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**Title**

Darlene Garner Oral History Interview and Transcript

**Date**

October 27, 2010

**Extant**

1 hour 46 minutes (two files) and 1 transcript

**Abstract**

Darlene Garner discusses the many roles she has played in, and outside of, MCC. Raised in the Baptist church by a strict family, she discovered MCC after coming out. In her activist work, she discusses founding groups for black gays and lesbians, and for people of African descent. She also served on the Mayor's Commission on Sexual Minorities in Philadelphia, and in AIDS ministry as a pastor in the 1980s.

**Biographical**

Darlene Garner is a lesbian Christian woman of African, Cherokee, and Irish descent with a National Baptist and Episcopal spiritual heritage. Born and raised in Columbus, Ohio, she was the oldest of five children. Darlene attended public schools, was an active Girl Scout and participated in the All-State Orchestra. As a teenager, one of her early role models was Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., whom she met at a dinner at her friend's house. She was baptized at the age of 7 at the Union Grove Baptist Church although she joined the Episcopal Church as a young adult. She came out as a lesbian in 1973 and joined Metropolitan Community Churches in 1976. As a lay person, she served as a Church Treasurer, Lay Delegate, and Assistant District Coordinator. She was ordained in the Metropolitan Community Church in 1988 and has served as Associate Pastor of MCC in Philadelphia; Pastor of MCC in Baltimore; Senior Pastor of MCC of Northern Virginia in Fairfax, Virginia; and Interim Pastor of Good Hope MCC in Cape Town, South Africa. Since 1998, she has been the convener of the MCC Conference for People of African Descent, Our Friends, and Allies.

On the MCC Council of Elders beginning in 1993, Darlene Garner served as Clerk of the denomination for ten years and Vice-Moderator for three years. She was the Liaison Elder for

MCC in Western Canada, Australia, Aotearoa/New Zealand, Europe, and various parts of the United States. Elder Garner then moved to Cape Town, South Africa for two years to serve as the resource person for Africa. Then she moved to Mexico, where she lived for five years in support of MCC's ministry in Latin America. She was also the Director of the Office of Emerging Ministries, which provides oversight of and support for new church starts, aligned organizations, diversity, and special projects.

Before entering the professional ministry, Garner served as the Executive Director of the Philadelphia Mayor's Commission on Sexual Minorities. In that position, she functioned as the liaison between the government of the sixth largest city in the United States and its LGBT community.

Garner's volunteer community involvement has included being a founding co-chair of the National Coalition of Black Lesbians and Gays; being part of the historical first meeting between the U.S. White House and gay and lesbian people of color; chairing the first International Conference for Gay and Lesbian People of Color; serving as chaplain for The Burning Bush, an AIDS hospice; serving on the board of directors of the Chase-Brexton Health Clinic; and serving as President of the Board of Northern Virginia AIDS Ministry. She has also served as a member of the Philadelphia Commission on Human Relations (hearing complaints of discrimination based on sexual orientation, race, gender, and national origin); the West Hollywood Business License Commission; the Human Rights Campaign (HRC) Religion and Faith Council and the HRC Diversity and Inclusivity Council. Garner has received numerous awards and citations for her service to the community.

Darlene Garner Ohio State University, Samaritan College, and Lancaster Theological Seminary. She is the mother of four adult children, has seven grandchildren, and five great-grandchildren. Garner and Rev. Candy Holmes were married in March 2010 and live with their canine son Joey in St. Petersburg, Florida, USA.

## **Scope and Content**

Darlene Garner discusses the many roles she has played inside and outside of MCC. Raised in the Black Baptist tradition by a strict family, she discusses coming out during her divorce, and discovering MCC in her search for an accepting church. Garner was founding co-chair of the National Coalition of Black Lesbians and Gays in 1978. She also served as initial chair of the International Conference for Gay and Lesbian People of Color. She described serving as executive director of the Mayor's Commission on Sexual Minorities in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. She worked in AIDS ministry as a pastor in the 1980s, and became an elder in MCC in 1999.

This interview was conducted by Dr. Monique Moultrie, an Associate Professor of Religious Studies at Georgia State University, and author of *Hidden Histories: Faith and Black Lesbian Leadership*. She conducted this interview as a consultant of LGBTQ-RAN as part of the oral histories project.

## **Access**

Open to all researchers.

<https://lgbtqreligiousarchives.org/oral-histories/darlene-garner>.

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## **Languages**

Collection material is in English

## **Custodial History**

This recording was given to LGBTQ-RAN archives by the interviewer.

## **Cite as**

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## **Tags**

MCC

Holmes, Candy

Black

AIDS

Clergy Activist

International Human Rights

Racism

Garner, Darlene