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**Title**

Rev. Dr. Carter Heyward Oral History Interview and Transcript

**Date**

October 30, 2017  
July 21, 2019

**Extant**

2 hours 54 minutes interview and 2 transcripts

**Abstract**

In this oral history, Carter Hayward, an Episcopal priest, lesbian, and pioneer in feminist liberation theology and the theology of sexuality, discusses her activism, from pushing her diocese's camp to racially integrate as a teenager, to working on behalf of the Equal Rights Amendment and being one of the first women ordained the Episcopal Church.

**Biographical**

The Rev. Dr. Carter Heyward is an Episcopal priest, professor, theologian, activist, and writer. A pioneer in the areas of feminist liberation theology and the theology of sexuality. Carter was born on August 22, 1945, in Charlotte, North Carolina, to Robert Clarence Heyward, Jr. and Mary Ann Carter Heyward, the eldest of three children. Two years later, the family moved to Hendersonville where Carter spent her early years in the mountains of North Carolina. It was during these early, formative years that the energy in these ancient hills touched her soul and, decades later, drew her back to live there again. The family moved back to Charlotte in 1955 where Carter spent her teen years. She was elected Chair of Episcopal Young Churchmen (sic) in the Diocese of North Carolina when she was 16 and, along with other teenagers, helped push the Diocese toward the racial integration of its summer camp.

Heyward received an undergraduate degree from Randolph-Macon Women's College in Lynchburg, Virginia in 1967. She attended Union Theological Seminary in New York for one year, but moved back to Charlotte in 1968 to work in her home parish, St. Martin's Church, for the next year and a half as a lay assistant. An activist for racial justice from her teen years--in church, high school and college--she became a young feminist in seminary, working on behalf

of the Equal Rights Amendment and, of course, women's ordination in the Episcopal Church. She became active for gay and lesbian justice (before either "Bi" or "Trans" were much on the radar) as the 1970's progressed. The key for her, as both theologian and lesbian, was in realizing the fundamental theological, political, historical, and psychological connections between gender and sexual oppressions and justice movements.

In 1971, Heyward returned to New York and earned a Master of Arts in the Comparative Study of Religion from Columbia University (1971), a Master of Divinity at Union Theological Seminary (1973) and a Ph.D. in Systematic Theology from Union (1980),

At a time in which neither the Episcopal Church--nor any other part of the world-wide Anglican Communion--would ordain women as priests, Heyward was ordained on July 29, 1974, along with ten other women: Merrill Bittner, Alla Bozarth-Campbell, Alison Cheek, Emily Hewitt, Suzanne Hiatt, Marie Moorefield Fleisher, Jeannette Piccard, Betty Bone Schiess, Katrina Martha Swanson, and Nancy Hatch Wittig. Bishops Daniel Corrigan, Robert L. DeWitt, and Edward R. Welles presided at this "extraordinary" ordination service at the Church of the Advocate in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Shortly thereafter, the House of Bishops held an emergency meeting to invalidate these ordinations and sanction the bishops participating. At the General Convention of 1976, the Episcopal Church officially approved the ordination of women into the priesthood.

In January 1975, Heyward and fellow priest Suzanne Hiatt were hired at Episcopal Divinity School in Cambridge, Massachusetts. As a professor, Heyward's primary teaching concentrated on 19th century Anglican theology, feminist liberation theology and theology of sexuality. She transformed consciousness, proclaimed the possibilities for women to be priests, for lesbians to be theological, and made way for new approaches to connecting the divine to the erotic, justice, activism. Heyward has authored or edited a dozen books, most recently, *Keep Your Courage: A Radical Christian Voice* (Church Publishing Co, 2010). She is currently working on a thirteenth.

In so-called retirement, she is founder and board chair of Free Rein, a therapeutic horseback riding center in mountains of North Carolina, where she lives in an intentional community. She is also active in the Democratic Party and is a fiddler in a women's old time string band, the Bold Gray Mares

## **Scope and Content**

In this oral history, Carter Hayward, an Episcopal priest, lesbian, pioneer in feminist liberation theology and the theology of sexuality, discusses her activism, from pushing her diocese's camp to racially integrate as a teenager, to being one of the first two women ordained the Episcopal Church, and her years of writing and leading women in LGBTQ religious movements across many denominations..

This interview was conducted by Heather White, a specialist in American Religions with a research focus on sexuality, gender, and twentieth century social movements and author of *Reforming Sodom: Protestants and the Rise of Gay Rights* She has served on the advisory board of the LGBT Religious Archive Network, and is visiting Assistant Professor in Religion and Queer studies at the University of Puget Sound.

## **Access**

Open to all researchers.

<https://lgbtqreligiousarchives.org/oral-histories/carter-heyward>

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## **Languages**

Collection material is in English

## **Custodial History**

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## **Tags**

Heyward, Carter

Author/editor

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Harrison, Beverly Wildung

Feminism

Ordination/clergy

Theology

Civil Rights Movement

