

Oral History Interview: Cedric Harmon

Interviewee: Cedric Harmon

Interviewer: Monique Moultrie

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Monique M. Today is February 4, 2011, and my name is Monique Moultrie. I'm here with Pastor Cedric Harmon, and we're going to discuss his life story. Thank you very much for being willing to go on record with us with the LGBTRAN project. We are looking very forward to what you're going to share. We're going to start at the beginning, so feel free to share as much or as little as you want as we go along. I always want to begin with the beginning, so where did you grow up?

Cedric H. Thank you, Monique, for the opportunity. I grew up in the St. Louis metropolitan area, what is now called southwestern Illinois, a small town called Centreville, Illinois, about ten minutes outside of St. Louis, Missouri.

Monique M. How long did you live in Illinois?

Cedric H. From birth until the age of 18, when I left Illinois to attend undergrad in Boston Massachusetts, so most of my formative life was spent in this same community with families and people from small communities in Mississippi, Tennessee, Alabama and Arkansas that had moved to that area in the 1920s and a little bit before that, so it was very fascinating to

grow up in an area where most people knew each other and the families were familiar with each other.

Monique M. And so growing up in the Midwest, what type of neighborhood were you a part of? You said it was sort of a hodgepodge from geographical areas, but was it predominantly black, multicultural?

Cedric H. It was predominantly African American. The area was quite rural. My father and mother, at one point, had plots of land and my dad actually raised hogs for a period of time, and had chickens, so this was a very rural farmland area, and I actually lived at the end of the street. We were the last house on our street, so all of our neighbors were above us and there was no one behind us.

Monique M. Ah, so you had to journey to meet friends and play.

Cedric H. You had to walk up the street – [*laughs*] – for a while to meet people, yes.

Monique M. Now, that's a very different experience. Did you grow up also working with animals and having a rural existence, or you sort of shunned away from that?

Cedric H. By the time I came along into the family, most of the animals were gone. But we still had pump water, and I would pump water, bring it into the house, and we actually had an outhouse. I grew up with an outhouse, which was an unusual experience for the 1970s, but that was my experience.

Monique M. And so how large was the community you were part of?

Cedric H. I think it was less than fifteen hundred people that lived in that area. And as I said, everyone knew everyone. And you spoke first thing in the morning to everyone that you met. That was the experience. And I came from a rather large family. I am the ninth of nine children. I'm the baby and the surprise baby in the family.

Monique M. That's interesting. Everyone I've interviewed has come from a large family – seven, eight, nine kids – and they've always been the middle child, though, so you're the first baby of the group.

Cedric H. I'm happy to be so.

Monique M. So in growing up as the baby of a large brood, what were your familial relations? Because I'm assuming that there is some age difference between kids. So did you grow up sort of feeling like an only child because you were the baby, or did you have siblings all around?

Cedric H. In the house, once I was born, there were at least four of my brothers in the house. My sisters were both older, and they had moved out and gone to college. And so I was closest to my closest siblings, and my closest sibling was nine years older than I, so quite an age difference.

Monique M. Wow.

Cedric H. And yet my older brothers and sisters did pay quite a bit of attention to me, so I did not feel isolated at all. My parents were much older. They were already past middle age. My mother was 47 and my dad was 57, so that was a different experience, having much older parents. And traveling in the community, I remember often my mother being asked, “Oh, is this your grandchild?” And my mother saying all the time, “No, this is my baby.”

Monique M. [*Laughs.*] Yeah. Yeah, that would make a difference there. So when you were born, they were 47, so you were born in what year?

Cedric H. Nineteen sixty-six.

Monique M. So at that point, schools were desegregated. Did you attend desegregated schools?

Cedric H. I started out grade school – didn’t go to kindergarten – but grade school was predominantly African American. But I was in the school district that was considered the white school district in our area, and by the time I was in third grade I was moved into a very integrated school setting, because I was placed in an academically talented program, so I left my community school and went to a predominantly white environment.

Monique M. Interesting. And so was this environment still within your county, your residential area?

Cedric H. Same school district, it's just that on one side, literally on one side of the railroad tracks, it was more African Americans, and Cahokia School District was the school district, but there were more whites going to the schools that I attended placed into the program.

Monique M. Gotcha. And so were you the only child from your family to sort of go forward, go out and have that different experience, or did you share that experience with some of your siblings?

Cedric H. We shared that experience. Especially by the time we would reach high school, it was Cahokia High School, and that more mixed environment, so my brothers and sisters had some of the same teachers that I did myself in those classrooms, so they would regale me with stories of my older brothers and sisters, and "Oh, you're Johnny's baby brother" or "You're Elaine's baby brother." I remember.

Monique M. Ah, yeah. Yeah, that does make a difference, for good or for bad, hopefully for good. So were your grandparents a part of your day-to-day?

Cedric H. No. Coming along as late as I did, my grandparents were all deceased. My father's mother passed just two years before I was born. So I never knew my grandparents. I heard stories of them from my brothers and sisters that were around.

Monique M. Were there aunts and uncles and other extended family?

Cedric H. Yes. My father's two brothers lived in the same community, and actually one uncle lived one house above us because my dad built two houses on the plots of land that he owned, and so my uncle lived basically next door. And then my other uncle lived in the community. On my mother's side, her brothers and sisters lived in Ohio and in Buffalo, New York, but there would be some road trips either to visit them or for them to come down and visit us.

Monique M. Okay. And so that gave you a sense of cousins and extended family much larger than your own large family?

Cedric H. Yes. I never lacked for family. There was always plenty of family.
[Laughs.]

Monique M. *[Laughs.]* Yes, yes. I share that. I share that experience. So growing up, you had your schoolmates as support systems, you had your brothers and sisters. What type of religious upbringing were you a part of, if any, when you were young?

Cedric H. Oh, yes. Church and religious environment very much a part of my childhood. I was thinking this morning that from birth to now I've always been around church. And actually, my formal introduction into a religious environment started at age five, as I recall it, and I actually joined the church at age six, and then actually announced a calling to ministry at age eight.

Monique M. Oh, my.

Cedric H. So I've been in church and in ministry most of my life.

Monique M. So you were a boy preacher?

Cedric H. Yes, I was a boy preacher. [*Laughs.*]

Monique M. They give you the stool to stand up and recite?

Cedric H. Tile. I stood on stacks of tile to stand behind the pulpit, yes.

Monique M. Yes, those make good pictures, they do. So there's still some up at the family?

Cedric H. There are. [*Laughs.*]

Monique M. Okay, and so what religious community was that that you were born into?

Cedric H. My father was Baptist, so when I was born, into the Baptist environment. Around age five or six, we moved to a Missionary Baptist Church setting, my mother and I, because my mother's childhood experience with church was more...they called that sanctified, at the time, which was Pentecostal. And so the Missionary Baptist Church that we found more reflected elements of the Pentecostal or sanctified worship experience.

Monique M. And so was it just the two of you all that sprouted out and went?

Cedric H. Just the two of us. My father remained at his church and my mother and I went to another environment.

Monique M. Nice, nice. And so the experience of having a dual Baptist-ly aligned family, was that a source of enrichment or a source of confusion for you?

Cedric H. I found it to be enriching, primarily because the way my mother came to the decision was very thoughtful, very careful. She respected her marriage to my dad, and so she had been in a more traditional Baptist setting because that was his tradition. And when she came to this decision, she talked about that with my father, and I saw that occur. And they came to an agreement, and there was no tension, and so I went with her to that other environment. And so there was always religious conversation between my mother and father, and between my mother and myself, so I saw religion as something you discuss, it's not a set thing, it is something that you explore and discover over time.

Monique M. Excellent. So when you were baptized, was that into your father's church or your mother's church?

Cedric H. That was in my mother's church.

Monique M. Other than preaching, what did you do as a part of the church? Were you part of the youth groups, the Cub Scouts, that kind of thing?

Cedric H. Primarily preaching, but our congregation fellowshiped with many other churches in the community, so there were Sunday afternoon services in other religious settings. There was also opportunity to go on church trips, yes, the renting of the wonderful buses and the car caravan down to

Kentucky and things of that nature, so it was a very enriching and fun time, but also serious. I recognized the seriousness and importance of faith.

Monique M. Now, you mentioned that being fun. What else did you do for fun as a kid? I know sometimes persons who are religious young that that sort of becomes their whole world view, and so they didn't play PlayStation and Nintendo and a lot of hopscotching and such.

Cedric H. I have to admit I've never been a video game child. But reading and being involved in school also provided a source of fun and activity. I became a basketball fan, and sporting events, and sang in the choir, and attended theatre, and tried my hand at band. Was in student government, model United Nations, and all of those activities provided an outlet to go to other communities and interact with children that were not in my immediate environment.

Monique M. Okay. And so all of these were still within your same community. Did they expose you to communities outside of where you were living?

Cedric H. They did. I began traveling with my mother at about six months, and obviously it attached to me, so any opportunity to go somewhere different appealed to me.

Monique M. Excellent. So you've mentioned sort of your religious upbringing. Were there specific values that were imparted based on either religion or secular values that were strong in your family?

Cedric H. My father was definitely the head of the household, and in many ways, I realize that my dad reflected a strong African understanding of family. And so there was right and wrong, there was a real emphasis on respect, especially respect of elders. Children were to learn, and he was always imparting wisdom and sharing with us the importance of education and valuing your family identity and name.

My mother provided a strong sense of compassion, care, love, fairness and questioning. She strongly provided for me the greatest gift of all, which was to question, always question everything that you hear a minister say and come to an understanding of who and what and how God shows up in your life on your own. And so those values of education, family, respect, equality and questioning have guided my life.

Monique M. I'm going to stop because of the sound quality in here. It just occurred to me. I want to make sure I can hear us over the TV.

[Part 2.]

Monique M. All right, so we were just talking about the values that you received from both your mother and your father, and a thing that I picked on was this intentful questioning that comes through. And so how did that progress

for you, both educationally and religiously as you grew up, that explorative nature inside?

Cedric H. So the congregation that I grew up in as a child preacher, I wasn't the only associate minister in that environment. At one point I believe we had about nine ministers on staff.

Monique M. Wow.

Cedric H. Still, I was the youngest. But we would meet each Tuesday, and during those meetings, just us, the ministers, not our pastor, we would actually rehearse and practice sermons, we would critique the Sunday services, we would go over the order of worship and how worship should flow. And so in many ways it was its own Bible course or even seminary experience just among this group of ministers.

And there again there was the opportunity to ask why, why do we do this, what does this mean? How is it playing out in the lives of people? The senior pastor at that time, Pastor Carter, provided every opportunity to explore all of the responsibilities and privileges of ministry, the word and the sacraments, and then also being available to provide support to the congregants in sickness, in death, in birth, in all of the phases of life. And so that provided a real holistic understanding of what ministry is all about.

Monique M. That must have been an interesting experience, as a child, to be part of, I guess, the production crew for the church service. Was your input valued, or were you sort of just being groomed, in a sense?

Cedric H. We were all equal partners. There was no distinction between myself and the others.

Monique M. So you were all equal partners there?

Cedric H. Yes.

Monique M. And so when they gave critiques of your sermon, did they also receive critiques of their sermons from you?

Cedric H. Yes, they did. I was able to lend my voice and say what I saw that wasn't working or could be improved. And so again, I wasn't treated like a child, I was treated as an equal partner. Just like every other minister, I was a minister.

Monique M. Interesting. That's a very interesting experience for a child to be valued for their religious gifts. [*Move to another location.*] Okay, and so as a child who was working within the ministerial staff, was there anything in particular you were in charge of doing, like were you always the responsive reading person or did you just fall into the preaching rotation whenever needed?

Cedric H. Wherever there was a need. On each Sunday's service you never knew what you would be asked to do till you arrived. We would meet in the pastor's study early in the morning between Sunday School and morning worship and assignments would be handed out. So again, I learned all of the responsibilities and roles in a Sunday worship, or even an afternoon worship. Whenever there was a gathering of that congregation, there was some role available. And it became training by fire.

Monique M. Now, when you first started preaching, was your father a part? Did your brothers and siblings get involved and hear you?

Cedric H. Family did attend. They were present. One of the curious questions that would always come up, because my mother was a Sunday School teacher, people would ask her – they never asked me, they would ask her – if she was actually helping me with some preparation. And her answer honestly was no. Because in my mind, whenever it was my turn to preach, it was something for me to do, and really, I didn't share that with my mom. She would find out on Sunday. I would not tell her this Sunday I'm preaching. I felt like that's kind of giving the secret away, so I kept it to myself. But she said she could always tell because there would be an intensity in my work that revealed, oh yeah, he's going to be preaching this Sunday.

[Laughs.]

Monique M. *[Laughs.]* Good. Good to know, good to know. There were indicators there. My partner preaches and the church members often ask that. "She

wrote a good sermon today, did..." sort of jokingly with him, so I do understand that. So as a youth who was very active in your religious community, how did that partner with your academic pursuits? Did you see yourself going primarily into full-time ministry when you were young or did you plan another career and religion sort of took over?

Cedric H. I intentionally decided, during high school, that I would not go directly to seminary. I wanted to have a regular life experience. So I decided to go to college and study the field of communication, and I hoped that I would become a general manager at a television station and make lots of money, and then eventually maybe come back to ministry. But I did decide not to pursue that whole direct leap into full-time ministry at the time.

Monique M. And so talk to me about your college experiences. Did that work out as you planned?

Cedric H. [*Laughs.*] I did study communication. I never became a general manager of a television station. And it took many years after college to actually use the degree that I achieved in undergraduate in a full way. I understand that that is the truth for most people that go through undergrad. But communication was the right field, and it did tie quite nicely into my life and ministry.

Monique M. Where did you go to college?

Cedric H. Emerson College, Boston, Massachusetts.

Monique M. And so while you were there, were you also a part of ministerial staff?
Did that stay a part of your life or were you just fully an undergrad?

Cedric H. I became a complete and total undergrad and did a full and complete undergraduate experience. But I did attend worship services in Boston at several congregations – a Baptist congregation, an Episcopal congregation, a United Methodist congregation, and a community church in Boston, which was very enriching. I never revealed to people at the churches that I was a minister. People on campus knew that I was a preacher. But it was great to observe from the pew.

Monique M. Yeah. And so as a young person who's fully an undergrad and who's still actively pursuing, what led you to these different communities? Were you just going with friends or were you religiously explorative at that point?

Cedric H. It was an exploration. Even while still at home in high school, I went to worship services with my friends. I went to Catholic mass sometimes and I would go to the First Baptist Church of Cahokia, which was a predominantly white congregation. And on those Sundays, I was the only African American in that congregation. They welcomed me, but I knew very clearly I was the only one. [*Laughs.*] But that exploration was very enriching. To have all of these different experiences and to understand the wealth of religious expression has served me very well.

Monique M. Excellent. Well, usually by this point there's been some mention of a partner or some tag way that I can say, okay, so when were you aware of

your sexuality? So since we haven't gotten there, I'll take us back and ask the question. So as a youth, as a growing adult, how were you aware of your sexuality? Were you aware of your sexuality?

Cedric H. I was definitely aware of my sexuality. It was somewhat confusing, because early on I recognized that there was a commonality or an equality of interest and curiosity across genders, and I thought that was – of course I was steeped in the church – love everybody with your whole heart and soul, so, oh, sure, I just love my male friends and I love my female friends the same. But of course adolescence takes you in other directions and you realize, well, there's something else there. Not quite sure what that is. And I decided not to deal with it until much later. So I'm in college at Emerson and there are out gay students at Emerson, and I'm observing them and saying there are some similarities between them and myself, but I don't know that that's quite who I am.

Monique M. Now, were these out persons of color or out white students?

Cedric H. These were out white students. So I don't think that that's me, but something is similar. And in college I did have girlfriends and a long-term relationship in college for three years. And I determined at that point what I would do is still wait and explore this other interest that I knew was definitely there. And I only had opportunity to really explore that after the relationship with my girlfriend ended. And by that point I was a senior in

college and about to start my first outside of college job, and met the first male person that I knew there was serious attraction with, while working.

Monique M. And so where was that first college job?

Cedric H. In Boston, at a publishing company. And this very handsome, somewhat older gentleman, African American, who was also out, out African American gay man and I became friends, and long story short, we exchanged a kiss that convinced me beyond any question that there is a greater interest in male relationships than female. The difference was palpable.

Monique M. And so at that point, were you interested in pursuing or were you still not going to deal with that aspect of life?

Cedric H. I was interested now in pursuing and really getting a sense of what that meant for me. But I knew that in Boston the prospects were limited, and also it just so happened that I realized the work I was doing was not where I wanted to stay, so I decided to move from Boston. And my mother suggested, “Why don’t you move to Washington, D.C. where your sister lives,” and I said sure. Not only because my sister lived there, but the prospects would be greater in Washington for African American male-male relationships.

Monique M. Yeah.

Cedric H. So pretty good move. [*Laughs.*]

Monique M. Thanks, Mom. Mom always knows.

Cedric H. [*Laughs.*]

Monique M. And so what year did you move to D.C.?

Cedric H. Moved to Washington, D.C. in 1989, and it was exciting to move here...or move there, I should say, and there were definitely more prospects. There were more same gender loving, out gay persons, male and female, and mates and friends. And went to my first gay club, which was shocking to my religious system, but not shocking enough to keep me away.

Monique M. Did you not club when you were an undergrad?

Cedric H. We'd go out to the straight clubs and dance a little bit, but not gay clubs. There were gay clubs in Boston, I just did not go.

Monique M. Yeah. They weren't easy to get to, though. They make them not too accessible. I'm sure it serves a purpose. So as you are immersing yourself into the black gay culture in D.C., what were you doing professionally?

Cedric H. First job in Washington, D.C. – well, I started out at a temp agency and then ended up working for a nonprofit because Washington, D.C. is home of almost all associations. And the nonprofit that I ended up working for was Dance/USA, a service organization to professional dance companies. It kind of fit with the whole kind of exploring my “gay” identity, which was good. It was a good experience, a great job, and I enjoyed the work.

Was involved in event planning and making sure that we provided our members the services they needed, so it was a very good professional environment.

Monique M. And so when you were working for them, was there an interest in maintaining a religious life at that point? Were you thinking about going back into the ministry there?

Cedric H. Not going back full-time, but I did find a home church in Washington, D.C., a large congregation, African American, Baptist, fairly progressive, but not affirming of same gender loving people. But yet had a very large same gender loving community of professionals that did not publicly, during worship, in any way, express their same gender identity, but immediately following worship were fully immersed in their same gender loving lives. So I saw a way of existing that worked for them, but left me with lots of questions.

Monique M. Gotcha. Was this community in D.C. or outskirts?

Cedric H. In Washington, D.C. proper, yes.

[Part 3.]

Monique M. Okay, so we had to change spaces, and we are continuing in our interview. We just talked about your participation in a home church that you found in D.C.

Cedric H. Mm-hmm.

Monique M. And you, at that point, were working for a nonprofit. So continue your narrative. What did you do from the nonprofit work?

Cedric H. So after the nonprofit work, I stayed in the nonprofit arena, realizing that that really kind of fed me. It was work with meaning, it was work that I could sink my teeth into and see how it was aiding society and the world around me. It was work that had values as opposed to just the value of the dollar, and so it kind of hearkened back to my religious grounding, that life is meaningful and equality matters, and justice is a mandate from scripture, and so I loved working in the nonprofit.

I went on to work for the National Association of Broadcasters, and here my college education came into play. I was like, wow, I finally have achieved partially what I wanted. And it was there, while working in the convention service area, that my manager came to me and said, “Cedric, you really don’t want to do this work. What do you really want to do?” And I said, “No, I’m enjoying the work.” She says, “You may enjoy it, but it’s not what you really want to do. Tell me what you really want to do.” And I said, “Well, I have a calling to ministry.” And she said, “So you want to go and study that?” I said, “Yes.” She says, “Go to school.”

And I did. I enrolled in seminary immediately following that conversation, left my job, and was back in it. And that was Wesley Seminary in Washington, D.C. I devoted time to study. And it just so

happened that prior to leaving my previous job at Dance/USA and going to this job, one of the gentlemen from this wonderful church expressed to me that he had been watching me and was interested in me, and I had been watching him and was interested in him, and I had my first real relationship.

Monique M. Nice. Also in D.C.? Was he in D.C.?

Cedric H. He was in D.C., yes. So dating, going to seminary, which you would not think would be congruent, but for me they were. And my mother coming to visit. And so my mother met my partner on several occasions here in the Washington, D.C. area, and my partner met my sister that lived in the D.C. area, and my sister from New York and my brother-in-law. And I never identified him as my partner, but they could tell. And so finally my mother decided to ask the question.

Monique M. Mmm.

Cedric H. Here again my mother giving a great example of questioning. My partner Wayne had just left our home, my apartment. My mother and I were there and she says, "Baby, I want to ask you something, but fix me some tea." I said, "Okay." Says, "After you fix the tea, I'm going to ask you something." Okay. So I'm fixing the tea and pour the tea and we sit down and she says, "I want to ask you something, but I don't want to offend you." And I said, "Mom, you could never offend me. You can ask me anything you want, you know that."

And she says, “Well, sit down.” So I sit next to her, and in her gentle, traditional, kind way she puts her hand on my hand on my lap and says, “Now, I want to ask you this question. Wayne.” And I said, “Yes, ma’am?” She says, “Is Wayne your friend or is Wayne your *friend*?” And I look at my mother and I said, “Well, Mom, uh...Mama, well, you have Daddy, right?” She says, “Yes.” “And you and Daddy do everything together.” She says, “Yes.” “And sometimes Daddy gets on your nerves.” She said, “Oh, yes.” “But you love Daddy, right?” She says, “Yes, that’s my husband.” I said, “Well, Mama, you have Daddy and I have Wayne.” And she says, “Oh, that’s all I wanted to know.”

Monique M. All right.

Cedric H. So it was a coming out that was the easiest coming out to a parent I have ever experienced. She just wanted to know who is this person in your life, because clearly he’s in your life.

Monique M. Yeah. Now, was the transition as smooth with your siblings?

Cedric H. I did not tell my siblings until much later, and I’m certain that my mother told my father when she went back home, because prior to this conversation with my mother, my dad, being my dad, began asking questions. The question that he had was all of your brothers and sisters have given me grandchildren. You have not given me grandchildren. When are you going to give me a grandchild? And this question came in a series of calls. I would have regular weekly calls with my mom and dad.

And so the second week he asked and I told him, “You know, I’m not working on that right now.”

The third week that he called, it had gotten to me, and so I decided to respectfully take on my dad. The way I did this was I said, when he asked, “So when are you going to give me a grandchild,” I said, “Daddy, I could make a baby. I could easily make a baby. I know young women that I could make a baby with.” I said, “But Daddy, I don’t want to make a baby and I don’t want to make a baby with a young woman, so if I did that, I wouldn’t be happy. So I could do it, but I don’t want to. That would not make me happy.” And my father said to me, “Well, son, I did not mean to offend you or upset you.” I said, “Well, Daddy, you haven’t upset me, but I just want you to know that’s not going to happen.” And he said, “All right.”

Later, years later, after I had the conversation with my mom, and my mother was ill, my father asked me to come home. And I came home to look after my mother, and the morning I was coming back to D.C., my father said, “Come here.” And I walked over to my dad and he says, “You’re going back today?” I said, “Yes, sir.” And he took my hand and he held my hand and he looked at me and said, “You’re going to be all right when you go back?” And I said, “Yes, sir.” He says, “You’re sure you’re going to be okay?” And I said, “Yes, sir.” And then he held my hand and looked me in the eyes and he did not say anything, he just looked

at me, and at the end he nodded his head. And I knew that he was saying, “I understand, and it’s okay.”

Monique M. Beautiful. That is. Because I’ve heard some not so nice stories that, when you go to the web site, you’ll see. It’s a beautiful difference, and one I’m glad we’ll get to share with others. So that brings you to having your first partner, fully working and going to seminary. Was your goal in seminary to return to religious life or you were just exploring some questions?

Cedric H. This was...entering seminary was, for me, a clear indication that ministry was going to be very much a part of my life. I did not know exactly how. The work I was doing at the time in seminary was organizing clergy on social justice issues, including LGBT issues, working on the First Amendment, gathering clergy for legislative testimony and all of that. So being a seminarian and also working with active clergy became my way of doing ministry, so religious activism was clearly going to be the trajectory for the rest of my life.

What I did not know is that the God of my understanding often pulls surprises, and the surprise was that I would then, after several years of doing this activism, be asked to join a new congregation as an associate pastor. An open and affirming and inclusive congregation. And it was at that moment that it became clear to me that I must have a conversation with my siblings because I’m going to be a pastor in an affirming congregation. Mom and Dad had both transitioned. I needed to tell my

brothers and sisters what was going on with me. And so I determined to make a series of calls. I called my oldest sister in Maryland and told her first. And she said to me, “Oh, that’s wonderful. Now, do you have a boyfriend?” And so... [*Laughs.*] I was like, well, clearly Mama had some conversations that I did not know that she had had.

Monique M. Well.

Cedric H. Then I proceeded to call my brother John back home in Illinois, and I said, “I have something to tell you, and you need to know this about me,” and I’m hemming and hawing, and I say, “Well, the fact of the matter is I’m same gender attracted and same gender loving.” And he says to me, “Well, good. I was waiting for you to be ready to tell us.” And so – [*laughs*] – again I had created for myself that this was going to be a journey, and really it was just a step. And so my family knows, and they are supporting and loving, and not all are as supportive as these two, but all of them love me completely, and appreciate what I’m doing in the world, and so this has been very easy for me.

Monique M. Now, to take a step back, before we started talking about your family, your step into seminary, did you explore questions about sexuality and faith while there, or were these non-issues for you, you just were who you were and knew that God loved who you were?

Cedric H. I had already come to the conclusion that God loved me completely as I am, and that happened prior to my first boyfriend, once joining the large

congregation here in D.C. and having seen this experience for many of my peers that were out, outside of the church, but were not out in the church. And it left me with a question about can you be fully a part of a worshiping community and withhold a part of yourself. And so that led me to pray.

So I did pray the prayer one time, and the prayer was, “Okay, God, I know you love me, and you know who I am. This is who I believe I was created to be, so if being same gender attracted, attracted to men is not your intention for me, stop it because you’re God. You can stop this. If not, you’re not going to stop it, then I will know that this is who you mean for me to be, because you’re God.” And I waited, and nothing stopped.

And I determined that I had seen all of these gifted gay and lesbian persons in congregation, serving the congregation, some of them not being out, some of them being out, but the fact of the matter is they were being used of God, they were being used for good purposes, they were contributing to the life of that congregation and to the world, clearly God was resident in their lives. And so when God did not stop it for me, it was simply another confirmation that this is who God created me to be. So in seminary it wasn’t a question of exploration. It was, however, a question of finding additional resources and opportunities to deliver this message more broadly.

Monique M. And did you feel like the seminary helped you do that?

Cedric H. It did. It did that for me.

Monique M. It was an affirming community for such?

Cedric H. It was. Wesley Seminary, a United Methodist Seminary, at that time was a place where there were quite a few same gender loving people in seminary, and they were out, and they were pursuing their degree, and the seminary was not having a huge debate about whether or not these persons were called.

Monique M. Okay. So that brings us back to your organizing work. So you were sort of training. Was the organizing work something you were doing as a part of being in seminary, like an internship, or that was an external job that you just got?

Cedric H. That was an external job that I got, and it made sense, as I needed a job that would be supportive of what I was doing in seminary, in my mind, and it worked out really well. The organization was Americans United for Separation of Church and State, a very progressive working environment. Internally the organization began to have questions about how to be supportive of LGBT equality, how to work on reproductive justice issues, so very forward-thinking. And here I am right in the middle of this giving leadership to the religious organizing it.

Monique M. So when -- just so we can follow a time frame -- when were you working for Americans United for Church and State?

Cedric H. I started there in 1996 and stayed there for about 13 years. And my portfolio grew and grew and included reproductive justice issues, welfare reform, LGBT equality, public education. And in all of those areas, sexuality and gender identity and diversity were at the heart of it.

Monique M. So at this point you've been in D.C. maybe 20 years?

Cedric H. Exactly.

Monique M. And so you are working full-time there for the organization?

Cedric H. Yes.

Monique M. And at that point just a layperson in your home congregation, the Baptist congregation?

Cedric H. Basically a layperson. I did have a conversation with my senior pastor when I enrolled in seminary, and he did write a letter of recommendation. And we were discussing ways for me to become more involved in the ministerial, pulpit life of that congregation. That did not occur because I decided to move to another space. Again, I would say it wasn't the most affirming space, so I began to explore other places of worship. And ultimately became involved in the founding of an affirming and inclusive congregation.

Monique M. And so when was that?

Cedric H. The congregation began almost four years ago. And so I served as the associate pastor from the very beginning up until October of last year, 2010, and late October I became the interim senior pastor for the congregation.

Monique M. And so your move towards pastoral leadership, that's a new move. Is that something that you think you'll see yourself fulfilling on a more long-term basis?

Cedric H. I have never desired nor sought to be pastor. I became associate pastor because I believed in the mission and vision. I believe that I will always be called pastor from this day forward, which is something I've had to settle with in myself. But I do think that my religious trajectory is religious organizing and activism, and I will probably return to that as my main outlet of ministry in the next year or so, but recognizing that being a pastor is not just centered in congregational service, that one can provide spiritual guidance and leadership even as one is engaged in social justice activism.

Monique M. Now, what led you to this community? You mentioned what you were led away from. What led you there?

Cedric H. My vision for the church, small "c," is a place where individuals are exploring and journeying with God and in conversation with God for themselves. But that requires teaching and guidance by spiritual leaders. And this community of affirming and radically inclusive people is a space

where such guidance and teaching is really required, and that's one of the gifts that I bring because my work prior to parish ministry dealt clearly with social justice and equality.

And what I recognize is that having a spiritual grounding for that work is extraordinarily important. So sharing that, sharing a vision and a worldview that says all of God's children literally means all of God's children is very exciting to me and where I place my foundation. That's the place from which I connect with God. So that's what drew me. If you're going to be radically inclusive, then you're going to have to know about what's going on in the community around you, and what's happening in the lives of children and older people as they're dealing with old age and trying to have services. It's going to require you to care about what's happening in Zimbabwe. It's going to require of you a larger view of God's kingdom, and that's the work that I love.

Monique M. Now, in this move towards this radically inclusive community, are you all associated with the fellowship? Are you UCC or are you under some other overarching unity, some other overarching—

Cedric H. We are an affiliate congregation with The Fellowship under the leadership of Bishop Yvette Flunder. That's how we started. The congregation is in exploration of becoming affiliated with the United Church of Christ. We of course draw people from many different traditions, many different religious backgrounds, and no religious background whatsoever. Because

to be radical in your inclusion means the doors are open and the table is broad for everyone. And building those kinds of communities is intensive, slow – [*laughs*] – and sometimes arduous work.

Monique M. Yeah. Absolutely. Now, in your role in pastoral leadership, especially in D.C., have you found that to be a space that is also able to pour back into you? Because there are numerous communities that you could be a part of, numerous communities that Protestants can be a part of, so is the space that you're creating a space – because as we're talking, it is arduous work – is it a space that you also find solace in? Or do you find that through the mentors you have and through other avenues, and if so, what are they?

Cedric H. It's a combination of both. The joy of watching individuals take full ownership of their spirituality is, of course, very rewarding. However, there are times when you're pouring out of yourself and giving of yourself that you need an infusion of strength, and that I draw from colleagues and peers in ministry, in the academy, and just personal friends with whom I share conversation and social time.

That reinforces why I'm doing what I'm doing and why it's important, stories from the field, from those that have been in this work 20, 30, 40 years that helps me understand what I'm encountering is not new and there is a way to get through this challenge. I have been very fortunate to know some of the greatest African American and other preachers, teachers, educators and theologians, and I did not know why I was meeting them

when I met them, but now I realize that they deposited gifts and encouragement that I can draw from now.

Monique M. Now, I realize, as I'm looking through my notes, that we went from your move from the Americans United to a move towards full-time ministry. Was that move intentional? Did you decide to leave to pursue full-time ministry?

Cedric H. Well, in some ways it's full-time ministry, but in other ways it's a combination. I stayed at Americans United for 13 years and at the end of that time, in 2008, I decided that I needed to let go of that experience. And so I left without an understanding of what would be next. And as we may recall, the great recession of 2008 hit in that fall, and so I was unemployed for two years, and I was serving the congregation, which is not a paid job.

And what I found myself doing was really going back to activism, and I volunteered in Washington, D.C. to secure marriage equality. And wasn't paid for that work, but worked on that, and we were successful in securing marriage equality, and worked together with many great leaders in D.C. to organize 200 clergy to get out ahead of the debate and say that we support marriage equality. And to witness clergy taking that stand in a predominantly African American city was amazing. *[Laughs.]*

Monique M. Yeah, y'all got really up there.

Cedric H. And so I did that work, and then that work led to a conversation with a peer and colleague that had been working on LGBT equality and inclusion for over 20 years. And as that conversation proceeded, it turned into a full-time job. And so now I am full-time working on inclusion with a web site and resources for straight allies and straight partners in the work for inclusion and serving a congregation. And so these two together are my full-time life. Did not know that it was going to happen, took two years to get there, but here I am.

Monique M. Plug for the organization. Who are you working for?

Cedric H. The organization is called Many Voices – Sharing Ways to Welcome in Faith. And an online community with liturgical resources and educational resources and an opportunity to blog and comment on blogs, Facebook page and Twitter. We're using social media to communicate to those persons that are just starting to dip their toe into the waters of welcome and inclusion within their places of worship.

Monique M. Nice. And it uses your communications background.

Cedric H. There we go. Once again it shows up. [*Laughs.*]

Monique M. Beautiful, beautiful. So we've mentioned your career trajectory, and we've followed that narrative. I want to, as much as you want or as little as you want, ask you to give us a personal trajectory. So fill in some of those spaces for us. Do you have a partner now? How do you see

yourself socially? Do you participate in social organizations? Do you find friends on a bowling league? That kind of thing.

Cedric H. I've been very fortunate, in the 20 plus years in D.C., to make friendships that have lasted 15, 16 years. They're wonderful friendships. I am currently single, but in the process of dating, and quite possibly will have a partner in my life again, which is very exciting. I do socialize. I go to plays and concerts and museums with many of those friends that I've made over time. Life is good. I'm not complaining about anything. Maintaining a balance is a conscious work.

Monique M. Uh, yes. [*Laughs.*]

Cedric H. And so I am very intentional about finding time and space away from the work and ministry. And doing a fairly good job of that balance. And recognizing that one can actually have an abundant and fulfilling life, and it doesn't require a great deal. When you know what really matters, and what's really important to you, you can live simply and mindfully, and that's what I'm seeking to do every day.

Monique M. That brings me to usually one of the questions I close with, which is in your internal search, what do you believe brings you fulfillment and joy?

Cedric H. I am most joyful in simple things like cooking a good meal. I enjoy being in the kitchen. Being near a body of water that's peaceful, laughing and joking with people that love me and that I love. It's really simple things

like that. I know that my mother loved me and still does. I know that my father loved me and still does. And I know that their love continues even though they have transitioned to that next phase of life, whatever it looks like. So I don't have any questions about that.

What angers me the most is when someone else is being poorly treated and unfairly dealt with. And so equality and fairness and respect really are the foundational values in my life, and I recognize that all of the God talk and all of the worship and all of the religious expression and spiritual search is ultimately about the quality of our relationships with one another. So my hope is that we will find ways to relate to one another from a place of love and respect, and not from a place of judgment, discrimination or oppression.

Monique M. Yes. And so as you do that, both in your social work, your personal work, what's your long-term vision?

Cedric H. Long-term vision is to now take the almost 20 years of living in Washington and working and caring about social justice and fairness, find a small cabin somewhere, maybe in the hills of North Carolina, and write and speak and share what it was like in 1989 and the joys of what it's like in 2011, 2012, 2015. Because I believe that things have...we've hit a shift, we've made a change, and we will never really go back to that place of shame and fear around being same gender loving or being opposite

gender loving. We will ultimately find a place of respecting everyone for who they love and who they are.

Monique M. Wonderful. I always close on a final question. As you look back through not so lengthy of a life – you're one of my younger interviewees – what will you say you think you're most proud of?

Cedric H. Oh. I think I am most proud of the work that I'm doing right now with this web site of resources. Throughout these years, the question has always been, but where are the resources, and how do you begin, and what should I read, and how do you actually do this, and won't I lose something if I take a stand for this? And now there will be an opportunity for someone in Indianapolis, Indiana that's in a congregation that says these bashing sermons just aren't right to be able to download resources and start a conversation that could change the lives of that congregation and individuals that they couldn't even imagine. That's the proudest thing I think I have in my life.

Monique M. Excellent. Well, as I look through my notes, I don't think I had anything else, but I want to see, did we miss a space in your journey that you're like, oh man, we should have talked about my love of kite flying and whatever?

Cedric H. My love of the arts, my love of poetry. There's not enough to be said about how the arts – visual, performance, vocal and oral and musical – how that is one of the best ways to break through discrimination,

oppression, and every negative “ism” in our world. We must be supportive of the arts because they are liberation in a beautiful box that’s open for everyone.

Monique M. Nice. Well, I want to say thank you again, on record, for a wonderful interview and a wonderful peek into your life narrative. I thank you for sharing. Give us your web site address.

Cedric H. www.manyvoices.org.

Monique M. I want to make sure that’s on record and in the transcript so that folks will know about it and know about the wonderful work that you’re doing. So thank you again for your time, and I will end our recording.

Cedric H. Thank you.

[End of recording.]