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Title

Rev. Jerry Anderson Oral History Interview Webpage

Date

April 20, 2023

Extant

1 webpage, (1:25:44 minute interview), 1 transcript

Abstract

Virginia Theological Seminary Archivist Joshua Waits interviews Jerry Anderson, the first openly gay Episcopal priest in the Diocese of Washington, D.C. and AIDS chaplain. In the interview he describes his decision to join the Episcopal priesthood, homophobia, his ministry to AIDS patients, founding and directing The Episcopal Caring Response to AIDS, the AIDS quilt, and his liaison work with various White House administrations.

Biographical

The Reverend Jerry Anderson was born and raised in the United Pentecostal Church in coal country Illinois and briefly attended a Pentecostal seminary in Texas. He discovered the Episcopal Church in 1962 while attending Southern Illinois University in Carbondale, Illinois.

This was followed by three years at General Theological School in New York City, where he graduated in 1968. He then served as Curate and the Assistant Rector at St. Augustine's Episcopal Church in Wilmette, Illinois, from 1968 until 1973. From 1973 til 1976 he completed thirteen units of Clinical Pastoral Education at Presbyterian St. Luke's Hospital in Chicago.

He moved to Washington, D.C., in 1976 to live with his partner; they remained together for thirteen years. He worked in Senator Adlai Stevenson's office from 1976 to 1979 when he was offered an assistant rector position at St. Patrick's Church. In 1981, he came out to the church, and after discussion was supported by the majority of the parish and Bishop Wilson. In spite of that support, the Virginia Theological Seminary, which at

that time had a very oppressive policy against gays, banned him from supervising its students in Field Education, which created a controversy.

In 1983, his first friend died of AIDS and more of his time was spent caring for AIDS victims. In 1986 he inspired the founding of the Episcopal Caring Response to AIDS in the Diocese of Washington and was its chaplain until 1969. During these years he pushed for an AIDS response at The General Convention of The Episcopal Church, participated in Interfaith AIDS Retreats, helped organize Barbara Bush's 1989 visit to Grandma's House, and started an HIV support group.

In 1969, he moved to Miami and created the Episcopal AIDS Ministry out of Trinity Cathedral, where he worked until 2001. He then moved to the Diocese of Los Angeles where he was priest in charge of St. Paul's Church in Pomona for thirteen months and then became Director of Pastoral Care at Good Samaritan Hospital in Los Angeles until he retired in 2016.

(This biographical statement was provided by Jerry Anderson.)

Date: November 2025

Scope and Content

In this oral history interview, Jerry Anderson describes his experience negotiating with whom and when and how to be open about his sexuality first at Virginia Theological Seminary and then at his parish in Washington, D.C. When he came out, he was the first openly gay Episcopal priest in the Diocese of Washington, D.C. He describes his AIDS chaplaincy. And to a lesser extent, he describes founding and directing The Episcopal Caring Response to AIDS, the AIDS quilt, and his liaison work with various White House administrations.

Source

This interview was conducted by VTS Archivist Joshua Waits for the project, Called and Holy: Virginia Theological Seminary LGBTQIA+ Oral History Project available online at <https://vtsbpl.omeka.net/items/show/504>.

Access

Open to all researchers at <https://lgbtqreligiousarchives.org/oral-histories/harry-stock>

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Language

Collection material is in English

Cite as

See Virginia Theological Seminary for citation information.

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Tags

Episcopal Church, clergy activist, Washington D.C., AIDS