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Title

Rev. Malcolm Johnson Oral History Interview and Transcript

Date

May 5, 2008

Extant

2 hours 3 minute interview (3 files) and 1 transcript

Abstract

In this oral history, Reverend Malcom Johnson, an Anglican priest and 1976 co-founder of the Gay Christian Movement, discusses being openly gay as a priest; his marriage to his partner, AIDS ministry, and defending homosexuality in church parliament.

Biographical

The Rev. Malcolm A. Johnson was born on 8 September, 1936, in Great Yarmouth, Norfolk. At the outbreak of the Second World War his parents were evacuated to a small village, Acle. It was an idyllic, rural five years. At age 12 Malcolm was sent to boarding school until he was 18, first at a local school then at Framlingham College, Suffolk. Like all young men at the time he then had to do two years Army Service and served as an officer in Cyprus and Germany from 1955-57. He spent three years at Durham University and received a BA degree in 1960. Two years followed at seminary-Cuddesdon College near Oxford.

Malcolm was ordained as a minister in the Church of England in June, 1962. His first job was in St. Mark's Church Portsmouth where he was one of a team of nine clergy serving three churches and a parish of 25,000 people. He particularly enjoyed the work with young people and was responsible for the large youth clubs and Sunday school. He received an MA degree in 1964. In 1967 he moved to London to be chaplain to Queen Mary College, part of London University and in the east end of the city. Whilst there he married but this was annulled and soon after he met his present partner Robert Wilson and this year (2008) they have been together 39 years. In December 2006 they became civil partners.

In the church Malcolm has always been open about his sexuality. Whilst at the college he and two others founded a social group for gay men (the SK Group) which met every Saturday evening and was the first such group in London. They soon had a membership of several hundreds. In 1969 he began to take Services of Blessing for same-sex couples and has conducted about 300 since.

In June 1974, Malcolm became rector of St. Botolph, Aldgate in the City of London which had a small congregation and a centre for the homeless in the crypt that was run by volunteers. Over the next 18 years Malcolm oversaw the expansion of this ministry, employing a large full-time staff, building new premises and opening four hostels in east London.

In 1976, he was one of the founders of the Gay Christian Movement (GCM), now the Lesbian and Gay Christian Movement (LGCM) and invited them to have their office in a room in the church tower. That May Malcolm and two other Anglican clergy started a consultation for gay clergy which still meets twice a year, and in December they organized the first Carol Service for the gay community which is now an annual event.

In 1985, Malcolm was appointed Area Dean of the City of London. He also began ministry with men with the HIV/AIDS. After traveling to the U.S. to learn more about the disease and treatment, he started the Ministers Group in London that provided care, arranged services of healing, educational events, and took funerals. In 1990, Rabbi Lionel Blue and he began to arrange two Jewish/Christian weekends away each year for people affected by AIDS/HIV. They continue today.

He was elected to the General Synod, the Church's Parliament, in 1985 and remained on it for 15 years. As an openly gay priest Malcolm spoke in the sexuality debates and in 1987 received much publicity at a debate about homosexuality. This meant that the Bishop of London, through his archdeacon, took him to an ecclesiastical court to expel LGCM from St. Botolph's. They won the case and LGCM were evicted in September, 1988.

In 1993 Malcolm published the first of his three books. He moved to be Master of the Royal Foundation of St. Katharine in Limehouse, East London, to continue his counselling and spiritual direction work, but the governors were not supportive so he was asked to leave after four years. The bishop made him an advisor on pastoral care based at St. Martin in the Fields in 1997. During 1998/9 he was chaplain to the Lord Mayor of London.

Malcolm retired in 2001 at the age of 65. He was given an MA from the Metropolitan University and Lambeth MA by the Archbishop of Canterbury for his ministry and work. In 2011, after four years of blood, sweat and research, Malcolm earned a Ph.D. from King's College London.

Scope and Content

In this oral history, Reverend Malcom Johnson, an Anglican priest and founder of the Gay Christian Movement, discusses being openly gay as a priest; his marriage to his partner, AIDS ministry, and defending homosexuality in church parliament.

This interview was conducted by Mark Bowman, the executive director of LGBT-RAN. He holds a Master of Divinity degree from Boston University School of Theology and has played a key leadership role in establishing a number of religious ventures and programs.

Access

Open to all researchers.

<https://lgbtqreligiousarchives.org/oral-histories/malcolm-johnson>

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Languages

Collection material is in English

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Tags

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Lesbian and Gay Christian Movement (United Kingdom)

Clergy Activist

Ordination/clergy

London

United Kingdom

Johnson, Malcolm