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Title

Ann Thompson Cook Oral History Interview and Transcript

Date

October 30, 2017

Extant

1 hour 23 minutes interview and 1 transcript

Abstract

Ann T. Cook, writer, activist, and straight ally first got involved in LGBT activism while leading Dumbarton United Methodist Church to join the Reconciling movement. She has written numerous guides including "and God Loves Each One" for religious communities to accept and affirm LGBT people. In 2010, she and Cedric Harmon started "Many Voices, A Black Church Movement for Gay & Transgender Justice."

Biographical

Ann Thompson Cook has provided visionary leadership in movements promoting social justice for nearly five decades. Through her advocacy in religious communities, she has continually found ways to expand thinking, reduce divisiveness, and create openings for respectful dialogue about sexuality, gender, and reproductive choice.

Beginning in the late 1980s, she created English and Spanish versions of And God Loves Each One, a guide to dialogue about sexual orientation. Her approach contributed to the strategy for the new movement to promote acceptance within the Methodist, Presbyterian, Episcopal, UCC, and other Protestant denominations. She was an early advocate for incorporating the concerns of transgender people in the gay rights movement and produced Made in God's Image, a guide to gender differences.

In the 1990s Ann served as President/CEO of the national, interfaith Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice, where she led the organization's transformation from historically white to multicultural leadership and initiated the National Black Religious Summit on Sexuality, which held annual conferences for 15 years.

In 2010 Ann and Rev. Cedric Harmon co-founded and co-directed Many Voices: A Black Church Movement for Gay & Transgender Justice. Together they published Black church versions of her acclaimed guides to sexual orientation and gender difference, as well as other impactful resources such as How to respond to negative claims about the Bible and LGBT, Questions you may have about God and LGBT, Rethinking the thorny issue of sin and LGBT, and more.

In her writings, she demonstrates an effective balance of clear, contemporary information combined with illuminating personal narratives that make her resources so accessible.

Ann's work, including the creation of these resources, has fostered dialogue and understanding about sexual orientation and gender identity, building bridges across racial, religious, orientation and gender divides. Her work frames the complex and essential issues of spirituality, gender and sexuality in a thoughtful, supportive manner while offering opportunities to launch personal reflection, church and family dialogue, and community education. Her publications are used by colleagues, congregations, students, parents, and faith leaders throughout the U.S. and beyond. Advocates report that her writings have saved lives and reunited families.

In addition to facilitating dialogue about sensitive topics, Ann has provided strategic consultation and executive coaching to scores of leaders in national LGBT and other nonprofit organizations. Through her support and coaching, others have grown and thrived as leaders in their own organizations and communities.

Ann attended Grinnell College and received a B.A. cum laude from the University of Kansas, and an M.A. from the University of Chicago School of Social Service Administration. In 2017 Ithaca College presented her with an honorary Doctor of Letters in recognition of her bridge-building work over the year.

This interview was conducted by Rev. Dr. David Weekley, who remains the only openly-out transgender elder appointed to a United Methodist Church. Rev. Weekley is the author of *In From the Wilderness: Sherman, (She-r-Man)* (2011)

Scope and Content

In this interview, Ann T. Cook recalls feeling called to advocacy when her church, Dumbarton United Methodist Church, voted to deny a same sex couple use of the building for a holy union ceremony. Although Cook is a straight identified woman, she used her experience working in sexuality education to form a committee to convince Dumbarton to be part of the Reconciling movement in the Methodist Church. She wrote "and God Loves Each One" in the 1980s, followed by "Made in God's Image..." in 2003 as guides for religious communities to accept and affirm LGBT people. Working with Cedric Harmon, she started "Many Voices, A Black Church Movement for Gay & Transgender Justice" in 2010.

Access

Open to all researchers.

<https://lgbtqreligiousarchives.org/oral-histories/ann-thompson-cook>

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Languages

Collection material is in English

Custodial History

This tape was given to LGBTQ-RAN archives by interviewer.

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Tags

Methodist (UMC, United Methodist Church)

Bowman, Mark

Harmon, Cedric

Many Voices

Reconciling Ministries Network (formerly Reconciling Congregation Program)

Ally

Author/editor

Trans activism