

Oral History Interview: Pamela Lightsey

Interviewee: Pamela Lightsey

Interviewer: Monique Moultrie

Date: October 30, 2017

Monique M. My name is Monique Moultrie, and today is October 30, 2017, and I'm here with Rev. Dr. Pamela Lightsey. We're conducting an oral history to supplement the biographical statement that's already up on the LGBT-RAN website. We'll begin early in your life. And we're going to hit milestones along the way. So the way these oral histories work is I sort of ask some prompting questions, but talk as you want. Feel free to skip questions, choose what you want to elaborate on, go back to a question if you think oh yeah, I forgot to mention this. And I'm going to try to map for the listening audience years and time frames and different identity constructs.

So we begin in the beginning, so I'm going to start by asking you about your early life, and what type of neighborhood you grew up in. What was your community like? I know you grew up in Florida, but tell the viewers and listeners and readers a little bit more about that.

Pamela L. Economically I grew up in an impoverished community. We did not think of it in that way, since we were all working together. It was a segregated community. And if you know anything about West Palm Beach, you know that West Palm Beach is kind of bordered off from Palm Beach by

bridges. You literally have to cross bridges to go over to the affluent section called Palm Beach. So in West Palm Beach, the black communities consisted of a lot of domestics. My mother was a domestic. My father was a day laborer. There were seven of us in a tiny, two bedroom apartment. In fact, we moved around from place to place until we finally settled into an apartment where we stayed our longest, and that was on what we called Second Street, right off a place called Tamarind Avenue.

And it was a wonderful community. I call it the queerest community. It was the queerest community, now that I look back at that community, probably in the county, because in my community—and I've written about this—in my community there were gay men, there were lesbians, there were, you know, we had a criminal element there. And everybody knew who the criminals were. Next door to me was a numbers runner, a pimp, prostitute. Down the street was the dirty old man that everybody knew about. And then just, you know, a few Mom and Pop stores. Educators there also. And then of course there was the police station, which we had some incarcerated. The county jail was a few blocks away, so very...it was a colorful community. I loved my community growing up. I did.

Monique M. So did you have additional family members that were in the community as well, or was it just your large family?

Pamela L. So there were additional family members who lived in other parts of West Palm Beach. And this was my mother's relatives, largely my mother's relatives. Just a small amount of my father's relatives, but largely my mother's relatives lived in West Palm Beach. And also later Rivera Beach was just, you know, there connecting their cities that are just so close to one another. So my cousins, my aunties, uncles, grandmother all lived in the area.

Monique M. What did you do for fun as a child?

Pamela L. [*Laughs.*] For fun as a child I read plenty of books, went to the library, took swimming classes, took industrial arts classes. The swimming and industrial art classes were largely summer because my mother, who was a maid, wanted to keep us busy and out of the streets. But, you know, we also played in our neighborhood, things like kickball, foursquare, jumping jack, those kinds of things. Guys in the neighborhood played basketball. I played basketball when they would allow me. So we had a lot of sports going on right in the middle of the street itself. And cars would come through and we'd, you know, step aside, let the cars pass through. But a lot of sports. A lot of activities, a lot of play right in the streets.

Monique M. What do you think some of the values you got from your family were from an early age? What family values were signaled as important?

Pamela L. Well, I learned very early on the importance of staying together as a connected unit. So the fact that my grandmother was not too far from us,

and my aunties, uncles weren't too far from us was really influential in my life, because I had a big family. We were often told by my parents that we needed to stick together. My age group was the first to desegregate the school systems, so we were put on buses from our neighborhoods. And of course my parents, again, impressed upon us the need to stay with our people, to stick with one another and to care for one another. So I learned very early on a commitment to not only my family, but more broadly speaking to that family and that neighborhood, that black neighborhood that I grew up in, that we were, you know, despite our particularities, that we were connected to one another.

Monique M. When you talked about, in one of the bios that I read, about being a product of black parenting, with messages about blackness and instilling pride in blackness, were those values given specifically, explicitly? Did they show up in artwork in the home? Or how were those things instilled? And how did that help you mediate being bused into these largely white areas?

Pamela L. So I went to segregated elementary school systems. And these segregated schools very early on taught us about black history. The civil rights movement was taking place at the time, so our teachers were very committed to exploring what was happening around us within the classroom itself. Within the neighborhood, not blocks from my very impoverished community, was a more middle class black community where the principal of the school lived. We passed his place every day.

My godmother was an educator. She lived in our neighborhood. And so there was always a sense that we were being taught, even outside of the classroom, because the presence of the educators was so strong within and around our community.

Within my household my parents had ongoing conversations about Martin Luther King, Jr., had conversations about freedom fighters. My peers, after Martin Luther King was assassinated, my peers and I got very, were very engaged with the Black Power movement. We did all things black. We wore afros, had afro picks in our hair, wore dashikis, Black Power signs. My sister and I actually earned extra money by corn rowing and braiding our peers' hair, so we were involved in the kind of arts way of being.

I drew some. And especially my godmother, she really encouraged me to continue my artwork. And she sent me, she actually—this is interesting—she sent me, a couple months ago, a picture that I had drawn of a black queen. You know, she kept all these kind of things that I would do. She was more committed to my education, I think, at times than I. She kept all this stuff, and she has tons of this stuff even to this day that I did. But she was very, very influential in my life also. Continues to be. I call her every time I have to make an important decision in my life.

Monique M. Any other major influences growing up?

Pamela L. I was just a bookworm, so I loved to read the writings of persons like Langston Hughes, Gwendolyn Brooks. The autobiography of Angela Davis just really...I just loved that book. Or the biography. Probably shouldn't say autobiography. I loved that book. I loved all books related to African American history.

I would spend—because the library was not too far from our home, I would spend hours in the library just picking up books and reading. I would get in trouble doing it, but, that's, you know. Oftentimes I would be reading, so my job, I would not get this or that chore done that my mother wanted us to complete, so of course she'd get angry about that. But those books enabled me to go to places that we could not go to from an economic perspective.

Monique M. I heard you speak about the role of humor, and it hasn't come up here. Was that a significant value or important for your childhood?

Pamela L. Yes, absolutely. My mother... of blessed memory was...well, she was—let me, I will put it this way. She was strict, and that's putting it mildly. And so my father was like a breath of fresh air to my mother's really, really strong discipline. And he had a sense of humor that was just out of this world, and he loved comedy, so he loved people like Redd Foxx. And he would bring in these albums that we weren't, as children, permitted to listen to. But we would sneak and listen to them.

And some Moms Mabley I loved, and later found that she's a distant cousin of mine from cousins in New York who told me about her as a person. And so humor was really that window for me that allowed me to kind of, in addition to the books, to be transported, at least mentally, to a happier state of being than what was going on around me. Yeah.

And part of humor also, in our community, was a game called playing the dozens. Now many black children are familiar, or at least in my generation were familiar with this game of playing the dozens. And that was filled with humor, and kind of gray criticism of your peer, and so I learned to play the dozens fairly well. And it took a sense of humor to play the dozens and win a sufficient amount of those rounds of playing the dozens such that people knew this person is not a person to be toyed with unless you want to be embarrassed, and rather efficiently. So I played the dozens real well.

And I would say that that has served me well in the academy, playing the dozens, and has served me well working with our denomination, 'cause to play the dozens well you have to understand the nuances of language, and you have to be able to read people's disposition as they're standing before you to know okay, I think I'm digging deep enough here. And also to develop the kind of discipline to know when enough is enough, when you've crossed over from mere play into a dangerous area of denigrating a person's character. And the dozens were not to denigrate character. So I learned to do that rather efficiently.

Monique M. So I'm going to skip us ahead to you approaching graduating high school and thinking about college. And from what I've read that led you to your military decision. So can you talk about making that decision and what the military experience was like?

Pamela L. Yes. There was a running joke in my neighborhood, but it wasn't a joke, it was reality. And the kids would say Lightsey, you're getting ready to graduate. You know you can't stay in your house. Where you going? And they would say it like that because my mother was, again, very strict. She had seven children, and so her method was when you turn 18, you had to know what you were doing with your life because you were not going to hang around her house.

And so I really searched things out. And I knew that my parents couldn't pay for college, and so when a military recruiter came and presented an opportunity for me to go to college, to get a college education while being in the military, I jumped on that. I also jumped on it because I wanted to leave Florida. My relationship with my mother was not good at all. It was a very painful relationship. And so in some ways I really wanted to leave her also. And so I joined the military, enlisted. My MOS, as we call it, was 72 echo. I was in signal corps. And I stayed in the military long enough to learn that, you know, that function fairly well, but also long enough to meet another soldier, fall in love, get married, and begin a family.

The military never allowed me time to go to college. In fact that was very disappointing to me. I felt like I'd been sold a bill of goods, that this wasn't...you know, false claims. The truth is you can go to college if, in your function, in your job, there's time for you to do so, if your commander approves it, and all these other things that you've got to get approved in order to get to college. And so those things did not work out for me. And I was very bitter. I was angry. I felt like if I could sue the government, I would sue the government for lying to me and convincing me to join the military for something that would never come to be.

But, you know, these many years later, the good news is I'm a veteran. I walk through the airport and I show my ID and I get all kinds of discounts. And I get all kinds of benefits for being a veteran. So some things worked out real well. And the fact that my decision to join the military was a crucial decision for me, crucial in that it put me on a path that would become clearer and clearer and clearer.

And that path was my relationship with the church. Because prior to joining the military, I didn't go to church much. We weren't an especially religious family in the sense of church attendance. Now in the sense of worship where we were, we were very religious. My father preached every Sunday while he cooked in the kitchen, so that was important for me to hear about God from my father, and to witness my father, every night, praying before he went to bed. I literally don't remember a day that my

father ended without literally getting on his knees at his bed and praying. I don't remember that. That was important.

Monique M. So how did the military then introduce you to formalized church?

Pamela L. While I was stationed at Fort Lewis, Washington—no, prior to going to Fort Lewis, Washington, I went home. It was a break between what we call it, AIT, and being at your permanent duty assignment. Your AIT was your advanced training where you learned everything you were supposed to do. But I had a break and I went home and went to church with my older sister, who had had a very transformative experience.

My sister was one of the many African Americans who got caught up in the heroin crisis. My sister was addicted to heroin and my sister also sold drugs to support her own habit. And she was in relationship with a young man, and they sold drugs. I helped—me and my older brother helped package drugs, so I was part of this kind of drug trade as a teenager. My sister just, you know, it's that thing about you don't take what you...any of the product. My sister made the poor decision of beginning to take heroin. It just took her down a really, really bad path. Really, really bad path.

But by the time I joined the military, she had gotten saved. And her getting saved was the talk of the family. So when I went home between AIT and permanent duty, my sister convinced me to come to church to hear her preach. And she was preaching. So transformative. Such a transformative

experience she'd had with God. She began to preach in this little church. And I went to this little church and I got saved, okay? And so I went back to my permanent duty station a changed woman. And I was determined to find a church similar to the church that my sister was preaching in, which was a Church of God, a Pentecostal church.

I found a Pentecostal church, a Church of God. It was called Warner Street Church of God or—yeah. And I met my—it was later called Warner Street. I forget what it was called before we moved. But I met my soon to be husband at that church, and he was also part of the military. And as things would come, as the teenagers in the church would say, we know who your rib is, Brother Fifer. And it was Sister Lightsey. So we actually, my then husband and I began to date. Both of us were in the military. And we decided to get married. And I got pregnant with my first child. We then made a decision that we didn't need two of us in the military, only one. And I was very happy to get out, so I did. And he remained in the military.

Both of us remained committed members of this church, this Pentecostal church. And he was licensed in the Church of God. I was not licensed in the Church of God, even though I was preaching, because my pastor, female pastor, was more committed to getting the men of the church licensed first than the women of the church, so that kind of patriarchy. Strange switch on patriarchy. Once she got the men licensed, they were licensed, then next in line were her daughters. They got licensed.

And as for me, as she told me and I told someone, I've said this, she told me that I would never make a good pastor's wife. Which of course I never did. I wasn't going to be anybody's pastor's wife, anybody's trophy. I wasn't going to do any of that. I knew very early on that I was a leader and I also knew that I could preach circles around any one of those men who had been licensed. And I saw it as an affront that a woman in ministry would stand in opposition to someone as gifted as myself. I knew myself to be gifted in preaching and gifted in ministry, and I also understood the kind of church politics that was at play.

And my husband, he knew I could preach better than him, you know. And in the Pentecostal church, when you preach a good sermon, there's a way in which the congregation lets you know the spirit is moving. And so there was a not a time that I preached where the spirit was not moving. I was young, too. I was also, you know, a bit full of myself, but I knew that I was not going to be made subordinate simply because I was a woman.

And other things that impacted me, one thing was just the opposition to women in ministry. That was so apparent to me. It was so apparent as to be repugnant to me. And so I think I really began to, at an early age, look around and see that all the work that we had been doing with civil rights was, for me, the strategy, the work, the methodology was transferable to strategy against the discrimination that women were faced with in the church.

Monique M. So when did you officially heed the call to ministry? So we can timeline it.

Pamela L. Yes. So I received my call in the barracks of 9th Signal Fort Lewis, Washington, when I was 18 years old. Eighteen years old. Not long after I'd been saved, actually. Yeah, I remember it. I remember. I was in what we called the day room. I was on duty, actually, as charge of quarters, CQ, charge of quarters. And I was in the day room on my knees praying. It was like maybe 2:00 or 3:00 in the morning. And I remember praying. And on my knees praying. And I remember feeling this really, really kind of strong presence of God, what some would even call a mystical experience. But I remember feeling and sensing that God was speaking to me and calling me to ministry. I was 18.

Monique M. So you leave Fort Washington, because eventually you're ordained and licensed in the UMC church, so talk about that shift between leaving the denomination. You spoke to some of the challenges you were beginning to note within the Pentecostal denomination you were a part of. What led you to the UMC church in Columbus?

Pamela L. So Washington State Church of God. Then we moved to Fort Monmouth, New Jersey Church of God. And between Washington State and Fort Monmouth I noticed the differences in church polity, particularly related to women. So Washington State with the Church of God women could not wear pants, they could not wear jewelry. In New Jersey women could wear pants. And they were wearing jewelry. But in both places they

weren't listening to worldly music and they weren't going to the movies. But just that subtle shift between the two places caused me to say, now wait a minute, God. This area they taught me this. The same denomination is allowing this in this area. I'm sure I'm going to go someplace else, and what will they be doing?

So I made a deal, I made a... In the parking lot of a mall in New Jersey, near Nordstrom's—they had a Nordstrom's store—I made a deal with God. I said, God, you know, it's like we're going to move a lot of places and people are going to tell me a lot of things, but I'm going to listen to you, God. And if you don't convict me, I'm not going to pay attention to what anybody else has to say. So I'm going to read your word, I'm going to try to interpret your word, and based upon what I know about you and how the holy spirit guides me is how I'm going to lead my life as a Christian. And that was a commitment I made to God.

So leaving New Jersey, we went to NATO/SHAPE in Mons, Belgium and became part of a kind of branch of the Church of God which is a Christian Serviceman's Center. And my husband at the time and myself, we actually became interim pastors for that small community. And that was exciting to kind of lead a Pentecostal church. And it was a lovely, diverse community of military persons. And then the church brought in the permanent pastor.

And between the time that we were serving as interim, I was also working as a volunteer up on base, starting a community choir. And that

community choir was, I mean, that gospel choir was great. NATO SHAPE Community Gospel Choir. We had some of the best musicians, some of the best voices, and we just—you know, I founded it, worked with musicians, and we brought in just, you know, people that wanted to sing for God. We didn't ask questions about their religious affiliation. We didn't ask them if they were saved. We just wanted to know do you want to sing gospel. And that was a, I mean, just a huge choir. And I directed the choir. And I was one of the lead vocalists for the choir.

The incoming pastor of the Church of God found out about my community work with the choir, and one little piece of it that really got him going was the fact that people who sang in the choir were not saved, that we had some people singing in the choir who were not saved. So he called me into his office. He said, Sister Lightsey, I understand you have people singing in that choir who don't know Jesus, who aren't saved, and the Lord has told me that you need to have those people leave the choir or you need to stop working with that choir.

Now remember, I said that I made an agreement with God in New Jersey. So by the time this pastor comes on board, I was, you know, I had been really committed to that covenant that I made with God. And I was trying to really understand God even more, so I was reading. I was reading everything I could put my hands on about the text, about scripture. I was reading all kinds of commentaries. I was really trying to understand. And I was also attending some military worship services with military chaplains

who'd gone to seminary and were doing some really wonderful things with the text.

So when he told me that I needed to ask people to leave the choir if they didn't know the Lord, my response to him was pretty simple. No, I'm not doing that. And he was taken aback. He wanted to know, well, do you understand? You hear what I'm saying, Sister Lightsey? You know, he got all male aggressive with me. And I said to him, I said, people who come to sing in the choir may not say they know the Lord, but if our Christianity is anything like what you say it is, then it seems to me that the Jesus that's on the inside of us ought to be able to influence even those who are coming into the choir to want to lead a life where they're in relationship and love God. And if we can't help influence people to love God out of Jesus with us, then we don't really have much to say about our religion.

He was so angry. Oh, he was. He thought I was being insubordinate to him. So he told me that I either do that, have the people leave the choir, or myself stop working with the choir, or I turn in my keys to the church.

Well, it didn't take me too long. I just got up and gave him my keys to the church and walked out. I was done. I continued to worship at the church with my ex-husband. And he used his good time in the pulpit to sling mud at me from the pulpit through his sermons. You know what preachers do. You know, somebody here who is working with the sinners and not having those sinners come—who else? I mean, it's a small church. Come on, man, who are you fooling?

Monique M. [*Laughs.*]

Pamela L. Who else you talking to, you know? So I had to endure that kind of garbage until I finally said to my husband at the time, I said, Ricky, you know what, I'm done with him. You can keep going, but me and my children, we're going to find another place to worship. Plus, I'm disappointed in you that you allow that man to talk about your wife the way that he talks about your wife from the pulpit. So that kind of began to really, what was going on in the church began to really impact my relationship with my husband at the time, because I really was... I was like you just don't... It was that sense of commitment to family that came back at the time.

So went to separate churches in Belgium. We moved from Belgium to Frankfort, Germany. Again we went to separate churches. A pastor from the Church of God came to our house to meet with me, to try to convince me to go to church with my husband because a wife needs to be with her husband, and a husband needs his family with him preaching. Because my husband was preaching also. And it wouldn't look good to have a preacher at one church and his wife and children at another. So I listened to him and when he left, I told my ex-husband, I said, well, I, you know—my husband at the time—I said I understand what he's saying, so why don't you come to church with us, because I'm not going to church with the Church of God anymore.

In addition to just my sensibility about the unhealthy ways that the Church of God—that I experienced in the Church of God, this is not to say it was the same in every Church of God—but the experiences that I had, it was also this sense of I read Church of God polity, and at the time the Church of God had, within their polity, within their church written law, that they did not support interracial marriages. So that was also problematic for me. And I told my ex-husband this is racism. Why are you involved with a church that is so committed to racism and sexism? And I was not going to go with that church anymore.

So in the military chaplaincy system in Frankfurt I had a couple chaplains who were Methodists, and those Methodist chaplains encouraged me to develop my ministry. Gave me opportunities to lead, a Sunday School teacher, Christian educator. Certainly loved my continued work in choirs and singing, but also nurtured me in the ministry. Actually called me a minister. Actually gave me the opportunity to preach in the military chapels that we were attending.

And by the time we got ready to leave Germany, my chaplain at the time pulled me aside and said hey, listen, you've got the gift. When you go back to America, find a Methodist church and work on being ordained. That's how I got to the United Methodist Church. He said a Methodist church. He didn't say which one. He later said I meant AME.

Monique M. *[Laughs.]*

Pamela L. And I ended up in the United Methodist Church. That's how I got there.

Monique M. So the church you chose to attend, was it predominantly black in Columbus, or was it a white church, interracial church?

Pamela L. It was predominantly black. The community had been predominantly white. When black people started moving into the community, white people started moving out. You've heard the story before. The church became a predominantly black church. The pastor of the church, who is now a bishop in the United Methodist Church, was once himself a Pentecostal preacher, so the way he preached, his style of preaching, was Pentecostal. He was with the Church of God in Christ. So he had a Pentecostal style of preaching, but he had been to seminary, so he would infuse in his sermons a lot of good theology. I was so hungry for it. I remember sitting in church the first time hearing him preach just crying like a baby. I was like ah, ah, this is what I need. This is where I can grow. And so the children and I—and being, at the time, when we got back to the States, my husband decided we're going to worship together, so we all joined the Methodist church. And we were worshiping in the United Methodist Church, with a pastor who made some sense and didn't mind being questioned. I loved that about the United Methodist Church. It wasn't as though the pastors were like paragons of virtue, smaller gods themselves, that if you asked them a question, you know, you committed

some sin against God. No, this pastor was willing to answer some questions, and to say I don't know. That was good.

Monique M. In the bio you did with Mark it noted that you divorced while in that church.

Pamela L. I did.

Monique M. And the church was supportive of you. Can you talk about making the decision to end that marriage, and was that also aligned with your coming to awareness of same sex attraction?

Pamela L. Ending my marriage had nothing to do with my sexuality. The ending of my marriage had everything to do with the infidelity of my husband for many years. So his unfaithfulness started while we were in the Pentecostal church at Fort Lewis, and just kept popping up along the way. And each time I would find out about this or that I would say okay, I need to forgive. You know, very Pentecostal. You forgive 70 times seven. And the sensibility that the devil was trying to tear up my marriage, and somehow or another, that if I could only pray through this and if my husband would commit himself more deeply to God, that somehow or another we could beat the devil and we could stay together.

Now years later—he's my best friend now. I should tell you that. And years later we both agree we got married when we were what, 19? Got married at 19. I was 19. He was in his early 20s, 21. And so his times of infidelity was really his trying to figure out who he was, having married so

young. And so after we'd been divorced, by the time he came back and apologized, I'd long since forgiven him.

And we had already determined, when we divorced, that we would remain connected and raise our children together. So we didn't have these arguments about joint parenting. The children spent time with him, spent time with me. And we did not, in front of our children, have these kind of—there was no need to have these kind of ugly arguments because we recognized we were truly in the...going through divorce we were truly committed to ensuring that our children knew that we were divorcing each other, but not them.

So yeah, it had nothing, you know, the divorce had nothing to do with my sexuality. Now once I was divorced, I tell people that was one of the most liberating moments of my life because it freed me to ask myself and to go back into my childhood and to wrestle with some things that I really, just really had denied for a long, long time. And so divorce freed me to think about Pamela.

At the same time I was taking undergraduate courses. I was working on my bachelor's in sociology. And that discipline, one of my advisors and major teachers was a bisexual Jewish man who really did good work in teaching us about human sexuality in sociology courses. You know, we'd have these great conversations. And I'd be sitting in class quietly on the inside having these aha moments. You know, aha about human sexuality.

And then thinking about myself and what this particular study might mean for me.

So yeah, divorce led me to figure out me. And I was also, I was dating, and as some people say, I was really getting buck wild once I got... Once I went through the divorce I decided I'm just going to...I'm going to enjoy myself. I'm going to figure out who I am. And that's what I did. Yeah.

Monique M. Where did you go to undergrad?

Pamela L. I went to Columbus State University. Before I went to Columbus State University I went to Chattahoochee Valley Community College for two years. Then I transferred into Columbus State from Chattahoochee Valley Community College.

Monique M. So what led you from the BA in sociology to want to go to seminary?

Pamela L. Just a great example that was being set by my pastor and the love of the church. So my pastor was not full of himself when it came to the pulpit. He allowed me to preach without a degree because he saw my gifts. And the church, you know, every time I preached—this was a church that was filled with very prominent African Americans. We had a Superior Court judge who was a member of our church, the first black surgeon in the community was a member of our church, teachers from across the community, very middle, upper middle class church. And yet I was allowed, so to say, to stand and preach without degree. And they loved

me. You know, they just were just a loving group of people. St. Mary Road United Methodist Church. I love them to this day.

And when I went through divorce, the members of the church, many members of the church said we want to support you. We want to support you. And we really want you to keep going to school. We want you to go to seminary. And the staff parish [committee] encouraged me to go to seminary. So also my pastor. And I saw what a seminary education could do in the preaching moment. And I was just convinced I wanted to have as much education as I possibly could to be the best pastor, because at that time I began to think about becoming a pastor myself. So seminary, of course, was the route to do that.

I was working for the government. I worked for the government as a civil servant for 16 years, and the latter part of my career with the government I was working on my bachelor's degree. And near the end of my bachelor's degree I decided, hey, I'm here, I'm divorced now, and I saw some statistics in the census. I went to the library when I was going through the divorce and I was trying to figure out, okay, what should I do here. And the statistics showed that persons with degrees, which is almost, you know, logical, but it showed the jump in income between various degrees.

And I knew at the highest level, which was a Ph.D., that as a black woman I stood a better chance of making the kind of income that could support me and my children. So that was my aim. That was my aim. Because I

wanted my children—two things I wanted for them. I wanted them to see and to live in a house with a parent who was college educated. But I also wanted them to see a black woman with a terminal degree in their mother.

And so we sat down. I remember sitting my children down. They were teenagers. I was a single parent by then. And just near, you know, right after the divorce I said to my children, I said, you know, have you ever had a dream? And they said yes, Mommy. And I said to them, I said, Mommy's had a dream for a long time. And that dream has been that Mommy could get college degrees. And I need you all to help me with my dream.

And delightful children, loving, said to me, okay, Mommy, what? And I said, I need you all to be on your best behavior while Mommy goes to school. I don't want you to get into any trouble that would cause me to have to leave class to come see about you. I want you to do what you must do, and I don't want to end my dream. I want my dream to come true. Do you want my dream to come true? And my children reached across the table and said—my daughter—yeah, Mommy, we want your dream to come true. And we prayed at that kitchen nook, and we prayed about our dreams.

Monique M. Oh.

Pamela L. Excuse me. I'm sorry. I get teared up when I think about that because that was a very...that was a rich moment for me. And my children, yes,

were—they went through the teen years. But something they always, I mean, really, they always came back to was, Mommy, you going to class tonight? Mommy, you going to class tonight? And I would always say yeah, I'm going to class. What are you all doing? What are you all going to do?

So I had a best friend, and we traded off on babysitting. And when I was in school she'd babysit the kids, when she was in school I'd babysit her daughter. So they had a sister in my best friend's daughter, and the three of them, they had a glorious time while we two were working on our degrees. Unfortunately, while I was working on my master's degree, by the time I was working on my master's degree, my daughter had grown up, and my son moved with me to Atlanta. He was staying with his father. He wanted to experience staying at his father's place.

But while I was working on my master's degree, my best friend, who remarried, died tragically, suddenly, and her daughter became my daughter. That was a commitment. And to this day, you know, the children understand themselves as family, the three of them. But when people ask me about my children, I always say I have three.

Monique M. So what made you choose ITC when you were...?

Pamela L. I chose ITC because it was black. And I knew that the... I could have gone to Candler. But remember, I came up through the civil rights movement, was influenced by the Black Power movement, and I understood that my

ministry would largely be in black churches. I mean, this was the South. And I felt that though I might be appointed to a diverse, cross cultural appointment, as the United Methodist Church calls it, the large part of my ministry would be with black people. And the ITC is a historically black school. And also I felt that the connections that I would make at ITC would be with me for the rest of my ministry, and so it was.

And the ITC, I learned about black liberation theology, I learned about womanist theology, and I just had an excellent education at the ITC. It was par excellence. It was close, it was nurturing. It was tough. I mean, it was like—and being at ITC took me back to the segregated schools of my childhood where the teachers didn't take stuff from you, and where they really demanded excellence. And so my elementary education really gave me a strong foundation for the years to come. I mean, I had an excellent education in elementary. Likewise at the ITC. It gave me a strong foundation for what was to come in my doctoral program.

And I appreciate my professors—Randall Bailey, Jacquelyn Grant, Riggins Earl and others, but these three, very formative, who really taught me, even outside of the classroom spent time talking to me about theology, talking to me about biblical studies, so that when I went into the doctoral program at Garrett, one of the first classes we took, they were covering books that I already read in after hours with my professors at ITC.

Monique M. You mentioned in your bio with Mark that at ITC, while it was very influential, you also noticed their lack of attention to LGBT concerns.

Pamela L. Yes.

Monique M. So can you talk a bit about your growing sensitivities in that area? Why was it that you noticed that they weren't doing this?

Pamela L. Yes. Well, by the time I got to ITC, I understood myself as bisexual. I had had a relationship, and was also in the middle of a budding, what would soon be another relationship at the ITC. But in the classrooms and what we were learning, particularly black liberation theology, a lot of conversation about liberation for black people. No conversation about liberation for black LGBTQ persons. And we had had people who had applied to ITC as out lesbians who were denied entrance at the ITC. And I was aware of those. I was also aware of, you know, just by listening to the conversations of my peers, just kind of the ongoing homophobia that was true in the black communities in the Atlanta-Columbus area also, you know, finding its way into conversations at ITC. Very disappointing for me. Very disappointing.

In fact I had a friend at the time who was a lesbian. We were walking across campus and she said to me, she said, you need to go on the other side because if you walk with me people will think you're a lesbian, too. And I said I don't care what people think. You know, I'm grown. I've gotten past the point of what people think. Let's just keep talking, you

know, let's keep walking and keep talking. That was strange. A place so committed to liberation. But so many people who were just anti the liberation, human rights of LGBTQ persons. And I'm not suggesting this of the faculty, but the persons who were coming from churches that would come past came with that ugliness.

Monique M. So you moved to Chicago after this wonderful experience and some tough moments at ITC. You talked about having the Ph.D. as your goal. So why did you choose Garrett?

Pamela L. I went to Garrett. It's another thread of my commitment to God, okay? While I was at the ITC, they asked me to have a meeting. By "they" I mean the Dean of Student Services at Gammon, asked me to have a meeting with the bishop of the Northern Illinois Conference and his cabinet. Now, in the United Methodist Church these kinds of meetings take place in seminaries across the country, where the bishop and their staff will come to speak with prospective candidates and persons that might be placed as local pastors or pastors in churches.

Monique M. Were you ordained yet?

Pamela L. I was ordained. Good question. So I'm one of the few. I became ordained as a deacon before I completed my M.Div. And I did that, that was like in record time. The United Methodist Church no longer ordains persons as deacons on the elders track. And I was determined to be ordained as a deacon on the elders track before they changed the requirements for

ordination. So I was ordained a deacon on the elders track before I finished my M.Div., which put me in a good position to be able to take an appointment to the church.

But after I was ordained, or just a few days before I was ordained, the district superintendent at the time in the Columbus area gave me a call and said, in his own way, white man, said well now—he's a district superintendent—he said, well now, I'm gonna have you ordained, but I don't have a black church to put you in. And that stunned me, because I'd not asked to be appointed to a black church. And I said to myself—I was holding the phone—I said okay, Lightsey, be cool, don't...

So I just listened to him quietly, and hung up the phone, and made up in my mind that I would be ordained, that I would work with them so that they would give me an appointment to be a student. My appointment would be fixed within the school, which we were able to do. And also I got the appointment to serve as assistant pastor at my church in Columbus, so I would commute on the weekends. And we were able to work this out ultimately to my advantage. But from that conversation I had a bad taste in my mouth about doing ministry in the South, 'cause racism just came back up for me.

So when the bishop of the Northern Illinois Conference came, I, at that time, had no desire to go into parish ministry. I just wanted to continue with school. But the conversation with this man, Joseph Sprague, who was

an activist for LGBTQ rights, was so intriguing to me, and it was supposed to be 15 minutes and lasted an hour. He wanted to take me to Northern Illinois then. The cabinet had to convince him she must finish her degree, bishop.

So I ended up in Chicago because I made the Lord another agreement. I had submitted my application to three doctoral programs, one of which was at Garrett. And I said to the Lord, I said, Lord, if I'm supposed to be pastor at this church in Chicago, then I will get admitted to Garrett. And I guess God said girl, don't play with me. Bam, there you are. *[Laughs.]* That's how I ended up in Chicago.

Monique M. Now, you're in Chicago. You're pastoring full-time?

Pamela L. Mm-hmm.

Monique M. And a student full-time.

Pamela L. Yes.

Monique M. So can you talk about how you're living out sort of your classroom experience in your community, your liberationist foundation, how that met with the people in the South Side of Chicago you were pastoring?

Pamela L. First thing, person in the community, man rode up on me. I was walking down the street, 95th and Cregier, this man rolls up, rolls his window down and says, are you the pastor of that new church? I said, yeah. He said, what you gonna do about drugs here? I said, what have you done about

drugs here? And the brother said, you're the pastor. And I said, but you've lived here. And that was the end of that conversation. But it certainly got me to thinking about the ways in which the community thought about responsibility of the pastor of this church that was located in the community.

My ministry was not drugs, you know, not related to helping to clean up the drugs in the community. Remember, I felt like I had barely escaped being convicted and incarcerated for drug trafficking, so I didn't see that as my ministry. I did see as my ministry in that area something much broader, and that was that the children from Robert Taylor Homes, Cabrini-Green were losing their places to stay because the city was tearing down these project areas, and these children were moving into what was once a very centered, middle income neighborhood, and they were moving into this neighborhood where I was pastoring. And the older members of the community were concerned, you know, about these children.

And at the same time, I was pastoring an aging church that wanted its new pastor to bring in younger people. They wanted new and younger people. So for me, I looked at what was going on and thought, wow, this is it. I'm going to do ministry with these children and their families, some of whom are trafficking drugs or taking drugs. I'm going to work with the babies. And as I work with the babies, that's my way of also working with the larger family. Little did I know that the church that said they wanted

young folk to come in, they didn't want those young folks, not those.

[Laughs.] Not those babies.

So my ministry in that area was interesting. I played basketball on the streets with the gang bangers. I would cuss gang bangers out. I will tell an example. I put my purse in the hands of—I just came from the airport. Members dropped me off at my parsonage. I saw the guys hanging out on the corner. I go hand one of them—you know, they got a basketball and I hand one of them my purse and I said don't walk away with my purse. I'm gonna beat your ass if you take my purse. Oh, Reverend, oh, Reverend! What you know, what you know. Give me the ball, give me the ball. So I'm taking the ball, I'm dribbling the ball, and they go oh! You know, as black people do it. So they're fully impressed with my dribbling skills, you know.

And so that was an opportunity for me just to make, you know, keep developing this relationship with gang bangers. It was a wonderful relationship. It was a challenging relationship baptizing their babies. I ended up also going to Cook County Jail with one who was there on charges, murder charges, walking with his parents through those charges. The growth of the church with the babies and, you know, the kind of resistance with the more seasoned members, and getting them to understand that the growth they asked for was in the presence of these babies, in the presence of these young people hanging out on the streets.

Ultimately our church grew. I was awarded what's called the Denman Evangelism Award. And that award was for church growth. So ultimately they got what they wanted, but in a strange way. And I got what I needed. They got what they wanted, I got what I needed. And what I needed was that continued, deep kind of relationship with members of the black community that are often spoken ill of and are forgotten about. And it was just...it was in keeping with how I was raised, that is, stick with your people.

So while I was working on my Ph.D. I was hanging out at Cook County Courthouse, I was working with the children of the Robert Taylor Homes, I was working in the middle school across the street trying to help the babies. And in trying to help the babies I think I ultimately...I know I helped the church. But I also helped myself emotionally, psychologically. Because the Ph.D., being in the academy working on a Ph.D. has a way in which it can pull you away from who you really are as a person. That work kept me grounded with who I am as a person.

Monique M. So how did you move from that work to a very different dissertation?

Pamela L. My dissertation was on classical just war theory. It was a very personal work because my son decided to join the army. And he didn't want to move to Chicago with me when I moved to Chicago. And like my mother, I gave him a choice. I said now look, I'm not leaving you in Atlanta to hang out on the streets. You either go to college or you go to the military.

That's what I knew. That's the community, those are the two communities.

Monique M. And his dad was still in Columbus?

Pamela L. His dad was in Atlanta, still in Atlanta. But his dad...his relationship with his dad was not of the sort that I really felt that leaving him in Atlanta would actually mean that he would have some structure. So he had those choices, and he looked at me. You know, he just was not ready for college, and he joined the military.

And when 9/11 happened, I think just a few weeks after that I got a letter from my son saying that his unit might be—he was in Afghanistan and that his unit might be crossing over to Iraq. And so I was doing my doctoral work on this vicious circle called theodicy. And September the 11th changed all that because theodicy just seemed like it was just too esoteric for me to be working with. I was also looking at theodicy in light of the capture and the harm done to black children of French and German descent during Hitler's reign and their imprisonment in the camps, and I wanted to work through that on the basis of those children, persons that Hitler called Rhineland bastards.

But with my son getting ready to cross over into Iraq, and with Bush's statements about this being a just war, I was really interested in what he meant by just war. Because I didn't consider it just. I didn't believe that there were weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. I thought they were lying.

And I could not, as a scholar, allow that opportunity to investigate just what is meant by just war to pass me by in light of the fact that my son's life was then in danger. So that's how I began to work on classical just war theory. A very trying time for me. I didn't sleep much during my coursework because the TV was on the news every day. And also because I couldn't tell my daughter where her brother was. My daughter didn't know that my son was in Iraq at all.

Monique M. Wow.

Pamela L. We couldn't tell her. We couldn't tell her because we knew she would fall apart. We knew it. And only near the end did we tell her, and she was undone. He wasn't writing her. He was writing me. And I was filtering all the information to the rest of the family. And I was sending boxes to him and I was carrying all of that. His dad knew, I knew, and we both determined we just wouldn't tell her. And we didn't. So I kept the news on all night. I just didn't sleep much. And when I slept I didn't sleep well.

Monique M. And so you went from that, working out those intellectual concerns, theological concerns, personal concerns, to continuing ministry? Or at what point did you make a move and decide full-time pastoring isn't what I'm going to do?

Pamela L. I think about my fourth year of ministry I began to really think about becoming a faculty member in the academy. I began to feel like I was...that my work at that local church, that I had fulfilled what my

calling was for that local church, and that a move was imminent. And understanding the churches, I understood the church. I wanted to control where I was going. By the time I got my doctorate, there were not that many choices within black churches for someone with a doctorate, particularly salary-wise within the United Methodist Church in Chicago.

So I was making a particular salary level at my local church. My next church was not going to be a demotion in terms of salary, so I knew it would be, you know, the logic I was working with would be that they would put me at a church that would certainly meet the kind of salary that was commensurate with the work that I had done in that church, first of all, and secondly with my particular scholarship and my abilities as a pastor. So I began to look around and think, okay, where could they put me? And in my mind I said, oh, they're going to give me a cross racial appointment.

And the more I thought about that, to be honest, I got a little...a little concerned. And the reason for that was because I felt the church was being unfair in how it was doing the cross racial appointments. Cross racial appointments usually meant that someone of color was placed into a white church, and rarely, if ever, the reverse, that someone white was placed in a predominantly black church. And in Chicago I knew of not one white pastor who was placed in a church on the South Side, a predominantly black church on the South Side of Chicago. Didn't happen. And for me that was a justice issue. So I didn't want to continue that trend. And I

knew that that might have been a possibility. Who knows what the bishops think? I don't know. But I knew that was a possibility.

With that possibility I began to think more and more about the academy. I didn't have to think too long because I presented a paper at some conference, the academic dean of Garrett saw me present the paper, saw the response, called me aside, and asked me to think about going back to Garrett as the dean of students. Ultimately that's where I ended up.

While I was at the church, just to talk a little bit about my work with the LGBTQ community, one of the things I did in ministry at that local church is we began an HIV-AIDS ministry. My brother died of AIDS, complications related to AIDS. So we worked...I did some kind of Christian education on the subject matter in the church, did some education on human sexuality at the church, and preached. And after a very powerful sermon the church decided that it would do work in that area. And I became committed, more vocal in my commitment to LGBTQ justice while at that church.

Monique M. Can you talk about what animated that decision?

Pamela L. On a personal level I was still kind of working out the dynamics of who I was as a sexual being. I was a single pastor, so people get snooty and nosy. And they were trying to figure out what my relationships were. In fact a group in the church accused me of being a lesbian. Well, accusation is one thing, but proof is another. And I took that occasion really to begin

to really speak more forcefully about homophobia in the church and to also speak more forcefully about LGBTQ rights.

When I went to Garrett, we had a United—there came a time where the United Methodists had a General Conference, and hearing Bishop Talbert speak out on the floor at General Conference admonishing the church to stop discriminating against LGBTQ persons really touched my heart, because I was in the closet. And I said to myself if this elderly black straight man can have the courage to stand with the LGBTQ community, why am I in the closet? What do I have to lose? What really do I have to lose? And when I thought about it, even the things that I thought I had to lose weren't worth me staying in the closet.

Monique M. In your book you write about reaching an identity formation of black queer lesbian, and these things being always tied together as a part of your identity construct. Can you talk about that decision, where you're coming to a decision I'm not going to remain in the closet, and how that related to what you were then going to identify as when you were, quote, unquote, out?

Pamela L. Initially, when I came out, I came out as a lesbian. No, I take that back. Initially, when I came out, I came out as queer in some corners. In other corners I came out as lesbian. When I talked to black people I often said I'm queer. And black people didn't know what the hell I was talking about. They didn't understand that language. Very few, I should say. And

it got to the point where I felt like I wasn't being understood and the ambiguity of the term queer, I really began questioning using the term queer and saying to myself are you using this term so you can remain in the closet with black people? It's ambiguous enough so that you can be out of the closet and yet remain in the closet with black people because they don't really understand.

And I decided, after a couple of these incidents where black people would say what do you mean by queer, that I would have to walk through exactly what the term meant with them, and they would end up saying, oh, so you funny, or oh, so you're lesbian. And I simply decided that the effort, that my efforts would be better used if I simply combined the two. And the reason I combine the two, one was to help people understand clearly, in the black community, that I was non-gender conforming, and also to say to the queer community that I was non-gender conforming.

So there is a way in which, if you say you're a lesbian in the queer community, they have ways in which people expect you, if you say you're a lesbian, to always be with another woman. I didn't feel like that was the case for me. I'm attracted to women, but I'm more attracted to the human spirit. And so I wanted to leave the windows open for me to love whomever I love, realizing that my strongest attraction is to women, but also really being committed in my very being to this idea of the fluidity of sexuality. So that's why I say queer and lesbian.

Monique M. And what does that get you that bisexual didn't?

Pamela L. When I used the term bisexual, I was really thinking about, more about bodies, you know, I'm attracted to the male body, I'm attracted to the female body. And that wasn't sufficient for me because for me, my attractions go beyond the physical and are really connected to the being, the person, in whatever physical place that lands. And bisexuality didn't do that for me.

Monique M. Okay. I want to move to your book "Our Lives Matter," and before the book, making the decision to be an activist on the streets while being an academic, while being clergy, and what animated the decision-making to take your social organizing out into that particular community.

Pamela L. Okay. There's something about these moments in life that happen that kind of shake you inwardly and just...they move you in ways that you do not imagine yourself moving. So seeing the body of Michael Brown on the streets of Ferguson in August, after having been so disappointed with what took place with Trayvon Martin's trial, and that moment just, it just shook me. And it shook me as I listened to the—I was listening. You know, I was so intrigued by this on YouTube that I was able to find some livestream and really hear, not to see what was going on, but hear what people were saying in the community.

And it took me back to being a young person in the civil rights movement.

And I actually felt like I was having an out of body experience, like this is

happening now, but this was happening then, and then in the days to come. So I was, I mean, I was literally, literally up for hours. So this is another time in my life where I'm up for hours. I'm up for hours on end worrying about my son and war. I'm up for hours on end following various livestream broadcasts of what was happening in Ferguson. I was not getting sleep. I was just that interested and torn by this.

So that by the time there began to be these conversations about the governor sending out the National Guard, military troops, it was like that's enough. I can stay here in Boston and kind of view this from afar, or I can use my...I can put myself there and I can do something. I can be actively involved with this and I can do this with the viewpoint of someone who's been in the military, the viewpoint of someone who has lived through the civil rights movement, the viewpoint of someone who came up very impoverished. I can do this.

So I called my dean. I said, you know, I've got to go. I have to go to Ferguson. I can't...I can't stay here anymore, I need to go. And fortunately for me my dean said, well Pamela, I understand, you do what you must. You do what you must. So I just boarded a plane. I called the people from Reconciling Ministries, my colleagues there at Reconciling Ministries Network and I said I'm going to Ferguson, and oh, by the way, I think this is something you all need to be involved with because you keep talking about antiracism. This is an opportunity for us really to be about what we talk about.

And to RMN's credit, they supported me in that work by sending two persons that work with communications from RMN. So they sent two people from communications. I had been working on livestreaming, which is why I was attracted to livestreaming with Ferguson because I had been doing livestreaming for B.U. School of Theology. So they prepared a media pass for me because RMN does their own media beat. They have this web presence and everything. And we learned enough to know that the press could move on the street in ways that the average citizen couldn't. So here I am with my press pass, two communications people on West Florissant Avenue, you know.

And one of them had connections with someone with Dream Defenders, and I was also able to make connections through the United Methodist Church with a pastor in the area, not block some police station. So with our connections, we showed up in Ferguson. We really didn't have a clue. *[Laughs.]* We really didn't have a clue as to the full, I mean, to the breadth of stuff that was going on in Ferguson. But we had a sincere commitment to justice.

And once there, I decided that I would livestream so that people who maybe really wanted to know what was going on, as I wanted to know while I was in Boston, could tune into my livestream. Had hundreds of people. One broadcast it was like 5,000 people who were looking. So it was lots of people. I was really intrigued about how you can help the world see what's happening through media.

I was also interested, as a woman scholar, about the ways in which women were leading in the movement compared to what had happened during the civil rights movement. So I really wanted to find the female leaders, where were the sisters who were leading, because I didn't want the story told in the future that this was a movement that was largely led by men, when in fact that wasn't the truth. So I paid particular [attention] to ways in which the women were leading, serving in leadership capacity in Ferguson as a woman. I was also wanting to know theologically what the people thought justice looked like, would look like for them. So I had all those sensibilities when I went down to Ferguson.

And fortunately, for me, the footage was really great, but beyond that, it was...I know I cannot articulate this. But the connection to black culture, you know, was so strong there. There was a commitment to the liberation of black people over and against the structural racism that was within that community and the nation that was so—it was palatable. It really was. And I just got connected and remain connected to Ferguson.

Monique M. And from that experience, I was really intrigued to hear your interest in bringing sort of the womanist desire to look at the experiences of women. Can you talk a bit about your experiences as then a black woman activist, and just give us a sense of how you've noticed challenges, how you've noticed opportunities, anything you want to get on record.

Pamela L. Yeah. I will give you an example, a story that happened to me in Ferguson. Maybe this will help. So here I am, a scholar, womanist scholar. I'm on the very street where Michael Brown was killed, so I'm feeling this sense of...this attention to, you know, what a horrible event that took place there. There are people all on Canfield on this day, and they're talking. Some are waiting for Iyanla Vanzant to come, and she's late as late as late. And some are having conversations with sisters. I'm listening to the community conversations that are taking place.

And there are two men who are having a conversation, two brothers, and they're surrounded by a deep circle of black people. And the conversation really is about black spending power, a kind of ageless conversation about how black people don't spend in black communities, or how the black dollar just goes out of the community. And they're going forth, and they're raising their voices, and they're getting real passionate in the conversation. And the brothers are going on.

When they finished, two sisters start in. You know, they start in, beautiful conversation, and they start raising their voices likewise as the men had raised them, in the passion of the moment. And this young black brother steps in between the two sisters and says all right, calm down. Holds up his hands. Calm down, calm down. As if to say ladies, ladies, lower your voices, calm down. And I yelled out, before I could catch myself, the activist in me, the womanist in me, I said, wait! You didn't stop the men when they were talking. Why are you trying to stop the women? And in

another corner a sister yells out, oh, don't come down here with that feminist bullshit. And I'm struck by this, you know. Then I come back to myself. I said now Lightsey—within my mind I'm like these are your people, but these ain't your people, you know.

Monique M. [*Laughs.*]

Pamela L. And my body begins to shake until another sister says, oh no, she right, she right, she right, she right. Well, by then I'd had all of these kind of quick internal conversations in my head about context, you know, about my own privilege, you know, my own privilege, and how, you know, I opened a door and stepped, you know, how I stepped into, put myself into the community that was my community, but not my community, you know.

So as an activist, that moment reminds—I go back to that moment in my mind because it helps me to teach people about privilege, about class privilege, helps me to teach people about sexism. It helps me to talk to people about the difference between womanist and feminist. Right there on the street, you know, all of that came into being. And I stepped away from that moment committed, for the rest of my time in Ferguson, one, that I would have a conversation with the brother who stepped between those two sisters, because for me there is a necessity that we remain connected though we may disagree. And I was able to have that conversation with him.

Secondly, that that moment reminded me of why I really should be there, and what the presence of a scholar, and the immediacy, what being immediately connected as a scholar, as a theologian in protest movements can and must do. And the danger of doing that, too, you know, the danger of doing that. So by inserting myself I'm, you know, just a response, inserting myself brought a conversation for the community about sexism. And that was good. It was a dangerous moment for me, but it allowed them to continue that conversation about women, black women.

Monique M. Can you close the loop then in how that activist animation then moves into the scholarly production? It then made you decide this should be a book that gets disseminated and put into the academy and into the populace, because it's very easy to read. So I can imagine it being something that I could have taught in my Sunday School or taught at the community center.

Pamela L. So I was writing my book while I was in Ferguson with no intention to include Ferguson in the book. But each night when I would go back to my hotel room, I would kind of replay the conversations that were happening on the streets. And I realized that my people would benefit from the very book that I was writing. But I also, from that experience, I knew that the book could not be written in such a way that it would be inaccessible to my community. So I made some very quick commitments. One, that the book would be small. Two, that the language in the book would not be the kind of language where people would not...that it would not be so dense

that people would just say I can't read this, I don't understand what she's talking about, it doesn't make any sense and it's not useful for me.

So I wanted it to be useful for young activists, for activists. I wanted it to be useful for the LGBTQ community. I wanted it to be critical, even, of the LGBTQ community and the black community. But also, not most of all, but also I wanted the book to be, I wanted people to be able to purchase the book because, you know, your first book out there's this temptation to sign a contract with this—there's a particular publisher who will, who I know signs with scholars, but the book is so expensive, and it's usually a hard copy.

Nothing blesses my heart more so than to have an activist whom I've given the book to take the book, read through the book, highlight the book, then fold the book up and put it in his pocket as he was going out to protest, then come back to me and ask me questions about it. He could literally take my book out on the streets with him. And so I tore up, I tell people I tore up about 700 pages to write that small book. And that was intentional. And the book is being used in classrooms across the country. It's being read by clergypersons and it's being read by activists. And I get letters from LGBTQ persons quite often telling me just what the book means to them.

Monique M. Excellent. So I'm going to end with the question that I end with, which is a question that I ask about, you know, look through your life span and to

think about what you're most proud of and to talk about moments and experiences where you find joy and fulfillment.

Pamela L. So I'm most proud of the fact that I have maintained a deep relationship with black communities. That's important to me because I don't want to get removed from my people. I'm also proud that my children have watched my life and they themselves have gotten college degrees, and they themselves are young activists, so it's being passed on.

I'm proud, I'm very proud of the work that I've been doing in the United Methodist Church to pull out discriminatory language in the Book of Discipline, to include protesting on the floor of our General Conference last year. I'm proud that we had a Black Lives Matter protest on General Conference floor. That was a...I mean... And the work that I've done making available for people all across the world to see what's been happening, the harm that's been done to black persons and to LGBTQ persons, I'm proud of that work.

Monique M. Okay. And joy. Some people talk about relationships, pottery, dogs, whatever brings you joy.

Pamela L. This is the hardest question you asked. Asking about my work, I can just easily say, you know, this, this, this. I think it's so hard to talk about joy because I don't intentionally... Joy happens in unintentional ways for me. So conversations with my children, subject matters that come up in those conversations bring me joy.

My family sending me text messages from their group text that ping off my iPhone all through the day. They aggravate me, but they also bring me joy. You know, to see 68 text messages, you know, my iPhone and my watch. It's so aggravating, but it's so wonderful to know that my family's so loving towards one another, because I know it doesn't have to be that way. Especially for me as a black queer lesbian, because there are families that disown you. But my family loves me. And that brings me joy.

Monique M. I would typically stop us right there, but I realize in your answer to the question that we didn't get on record any of the reasons why you have been so activist oriented in the United Methodist Church around changing the Book of Discipline. So I don't want to leave the record without having you include some of your own thoughts about why take up this cause.

Pamela L. I took up the cause of LGBTQ activism in the United Methodist Church because I felt that I have the cover to do so. Let me explain what I mean by cover. First of all, the United Methodist Church has already repented of its discrimination against black people, so as a black person and queer and lesbian, the United Methodist Church, I mean, the right wing of the United Methodist Church I felt would be taking its chances to attack a black woman. They already take their chances, horribly so, to attack LGBTQ persons.

But I'm a...you know, the church has been good to me. I'm one of the few ordained elders, black ordained elders in the United Methodist Church

with a Ph.D. Not a D.Min., but a Ph.D. So I wanted to use my achievement, my accomplishments that have been supported by the church to help make the very church that supported my education better. And I thought it important for me to do that. This is my way of thanking the church for being committed to helping to improve the lives of its lay people, it's clergypersons. So what better way than to help the church live out the principles that it articulates.

Secondly, I do this because I want black clergy in the United Methodist Church and black people in the United Methodist Church to understand that homophobia is illogical, is an illogical place to lay their hat, to hang their hat as people who have been oppressed. I mean, come on, black people...being homophobic? Yeah, it happens, but why should we? We of all people ought not be oppressing people. So I use my theological education to make that point.

And I use what clout I have in the church. But you only get so many minutes of fame, you know, and so I'm trying to use my few minutes of fame to make life better, not just for our church members, but for people who have been hurt by the church and who walked away from the church. I want them to know that God loves them. And unfortunately, when people talk about LGBTQ persons, in the black community I've heard it too often where they say that's a white man's problem. I'm trying to help people to understand that black people are part of the LGBTQ community. And I'm also committed to saying and we really do matter.

Monique M. That is a perfect place to stop. I want to say thank you on record. And I'm going to stop my various devices.

[End of recording.]