says, “Eva, do you mind if I tell you something?” And I said, “Go for it.” She says, “You know you’re a dyke.” I said, “Excuse me?”

She says, “You know you’re a dyke.” And I said, “Uhhhhmm.” She says, “You do know what a dyke is?” I said, “Yes, I do know what a dyke is, and no, I’m not a dyke.” And she said—she says, “Uh, yes, you are.” And the conversation—all I knew was wanted to run from that place at that point and—and it one of the loneliest places I ever knew myself that I could possibly be. ‘Cause here I was with a group of people that I had spent hours upon hours upon hours with, and I felt there was nobody in that entire group that I could talk with, nobody that I could share this with. And I literally went running downstairs, got in my sleeping bag, pulled it over my head, and I stayed there for the rest of the night. Didn’t sleep, didn’t do anything, just thought, “Oh God. No, I don’t know what to do with this.” So, I was supposed to be in Ohio yet for seven days after that on vacation seeing my family, who I was obviously not going to talk about this with. And, the next morning she was in tears, she thought she had come on to a straight woman and that she had just done this horrible thing. And I said, “Diane, I don’t know what any of this means. Just let it be right now. We’re friends. You’re gonna be fine.” And I said something that I—I—I always think twice now when I say it to anyone. For the longest time, I would never say it to anyone again, because it was so condescending. I said, “I’ll pray for you.” And I left that place with her in tears, and everybody saying, “What’s wrong with Diane?” I said, “She just really misses people, that’s all.” Couldn’t tell them what was going on with her. I wouldn’t do that to her. And... ended up in Ohio. Well, I ended up talking to Diane every night. I’d wait until my brothers and sisters went to bed. I was staying with my oldest sister. It’s the only person I ever really stayed with in Ohio. And I’d wait until she went to bed, and I’d sit up and talk to Diane, and talk to Diane, and talk to Diane. By the time I got home, I was pretty clear within myself that I was lesbian. And at the time I was, I was not only in therapy, but I was seeing a spiritual advisor who was a Catholic Priest. I had—I had wanted—I had wanted to go on—on a spirituality retreat, and so I found this retreat that Bon Secours Sisters that was being run by a priest and a nun. And the priest was the one that I heard of from a priest friend of mine, and I thought, “Wow, he must be really neat. And I’d really like to meet him sometime and just hear him speak and just that kind of thing.” And he was leading this retreat called the Hungers and the Wonders of The Human Heart, and I thought, “I really wanna go to that.” Well, when I went to the retreat, I found out it was a seven day silent retreat. I didn’t know it was a seven day silent retreat when I went. And they finally, I thought, I can’t do this. It was so much fun ‘cause we—I was there with 40 religious women. They went around, everyone was giving their order, who they were with, and all that kinda thing. And they said, “Well, did we get everybody?” And I put up my hand, and I said, “Not me.” And they said, “Who are you with?” I said, “The Church of the Brethren.” They said, “The church of the what?” [laughs] And so, I was the only one who was not Catholic who was there. So, they had a talking dining room and a silent dining room. And I thought, “Well, maybe if I can talk for the meals, I can handle this.” So I stayed, and first day, I went to the talking dining room. I found it was so obtrusive into that time where I was being invited just to deal with me, that I only went there one time. Then, I went back to the silent dining room, and I stayed there. I was in silence for the whole seven days. But one of the things that happened there—my therapist had had me dealing—doing some work with my inner child, and he had this little burlap doll that I had done some work with and for some reason—I don’t know why though—when I went to that retreat, I took that—that burlap doll with me, just as kind of a meditation focal point. And I ended up carrying that doll down to chapel with me one night when they had communion. And I literally felt—I’ve never been able to put it into words, but I felt during this retreat this whole wall just kind of collapse. And I cried, and I cried, and I cried, and people just let me. You could just—you did whatever it is that you needed to do. And

so when I was coming back from Ohio, I was supposed—I had continued then seeing this Catholic priest once a month for spiritual direction. So, I was supposed to go talk to him, and then the next day, I was gonna go see my therapist. I thought, “I’m ready to deal with this sexuality stuff now with my therapist,” ya know, but what do I do with the Catholic priest? ‘Cause that’s all I was really thinking about. And so I thought, “Hmm okay, I know. We’ll talk about jobs and where it is God is calling me, and what I’m supposed to be doing,” and that sounded like a pious thing to talk about. Yeah. So I went in and sat down with—with the Catholic priest, and __Lowell__?? said to me, he says, “Well, what do you wanna talk about today?” I said, “Well, I don’t know where God is calling me.” I said, “I have this opportunity. Manchester was looking for a chaplain. Some of my friends were saying, ‘Why don’t cha come back to your alma mater and be the chaplain on campus?’ Some other were saying, ‘Ya know? Why don’t you apply for a church in Ohio? At least then we’d getta see ya.’ Some others were saying I could’ve stayed in the church in Baltimore, Dundalk. They had no problem with me, we were doing fine.” And I was working with this group called Prison Visitation Support who withstood the federal military visitation. And I had—I had the chance to possibly take some employment with them and be their recruitment coordinator. So, I laid out all these possibilities. And __Lowell__?? looked at me and says, “Eva.” He says, “Tell me where God has touched you most deeply in your life.” And I started crying, and I said, “I can’t tell you that.”

[dog jumps up and starts barking]

[Eva shushes dog]

[dog growls]

EO: [Talking to dog] Quiet. Quiet. That’s okay. You’re just fine. Just quiet.

[dog pulls off Eva’s mic]

EO: Sunshine, back up. Back up. Okay. There we go. There. Sorry about that.

MS: I was just like, “What!?”

EO: So. So. He said, “Tell me where God has touched you most deeply in your life.” And I said, “I can’t tell you that.” He says, “All I can tell you, Eva, is that if you tell me, I’ll treat it as a treasure. And you’ll never have to worry about anyone else knowing or anything else. It’s something I will treat as a treasure.” And I said, “Well,” I said, “it’s in my relationships with other women. It’s in my intimate relationships with women.” And I said, “It’s about the fact that I’m lesbian.” And I went to the therapist the next day, and I walked in, and I said, “Hey Dick! Wanna talk about sexuality? I’m ready. I’m lesbian. What do you wanna talk about?” [Laughs] And I told him, and he and I met for about six more weeks, but it was really—everything fell into my—into place in my life at that point. Everything. And so... so I ended up leaving—resigning from the Church of the Brethren. The woman in Ohio ended up being my first partner. She moved out. She moved into the parsonage with me, ‘cause she moved out—the weekend she moved in was the weekend I announced my resignation, but I gave them a six month window. And... I said—I told them that I just had another opportunity that merged my love of criminal

justice and ministry which was the Prisoner Visitation Support. Which was true, it did, but I also wasn't willing to put the Dundalk church in the middle of a church fight, and—and I knew it would be. I knew the denomination would have a problem if came out as openly lesbian, and they might put up with my doing chaplaincy or doing a prison kind of thing, but they weren't gonna put up with me pastoring. And I—Dundalk probably would've supported me in that kind of fight, but I just wasn't willing. I loved the church, and I wasn't willing to put them in that place. And I needed to understand what it meant to love another woman. And I didn't wanna live in a parsonage and figure that out. [laughs] So—so, I ended up resigning from the Dundalk Church of the Brethren, and I did the prison ministry for three years, and when I—my commitment to that ministry was for three years, and when the end of the third year came, I said, "Okay, what am I gonna do now?" And I probably could've stayed doing that a little longer, but I—my heart—my heart has always been in pastoral ministry. And, so I knew I wanted to go back into pastoral ministry. And I already had the relationship with MCC developed. And so it was an easy decision to just say, "I'm gonna move my—my pastors credentials into MCC and do my pastoring there." And that's when—that's when—I was just in the process, I'd taken my first class that was required of me to move the—my credentials. A class on sexuality. And there was a district conference at the end of that. Well, in the middle of the district conference, the Harrisburg MCC, MCC of the Spirit, broke out into this big congregational fight right in front of the district committee. [laughs] And back then MCC had different levels of churches, and so they were a commission level church and that meant they got to decide their own pastor. Well, when this big fight broke out, they actually voted out their pastor that was here before me and—but they wouldn't acknowledge that that's really what they had done, so there was some dysfunction going on in the church and so when they broke out in this big argument right in front of the district committee, the committee says, "We're moving you down to a mission church. We're lowering your status. We'll decide who your next pastor is." And they came and found me and asked me if I would—if I would go and be an interim for six months and see what I could do with the church. And that's how I ended up here in Harrisburg. Was doing—I did the six month interim, and then we decided that we were a good enough match that I ended up staying as the settled pastor. And I was here for 17 years.

MS: And what was your most stand-out experience while you were there during those 17 years?

EO: Oh come on. There were so many.

MS: You can tell us about a couple.

EO: [Long pause] Stand out in what way?

MS: Just anything that's really like stuck with you.

EO: Oh there's so many. There was [laughs]—I—I was—we had the great bathroom controversy. I always remember that one. And I remember the church making some—some very specific decisions. We worshipped for 16 years in the Quaker Meeting House. So we—our worships were always at night. We had to set up church, tear it down, all that. And finally, we were strong enough as a congregation, we wanted to make a plan to actually buy our own facility, and in fact, the church at the time had took a lot of pride in—in recognizing that we

were—we believe we were the first primarily GLBT group in Central Pennsylvania to actually own our own property. And before we bought that property, we wanted to make some specific decisions, and so one of our decisions was we wanted it to be in the city, and we wanted it to be in an integrated neighborhood. So we did not—we wanted—at that time, the West Shores were known very much as the White West Shores, back in that day. And it was—it was more divided than it is today. I don't think you hear that quite as much today as you used to. But it used to be that if you were African American, you really didn't feel that comfortable traveling over on the west shore of the river. And so we—we made a decision that we really wanted to be in the city. We wanted to support the city, we wanted to be in the city, and we wanted to be in a neighborhood that was multi-racial so that we would have the chance of attracting different races and be a multi-cultural congregation. So... we... we found—we found the building in the city. It was the—we looked at a couple. At the time, there were a bunch of catholic churches that were closing down, and we did look at Sacred Heart. It's down at the corner of 13th and Sycamore—was at the corner of 13th and Sycamore. And that was the one a lot of people really wanted. Beautiful stain glass windows and the whole bit. I was really glad we didn't get it. [Laughs] Because it would have taken as much to bring—make that one handicap accessible and bring it up to code as it didn't to renovate the entire office building that we did buy. And so we ended up losing that bid because someone—someone let slip to someone who was a part of another company that we were putting in a bid and what it was being put in for. And so the electric company—not PPL [PPL Electric Utilities] but, an electric—electrician—they do electrical stuff, they ended up out bidding us. By just a few, a little bit. But we're pretty sure it's because someone let it slip, and they didn't want us in there. So—so we lost that one, so we kept looking and finally settled on, what the time was the—an office building that had been built for the liquor control board and had most recently been used as FEMA [Federal Emergency Management Agency] when the flood was in Harrisburg, and they had operated out of that building. So, we bought that and took it over, up on Jefferson Street, and redid the entire thing. Then, they said, “Well, we still don't have any African Americans in our congregation.” So, we started talking about language and about worship style and all that kind of thing. And I think one of the things I'm proudest about with that congregation was that they were willing to have those conversations at that time... and they were willing—I'll never forget when we invited two African-American lesbians in our worship service. One was a member of our church, the other was just somebody who had done some stuff with us kind of in and out of the congregation—was a friend of the congregation but wasn't a member. Talk about what it felt like to come into our congregation, and how they felt they were treated as an African-American lesbian in our congregation. And people's—they were amazed—they did not realize the kinds of attitudes that they picked up. And it changed the congregation at that point. I was—I was really glad that people were willing to have that conversation and that they were willing to put themselves on the line to make some changes. Because it had to do with the type—the style of music that we used. So, we knew that we—the next—when we went to get our next music minister, we needed someone who played gospel. [laughs] Black gospel. And we got somebody who did that, and it made a huge difference. It's not that we were then overrun with a lot of African Americans, and I don't know that there are that many that are there now, but it was important to the congregation, and they were willing to have the conversation, and they made the changes that they needed to make. The bathroom controversy is kind of the same thing, only it had to do with the trans community. We—we were always right out in front ya know inviting in the trans community. We—we had trans folk who were part of us over in the Quaker Meeting House, and when we gone into our

own facility then, one of the things we did was approach Renaissance and say, “Do you need a meeting space?” And so Renaissance started meeting there, and they’re now not called Renaissance, they’re called something else. But they started meeting there on a regular basis once a month. There were a number of trans people who are part of our congregation, and one of the things that happened when we moved into our own building was some women came and said, “Why are you letting men use the women’s restroom?” And I said, “I didn’t know we were.” And they said, “Well,” they said, “they haven’t had surgery have they? So, they’re really men.” And I said, “Ya know what? I didn’t ask to see their parts. Have you?” [Laughs] And so we—we ended up having to have—we had a whole congregational forum on what it meant to be transsexual, what the difference was between transsexual, transgender, crossdressers, ya know the whole—the whole ball of wax. And, ya know, finally I came down and said, “I am not standing at the door and asking anyone who they are. If you’re in the restroom and you see anyone peeking in the crack at you, you come get me, and I’ll escort them out of the church no matter who they are.” But I said, “Other than that, I am not gonna ride—I am not gonna decide who uses what restroom. And nobody else here is going to do that either.” And MCC did that when I was pastored there. We did that with the transgendered issue. We did that with autism. We had a couple who adopted a little boy, and it turns out he was autistic, and people would come and say, “Why can’t you control him?” And I said—and they’d come and say, “People are saying really awful things to us.” And I said, “Let’s do some education,” and so one Sunday, in the middle of the worship service, ‘cause that’s when the most people were there, I had them get up, and I said, “Educate us about autism.” And so they did. They had handouts and everything else. We never heard another complaint, and in fact, that young man ended up frequently celebrating communion with me. He—he couldn’t—he—he knew the words that I was saying, he couldn’t mimic them, but he could come up, and he would stand beside me, and just be silent, and raise the bread with me or raise the cup with me, and people would be in tears, but it’s because they were willing to learn. And—and understand that every—if we really wanna be multi-cultural and multi-racial and multi-ethnicities and those kinds of things, we’ve gotta learn from each other. And we’ve gotta—I always tried to model that when I was pastor and in a number of different kinds of circumstances. Even when I was invited out to Messiah College to do a panel discussion out there. My associate pastor and I were invited out to do a panel discussion on homosexuality in the Bible. And I think we blew them away because the only thing we asked was for them to recognize we took the Bible as seriously as they did, we just come out at a different spot. And we—we’d done that over eons with all kinds of issues. Sexuality is just another one, that’s all. So, it has to do with the way we’re willing to be educated and then take responsibility for that education. There are people who left our church after that bathroom controversy and said, “I don’t feel safe. I can’t do that.” I said, “That’s fine. You have every right to do that, but we’re gonna be here and be open, but we’re not gonna—we’re not going to say no to the transgender community.

MS: Okay. And I know that MCC advocates for a lot of groups. Some of the stuff I found online was like Eagles Perch, the Silent Witness Program. There’s the Trans Central Alliance. Were you ever really involved with any of those specific groups? All of em’?

EO: Silent Witness, I like to remind folks, started MCC. It really did. It started because there was a member at MCC, it wasn’t because of me. It’s ‘cause a member of MCC went to the Pride Festival and she kept seeing the person that we used to call the morgue lady. She had an old Ford

truck, and she had taken the “L” and turned it into an “L”—the “F” into an “L.” So, she had a truck on the back it said “Lord” [laughs] and—

MS: God.

EO: One day we were at the—the Pride festival and Yavonne Wilson—nobody’s interviewed Yavonne. Yavonne is somebody who really should be interviewed. Yavonne Wilson, in her own quiet kind of way, because Yavonne would never say, “No, I was the one who started it.” We saw her walking out toward this women, and she had a sign. We said, “Yavonne, what are you doing?” She says, “Well, I just want people to know there’s a different message,” and she had this sign that just sat some place that says, “God knows I’m gay,” I think that what it said. And—or something like that, it was a very neutral kind of thing, but just a positive statement about being gay and a positive faith statement about being gay. And she said, “I’m not gonna take em’ on.” We said, “You’re just gonna antagonize things. And you’re gonna make it worse.” “No, I’m not. I’m just gonna stand there with her.” And so she did, she went out and for the entire day, she stood there beside this protester who was shouting stuff. Yovonne didn’t say a word. She just stood there with her sign. And you could tell that the women really was getting annoyed with her, and so she finally said, “Oh well, I guess I’m closing up for the day,” and took her sign and started walking down the street, only to set up some place else. Yovonne followed her with her sign.

MS: Oh my god.

EO: Didn’t say anything just stood there with her. She did that for the entire day. The next year, she came to the church, and there were a couple of us who joined her in that. And so the whole concept of Silent Witness started from Yovonne’s... from Yavonne’s... single mindedness. And simply out of—simply out of an attitude of love. That’s all she wanted to do. She just wanted to love this women, and she wanted to let the people know that she was talking to that there were two sides. And they could choose whichever one they wanted, but she wanted to know both sides, and that’s all there was to it. And that was just such a powerful, powerful witness. Eagles Perch was in existence before I ever came to the church. It was—it was already inactive by the time I got there. But when there was nobody else in this community doing anything, there was a group, and it was a small group at times. I mean, there was a point when they were gonna close the MCC here in Harrisburg. There were five people who were holding it together and part of the time they met on City Island even, they didn’t have a place, they just went down and gathered. And they went down there, because at the time, it was an area where a lot of gay and lesbian people did things that they probably shouldn’t have been doing. It was a cruise area. And so they wanted to be down there and do church and do Bible study where they could see there was a different—there was a different message that they could have. MCC started, because Troy Perry wanted gay and lesbian and trans and bi and affirming people to know that there’s a God who would embrace their sexuality. And they didn’t have to have—they didn’t have to either have their sexuality or their faith—that they could have both together. And it’s because of that that I think there will always be a place in... in history and in current society for MCC. I don’t know that it’ll ever be large like other mainline congregations but, they bring together faith and spirituality in a way that nobody else does, nobody else does. And I don’t think ever will.

MS: All right, and with that being said, how do you think MCC is perceived by other churches that aren't as accepting as the LGBT Community?

EO: The gay church.

MS: Mhmm. Yeah, basically.

EO: Yeah. They see MCC as they gay church and even members, when they talk about MCC they'll say, "Yeah, we go to the gay church." And I said, "No, you go to a Christian church that has a primary ministry to the gay and lesbian community." They're two very different things. If you, if you know the history of—of—of MCC as a denomination, the first 13 people that ever met—it—it was a very diverse group. There were different races. There were different sexual orientations. There were straight people as well as gay people. It was a very, very, very, diverse group. And that as always been the—the vision of Troy Perry, who was the founder. And I think should always remain the vision. I think I think that in all honesty, I think that those who would put down an MCC probably do so, because MCC takes the Bible seriously as anybody else and—and comes out at a very holistic place. And I think that's threatening. The same reason the denominations are fighting themselves divided over the issue today. If they'd simply do much as the UCC [United Church of Christ] has done and say denominationally, we're gonna say it's accepted, but then leave it open to every local congregation about what they wanna do with that, people will find their own journey through that. I've always said, I—I don't have a problem with congregations who say no to the acceptance of gay and lesbian people. But then just let them say—let their yes be yes and let their no be no... and not spend the time putting each other down, just having different paths, that's all there is to it. That's what seems to be so hard for us sometimes is not allowing others to be where they're at. I probably learned that in my own family, because I have—in my family—when I came out, my parents were no longer living, so I didn't have to deal with that. But I first came out to my oldest sister, because I knew if anyone would accept me, she would. And she did. Now her acceptance changed over the years from tolering—tolerating to true genuine acceptance, I think. And that had to do with the fact that, though I was probably closer to her than any of my other brothers and sisters, she didn't—she didn't know... me in a personal enough way to really make all the connections she needed to make. And when she found out that the guidance counselor at her school who was her best friend was lesbian, then she could make those connections, and it changed our relationship. So we've always been fine with each other, but I had to—I had my older sister who wrote a letter to me and said I could never spend time with my niece and nephew alone again. And I had my younger sister who quoted me every Bible verse and that there was and said, "Ya know, you're going to hell." And I've always said the places I've pastored have done well, because I have two sisters who are still praying for my salvation. [laughs]

MS: There you go.

EO: So their prayers are just being answered, but not in the way they expected them to be. And I think one of the most powerful stories in my own family, for me, has to do with when I had a nephew who struggled with drug addiction. And he attempted suicide when he was around 27 or something like that, and my—this was my next oldest sister's son, and they said they had done everything they could do, he was not allowed to come home, and he ended up calling Mary and I

from York Hospital and saying, “Would you come down and see me?” So, we went down to see him, and we talked with him and he said, “Can I come live with you?” And I said, “Okay, but there’ll be some ground rules. No drugs. You have to work.” And so he came to live with us, and he lived with us for about nine months. In that time, he was off drugs from everything we know longer than any time he had been previous in his life, but he ended up OD’ing while he was here in this house. I had to call my sister and say, “Your son died last night,” and she came up with her missionary Baptist pastor, and I met her at the door, and I said, “I’m so sorry.” And I said, “I don’t know where you want to have the funeral or anything like that,” and she looked at me and said, “Well, it’ll be at your church.” I said, “MCC?” She said, “Yeah. That’s where he went.” And I said, “Well, yeah.” She says, “Well, then that’s where we’ll have the service.” And I said, “Okay.” So, my other sisters ended up coming out. We were all here together, and we ended up doing the funeral at MCC. And I couldn’t do it, because I was just too emotionally involved but, two of the people at the church took over for me, and they—they did the funeral, and people got up and testified and—about how Isaac had changed their lives and what changes they had seen in him while he was there. And, my sisters were actually in—all in a congregation that I was pastoring that was primarily gay and lesbian for the first time. Only time. In all the time that I’ve been pastoring. And it changed, it changed us. As a family, we’ve never been the same since then. We’re not necessarily in any greater touch than we ever have been, but even her missionary Baptist Pastor, he came to MCC that night for the funeral, and when he ended up hearing the testimonies, he went back to his own church the next—the next night we had—we also had a service down there [points] for the church folks down there. And he stood up, and he said, “Ya know, before last night, I wouldn’t have known what to say about Isaac.” But he said, “I met a group of people last night that had reached out to him and that he had reached out to in a way that I never would have guessed.” And he said, “I saw God in a place I never thought I’d see God.” And so I’ve learned from even my own family that things change. If you just keep the faith and stay on course, things change. None of us ever thought we’d be able to be legally married in Pennsylvania in my lifetime. But it changed, didn’t it? I did more funerals for people who—in Central Pennsylvania whose family would not recognize their partner, who... they... didn’t take care of each other legally, who were kept apart from each other, that—I’d never thought I’d see that change in my lifetime. But it has.

MS: So what struggles have the church faced due to their willingness to be inclusive, besides the whole, you trying to build—buy Sacred Heart and them kind of pushing you to the side—the electric company.

EO: I mean to go from the fact that marriage is legal now, to remembering the Pride Festival when I did a mass marriage on stage with the protesters about ten feet away, yelling as loud as they could about what we were doing. [laughs]

MS: Wow.

EO: I mean, things have just changed so much.

MS: You did a mass marriage?

EO: I did.

MS: What—what was that like?

EO: Well I mean it wasn't legal back then so it was a mass commitment ceremony, and I did it on the stage at Pride Festival. And—'cause we were trying to make some progress with marriage, and we wanted to make a public statement. So, all the couples had to meet with me ahead of time and we—but we did it. But the protesters were right there. It was down at the Southgate and the protestors were just right out at the street, and you could just hear them really, really, loud so I had to talk over all of them, and— [laughs]

MS: What was that experience like for you? Like, how did that make you feel?

EO: A long time ago, when I had first come out, I was at a Church of the Brethren annual conference and—and we were in the midst of a dialogue session on sexuality, and there was a women in the room who got up and said—pointed at us. I think this may have been the—the conference I was wearing around my shirt, “Nobody knows I'm a lesbian.” [laughs] I said—I've always said this is the most Brethren Church shirt I had, because as long as you're willing to be closeted, it's okay and sort of like “Don't ask, Don't tell.” And she got up and she pointed at us and she said, “All you want is for us to accept you, and I don't have to accept you.” And I looked at her, and I got up a few minutes later, and I said, “Ya know what? You're right. You don't. Most important thing is I accept myself. And if I accept myself, it really doesn't matter what you think of me. Oh, it'd be nice. But in the end it doesn't really matter.” And I've kind of taken that approach, so when—when the protestors are out there yelling, ya know, it's like—it's like the UCC I was pastoring down in York. When I—I was the interim pastor. That's what I just finished with.

MS: Mhmm.

EO: And when they interviewed me, they said, “Does it bother you that we're not open and affirming yet?” And my response to that was, “Well, it seems to me you gave me an interview, so you must be open.” I said, “Whether or not you're affirming or not,” I said, “I think that falls on you guys, not on me. I know I am. [laughs] So, you're gonna have to decide whether that's something that's important to you.” And they're in the process now, and they'll—by June, they'll—they'll vote to be open and affirming. It's one of the most affirming congregations I've been a part of. I don't know why they hadn't done it before this, but... and so, we're—while I was pastoring MCC, I was invited to a panel discussion at a UCC church in Halifax, and I went out there. I was called every name in the book. They're no longer a UCC church anymore. They left that denomination. And I had to learn from these kinds of experiences. Ya know, when people do that, it's because of something they're fighting in themselves, they're not fighting me. They're not fighting me. And so... it's their issue, not mine. It's kinda like—one of the things we did when I was at MCC, too, is we did condom distribution down on State Street. And we used to take condom packets, and we'd put our—a sticker on the outside of the packet with our name and address of the church and our worship time. And we'd go down between 11 o'clock and 2 am and on State Street and just walk the street and pass out condoms. And one of our members used to get me on a corner and say, “How can we be doing this? We're—we're—we're telling people that it's okay to have sex and all that kind of thing.” I said, “Ya know what? It seems to me that if I got handed a condom with the name of the church on it, I don't have to condemn

anybody. They're probably doing more self-condemnation to themselves than I could ever possibly do." I said, "The only reason I'm doing is 'cause I want them to be safe. If they're gonna go have sex, I want them to be safe. I don't want them getting HIV. I don't want them to get other diseases that they can get sexually transmitted," and I said, "I just want them to be safe. And I want them to know that there's a place that cares about them." And I think part of the problem with that person was they didn't know that God cared enough for them to be safe. So, we did it. And you do it, because it's what God calls you to do. Not because of what it's gonna get ya, or how it's gonna make you feel. Or anything like that. You just do it because it's the right thing.

MS: Well, besides passing out condoms, you said you did other work with HIV when you were kinda running down through saying all the involvement you did?

EO: I did.

MS: What kinda work were you doing?

EO: After I left—after I resigned from MCC, then I spent six years working for Alder Health Services. They were AIDS Community Alliance when we first started. And then—and I—I was in charge of their... I was in charge of their... I was the client assistance director. Started out with just housing, and then we assisted in all kinds of other ways. So, basically with the folks that were HIV positive, I would meet with them, and if they needed help with their rent or utilities or those kinds of things or ya know, when health care came down the pike, if they needed to apply for health care, if they... ya know, whatever type of assistance they needed. If they needed help with budgeting, those kinds of things, I would help them do that. So, I met with people primarily in their homes and helped them determine not only what they needed but what their plan was to take care of that need long term.

MS: And what like drove you to want to work with people that had HIV and AIDS after pastoring?

EO: Honestly, I had worked with people who—I mean I had congregational members who had HIV and AIDS. But honestly, after I finished the pastorate, there wasn't another MCC around to pastor, and my partner and I wanted to remain in the Harrisburg area, so I had to find something to do. And I happened to know some people up at Alder Health Services, and they knew me and my work in the community, and they happened to have a position they were developing, and so I just kinda fell into that. It's not that I was specifically working—looking to work with people who were HIV positive or—I was looking to work with the community and—and remain here, and to find something that that would also be considered ministry, and of course, in a denomination like Metropolitan Community Church, working with HIV will always be considered ministry.

MS: So, now that you've kinda like finished up your interim, what are—like—what are your plans?

EO: I'm looking for another church to pastor.

MS: Okay.

EO: But it may involve a move this time. And probably with United Church of Christ now instead of—instead of Metropolitan Community Church. I would love to pastor again with Metropolitan Community Church, but there are not that many of them around and some of them that are around are not full-time, and I need a full-time position. So, for that reason, I'm probably—my—right now I have my clergy credentials both with MCC and with the United Church of Christ, but right now I'm looking probably at the United Church of Christ for that reason.

MS: Do you think it might be possible for us to get more MCCs around here that are like full-time. Like how beneficial do you think that would be?

EO: [takes a long pause] That's hard, because though I believe that MCC has a particular niche, I'm also not sure that because of its particular niche and because of the rural kind of setting in Central Pennsylvania, I'm not sure how realistic it is to think that were gonna have a lot more MCCs. Maybe if it's like a—a several point charge, like ya have in the Methodist church or some United Church of Christ or something like that. But, I think that it would probably be as beneficial just to have congregations of faith open up and be truly inclusive of all of God's people. That means in all kinds of ways. I'm not one that wants to see a whole lot more church buildings around. I think there are enough of those. We need to be about doing the ministry with the people. And I know that from when I was a pastor of MCC, I mean we attempted to get something started in York, and we attempted to do something up in Williamsport, and it just—it wasn't really feasible with the people and the resources that we had. So, I think there—there needs to always be more and more places for GLBT folk to be—to be included, but whether it'll mean more MCCs or not sure.

MS: Okay. Is there anything else you wanted to talk about? I think we touched on pretty much everything.

EO: We touched on a lot of things.

MS: Yeah. Everything from the beginning to the future. I mean, based off of what you've seen so far with MCC and just even how you were saying that that one church was moving towards being affirming, what do you think the future holds for the LGBT community just in this area?

EO: I think the LGBT community in this area is probably gonna have to get a—a wider focus. I mean we have spent so many years talking about marriage and so many years talking about—I mean there's still a lot of work to be done, particularly with—with young people in the area bullying, and that kind of thing. There's always work to be done around being inclusive, around what it means to have Gay Alliance—Gay/Straight Alliances in high schools and in colleges and that kinda thing. There's still work to be done with all of that, but it... it becomes a different kind of work and needs to have some re-visioning and some—a sharper focus in terms of what it is that we really—I mean we haven't even started to touch the aging issues.

MS: Mhmm. Yeah.

EO: I mean with nursing homes and all that kind of thing. None of that has started to be touched in this area, I don't think. Very little I think has been done with that. And I think that has to—that's gotta be, because we have so many people who are gonna grow older now. You're interviewing some of us.

MS: Yeah, You're fine. You're young and spry. You're good.

EO: That are—that are growing older and... and have to address those kinds of things. I mean we been so focused on just tryna keep our—our—our legal rights and making sure our partners are taken care of in terms of that, but then... we go into, ya know, whole other places... and what we do with those things. I mean retirement communities... and if a lesbian couple is married, can they go share a place? An apartment or something like that at a retirement community with their—when they're a religiously based community? I don't know. It's—it's the kind of thing where ya have to—there's continuing work that has to be done with those things, so...

MS: Do you think we'll see any of that change anytime soon?

EO: Oh, I'm always hopeful. I found that a friend of mine had applied—well, a transgendered friend had applied at a—at a home, a Brethren home in the area. Because they were married as man and wife, so that they still had that certificate, but she has now become transgendered, transsexual, and so—but their marriage certificate still holds, because all of that changed when she legally changed her name. And—but they knew somebody on the board, and they got on the list to be in the place. That's with somebody who's transgendered. That's unheard of. So, if that kind of thing can happen in Central Pennsylvania, anything can happen. But it's not gonna happen unless we keep working at it.

MS: Okay. Anything else you wanted to discuss?

EO: [shakes head no]

MS: You good? All right, well, thank you.

EO: I'd like to thank our dog for not barking again.

MS: Yeah, yeah. She did well, she did well. Oh, and I wanted to thank you for taking the time to do this. I really enjoyed interviewing you.

EO: Good.

MS: It went really well. All right.