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Title

Nancy Wilson Oral History Interview and Transcript

Date

July 4, 2025

Extant

1 hour and 39 minutes and 1 transcript

Abstract

In this oral history, early and long time leader in the Metropolitan Community Church (MCC) Nancy Wilson describes how her strong base in the Methodist Church, along with the influence of the Civil Rights Movement and anti-war protests shaped her vocation as she came to identify as a lesbian and minister. This interview richly describes how MCC began in Boston in the early 1970s, her move to Detroit in 1975, and to the MCC central office in 1979. Her narrative of the years in Detroit document how MCC served as a voice for the LGBTQ community, humanizing the hate crimes both locally and nationally such as Harvey Milk's assassination, the Triangle Fire, and church bombings. In 1979, she joined the MCC central office under Troy Perry. She describes the MCC responses to the challenges of AIDS, feminism, and anti-racism. Throughout, she points to MCC's non-violent response to multiple church bombings and hateful slurs during the AIDS crisis. She pointed out the pervasive (if quiet) help from allies in otherwise homophobic denominations. Globally, she pointed to the early work of MCC globally, not only for worship, but also as a focal point for human rights organization.

Biographical

Rev. Elder Dr. Nancy Wilson is the former Moderator (global leader) of Metropolitan Community Churches (MCC). She was elected to that position in 2005, following the retirement of the Founder of MCC, Rev. Elder Troy Perry, and in July 2010, she was re-elected for a term of six years. She is only the second person, and the first woman, to serve in that role since the founding of Metropolitan Community Churches in 1968.

Rev. Wilson obtained her B.A. from Allegheny College, her M.Div. from SS. Cyril and Methodius Seminary, and her D.Min. from Episcopal Divinity School (EDS). She received an honorary Doctor of Divinity degree from EDS in 2016.

Rev. Wilson found MCC in 1972, and became a pastor at the new MCC church in Boston, as well as an activist in the community. She was ordained in MCC in Dallas, Texas, in 1975.

She served as pastor of Church of the Trinity MCC in Sarasota, Florida, from 2001 to 2005 and was previously the pastor of MCC Los Angeles—now Founders MCC—from 1986 until 2000; the church founded by Rev. Troy Perry in 1968. Rev. Wilson joined MCC as Associate Pastor of MCC Boston in 1972 at 22 years of age. She served as Pastor of MCC Detroit from 1975 to 1979. She was elected Elder of MCC in 1976 and served as the denomination's Vice-Moderator from 1993 to 2001.

Rev. Wilson served as Clerk of the Board of Elders for ten years; and became MCC's first Chief Ecumenical Officer, a post she held for 23 years. She has been the official delegate of MCC to the World Council of Churches General Assemblies in Canberra, Australia (1991); Harare, Zimbabwe (1998); and Porto Alegre, Brazil (2006).

Rev. Wilson is also an Associate Minister with The Fellowship of Affirming Ministries, which Dr. Yvette Flunder serves as Presiding Bishop.

In 2011, President Barack Obama appointed Rev. Wilson to the President's Advisory Council on Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships. Their work culminated in a report of recommendations to the President: "Building Partnerships to Eradicate Modern-Day Slavery." Following President Obama's re-election in 2013, Rev. Wilson gave a Scripture reading at the Inaugural Prayer Service at the National Cathedral in Washington, D.C., and was the first openly gay clergy member to participate.

In 2014, Rev. Wilson was named as one of the spokespeople for Blessed Tomorrow, a team of twenty-one top ecumenical and interfaith leaders in the United States to spearhead an effort to mobilize religious communities to address environmental concerns. Blessed Tomorrow emerged from EcoAmerica MomentUs, a group that invited Rev. Wilson to join in 2013 as they began to formalize their strategy to secure grassroots support through faith groups to work toward climate solutions in their congregations, communities, and homes.

In May 2014, Rev. Wilson was one of four honorees to be recognized by Intersections International for her humanitarian work in the area of social justice.

In honor of International Women's Day in 2014, HuffPost selected Rev. Wilson as one of 50 "powerful religious leaders...making change in the world."

Rev. Wilson's published works include: "Trust is a Queer Thing," in *Stars Shine Upon the Road of Hope* (繁星照耀希望路); "A Queer Theology of Sexuality," in *On the Way of Acceptance: Christianity and Queer Community*; *Outing the Bible: Queer Folks, God, Jesus, and the Christian Scriptures* (LifeJourney Press); *Outing the Church: 40 Years in the Queer Christian Movement* (LifeJourney Press); *Nossa Tribo: Gays, Deus, Jesus e a Bíblia* (Metanoia); *Our Tribe: Queer Folks, God, Jesus and the Bible* (Alamo); with Fr. Malcolm Boyd, *Amazing Grace*. Rev. Wilson's prayers and poems are included in *Race and Prayer*, edited by Malcolm Boyd

and Chester Talton (Morehouse Press). Her most recent publication is *I Love to Tell The Story, 100+ Stories of Justice, Inclusion and Hope*, published by Books to Believe In, 2016.

Rev. Wilson is frequently published in Huffington Post, and has been interviewed by various local, national, and international news agencies about matters related to the LGBTQI community and social justice issues. Rev. Wilson has spoken at colleges, national, and international conferences on the topics of eradicating human trafficking, a queer response to climate change, global LGBTQI human rights, racial reconciliation and economic justice; HIV/AIDS, women's reproductive freedom, religion and social change, and marriage equality.

Rev. Wilson is a popular preacher and speaker. She also writes poetry, and is an avid birdwatcher. Rev. Wilson resides in Bradenton, Florida, with her wife, since 1977, Dr. Paula Schoenwether, an artist and jeweler.

Scope and Content

In this oral history, early leader in the Metropolitan Community Church (MCC) Nancy Wilson describes how a strong base in the Methodist, the Civil Rights Movement, and anti-war protests shaped her as she came to identify as a lesbian and minister. This interview describes in detail how MCC began in Boston in the early 1970s, her move to Detroit in 1975, and to the MCC central office in 1979. Her narrative of the years in Detroit document how MCC was a voice for the LGBTQ community, humanizing the hate crimes both locally and nationally such as Harvey Milk's assassination, the Triangle Fire, and Chris Glaser's ordination rejection. In 1979, she joined the MCC central office under Troy Perry. She describes its responses to the challenges of AIDS, feminism, and anti-racism. Throughout, she points to MCC's non-violent response to multiple church bombings and slurs during the AIDS crisis. She pointed out the pervasive (if quiet) help from individual allies in otherwise homophobic denominations. Globally, she pointed to the early work of MCC globally, primarily for worship, but also as a focal point for human rights,

Access

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Languages

Collection material is in English

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Tags

MCC

Perry, Troy

Author

Clergy Activist

Detroit, MI

Boston, MA