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Title

Rev. Bernd Wangerin Oral History Interview and Transcript

Date

May 2, 2008

Extant

1 hour interview (2 files) and 1 transcript

Abstract

In this oral history, Rev. Bernd Herman Wangerin discusses coming out after being ordained in a German evangelical denomination; with the support of his superiors, he took up prison ministry and became involved with the Homosexuelle und Kirche (HuK), later becoming the national delegate for HuK and was active in the European Forum of LGBT Christian Groups. He spoke about the threat of AIDs and how he managed the group's communication.

Biographical

The Rev. Bernd Herman Wangerin was born on August 5, 1940, in Hamburg, Germany. His parents were Fritz Wangerin and Hildegard born Ronnau. Life in Germany was difficult during the wartime and its aftermath: baby nourishing food was rare, persons were homeless and displaced due to the bombings, many refugees wandered the country, and the society lost its orientation in democratic ideas. Evangelical Protestant religion became a source of comfort and solace for his mother as well as young Bernd. They were regular participants in worship, Bible classes, prayer services and youth club. Bernd took these Christian activities very seriously and was sometimes called 'Jesus' by his mates.

In his teen years Bernd was attracted to missionary service and at age 20 began four years of training to become a deacon, a social worker, to carry out a ministry of service to others. In the spring of 1964 he passed the required examination and that October was blessed as a deacon. The next month he moved to London to take a position as a secretary in the German YMCA. There he was managing the Anglo-German-Circle, even tried to train a Scottish Folk Dance group in absence of the leader, managed a youth hostel during the summertime and

was editor of a newsletter. Because of financial and management instability at the Y, he left after a year and a half. He was subsequently given a position as a youth worker in a parish in Wiesbaden in Hessen.

During the three years working with youth in this parish, he was married to Anne and a first child was born, daughter Annette. A son Clemens was born later--in 1972.

He spent a year in theological studies at the university in Bonn, Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelm Universität, and passed the theological examinations and was ordained a vicar, i.e., an assistant pastor, in 1973. He became pastor of a parish in Heftrich near Idstein/Taunus district of Wiesbaden.

During these years of ministry, Bernd began a series of occasional liaisons with men and became increasingly aware of his sexual attraction to men. At the end of 1981, he made contact with the Homosexuelle und Kirche (HuK) group in Hamburg. Shortly thereafter he became active in the HuK group in Frankfurt. This became a transitional time in his life as he began to work in prison ministry and also separated from and divorced his wife in 1985.

Although his religious superiors became aware of his sexual orientation, they continued to support him in ministry.

Lothar Koschig, a psychologist who was also a leader in the HuK Frankfurt group, became one of the founders of the European Forum of LGBT Christian Groups, which had its first meeting in 1982. Koschig served on the board of the Forum and enlisted Bernd's assistance in managing the Forum's communications. When the Forum met in Oslo in 1986, Bernd attended and addressed the assembly on the topic of "How Christian gays can face the threat of AIDS?"

Bernd continued active involvement in the Forum and later was elected to the board and served as treasurer. He enjoyed the international gay (and later lesbian, bi and transgender) community and supported the development of the European Forum as a regular and frequent participant.

Bernd retired from active ministry in 2000 and now lives in Frankfurt/Main. He continues to be active with HuK as the national delegate to the EF, as the 'online counselor' of HuK and sometimes is minister at rainbow services. He is often a member of preparing committees for the next Kirchentag or Katholikentag. He is involved in a 'Gay and Grey Group' at Frankfurt and, last but not least, lives with his partner and keeps contact with his children and family.

Scope and Content

In this oral history, Rev. Bernd Herman Wangerin discusses coming out after being ordained in a German evangelical denomination; with the support of his superiors, he took up prison ministry and became involved with the Homosexuelle und Kirche (HuK), later becoming the national delegate for HuK and was active in the European Forum of LGBT Christian Groups. He spoke about the threat of AIDs and how he managed the group's communication.

This interview was conducted by Mark Bowman, the executive director of LGBT-RAN. He holds a Master of Divinity degree from Boston University School of Theology and has played a key leadership role in establishing a number of religious ventures and programs.

Access

Open to all researchers.

<https://lgbtqreligiousarchives.org/oral-histories/bernd-wangerin>.

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Languages

Collection material is in English

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Tags

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