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## Oral History Interview: George Hyde

Interviewee: George Hyde

Interviewer: J. Gordon Melton

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Transcribed by: Teresa Bergen

[Begin Tape 1 of 2, Side A.]

J. Gordon M: This is Gordon Melton. We're in Belleair, Florida, in the home of Archbishop George Augustine Hyde. It is July 6, 1905. [laughs] I've got my years all wrong. It's July 6, 2005. We're going to maybe begin, Archbishop, why don't you tell us a little bit about your birth, your early life, where you grew up.

George H: I was born in Chattanooga, Tennessee, July 2, 1923. And immigrated to Atlanta when I was about three. Stayed in Atlanta through high school. And then from that was work and school in different places. I had one traumatic experience, I guess, when I was young. Had polio. But after several years of treatment and surgery, that was conquered. So no problems there. And as I said, went to school in Atlanta. And at the time, attended a Southern Baptist church.

J. Gordon M: So you were not raised a Roman Catholic.

George H: No. No. I got interested in the Roman church and then orthodox through reading. And I decided I was going to be a priest. And the bishop of Atlanta ended up being a very good friend. Bishop Gerald O'Hara. He sponsored me into the seminary. Which was not a good idea, because I found it to be very medieval in its thinking and hypocritical. But that was part, in my mind, at the time, that was

the entire Christian church was hypocritical. Cause I, when I was in the seminary, I heard things I didn't know about. They were very judgmental. And you were guilty if they thought you were, rather than something you did. So it hit the fan, and I did my little Martin Luther speech and left the seminary. I must say this: I was nineteen, I think, twenty, maybe. And I didn't know zero about one's personal life, one's sexuality, emotions, this stuff. I'm just a little Georgia boy. Get to the seminary, and that was always a prime subject among the faculty. I knew something was wrong somewhere because we had about 300 students, and it went up and down. These boys were here today, they were gone tomorrow. Next week, these boys were gone. Why? No one could tell me. But they were suspected of being immoral. Suspected. (Sound of hand hitting the table) So you're out of here. I didn't like it. I thought that was hypocritical. I didn't like that. Because I knew at the same time that the priestly faculty and the church at large tolerated adulterers and fornicators. Cause they had what you would say an acceptable, normal sin. But these men at the seminary were abnormal. Because it was a same gender thing. And so I didn't like that. So I challenged them. So I said, "I'm leaving. This is too much for me." So one day I was talking to a friend of mine, a deacon. And he said, "I heard this. Is it true?" I said, "Yep. I'm leaving." He said, "I'm sorry. We'll miss you." And he embraced me, and kissed me on the cheek, as was common among the seminarians. [laughs] The very next day, at chapter, a thing we had once a week where we'd accuse ourselves of wrongdoing, or a fellow seminarian can accuse you—it's good for you, to be purged. So I'm sitting there, and this one stands up and he says, "I want to accuse George and Deacon So and So of fondling each other in an immoral way." All the devil flew into me. So this seminary chapel was a big, long thing, like bleachers on each side, the seats. Altar down there, and the superior's throne down here. So I walked down. And reverend (subaltern?) and then reverend father superior. And I cut loose and told them that they were hypocrites [laughs] and that they were traumatizing innocent people. That our job as religious was to help to draw people

*into* the body of Christ, not to chase them out. And they were building closets in every corner of the church, shutting people away from the altar. I went on for about thirty minutes. And I went in my room. And lo and behold, got to my room, my suitcase was packed. They had gone up and packed it for me. And they had a train ticket ready from St. Louis back to Atlanta for me.

J. Gordon M: Oh, so you were in seminary in St. Louis.

George H: In Perryville. [pause] So they dropped me off at the train station in St. Louis and I sat there for about an hour and thought about it. I said, "I don't give in this easily." Went over and cashed in my ticket. Went to the YMCA, got a room. The next day went down to some department store, I don't remember the name. Big one. It was to St. Louis what Macy's is to New York. Got a job as an assistant floorwalker. And I worked there for about two months. Of course on my application I had to fill out where I had been, worked or not worked. So I listed the seminary. Well, they wrote to the seminary for a reference. So one day they called me into personnel and said, "Here." Gave me a check. I'm fired. Because they had heard back from the seminary and got a bad reference on me. I said, okay. So I take off for Atlanta. And I stayed for a few weeks with the bishop at the cathedral rectory until I discovered what I wanted to do. So it was during that period of time, in late 1945, the end of '46, that I got involved in a rather unique outreach. The downtown Sacred Heart Church in downtown Atlanta, nice old church with absolutely beautiful music and all of that. It was more spiritual, more interesting to go to than at the cathedral where I was living. So I went down and reacquainted myself with some of the priests there. So I would go there on a regular basis. Then one day I heard about an episode that had taken place at Sacred Heart. Some young man had gone to confession on Saturday afternoon, and had talked to the priest about having engaged in an unacceptable form of (pause) lovemaking. And so the priest said, "You are an abomination under God!

And just admit it, and I can give you absolution.” And the boy said, “But I don’t think that it’s wrong for me.” And I’m sure you’ve heard this argument. So the priest got very angry, and he said, “You’re not going to ever again receive the sacrament if you don’t confess that you are an abomination to God.” And the boy said, “No!” And the priest says, “Get the hell out of my church!” And of course everybody else in the church heard that. There’s people waiting for confession. So the next day, Sunday, this boy went up to receive communion and the priest bypassed him. So he didn’t know what to do. He went and sat down. And then the next Sunday he did the same thing. And this time he was so stunned, he just stood there for a while. So soon the gossip starts. And we heard it out at cathedral. And of course, it spurred me into action. I had to go down and defend him. So through some priest friends at Sacred Heart, I found out who it was and I contacted him. So being the fool I was at the age of twenty, I said, “Listen. Next Sunday, I will go stand with you at the communion rail. They won’t *dare* pass you by if I’m with you.” I thought. Passed by both of us. So we stood there till the Mass was over. Some people said we made complete fools out of ourselves. But we made a statement. So the priest, whose name I’ve forgotten, said, “If you pull a trick like that again, I’ll call the police and have you arrested for disturbing the peace.” So I said, “Well, you know. I’ve got to make the priest happy.” So we did it again. And this time, a couple more people stood with us. So to make a long story short, by the end of about five weeks, we had eight people. A total of eight people against the congregation of about 400. And then the pastor of the First Methodist Church, directly across the street from Sacred Heart, went over to see the Roman Catholic pastor and said to him—and I get this direct from a priest at the church—he said to the pastor, “How long did it take you to know that guy was queer?” And I never heard that word before, incidentally. And the priest said, “Well, I don’t know.” And the Methodist pastor said, “I knew it the first time I saw him.” And then he did a little sermon about it, the Methodist did. So I sat down and wrote him a letter. And I closed it and says, “Sir, maybe the old saying is right, it

does take one to know one.” And signed my name and mailed it. Well that shut him up. But that’s the only political thing, or agitating thing, I ever did in that area. But it did the trick. So again, we were off and running. So I guess by April, ’46, we had about, I’m guessing eighteen to twenty people pulled together in a group. So we’d get together and talk. Finally I said, “Why don’t we just have our own bible study and our own church service? We don’t need all that institutional stuff.” And they agreed. So we started out, we had our first regular meeting. And we had eight black people. We had about three non-gay couples, thirty-something crowd. And two or three sets of parents. And the rest were just ordinary men and women. And in 1946 in Atlanta, you were not supposed to mix black and white. But we did. And we paid for a lot of broken windows as a result. Had a lot of stones thrown at us. So we started. And then finally, in process, we ran across a suspended Greek Orthodox bishop, who was teaching Greek in the Atlanta public school system. And I had taken a job as public school music teacher for the Atlanta school system. So this bishop came along and we said, “Do Mass for us. Our liturgy.” And he said, “No. But,” he said, “I will ordain you.” We discussed it. And we finally decided, and they, the people, said, “We want you to be our priest.” So I was. We had an ordination on July the first, ’46. We found an old house, just a couple blocks down from the business district. Rented that. Turned one side of it into a chapel, and the other side was an office and sleeping quarters. And we started a church. We called it Blessed Sacrament because the sacrament was being denied to certain people. But now we *had* it. And then we found out there was an Anglican church and an RC church in Atlanta called Blessed Sacrament. So we changed it to Holy Eucharist. And in common use, it became known as a Eucharistic Catholic Church, which is a strange name. And then we had our first formal liturgy on Christmas Eve, 1946. And this was a motley crew of gay and non-gay, black and white, Protestant, RC, you name it, people. We had stones thrown at us as we left the church service. I still have one of them. I got a scar here somewhere. Is it here? Yes. Where it hit me. So one of the boys standing

next to me reached down to pick it up to throw it back and I stopped him. I'm glad I did. And I put it in my coat pocket without thinking. So that's why I saved it. So we started there. And there's been, as you may know, some erroneous information about that first church service. Says it was held in a gay bar. It was not.

J. Gordon M.: I helped perpetuate that.

George H: Did you do it?

J. Gordon M.: I helped. I didn't start it, but I helped it get—

George H: Lord, don't let the ceiling fall in on this man! But I know where it started. But it's not true. The management of a gay bar and the Winecoff Hotel financed meeting rooms. He rented a hotel meeting room next door to where the bar is. And we had our meetings there. And then they'd help pay for the rent on this old house that we had. But that first Christmas Eve liturgy was not held in a gay bar, or even the Winecoff Hotel, because the place was boarded up, having burned on December the seventh. But there's a man named Michael Itkin who started that story. Because Michael was dramatic sometimes. And so that's more dramatic to say that. And I didn't know that that story was widespread until relatively recently. We were not, and people often don't understand this, (sound of pounding the table) we were not trying to start up a separate church for people of the same gender sexual and affectional orientation. That's wrong. That would be just as wrong as having an exclusively heterosexual church. And so that was never it. We were concerned with a person's spirituality. Not the (sound of pounding the table) sexuality. Cause I said, "If we get the spirituality balanced, everything else will take care of itself." And it does! It did. And a good example of that, there was a young man in Atlanta -- [Illustration omitted at request of G. Hyde.] So we didn't

try to cure this boy of anything. We just tried to infuse him with a certain God-legislated morality and ethic and discipline. And it worked. We focused on the spirituality, not the sexuality.

J. Gordon M: So how long did you stay in Atlanta with this congregation?

George H: Till about 1950.

J. Gordon M: And as I understand it, there was a second congregation that the Greek bishop had?

George H: Yes.

J. Gordon M: That was kind of in fellowship with this one?

George H: Yes. He pastored one. Plus a mission in Macon, Georgia, and a small mission in Savannah. And he was of advanced age. And it got to be a little too much for him. But we soon had some help. We had a couple of Episcopalian pastors and a couple of Roman pastors who came over and worked with us. So we're able to give him some relief. And then I had the initial parish in Atlanta, plus one at the university in Athens. And then up in the mountains of north Georgia, in a resort area, a small mission. And then I don't really remember why I ended up in Washington. But I did, about 1950. And we had there, we were able to rent like a thirteen-room Victorian house and we used that as an informal seminary. But we set up a thing, we called it worker priest movement. Domestic missionaries. And these boys worked in secular jobs and took the church to their jobs. Without cramming it down anyone's throat. And we had them working for the local hospital, local Holiday Inn. And in fact, I don't know if you know it or not, even today, every Holiday Inn has a chaplain on call. We started that. We had one of

our boys at the Holiday Inn just across the street from Catholic University in Washington. And quite frequently, on weekends especially, we would get drunks who would want to talk to somebody. So through him, we finally started sending, when they wanted someone, we'd send a priest over. So the owners of that particular franchise, then, said, "I like that. So we would like to have your captain serve this one, Inn, plus the one downtown." And several years later, that became an official policy of Holiday Inn. So I'm kind of proud that we started something worthwhile. The worker priest thing didn't last too long, cause these boys worked, they supported themselves. And then their salaries helped support things of the church. But we did rather well. You are familiar, I'm sure, with the Jesuit magazine, *America*.

J. Gordon M: Yes. Whose editors just got fired.

George H: Yes. They did an article on our domestic missionary worker priest program back in about, oh, the early 1960s. They thought it was kind of interesting. But it eventually fizzled out. Cause there was a lot of opposition to us because the general uninformed public did not like some of the things we stood for. So it bothered us. But yet, there was some support.

J. Gordon M: Let me back up just a minute.

George H: Yes.

J. Gordon M: The churches that were in Georgia in the late Forties, did each of those, did they include gay members? Were each of them what we would today call gay-friendly?

George H: They were, we never had a congregation that was exclusively—

J. Gordon M: Right.

George H: Of the gay thing. No. There was always a mixture. But these churches down in Macon, in Savannah, Athens, were started, came into being, as a pastoral outreach to gays. And if other people happened to come along, that was good. So all of them had a goodly portion of its members were of the gay, so-called gay movement.

J. Gordon M: Did you identify with these people yourself?

George H: In what way?

J. Gordon M: Well, did you think of yourself as gay?

George H: Oh. No, not really. Because to begin with, I was (pause) started out in this religious life, had to take a vow of celibacy. So it was never a problem for me. But I didn't know gay from Beelzebub until I got accused of being immoral. And I thought about it and talked about it. And that sort of angered me. Because I'd been taught in some of the classes in the seminary that human sexuality is God's gift to man. So I said, "Look, I don't think a just god would give me a gift and tell me to put it on the closet shelf and never open it. So somebody is mixed up somewhere, and it's them and not me." And so I never made an issue of it. If it had not been for my particular discipline of having taken a sacred vow, I have thought many times how my life would have otherwise developed. But I was just not free to let it develop in that direction. But yes, I identified with these people. They were my people. I was their people. I did not like the life that some of them lived. They were totally immoral, as were their non-gay counterparts. So my job was to say, "Look, God legislated certain definite confessional, ethical, moral codes for us. We have to make an effort to live according to those." So you fall

down flat on your face, I'll pick you up and brush you off and we'll go on again. But you've got to try. And for this reason, I think, we were never embraced wholeheartedly by the later so-called "gay community." Cause we demanded the same moral standards of those people as any other person. I mean, multiple sexual partners, sex in the bushes just doesn't go for a Christian. I don't care what your orientation is. So there are some in the gay community starting in the Sixties who thought that because they'd had a hard life and the world was mean to them, they had a special license to be promiscuous. So we had that little problem.

J. Gordon M: But gay couples were okay.

George H: Oh, yeah. No sweat. No sweat. Because we go back again, if all these theologians are right, that our human sexuality is a gift of God, why would he give me a gift and say you can't open it. He wouldn't. But he did say, "Have some discipline about your life." So, it worked out for us. We had, I'll tell you one interesting thing that most people don't know about. And I have to be cautious in talking, because I don't mention names of people, even though they may be dead now. But who, in their lifetime, guarded their privacy. [Names omitted at request of G. Hyde.] He helped us, when he started selling his books, he helped us out financially. Because he thought it was a worthwhile project. And so we were going along, in the Forties and early Fifties, the so-called—preface it with "so-called"—gay community in Georgia, in Atlanta, was a population of traumatized people. They had gone to church since kids, little kids, and been told from the pulpit, "You people are no good." They knew their feelings, so they said, "They're talking about me." And they were really, truly traumatized. And they were very conservative. I mean, here's a gay bar in Atlanta. Half a dozen people sitting on a stool at the bar in shirt and tie and coat on Saturday night. Not in casual clothing. Because, the thing was, to look like and act like those other people. And they were so afraid of being discovered that they had no confidence

in themselves. I was disturbed because I think the church was guilty of this. The church was hypocritical. And I say that because I know of cases where Mr. So and So maintained a girlfriend in this apartment, and a wife in this house. And he was a member of one of the church's most active groups. And his adulterous affair was common knowledge. But it's okay because his sin was more acceptable. More normal. And he gave more money than these little office clerks. That's the way I looked at it. I could be wrong. I don't think so. Cause I ran across cases later on. But the thing about it is that these people who were told that, "You are an abomination. We can prove it by the Bible." And on and on, they were just a total wreck. And someone had to say, "Look. God does not. . . They're not speaking for God." And that a church existed long before there's a New Testament, anyway. The teachings of Jesus and the apostles were handed down orally. And eventually put into writing. And they didn't teach this sort of thing. So don't, don't beat yourself to death. So it was a gay ministry, but it was just gay in the Good News type way.

J. Gordon M: So how did you meet Clement Sherwood?

George H: Well, Bishop John, the Greek bishop, said he wanted to go back to Greece. He was not well. He knew Archbishop Clement, so he got us together. And Archbishop Clement, I thought, was the most hateful man I ever met. Tall, slim, sharp features. But I loved him dearly. He's a wonderful man. So we met and talked about our work merging with his. He had a kind of older, more advanced, larger church group. And he said, "Fine. Good deal. We'll do this and that and the other." So it seemed so simple. I said, "Look, there's no institutional church man who is so easy to get along with. Something's wrong somewhere. I'll find out what kind of man he is," I said to myself. I said, "Bishop, there's a little problem here." "What is that?" I said, "Most of my people are gay." He said, "Okay, but what's your problem?" I fell in love with him then. He's inviting all of us. And so

they felt that I needed to have a little extra education. So Sherwood set it up with some of his brother bishops. For the next three years, I had really intense tutoring. And I had, I think some of the best theologians ever. I had that Albanian Archbishop Fan Noli, I had the Russian archbishop Joseph (Klimowitz?). I had a Ukrainian bishop Nicolas, whose last name I can't pronounce. And then I had Clement Sherwood. And this went on for three years. And I got a good education out of them. From them, rather. And then I lived in New York with Archbishop Sherwood for a brief period. And he never—none of the bishops—this is the interesting part—none of the African Orthodox bishops, the Russians, the Greeks, the Ukrainian, the Polish, all knew the whole story. None of them ever said a negative word about it. And I said, “I have really found true Christians.” It's what I thought. So we sort, after that we sort of blossomed. And we ended up with parishes where the priest was a married man with seven kids. His congregation was largely gay. Houston, Texas. Which congregation is now part of the Autocephalous Orthodox Church in American. Because they were the Eastern Rite, and we transferred them over, gave them to them. We had a congregation where the pastor was an admitted gay person, whose congregation was largely non-gay. No problem! We were just simply a church. And we fought hard to keep from being put in the category of a “gay church.” Because no one ever called us a black church because we had black members. But they would call us gay because of some of the gays. And I fought that and fought it, and challenged people, and argued. Threw up my hands in disgust and frustration, and then felt sorry that I had lost my temper. But the way we did it, we attracted people who would not normally come. We had some rather notable—I won't say notable—we had some people of some celebrity from show business who attended our little St. Peter and Paul Church in West Harlem. So you get a stage actor who is rather well known to get on the subway and come from Midtown up to West Harlem to attend church in a black neighborhood! Something is drawing him there. I like to think it was the spirituality of the place. We then, this thing called Stonewall

Rebellion, which I think was the best off-Broadway comedy of the season, really, because they did nothing positive, in my opinion. It was all political. And I didn't like it. But we did not have any part in this *political* movement among the gays. Our goal was down another road. But we worked with different people.

J. Gordon M: Now as I understand it, Clement—and correct me if I'm wrong—Clement had both, operating both as a diocesan bishop and as the head of a synod of other diocesan bishops?

George H: Yes. Yes.

J. Gordon M: Explain that.

George H: Well, he in fact, I was just reading in the minute book where he's described as the primate of the Orthodox Catholic Church of America. And an archbishop of the American Eastern Orthodox Diocese of New York., [church history omitted at request of G. Hyde]

[45 minutes]

[End Tape 1, Side A. Begin Side B.]

[church history omitted at request of G. Hyde.]

J. Gordon M: And when did you become a bishop?

George H: May 7, 1957.

J. Gordon M: And who consecrated you?

George H: [Names omitted at request of G. Hyde.] And I've only participated in two consecrations in my lifetime so far. I haven't produced any new bishops, not many. And as a bishop, I've ordained maybe, I'm just guessing right now, a dozen priests in these forty-eight years, or forty-nine years, that I've been a bishop. And I would guess maybe fifty percent of them might have been gay men. And their sexual orientation had nothing to do with whether or not they were ordained, and had nothing to do with which parish they were going to go to. Some of them were sent to a parish that was largely non-gay. Or maybe largely gay. It didn't matter. The people just needed a priest, or needed a pastor.

J. Gordon M: You eventually became head of the Orthodox Catholic Church of America.

George H: Yes.

J. Gordon M: How did that organization get started? Where did it come from?

George H: Well, that was started in 1885 by a Joseph Vilatte. And then a European Catholic ordained him priest for his congregation in Wisconsin. In 1891, he and his congregation came under the protection of the Bishop Vladimir of the Russian Orthodox archdiocese in North America. And the following year, in 1892, he was consecrated bishop by three bishops of the original historic Syrian Church of Antioch. One of his co-consecrators was canonized as a saint, St. Gregory, in 1903, I think it was. So the name Orthodox Catholic Church of America was adopted in 1910. And over the years, under that umbrella of the Orthodox Catholic Church of America, there were different church entities. Like the African Orthodox Church. Primarily black, Episcopalian converts. The American Catholic Church, also largely Episcopalian converts. Swedish American Catholic Church. And that was all began to be crystallized and solidified in 1932, when Archbishop Sherwood was elected to head the church. From 1924, when Archbishop Vilatte

left America and went back to France, from 1924 until 1932, the church was administered by a consistory of bishops under the chairmanship of Bishop George Alexander Maguire, of the African Orthodox Church. And the consistory finally, with some internal turmoil, was straightened out, elected Archbishop Sherwood, Bishop Sherwood then, to be the second primate of the American Church. And then when he died in April of 1969, and we had problems getting a consistory, (correcting himself), quorum, I was finally elected his successor in January, 1970.

J. Gordon M: I gather that the church was meant to be a Western Rite Orthodox Church.

George H: Yes. Yes. Primarily. In fact, interestingly, and in this book I have here of the minutes of the senator bishops, in 1954 they passed a resolution. And all the bishops, eleven of them, agreed in a primarily Eastern Rite, agreed that by the end of 1969, they would have divested themselves of their ethnic titles—Russian, Greek Ukrainian—and identify themselves as American. And that those who used an Eastern liturgical tradition would agree to gradually westernize it. Not to junk it completely, but to make it more compatible to the Western mind and eyes and ear. And so most of them did. But finally they started thinking, we don't want to give up our heritage. And they balked. And that's one reason that they took so long to get a successor to Archbishop Clement. And so we finally, in 1976, got rid of the last of our Eastern Rite parishes. We had a parish in Houston, which I mentioned earlier, pastored by a non-gay priest whose congregation was largely made up of gays. And they were Eastern Rite. So I encouraged them to go over to the Autocephalous Orthodox Church in America. They would feel more at home there. They would get more attention. Because my attention was for the Western Rite. We had a Russian-oriented church in Palmerton, Pennsylvania. We sent them over to the OCA, Archbishop Herman, now Metropolitan Herman. And then we had St. Peter and Paul in New York, which was Eastern. And so we became, in '76, totally Western Rite. And it started developing, reconstructing, the

Western liturgical tradition, sans Romanisms and other such things that took place after the ninth century.

J. Gordon M: How did you feel about the filioque clause? Or did you use it?

George H: No, we did not use it. I do not know when I learned about that and started studying it and figuring it out. But I concluded that the filioque creates two causes for the Holy Spirit, instead of one. God is the cause. Not God the father and God the son. But it proceeds from God the father. And since it was, the creed was originally formulated without it, and I think the people who inserted it had none but the best of intentions. They wanted to emphasize the divinity of Christ. And if the Holy Spirit proceeded from Him also, then he had to be divine. And so then some Spanish bishops who pushed this through, but they got overzealous. And of course Rome didn't accept the filioque until, I think, I couple hundred years later, in eleventh century. So we never used it.

J. Gordon M: What kind of practice did you have in terms of the sacrament of penance and the relationship to communion? Open communion or closed communion?

George H: When we have an official church position my position, sometimes, not always the same. I've always felt that the person receiving communion must believe, have the same belief, as to what it is that the priest has. That the church has. It's not simply representative of, it's not memorial of. It is. And we do not question them, ask them twenty questions to see if they were worthy. But the bulletins always explained what communion is for us, and the standards. And so we assume that the average decent person would not come to receive communion if he did not believe. He did not have to be a formal member of our particular communion. Because the Roman church believes about the Eucharist, the same as we do. And many Episcopalians do, also. So that was really never a problem for us. And we

did not have open communion to the degree that anyone—you can have some far out denominational Christian, I'll say, who likes ritual, maybe. Who thinks it would be fun to go up there and receive communion. That's receiving it unworthily. So we stayed away from open communion in that sense. But it's never been a problem for us.

J. Gordon M: Did you demand participation and confession and penance before receiving communion?

George H: No. We encouraged it. We encouraged you to meditate, to reflect, and to confess to God that you had sinned and you were sorry, and you were going to make an effort not to do it again. You do not have to do it to a priest. But if you needed spiritual guidance and advice, a priest was always available. We just said, "We just assume you have confessed your sins before you come up here." We had to trust the people to be sincere. They trusted us. We wanted them to trust us to be sincere. We had to trust them. And so this personal confession to a priest didn't jive with what we were trying to teach the people. And so, that's it today. We occasionally have someone who will come by here and want to talk. Friday afternoon, maybe. About something. And they just want some guidance. Because they are going to confess their sins to God, and then receive communion. And of course, if you tell a lie, you lose your temper, that's not going to bar you from receiving communion. That is not a sin that God is going to put you in jail for, ever. Shouldn't do it. But it's not going to keep you—cause if that Eucharist is what we believe it to be, what we say it is, that's the best thing in the world for you to have if you sinned. It gives you spiritual nourishment. It's like a hot dog gives you bodily nourishment. I don't know if my theology is any good on that, but I stick by it.

J. Gordon M: Tell us about Robert Clement. How did you meet him?

George H: I bless him. I love the man dearly. He wrote to me sometime in the Seventies, the early Seventies. And I thought he was kind of far out. But we were having a clergy/laity conference in Houston. And he said he was trying to start a congregation, and told me what it was all about. I said, okay. Along the same lines that I've worked for several years. And he said, "But we're going to need our own bishop, and I'm going to be it." I wasn't too happy about that. I don't like too many bishops in the same territory. So I invited him to come down to the meeting; he did. He talked to our group of lay and clerical delegates. And they discussed it. And then they concluded that they did not want me to make him a bishop. Accept him into our church with his new congregation, but not as a bishop. And so Bob didn't like that too much. So he went off and did his own thing. But we had established contact, and we developed a friendship. And we worked together. And over the years, I've shared things with him from the original parish. And he wanted a name for the work he was developing. So he took the name Eucharistic Catholic Church that we had used. And I said, "Fine, take it." And I passed along to him the original vestments that we used at the first liturgy. And just, artifacts. And then he built up a good work in New York. Took an old building, made a church out of it. And you walked in, you knew you were in church. Four or five hundred people. So then they said, "We need a successor bishop." So they had someone on hand. And a couple of people were asked to serve as co-consecrators, and they wouldn't. They were afraid of the publicity they might get. And he asked me and I said, "Sure. Glad to do it." One of our bishops in the Orthodox Catholic Church of America, another one of our bishops, was asked, too. And he refused. And so I went up and served as co-consecrator with the new bishop, who died about a year ago. So that's where I met Bob [Clement]. And we've been friends ever since. It's a good friendship. And he has done a good work. For various and sundry reasons, they had to terminate their work at Beloved Disciple in New York. But it made an impact. And we, even

now, we talk frequently, and share with each other. And, pretty much on the same page.

J. Gordon M: How did you meet Lankenau? [Alfred Louis Lankenau].

George H: He wrote to me in the Seventies. He had been ordained a Roman priest. Had left the Roman church. And was pastoring a small group of former Roman Catholic Dignity members. And he wrote to me and said, “We need to belong to a functioning church. Take us in.” And so we discussed that. And the doctrinal and theological standards of his group, and his own. And concluded that in time they could all be chrismated as Orthodox Catholics. And so that’s the way I met him. And he was accepted in as a priest. And did a good job in Indianapolis. Built up a little congregation of maybe 45, 50 people the first year that he was with us. And I went up to visit several times. And then we decided that we’d better start taking steps to ensure that we continued into the future. We needed another bishop. So they elected Alfred to be the new bishop, the next bishop. So we had his consecration in Indianapolis. He was given the title, Bishop of Indianapolis and Chicago. And did quite well.

J. Gordon M: Now where are you living at this time?

George H: Then? South Carolina.

J. Gordon M: So you’d moved from Washington back to the South.

George H: Yes. We had a small church at Hartwell, Georgia, a town of 8,000. But we were doing some extensive evangelizing in the mountains of north Georgia. Small towns. And so Hartwell was at the foot of that. And that’s one reason we bought the church. It was a former Assemblies of God church. Little white frame with an

adjacent residence. Which I moved into. Had one priest with me. So we became circuit riders, so to speak. On Sunday morning, I would do liturgy at Hartwell, small congregation. Then take off down to Commerce, Georgia. And then up for a service. And then a couple of hours later, up to Gainesville, Georgia. And then that afternoon, up to another town in north Georgia to make the circuit. And he would start up at (Gatness?), South Carolina, and work his way down. And so we, together on a weekend, we could serve about six different congregations. Some of them, groups of half a dozen people meeting in a living room. And some were larger. I must tell this, this is interesting, I think. There was a church, a snake handling group, up in north Georgia, called the Fire Baptized Church of Jesus Christ on the Solid Rock of Faith. My favorite church. And he converted the pastor and the entire congregation, my co-priest. And we had up at Clayton, Georgia, which is a resort town, we had a small congregation there during the spring and summer. Couldn't make it in the winter. And we were, quote, "them Catholic boys," end quote. We were foreigners, really. Those mountain people, most of them, didn't care for us. But then the church in Hartwell burned. So we sold the land. And I moved to Anderson and started a church there. And worked in nearby Greenville and Spartanburg, and so forth. And kept expanding. And in Anderson, which is interesting, Anderson is a town of about 55,000. The boy ordained as priest had been kicked out of the Roman Catholic seminary in Baltimore because he was suspected of being a gay person. I don't like that expression "gay." I never heard it until the Seventies. Back when I was a young man, gay people were referred to in Atlanta as "festive." But anyway, he was gay, so-called gay. He was different. But very competent person. Very spiritual boy. So he was ordained priest. He was ordained one Sunday. And the next Sunday, he set up the den in his mother's home, put an altar in there and a dozen chairs. Had three people. And he started his church. This was 1983. By 1986, in this town of 50,000, predominated by the Assemblies of God and the Roman church, he had a congregation of about 85 people. They had bought four acres of land to build a

church and a cemetery. In just three years. And, to my knowledge, there's only one gay person in the congregation. Had a gay pastor. And the people loved him. Had a large Sunday School class of children. In fact, I remember one little boy was about four years old, I guess. Of course, he's an adult now. But I remember Josh used to say to Father Joseph, "I'm going to have your job, Father." Meaning, I'm going to be a priest, too. And he is now in his twenties. The priest is gone, but he's still there. But it was a good thing. And this whole thing, the people were Christian people. Their spirituality was in context of everything that we read and have heard about God. And they were reasonably clean-living, moral people, whether they were of a same gender or opposite gender orientation sexually and affectionately. That's the important thing, I think.

J. Gordon M: One of the names that shows up in the early Eighties is Archbishop James Francis Miller.

George H: Yes.

J. Gordon M: Tell us about him.

George H: He was a good man. He came to me in the Seventies. He was living in Scranton, Pennsylvania, I think, at the time. And he was an ordained priest and built up a nice congregation in Pennsylvania. And he subsequently immigrated to Washington, DC. First, I think, to Philadelphia. And then down to Washington. And was a very stable man, and a good pastor. In fact, just yesterday I was going through my album and putting in some photographs of him made at his ordination. And he died, I guess, ten years ago, at least. He was a good friend, also. And he was with us, we had a clergy/laity conference in Cleveland sometime in the Seventies, I don't remember exactly. And we were going to elect another bishop. This was long before Bishop Alfred. And James was elected by the people

and clergy to be bishop. Fine. All I knew, I knew he had been a good, productive priest, and I liked him. So later he came to my hotel room and says, "I need to talk to you." So, okey dokey. He said, "I have to tell you this about this bishop thing. I'm gay." And so I remembered what Archbishop Sherwood said. "So what's the problem?" That's what I told him. And the man cried. He had never had that response from anybody else, I don't suppose. But it was never discussed beyond that. He just said, "I'm gay." Saying, "I can't be bishop because I'm gay." And I was saying, "No problem. You can be." And so we did it. We had, incidentally, this is interesting, I think. We had a small mission congregation in Cleveland at the time. And one of the ringleaders, one of the backbones of that congregation, was a boy named Ray Bernard. And Ray was going to be ordained priest eventually. But when it came time to get a consecrator for James Francis Miller [correction: James Leonard Miller], the only one I could come up with was Bishop Robert Clement in New York. Ray threw a hissy fit. "Can't do that! Scandalous!" Blah, blah, blah. "Don't you know what he is?" And I said, "Yes. I know he is a good friend and a good Christian bishop. Period." So Ray says, "If you do that, I'm leaving the church." So I did, and he did. But that didn't last long. Ray and I soon patched up our disagreements and became close, close friends. But James, I had been given a ring way back yonder in the Fifties. Archbishop O'Hara of the Roman diocese of Atlanta gave me a bishop's ring, and said, "You're going to need this one day." I hate to say he was a prophet and I didn't know it. And so I don't like the ring. So I gave it to Bishop Miller when he was consecrated bishop. He wore it. But I just don't like those things. And then he gave it to Bishop Germaine Hardy of France, who is planning on giving it to one of his priests, whom he plans to consecrate auxiliary bishop in September. Which priest was here to visit with me recently, and wanted to come here and join up and be one of my priests. So that ring has made the rounds from the Roman Catholic archbishop to me, to Miller, and on to France, and back to me.

J. Gordon M: Now did Miller stay with the church? Or he developed some independent work?

George H: Yes. When he was in Philadelphia, he, (slight pause) Bishop Miller took in some people, I would say carelessly. He was not too careful about the theology, about the doctrine. They believed in God, they believed in Jesus Christ. But what do you believe about him? And in some cases they believed, I think, erroneously. But he took them in the church anyway. And we, I said, "Well, I'm sorry, bishop, but I'm going to have to exercise some discipline here." So he did some independent work. But we remained friends.

J. Gordon M: And I understand that he eventually brought his work back into the church.

George H: Yes. He did that through, there's a priest, Edward James, in Washington. Ed was a professor of English, I believe, at the University of Maryland. Had a small, all-black congregation in Washington. And he and Bishop Miller became close friends. And Ed influenced Bishop Miller to come back home.

J. Gordon M: Another name that shows up in the records is Father Stephen (Teronis?)

George H: I don't know him.

J. Gordon M: All right. Well then, let's move on. Most recently, you've had your differences with Bishop Alfred. Would you share those with us a little bit?

George H: [section omitted at request of G. Hyde.]

J. Gordon M: So what, the new church, what name are you operating under now?

George H: Well, our corporate title is Autocephalus Orthodox Catholic Church of America. That's our incorporation and our IRS name. But in common usage, we're simply

Archdiocese and Metropolitanate of America. Or just simply the Orthodox Catholic Church. And we have, we started in 1995 with three priests and less than 100 people. Today we have seven priests and about 700 people. Our largest congregation is Miami, with about 250 people. And two of our priests came to us from the Antiochian archdiocese. The pastor of the Antiochian church in Pinellas Park came over to us. In fact, we ordained, and I have to tell you this, because this whole thing of ecclesiastical relationships and this division that we have. An Episcopalian pastor, 25 years experience of Ascension of St. Agnes Church down in Seminole, converted. He left the Episcopal Church and became orthodox via the Antiochian church in Pinellas Park. Okay, they're Eastern Rite. He would be more happy with the Western liturgy. So the pastor, Father Richard Simmons, wrote to Metropolitan Philip and said, "Why not ordain Harry Williams a priest, and he can have Western Rite work here in the same church with us?" A year later, they had not responded. So this upset Father Simmons and Harry. And so someone told them about me. They came to see me, said, "Would you take him in and ordain him?" I said yes. So he said, "Fine. You can use my church." So we ordained this priest in the Antiochian Church.

J. Gordon M: Is it the St. Nicolas Church?

George H: Yeah. Yeah. But the interesting thing is, I helped found that church in 1983. Father Michael (Curry?) was the mission priest for St. Nicolas. He also had a mission in Clearwater, St. Michael's. I had just arrived here briefly, and so I co-pastored with him. And I did Mass at St. Michael's. He did St. Nicolas on a Saturday afternoon. Then I'd do St. Nicolas on Saturday, and he'd do St. Michael's on Sunday. So after about a year, the archdiocese says, "We can only have one congregation. Either Clearwater or Pinellas Park. But not two." And they had more people, so they won out. So St. Nicolas. But I have in there in my artifacts, I have the original tabernacle for St. Nicolas Antiochian Orthodox

Church that was willed to me by Father Michael. One he made out of a glass dome and so on and so forth. I'm very proud of it. But then subsequently, Father Richard came over to us and became our (Chancellor?)counselor. And then the entire congregation of St. Lazarus Church in Miami came over to us. And they've been with us almost ten years now. And they're largely a Spanish, a Cuban background.

J. Gordon M: Spanish speaking?

George H: Yeah. Yeah.

J. Gordon M: Finally, tell us a little bit about the new bishop Itkins.

George H: [portion of interview omitted at request of G. Hyde]

[90 minutes]

[End Tape One, Side B. Begin Tape Two.]

[portion of interview omitted at request of G. Hyde]

J. Gordon M: All righty. Thank you. We've gotten through the set of questions I have. I know quite assuredly that once I listen to this tape, I'm going to have some more. So I hope that I can come back some time.

George H: Sure.

Third person in room: He's also very good at answering email.

George H: Who?

Third person in room:        You.

George H:     Oh, really? I don't like email that much. [laughs] I really don't. I don't turn on that computer every day. But I had twenty emails this morning. And I said, "Who are these crazy people? How do they find me?" It wasn't all spam, you know. But I must tell you something interesting. I finally got rid of a typewriter and bought a word processor. About ten years ago I bought a Brothers word processor, because I have to type that newsletter every month and get it printed. Well, my word processor started getting old, and some of the keys didn't always work. Wouldn't print out. So I called Brother, said, "I want to order another one." They said, "We stopped making those things three years ago." Went out to Office Depot. "Oh, no." They don't make word processors anymore, I found out. Okay, I want a typewriter that will give me right margin flush. "Uh huh. Forget it." So I said, "The only thing I know to do, I'll buy a computer and a printer, and use the word process part of the computer." So I did. It took me a year to figure that out. But meanwhile, I got some WD40 and sprayed it on the keyboard of my word processor. And let it soak for a few days. It's working like a new word processor. So that's what I'm using now for my letters and for my newsletter. Which will be 100 years old next year, I want you to know.

Third person:    What, the newsletter?

George H:        Uh huh. It was started by Archbishop Vilatte. And I'm going to keep printing it till it gets 100, then I'll stop, I guess.

Third person in room: Any last comments before I turn this off?

George H:        I didn't know it was on. [laughter]

J. Gordon M: Okay. Here it goes.

George H: I didn't know—

[102 minutes]

[End Interview.]