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Location: LGBTQ-RAN thanks the Bishop Payne Library of the Virginia Theological Seminary 3737 Seminary Rd., Alexandria, VA 22304 for permission to include this interview on our website. The original can be found at <https://vtsbpl.omeka.net/items/show/504>

Abstract Jerry Anderson, the first openly gay Episcopal priest in the Diocese of Washington, D.C., and AIDS Chaplain describes his decision to join the Episcopal priesthood, 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.

Tags:

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

Transcript

Joshua Waits: We are recording. My name is Joshua Waits, I'm the activist here at Virginia Theological Seminary. Today is April 20th, 2023, at approximately 1:20pm. I am here with Reverend Jerry Anderson who is here to give his oral history for the Called and Holy LGBT oral history project. Thank you Reverend Anderson for being here.

Rev. Jerry Anderson: This is an answer to a prayer, praying for something like this coming for a long time.

Joshua Waits: Let's start with just some basic information. Would you mind telling your full name?

Rev. Jerry Anderson: I'm Jerry Ray Anderson.

Joshua Waits: Do you have a preferred way to be addressed as far as your name, reverend, doctor?

Rev. Jerry Anderson: Yeah Jerry is fine.

Joshua Waits: Jerry. Alright. How do you identify? Do you have preferred pronouns?

Rev. Jerry Anderson: Well I identify as gay. And I sort of like the idea of queer being reclaimed. I have not, um, settled on my pronouns. All of them, I don't know. I'm open to, yeah.

Joshua Waits: When and where were you born?

Rev. Jerry Anderson: I was born in a town in the extreme southern part of Illinois, Herrin. H-e-r-r-i-n. Most people don't know it, but it's where I was born. And did you say when?

Joshua Waits: When.

Rev. Jerry Anderson: March 25th, 1942.

Joshua Waits: Having perused your memoirs, you say you grew up the son of a Pentecostal preacher who was a coal miner by day.

Rev. Jerry Anderson: That's true. Yeah.

Joshua Waits: Would you tell us some about your growing up in that tradition and what it was like for you?

Rev. Jerry Anderson: Well, you know, looking back on it, the people in the congregation were lovely people. And it was a very tight community, and we were in church every time the doors were open. My father was the assistant at the parish, our church where we grew up. He led the testimonials, singing, and he was sort of the warmup act. And he also taught at the men's bible college and, I mean, men's bible class. And he never felt like he wanted to have his own church, although he toyed with that. But I also, as a child, we were the old fashioned holiness Pentecostals, and as a child, I can remember, I don't know why, but every school year they wanted you to put your religious preference. They all know we're going to have to write Pentecostal again. And I knew people made fun of us because of the shouting, and all that sort of thing. And, what was the question? How was it growing up?

Joshua Waits: How was it like to grow up in that tradition?

Rev. Jerry Anderson: Okay. By the time I'm 16 or my teens, and of course this is 1950, I was keenly aware of the issues of segregation, integration, of course television was portraying horrible things in the south. But I also grew up in a "sundown town." No blacks after sunset. So I became very aware of all of that. And well, 1957 there was a huge integration battle in Little Rock, Arkansas. Several high schools they were trying to integrate it and there were violent protests and that's when President Eisenhower sent in federal troops. I was riveted with all of that and watching it on television. And so, the next year, my parents and several other people from the church went to Little Rock for a United Pentecostal Church convention. And I just turned 16 so I could drive and I really, so I borrowed the car and went out just to see the high school. Things had calmed down, it was such an iconic image. And, which I did. And then I came back and the most important issue before the convention was whether we could own television sets. And they finally compromised and said that they couldn't enforce it with the laity because sister so-and-so might have a husband who didn't belong to the church and it had become an issue for them. But the clergy could not own televisions. And I thought you know there's something wrong with this. So, I think that emotionally began my desire to get out. The other thing was I was terrified I was going to become a coal miner. My brother became a coal

miner, I even had nephews younger than I who became coal miners. And I was plotting on how I was going to get out of the coal fields. So I was, notably, I didn't know anything about the Episcopal Church. There wasn't an Episcopal Church in my hometown.

Joshua Waits: Now was this like Congregational Holiness Church or Assemblies of God, Church of God?

Rev. Jerry Anderson: It was the United Pentecostal Church which is a denomination in and of itself. They are, uh, Jesus only.

Joshua Waits: So, oneness?

Rev. Jerry Anderson: Oneness Pentecostal. Baptized in the name of Jesus only, that separated them out. But they also are very much Holiness to us and all of that, you know.

Joshua Waits: Yeah because I saw in your book where you had to have the provisional baptism, if you have not been baptized by that-

Rev. Jerry Anderson: In the Episcopal Church. Yeah when I got, Father Harris who was the director of the church, I found the Episcopal Church actually the year I was in Bible College. There were these Episcopalians speaking in tongues, I thought that was interesting. So I began to research the Episcopal church. And when I ended up back at Southern Illinois University, I went one year there and then went to bible college in Texas and actually it was at bible college I discovered I was gay, in 1961. I mean, for no other reason it was good that I went down there but it was also a miserable year. So anyway, when I came back, I found the Episcopal church. And, by that time, you know, I knew I couldn't be a Pentecostal preacher, I was struggling with the possibility of ministry but I thought I was going to be a lawyer or a politician and do good work that way. So when I discovered the Episcopal church and fell in love with it, and then discovered there were gay priests in the closet, you know, pretending. I thought oh, well maybe all this could come together for me. So when I began to talk about the seminary and Father Harris said well, you know, when it comes time for you to be ordained, you're going to have show proof of your baptism and he said I would hate for that to be an issue. So yeah I was conditionally baptized on Holy Saturday. But being classic Episcopalian, they just didn't assume I wasn't baptized. They didn't want to offend me. So, if you have not already been baptized, I'm now baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. So that made me legit, otherwise I'm not really.

Joshua Waits: Which bible college did you go to?

Rev. Jerry Anderson: Well it was a little known bible college called the International Bible College in San Antonio. Founded by a Pentecostal missionary who was kicked out of Japan in World War II and came and started this bible college. And when I was there, his son, David Coote, Senior Coote was dead at this point...and he's the one who one day handed me this magazine, said "oh this might appeal to you." And it was a magazine published by the

Charismatics at St. Mark's Van Nuys, California. Dennis Bennett who was one of the, you know, one of the personalities that emerged in all that, they had very good artwork and it was a slick magazine and I thought who are these Episcopalians?

Joshua Waits: So, when you were introduced to the Episcopal church and then when you left the college, you then started attending the Episcopal church.

Rev. Jerry Anderson: Well actually what happened was I was miserable but I couldn't go back home because I just returned, just rededicated myself to Jesus in the summer of '61, my first year of seminary, of college. And so, and they were prophesizing I was going to be a preacher, so the person who introduced me to the homosexual world was kicked out two weeks after I had gotten there, or we had gotten there. And they almost kicked me out because we had told a lie and said that we were going out to dinner with his parents who were coming down from Shreveport. And instead of his parents we went out with two of his cute gay friends and they took me to a gay bar and also told me about famous people who were gay and all this other stuff. And I made out with one of them on the way back to Hallelujah Hill, which is where the Bible College was. Anyway, they didn't kick me out because they were afraid, they told me that I'd go back to that Baptist university and be lost forever. So at the end of that year, my uncle, my dad's younger brother, who was a Pentecostal preacher in California, he and his wife invited me to come out there and I think my uncle really thought I might stay for the ministry under him. So that summer, in a small town there was an Episcopal church and I read in the newspaper that there was a charismatic priest preaching at St. Matthias in California that Sunday. And my uncle allowed me to go to the 8:00 mass to hear the sermon. And I instantly loved the Episcopal church. So, I would go over, I was working in a Western Auto store and I would go over, it was about a block from where I was working and sit on my lunch hour. Then the other thing that happened was I had a date with a girl and one parent was Roman Catholic and one was Episcopal. And, when I got home that night, my uncle was furious with me, of course I've got this secret, furious with me I dated somebody outside the true faith. And I'm like God I thought, I cried myself to sleep that night. And the next day said I'm going back to Southern Illinois University and going home. So that launched me back and I found the Episcopal church immediately and never looked back.

Joshua Waits: My grandmother was raised Congregational Holiness.

Rev. Jerry Anderson: Where was this?

Joshua Waits: This was in Cedartown, Georgia. So it's just at the beginning of the Appalachian Mountains in Georgia.

Rev. Jerry Anderson: I've never heard of Congregational Holiness.

Joshua Waits: They were an off-shoot of the Assembly With God but rejected bishops.

Rev. Jerry Anderson: They probably were Trinitarian.

Joshua Waits: They were Trinitarian.

Rev. Jerry Anderson: Yeah because United Pentecostal broke away from the Trinitarians back in, I think 1950.

Joshua Waits: And I remember when I started attending the Episcopal church. And my mother told my grandmother which we were Baptist, not -

Rev. Jerry Anderson: How old were you?

Joshua Waits: I was 25.

Rev. Jerry Anderson: Oh.

Joshua Waits: But my grandmother's response was well, I don't know many Episcopalians but I do know they're good people.

Rev. Jerry Anderson: Oh sure.

Joshua Waits: And my mother came to the Episcopal church in its defense and she said well ,I'll say this much for the Episcopal church, when those people say they pray, they pray. And you know what, there's worse things that could be said to describe your church.

Rev. Jerry Anderson: Really flattering.

Joshua Waits: To which, my grandmother went well that's what matters. I'm like, okay. She's 85 now. And the older she gets, the more Holiness she becomes. So, you come into the Episcopal church, you received conditional baptism, is that all in preparing for discernment to the priesthood?

Rev. Jerry Anderson: Well it was going on at the same time, yeah. I don't know quite when, well I probably just made up my mind to the committee of the diocese of Springfield accepted me in late '64.

Joshua Waits: And you ended up attending General. So, I want to really plug into your decisions to attend General as your seminary.

Rev. Jerry Anderson: Well my bishop, Bishop Chambers was a General graduate. I didn't want to stay in the Midwest I knew that. I said to him that I really liked the New England seminary. And he said "well, that would be a dramatic thing to do. I think you should go with General." Well, that was fine with me.

Joshua Waits: It is the high church seminary.

Rev. Jerry Anderson: Well, for decades they tried to play middle ground because they were THE seminary of THE church. Nashotah House was the high church.

Joshua Waits: Well, and Nashotah House has now become the high church but the conservative.

Rev. Jerry Anderson: They lost their minds.

Joshua Waits: Which is interesting because Virginia was always known as low evangelical and now it's the, and conservative, and now it's more of the progressive broad.

Rev. Jerry Anderson: Thank God. Of course, Virginia was, you know, our great rival and they always beat us in sports. So, football and basketball. So we used to say well, Virginia has a great athletic program. I mean, thank God Virginia is doing what it's doing.

Joshua Waits: So, what was it like being at General? Were you able to be more open about your sexuality?

Rev. Jerry Anderson: I was, but we still played, you know, games with people. There were enough of us who were gay to have close fellowship and then there were others who we were trying figure out which way they were going. So, it was, that... of course at Southern University, there was just a small group of us, and we were pretty much scared. So, General was a much more affirming place.

Joshua Waits: And what year did you start?

Rev. Jerry Anderson: '65, graduated in '68.

Joshua Waits: So, this was all pre-Stonewall?

Rev. Jerry Anderson: Oh God yes. Pre Stonewall, pre Hair, that came out I think in '69. Pre, um, I'm sorry, there's another I can't remember. And I didn't - and my friends really didn't go to the bars. It hadn't...Gay bars were still, sort of, not a place where you hang out. The discos really took off in the early 60s. And then everything took off. Did I say 60s? Early 70s. And, you know, it became where everything was breaking loose.

Joshua Waits: So when you were at General, it's really sort of the time of the Mattachine society?

Rev. Jerry Anderson: Well they, yeah Mattachine was in the 50s.

Joshua Waits: Right.

Rev. Jerry Anderson: And they were very small. And I don't know when I first became aware of them. But I mean, they were kind of an esoteric group it seemed like, I don't know. There wasn't anything that occurred to me I should belong to.

Joshua Waits: Okay. So you said you had sort of this pocket of friends but you didn't really attend the gay bars.

Rev. Jerry Anderson: I went to two gay bars in three years I was there. And with different friends and didn't feel like it was something, I mean Stonewall was right there. I never went to Stonewall, could have. But yeah, it wasn't, we didn't need it. We had enough socializing. I think there were seminarians who did, but not I or anyone I knew.

Joshua Waits: So, you pretty much were staying in this network at the seminary because you were queer community. You graduated in '68. Did you go back to your diocese or did you go straight to Washington, DC?

Rev. Jerry Anderson: No I was ordained a deacon in Springfield, southern Illinois. But my first position was as a curate in a suburb of Chicago.

Joshua Waits: Right.

Rev. Jerry Anderson: So I ended up in Chicago which is, again, I was happy.

Joshua Waits: So what was so wonderful about Chicago?

Rev. Jerry Anderson: Well it was a big city. It wasn't a small town in southern Illinois. And I fell in love with New York. That was light years away from where I had been. And um, but I also loved the rector I worked for, I loved the parish. I was 26 when I was ordained and a youth director and that was when young people were doing all sorts of crazy things, challenging the system, so on so forth. So it was a wonderful, almost five years.

Joshua Waits: So, if you were ordained, so you were ordained a priest in '68 as well?

Rev. Jerry Anderson: A deacon in June and priesting was in Chicago.

Joshua Waits: Priesting was in Chicago in December?

Rev. Jerry Anderson: Yes, 28. I'm sorry 20.

Joshua Waits: And you were the associate, no you were a curate.

Rev. Jerry Anderson: I started off as a curate and as assistant rector.

Joshua Waits: And then assigned the youth ministry.

Rev. Jerry Anderson: That was my primary focus yes.

Joshua Waits: So you were dealing with youth ministries during, not so much civil rights movement but still dealing with Vietnam.

Rev. Jerry Anderson: Well civil rights was still going on, but Vietnam was huge. And, hippies and long hair and all that. And kids acting out, you know, going off to hippie communes and so and so forth. Quite an exciting time for all these kids.

Joshua Waits: Right.

Rev. Jerry Anderson: And a lot of parents. But in terms of the sexual thing, I was living in the closet.

Joshua Waits: So you were living in the closet.

Rev. Jerry Anderson: Pretending to be straight.

Joshua Waits: And then in '69, Stonewall happens. That, which of course, cascades pretty quickly. I think in 1970 was the first Pride Parade and then it starts to spread throughout the country. So while you were working in Chicago with youth ministries, was your congregation having to deal with now this rising gay rights movement?

Rev. Jerry Anderson: I don't think it was on the radar for most people.

Joshua Waits: So, you're corralling for, the concerns of these parents is not so much sexuality issues, it was my kids protesting Vietnam or growing their hair long or experimenting with drugs. So that's what you were shepherding.

Rev. Jerry Anderson: Mostly yeah. I think looking back, there were only a couple of those kids who confessed to me they were gay. That wasn't a huge issue.

Joshua Waits: So, what brought you to DC?

Rev. Jerry Anderson: Well, we should just tag the fact that after my parish in Wilmette, I went and did hospital chaplaincy work and did actually 13 units of CPE.

Joshua Waits: 13?

Rev. Jerry Anderson: I know that's exactly why I don't tell people because clergy look at me like I've lost my mind. But I ended up doing that and working at Bishop Anderson House which was Episcopal Chaplaincies and going to psychotherapy during that time and getting my head straight about me and then my father hadn't made me gay, not being emotionally distant. And

really getting over my internalized homophobia. And that allowed me to fall in love, well I've fallen in love before but I fell in love with somebody that it wasn't an insane relationship. And that person, Terry, was living in Washington but he moved in '75 to be with me in Chicago. And then, about the time my CPE was ending, he got a very good job back in Washington. And so we moved to Washington and I opened, for me at that time in regard to my story and my sexuality, was I thought I can't live in the closet again. But how am I going to find work? And so that became a big issue with me personally. So I ended up working on Capitol Hill in a senator's office. And then went back and worked on a political campaign and by this time it's 1979 and I did some interviewing and I thought if they get to know me well enough and find out the truth, I won't get the job. So, I think the Holy Spirit was at work. And Jim Steen who became rector of St. Patrick's Washington in August of '79, he and I had been in seminary together and he was a year behind me and while we liked each other, we weren't really that close. So when he got to St. Patrick's, I called and said let's have lunch. So we were having lunch, in like October I think it was, and in the middle of lunch he said to me you know, I need help, I have a little bit of money, why don't you come and work for me. And I started crying. And it was totally out of left field. I didn't see it coming. So, I like to say I slipped through the back door at St. Patrick's in '79. And by early '81, the parish had grown in numbers and income and all that, they said, do we get into this story? Because that leads me to the seminary.

Joshua Waits: Well let me ask some follow-ups. First, this one is just brief, could you tell us what senator you worked for?

Rev. Jerry Anderson: Adlai Stevenson from Illinois. The son of the presidential candidate.

Joshua Waits: Oh alright. I think this particular quote will lead us into Virginia and to your coming out. In your book, you say "the value I place on my relationship with Terry, I doubt I would have been prepared to risk falling on my sword professionally as I did in coming out to the congregation at St. Patrick's."

Rev. Jerry Anderson: Right. Yeah.

Joshua Waits: Could you tell us a little bit more about Terry?

Rev. Jerry Anderson: Sure. Well, once you accept yourself as being gay, and you're not playing games, and you know, hiding or whatever, and you really do accept yourself. And you really do think my God, I have value and I'm not dominated by shame. And then love comes genuinely. It's the sort of thing you would fall on your sword for, that you would die for it. So that's the state of mind I was in. And we were having a great relationship, a lot of fun, and so on and so forth. And I wasn't going to dishonor that. Does that answer your question?

Joshua Waits: Certainly. And what role were you playing at St. Patrick's?

Rev. Jerry Anderson: Well I was considered the assistant rector. I did a lot of pastoral work. Weddings. I also had a youth group, although it wasn't as large as the one in my first parish. And preaching, and sacramental. Yeah.

Joshua Waits: Alright. So now, we can go into, before you go into your coming out at St. Patrick's and of course the subsequent traumas that will follow that, can you tell us what brought you into working with VTS?

Rev. Jerry Anderson: What do you mean by working with?

Joshua Waits: Well because you were supervising seminarians.

Rev. Jerry Anderson: Well I was in, the rectory, I hadn't had a formal relationship with students but certainly had students that I was involved with.

Joshua Waits: So you had not become a supervisor of?

Rev. Jerry Anderson: Not officially, no.

Joshua Waits: Alright. But that was certainly the plan was to get you recognized -

Rev. Jerry Anderson: I mean I had all the CPE supervision.

Joshua Waits: Right. At this point in CPE, you could be the bishop of all chaplains.

Rev. Jerry Anderson: Yeah but I don't think I'm going to strive for that. Could I tell you though before we get to '81, I moved here and I heard that here at the seminary, it was first time I was at the seminary, I heard that there was going to be a debate here between, oh hell, the founder of Integrity, Louie Crew and David Scott. And so I just came over, I didn't know any students or anybody, and it was in your Scott Lounge.

Joshua Waits: Yes.

Rev. Jerry Anderson: And the place was full of people, one afternoon. And it was a lively debate and discussion. And the, I would say the majority of the students were on David Scott's side. I didn't talk to anybody and I left and I felt that old shame again that came over me. You're not worthy of what you're asking for, et cetera et cetera. That was my first time at the seminary.

Joshua Waits: Your first experience was a debate.

Rev. Jerry Anderson: Yeah, exactly.

Joshua Waits: Your dignity as a human being.

Rev. Jerry Anderson: I was involved yeah.

Joshua Waits: Wow. So, and that was in 1980?

Rev. Jerry Anderson: Well I think it was more like '78 or '79.

Joshua Waits: Because yeah so you worked for several years in DC.

Rev. Jerry Anderson: Yeah it was before I went to St. Patrick's.

Joshua Waits: Okay. Did the rector, so you said the rector knew you were gay.

Rev. Jerry Anderson: Yes. And we agreed, I said you know, well, so in early January they had enough money to have a full-time assistant. And , uh, I was going to be considered. And that's when I said "Jim if I'm going to do this, they need to know what's going on. I do not ever want to dive into closet." So, that became Anderson because there were a group of women who wanted a woman priest. And that put me in an awkward position because I had been very much for the ordination of women and it never occurred to me I might end up competing. But there I was. And so, they had a meeting in January and it was a very long, stormy meeting, it went until after midnight. And Jim called me and said "they decided they're going to come back in two weeks and decide. They want to talk to the parish." Well I wasn't at the meeting but I certainly heard stories and there was one exchange where one of the women who was for a woman priest said "when are we finally going to take a risk and hire a woman?" Well, a parishioner by the name of Tucker Battle, who has gone to his reward, said "risk, risk, what do you mean risk? I've got three sons in the youth group and you want to hire a homosexual." So, they weren't really into it. But they came back in two weeks, I was very much filled with this pain and suspense. And voted me and there were three woman who voted against me, all of whom became friends. But anyway I was in and it felt wonderful, it truly felt like a huge weight had been taking off me like I was breathing deeper than I had ever breathed in my life. It was a wonderful moment for me.

Joshua Waits: Did Bishop Walker know?

Rev. Jerry Anderson: Yes. Yeah he signed off on it, yes.

Joshua Waits: Okay. So, before any official coming out, there was a conversation with the rector, conversation with Bishop Walker. And then eventually there's the conversation with the congregation. And now you are free to live your life out as a gay man and as a priest.

Rev. Jerry Anderson: Right. And I actually preached the Sunday after the vote and I had a sensation that I was standing there naked and some voice said to me "but they're not running away," and I sort of relaxed.

Joshua Waits: So, how...can you explain to me then how does VTS come into making a determination about your ability to supervise students when you have not officially become a supervisor anyway?

Rev. Jerry Anderson: Right.

Joshua Waits: Did you apply to become a supervisor?

Rev. Jerry Anderson: I don't think so. What I remember is, you know, I'm breathing deeply, we're all celebrating. And two months later, the call came from the director of pastoral supervision fieldwork and said I needed to come see you and called the rector. And he came and it was a shock. Nobody had thought this through in terms of the ramifications. And he said "I don't agree with the policy but I have to enforce it." Well, what happened was, because then the debate or the issue was in a much broader arena. And there were people taking sides here, et cetera. And then the chancellor of the diocese, David Booth Beers, who was a parishioner, took me aside on Sunday and said the Bishop does not want to deal with this issue in the Washington Post while the primates are in town. All the Anglican primates were meeting at the Washington Cathedral. Prince Charles was to read a lesson at Evensong, and I mean we weren't calling the Washington Post but I mean, I'm going oh my God. And then, does the name Bill Wendt mean anything to you? Bill Wendt had been put on trial about three years before this for allowing St. Stevens Incarnation ordination for women before we had officially approved it on the national church and Bishop telling he didn't give permission to do that, and he went on and did it. So they put Bill on trial. So he says to me, "David says to me you know, all it would take is for four priests to bring moral charges against you and we'd have to have a trial." Oh my God! Nobody had thought anything like this. So that really got my attention. Well fortunately the Washington Post didn't decide to write a story about it or find out about it and the primates left town and I was not put on trial.

Joshua Waits: Which is very interesting because Bill Wendt, we hold in the archives John Walker's papers.

Rev. Jerry Anderson: Oh you do?

Joshua Waits: And one of the papers is the trial.

Rev. Jerry Anderson: Of course.

Joshua Waits: Of Bill Wendt.

Rev. Jerry Anderson: I wonder, well yeah.

Joshua Waits: Which is interesting because the final straw that actually is the case that goes before is that he allowed VTS graduates and one of the Philadelphia 11, Alison Cheek, to celebrate the eucharist. And that's listed in the charges against him.

Rev. Jerry Anderson: Oh is it?

Joshua Waits: You know, so.

Rev. Jerry Anderson: Is there a copy of the picture? One of it being carried around the church? Two or three priests, one of the women and that was blasted all over the press.

Joshua Waits: No I don't have that in the archives. But all of that was going on, unfortunately Bishop Walker was very much aware of it. And, but you say, you're talking about how there's these Anglican primates but you also say that Bishop Walker could have been more aggressive in supporting you.

Rev. Jerry Anderson: Well that was my feeling all along. He certainly didn't ban me or didn't say I couldn't be in the diocese or anything. And he would from time to time show me support. You know but I never felt like it was his top issue, that he wanted to fight for this. You know one of the regrets I have is that I didn't organize a group of folks to come over here and picket the seminary at graduation or something. Didn't force it a little more public as time went on. Other priests were at it.

Joshua Waits: So, your book says that the rules that was laid out from VTS was that you could not supervise but other priests at St. Patrick's still could.

Rev. Jerry Anderson: Right.

Joshua Waits: So the compromise as always the case, is that VTS was fine with you still being a priest in that church.

Rev. Jerry Anderson: Well they couldn't do anything about that could they?

Joshua Waits: But they weren't going to pull supervision status.

Rev. Jerry Anderson: What we were told was that field work supervisors were considered adjunct faculty. In which I hadn't heard of that before but anyway, as adjunct faculty I had to comply with the rules.

Joshua Waits: That was one of the policy changes that took place before the admissions policy change in '96. But when, in the 80s when General convention said that being homosexual was not a barrier to ordination, that of course became a question here...that VTS could not control who bishops ordained.

Rev. Jerry Anderson: Right but they might want to.

Joshua Waits: Right. And so they were going to come into this situation again that they had come into with you. And the policy was then changed to where the supervisors would not be considered adjunct faculty.

Rev. Jerry Anderson: I missed that one.

Joshua Waits: Yeah that was how they changed the policy. That was in the 80s.

Rev. Jerry Anderson: That didn't get explained to me. By then I'm doing the chaplaincy work but I didn't know that.

Joshua Waits: Yeah so they did change that policy before they changed the official thing.

Rev. Jerry Anderson: Priests and allowing students to be supervised?

Joshua Waits: From what I understand from reading the policy that they're making it to where if field supervisors were no longer adjunct, they didn't have to ask the question.

Rev. Jerry Anderson: You mean I could have been supervising?

Joshua Waits: At some point in time probably.

Rev. Jerry Anderson: Before the policy got changed?

Joshua Waits: Before 1996 probably.

Rev. Jerry Anderson: I'll be darned. Because I had, when I was doing the chaplaincy work I had an intern come from the school of divinity, was a wonderful guy. I'm trying to think who else, well that's interesting.

Joshua Waits: So, in spite of Bishop Walker's restrained support, you still helped produce the video for his sort of bid for presiding bishop?

Rev. Jerry Anderson: Right.

Joshua Waits: And then of course, tragically he passes away.

Rev. Jerry Anderson: Right.

Joshua Waits: And then, this new disease starts spreading. That has been going through and you shifted your ministry to focus on AIDS.

Rev. Jerry Anderson: Right.

Joshua Waits: Would you talk about that shift?

Rev. Jerry Anderson: Well, let me just put in there, so, when it became publicly known that I was gay, at St. Patrick's one of the wonderful things that happened was I even had rectors sending gay parishioners to see me. And, or they came on their own. And that felt very good to me. And we ended up having two different lesbians. One is Joanne Bielstein who has grown up at St. David's in the Palisades and she went to see a rector and said she wanted to go to seminary and he wouldn't support her because she was a lesbian. And so, Jane Dixon said go and see Jerry Anderson. She became a parishioner and she ended up being ordained. Another one was Susan Anderson Smith who had grown up in Mississippi as an Episcopalian and had gone to Sewanee and went to her bishop in the early 80s and again, he wouldn't support her because she was a lesbian. And Terry and I bought a house here in Alexandria in early '85, not far from here. And she was our mortgage broker. And she was not going to church. And was mad. And I said well Susan, you need to come to St. Patrick's. Well she and her then partner came to St. Patrick's and her partner was the first person baptized in the new church and she went off to seminary and she's a priest now in the church. I had a young man come to me, he was an organist at the Falls Church, this was in the early 80s.

Joshua Waits: Okay.

Rev. Jerry Anderson: And the rector there was one of the charismatics who was very much against gays. And he discovered this guy perhaps was gay and told him that he had to go to the seminary chaplain to be a seminarian, that he had to get into therapy and if he didn't solve his problem, he couldn't be the organist. Well, he did some therapy and he proposed to one of the women in the choir and they got married. And he said at the reception, when they were feeding each other cake, he got nauseated and went into the bathroom and threw up. So I began to be a pastor to a number of people. And then my first friend died of AIDS in '83. Was out for a couple years. And that drum beat continued. And by '86, I'd had a couple friends say why don't you do an AIDS ministry? I couldn't do that for the time, it would kill me. And then I was brought to my knees and I realized I had to do it. And immediately went up to Bishop Walker and told him I wanted to do the AIDS ministry and he gave me his blessing and we were off and running. And the support came in and I think part of it was because I had come out and had garnered support and gave me confidence, I think I was able to really do what I did then. And the other thing that occurred to me when, after all that CPE when I was back in ministry I thought boy, that was overkill. Well, I now see, I believe that the Holy Spirit knew what she was doing because I don't think I could have spent all those years doing AIDS work, if hadn't had that training. I would have been done in sooner.

Joshua Waits: So, you begin this AIDS chaplaincy work. How was that, how did you structure that work? Were you just working with certain hospitals? Were you freelance?

Rev. Jerry Anderson: I was considered chaplain at large. How ACRA the Episcopalians support group that form was that there were 16 parishes in 1986 that had raised money. Sanford Garner who was the rector of Christ Church Georgetown had had a young man die of

AIDS and he got galvanized and he pulled together a committee and 16 parishes sent a representative, Episcopal parishes. And they decided to raise money and through the Whitman Walker Clinic, found the first residence for men with AIDS. And it was named after Michael Hoss who was an Episcopal organist who died of AIDS in like '84 or something. So that was the first, and then as that was happening, that was when I went to the bishop. So then that committee came up with the idea of creating an organization. So, we started out with 32 board members because we said any parish that supported us financially could send two board members. That turned out to be problematic as time went on but it was amazing how much support came. And so I was, by the summer of '87, had a full time, I was part time working out of my house and then by the end of '87 I was paid full time. And then we worked a good interfaith group of people and we did our first interfaith AIDS retreat in the fall of '87 and there were 27 men there, all white, everybody gay, except one. We also, in '87, had an interfaith AIDS conference at Western Theological Seminary. Tony Fauci was on the panel, Diane Green was a moderator, had been a parishioner down at St. Patrick's. Diane ended up having me on her radio talk show both as a gay person talking about being gay and the AIDS programs too. Anyway, it just took off. And it was a wonderful experience.

Joshua Waits: Amongst the people you cared for, were any of them Episcopal clergy?

Rev. Jerry Anderson: I had my first Episcopal priest friend from seminary days die in '84. He was in New York. And then Mills Amelie, wonderful guy. And I'm trying to think, Michael Coons who was in seminary with me died in probably '88, something like that. There were none, well I take it back, there was one in Washington who died but he was pretty much in the closet about it in the 80s. I had a dear friend, Bill Barkus from San Francisco who died. There are definitely priests around. I'm having to dig through. There was a Roman Catholic priest that got involved with their retreats. But none that leap out at me right now.

Joshua Waits: Yeah because one of my thoughts when I was going through here was when the ironies would be if all of a sudden you're now chaplain to a VTS graduate.

Rev. Jerry Anderson: Oh well, that would have made an interesting part of the story wouldn't it?

Joshua Waits: But you don't believe that there was.

Rev. Jerry Anderson: I can't think of any students. There was a student in Wesley Theological Seminary who became very much a part of my ministry and he was an artist and the son of a Baptist preacher. He was there getting his masters in theology and art. And he loved doing provocative paintings. In fact he painted this painting. And he painted that at St. George's Cathedral in Cape Town. So we teamed up with the AIDS ministry and St. George's Cathedral in Cape Town we had a companion, the dioceses had a companion relationship with Cape Town. And they took Max Laudin and Nolty Coleen who was a member of our flock, who was a standup comic and drag queen. They flew them down there for World AIDS Day and Max painted this painting while he was there that got criticized, there was a little article in the paper.

And a Dutch-reformed minister criticized it as blasphemous, which generated more attention and somebody called and said they were going to coming to the cathedral to destroy it. And anyway, at some point, Bishop Desmond Tutu defended it, which made it an international story. But Max is wonderful. He lived probably ten years or so and struggling with AIDS and doing his artwork. But I don't ever remember, be interesting, if there was a student here who got sick. I recently had dinner with a priest who was at General in the 80s and in fact he came down and did years at a parish internship which I supervised from General in '83 or something like that. And he said he had friends at General who died. That would have been the right timing on that.

Joshua Waits: Because, you know, I think there's no way, just statistically it would be very obvious our institution wasn't touched by AIDS in some way.

Rev. Jerry Anderson: It would be interesting for that.

Joshua Waits: So, one of the things that you did and you talk about in your book was you arranged for the AIDS memorial service.

Rev. Jerry Anderson: Oh the first one yeah.

Joshua Waits: Yeah.

Rev. Jerry Anderson: Yeah that was in '88.

Joshua Waits: And you talk about there was a discussion about whether or not the gay men's chorus could perform in the cathedral. Can you describe the process of getting that together and what difficulties you may have had and what blessing may have come out of it?

Rev. Jerry Anderson: We knew in '87, we knew that St. John the Divine, and Grace Cathedral in San Francisco, both had some sort of an AIDS shrine in one of their chapels for people to go and light candles and pray. So, a group of us went out, made an appointment to see a provost, Eugene, I don't remember, provost parish.

Joshua Waits: Charles?

Rev. Jerry Anderson: Charles. Thank you. Yes. Charles. And we knew he was homophobic but we went and we even took one of the Episcopal blue bloods of Washington with us whose son had died of AIDS at Christ Church Georgetown in '86. And he had served on the cathedral chaplain, Charles, I mean Peter. Well I had come over here earlier in April in the 80s and met with Dean Wood, no, the second dean.

Joshua Waits: Dean Reid.

Rev. Jerry Anderson: Reid. Then I came over and saw the chaplain. It was like talking to a post. There was no passion whatsoever and it never went anywhere. So we had that

experience. And now it's '88 and the quilt is coming and we are excited and we form a committee, and we go up and meet with one of the Canons. And this elderly woman from Christ Church, Georgetown, who sung in the choir was going through the order of service we put together. And then she got to, and here the gay men's chorus will sing solo, the canon turned pink. Just very anxious and said oh I don't know I don't know that it can happen. I'll have to talk with the provost. Well, I sat there and went like just...and so we waited for months and the gay men's chorus was getting anxious and threatening not to even come. And I said well they haven't said you can't be in the service and present in your tuxedos, whatever. Well finally a couple weeks before the event, they made an appointment with the bishop. And the bishop actually concurred that they couldn't sing the solo but he wanted them there and they decided to come which was a huge relief. And then, two years later the group came back and we had another service and by then, Bishop Walker was dead and the provost was gone and they sang a solo. But, and the cathedral was packed, overflowing with people all over the world. And we had healing stations around and it was wonderful, wonderful. That was back in '88, a wonderful service.

Joshua Waits: Can you talk about your, I guess you could say friendship with First Lady Barbara Bush?

Rev. Jerry Anderson: Oh, well I came to be one of her fans. Two weeks after President Bush would have been President, he was inaugurated in '89, a woman who was a parishioner at St. John's Georgetown was on her staff and two weeks later called me and said the first lady wants to put AIDS at one of her top priorities. Can you help us? Of course we can. So yes, she was incredibly supportive. She had several AIDS events. We decided that maybe the first one should be going to Grandma's house which was children with AIDS. And like we had two gala fundraisers afterwards and she was honorary chair and she was very genuine. We met with her and I mean I really, I had not thought much about her up until then but I really became a fan. And Tony Fauci recently said that her son, George W., the President did more for AIDS than any other of the Presidents he worked with. And it had to do with all that money we assigned to Africa and for you know, AIDS vaccines and so on so forth and I thought, his mother was who he was with so of course we're going to see her.

Joshua Waits: So while we're still talking about first ladies and the memorial quilt, were you here, let's see, I believe it was during President Clinton's first term and the quilt was placed and they became the first President and First Lady to actually go and view the quilt. Were you in Washington, DC?

Rev. Jerry Anderson: Yeah I walked, I marched with the AIDS coalition in the parade. And the quilt, that would have been '92 right?

Joshua Waits: Yes.

Rev. Jerry Anderson: And then, was it '96 that the quilt, it was '96 that the quilt filled the whole mall. I have a good friend who's an Episcopalian who's a long time AIDS survivor who told me

that, he lived in New Mexico and his partner worked for Governor Richardson who was a big democrat in Clinton's administration. The two of them were at some sort of reception down there and Hillary was there and he said I went over to her and I said I want to thank you because your husband saved my life. And his story is that when the Clintons went to the mall, that he came back to the White House and called agents, and said I know you have certain medications that are in the pipeline, I think you need to release them. And my friend began one of the protocols.

Joshua Waits: Wow. If I'm correct, the way I've heard was that it was sort of an impromptu visit to the quilt.

Rev. Jerry Anderson: And I'm sure somebody must have been advising then.

Joshua Waits: It wasn't part of the official thing but, from what I understand at the time, First Lady Clinton, it was like we're going to see.

Rev. Jerry Anderson: She gave him a hug and he said I cried in your arms. There's something that we haven't talked about which has to do with seminary is coming here and doing a workshop on AIDS.

Joshua Waits: Yes so please tell us about that.

Rev. Jerry Anderson: After I started the AIDS ministry I tried to generate interest to come and speak. The Episcopal high school next door, the chaplain invited me and I went and spoke to the student body. St. Albans School, they invited me to come and speak. And we couldn't get the seminary interested. Well, this would have been in '89 I guess. Yeah. Jean Rogers was a student here, middle aged woman. Bishop Dean Wolf, who's bishop in Kansas, is now rector of St. Bartholomew's in Manhattan, he was a part of that student body. Some of that group, I considered a little more mature students, put together a conference, a grade A Saturday conference and just made it happen. And my lover at that time who had AIDS, Terry and I had split after 13 years. We were on the panel, we had other people on the panel and I celebrated the Eucharist in the chapel on Friday evening and so on so forth. And then Saturday we had workshops all day. And Jean Rogers talked to me on the phone, told me and I didn't know it, they were told that we shouldn't, we the participants shouldn't be eating in the refectory, but we made it happen. But, and she said the only faculty who came was David Scott. Sat in the back of the room. But that was a wonderful experience. We felt like we finally were inside the gates here.

Joshua Waits: Did you find that to be a healing experience for you?

Rev. Jerry Anderson: It was very positive, I felt good about it, yeah.

Joshua Waits: So, you sort of brought up the person that I want to, we have to discuss if we're going to discuss your life and AIDS ministry, we also have to discuss Ron. You describe him as friend, lover, and spiritual director, leader. Could you tell us some about Ron?

Rev. Jerry Anderson: Sure. Terry and I, as I said, had been together for 13 years. And we were big partiers and drinkers. And on his, Terry's 40th birthday which was August 26th, 1986, 27 people were coming to his dinner, a surprise dinner at a restaurant in downtown Washington. And that morning, we got a call that our dear friend, Logan Soliday who had been a dear friend, was in intensive care at Washington hospital. And I went down, racing down to the hospital and he's on oxygen and I went in shock, I couldn't believe it. I considered him to be like a brother. He and I were two days apart in birth. And I felt like he took the bullet. Anyway, I was in shock all day. And we arrived to dinner and everybody was in a great mood, party mood and I couldn't get there. Just couldn't get there. Well that began for me, the end of my drinking. Because the party stopped, I didn't enjoy it anymore. But it took almost another two years for me to finally give it up. So, in '88, you know, I was in the thick of people dying and so on so forth, I was just, I was really feeling down. And three different women, two on my board, brought up the subject of my having AIDS. And I think they intuitively realized something was going on with me and I was a little surprised. And the third one was a woman who had AIDS dementia. And by that point, she couldn't stay at home any longer and she was in a hospice that Mother Theresa had built. I went to see her and she said she had heard on the radio that I had AIDS. Because the other two friends questioned whether I had AIDS or not and so, then I insist that Terry and I go off to Italy where a friend had an apartment in Florence. And I think I was desperately trying to pump life back into the relationship. But anyway, while we were there, we were going to go to this dinner party with a group of Episcopalians. And I also loved smoking grass because I was drinking. And so I knew there wouldn't be any grass there so I was hiding between these two little Italian cars, it was broad daylight, smoking marijuana. And while I'm down there, I hear this voice that says this is pathetic. My God, it is pathetic. And so I announced before we left Italy that I was going to come back and cut way back on my smoking and drinking. And I did. And I mean I was doing so much better and within less than a month, Terry announced that he was dating somebody else and wanted to end the relationship. And I was in shock about that. But yet it was like somebody just cut down mooring lines and we began to drift like this. And I kept feeling better about it, feeling better about my life and had more energy and so on so forth. When I met Ron he had been sober four years and he was absolutely full of life and he had been diagnosed the year before with full blown AIDS. And he wasn't emaciated. He didn't have any real symptoms. He was full of life. And he and some other people began to guide me into AA except they weren't doing it in a concerted way. And I had made myself a promise that Christmastime was not going to get drunk or get high. I always drank too much at Christmastime. And the first week of January, and Ron and I had truly fallen in love. Terry told me that he and Chuck, his new friend, were going to go to Atlanta and visit friends of ours. Friends who had had two daughters, both of them I baptized. And I felt terribly violated. I felt like something was taken from me and it happened on a Friday afternoon on a cold, gray day in Washington. And I thought who's having a party? I'm going to get high. And then I thought but you promised yourself, you promised yourself. And in that moment, I called Ron and said are you going to an AA meeting and he said yes and I said can I go and he said yes. And I literally just like scales fell from my eyes. I walked from one reality to another, huge respecter of denial no matter what it's about. I mean it's a powerful powerful drug, denial is. And that began my journey into AA. Ron was, when he died, a woman who was doing AIDS ministry work, she

worked with guys with AIDS and helped them change their attitudes, she said Ron was the most alive person I've ever met. And it was true. And we, I say, danced for two years and three months before he died. He was an incredible human being. Changed my life.

Joshua Waits: So, how relieved do you say -

Rev. Jerry Anderson: Oh yes.

Joshua Waits: I mean you go to Florida.

Rev. Jerry Anderson: Yeah and create an AIDS ministry there. That was in '96 and I was there for five years.

Joshua Waits: And then you went to Nassau.

Rev. Jerry Anderson: Oh that trip. Oh, you have read the book. Yeah while I'm in Miami in 2000, I had a priest friend who had spent tons of time in Nassau and some of his friends were going to, no I'm sorry in 2000, they were wanting, they were trying to find a minister who would go on the radio and a talk show and debate a conservative Baptist minister about homosexuality. And it was in part generated by, there were gay cruise ships beginning to land in the islands. And there was a huge protest by the clergy led by the then Anglican archbishop. And so anyway, they couldn't find anybody to go on the go. Even the Unitarian ministers were afraid to. So they imported me and I went down and he actually, he was rather rational and reasonable until I made some comment that I felt like one of my channels to God was through my partner. He went ballistic. I mean, shouting and screaming and so on so forth. And the interviewer ran the program 20 minutes longer because there were so many people calling in.

Joshua Waits: Oh wow.

Rev. Jerry Anderson: Yeah and I was taken to a gay bar out with some of the locals and a week later, a ship of lesbians arrived. 800 lesbians in Nassau and there were still 100 protesters at the ship. And somebody shot buck shot at the front of the gay bar where I had been the week before. But then the next summer they invited me back for their first Gay Pride festival which is about 50 people celebrating indoors. So I went down with a dear friend of mine, a Baptist minister who is now an Episcopal priest and we were a spiritual presence for four days and it was a wonderful experience.

Joshua Waits: And then you eventually moved to California.

Rev. Jerry Anderson: I was, yeah I have a wonderful priest friend, Albert Ogo, who had founded an AIDS organization in Pasadena, California. In the 80s, in '88, a number of us who were doing AIDS ministries around the country came together in Detroit and had a wonderful time creating the Episcopal, the AIDS Coalition which was the National AIDS Coalition Organization and the National Episcopal, well no that was our organization in Washington.

Various ministries around the country came together and Gene Robinson was on. So we all became very good friends. And Albert was a part of that group. And so by 2001, he knew me pretty well. And I went up there on a vacation for a few weeks. I was supposed to go to Africa and been a part of an AIDS conference and they disinvited me and I was tired and he said oh why don't you come out here for two weeks. So I went out and while I was there, he had a townhouse overlooking the Pacific. I think he's an Irish witch but helped me see I was exhausted. And I realized I was. And so, at that time, I didn't have a partner. I was burnt out. And so I moved to southern California. And that's where my book ends.

Joshua Waits: And how has the story continued after California?

Rev. Jerry Anderson: The best years of my life. I didn't have a job but shortly afterwards, they assigned me to go to a parish for two and a half months to be a pastoral presence until they found somebody to place there and I was there 13 months. Two weeks after I get there, at an AA meeting I meet a man who's pretty much a part of my life now. And then the bishop appointed me the director of pastoral care at the Episcopal hospital in downtown LA. And I was there 13 years. And it was a great place for me to utilize all that I learned and so on so forth.

Joshua Waits: So, your story explains the complexity of ministry in the Episcopal church and of course the relationship to VTS. What are your hopes for the Episcopal church and seminaries for the future?

Rev. Jerry Anderson: That some of them survive. I'm grieving the General seminary, and that I'm grateful Virginia is part of the process of trying to keep it going, I think that's wonderful. I certainly would hope that, I think the church will survive, the problem is it seems like it's surviving in places where there's real urban places. And the church in southern Illinois that I attached to, all the churches are struggling. It's very sad. But I'm very encouraged, I mean, St. Patrick's is calling me to be a rector starting in June with a husband, director at St. Thomas Dupont Circle is very exciting and that whole place is very exciting, St. Margaret's, those parishes are actively involved in my ministry. Very encouraging. And Virginia seems to me everything right here sounds good.

Joshua Waits: I looked at my timeline and I didn't have in my timeline the decision about changing the supervisors from adjunct faculty but I'm going to look into faculty minutes and I'll actually tell you when exactly the decision was made. So at least then you can know whether or not.

Rev. Jerry Anderson: Right. It didn't somehow get articulated.

Joshua Waits: Right but I'll doublecheck and get you that date.

Rev. Jerry Anderson: But I still plan to blow the horn as they say, and I've never met her. Never had a chance to tell her that in person.

Joshua Waits: Is there anything else you'd like to share that we haven't covered?

Rev. Jerry Anderson: Well I'm a little bit exhausted, my brain is about to close down. I'm trying to think. Did we include something, particularly in the seminary I don't think so. I should say that Bishop Walker who I do have deep affection for, and I either wanted his position but a few months before Ron died, I mean before he died, Bishop Walker died in '89, I was talking to him about having, he was giving us permission to have our relationship blessed in church. And he had said to me well, you know, write up the service and let me see it. And we were spinning around like crazy and then he died in September, and that never happened.