

Interviewee: Theda Good  
Interviewer: Rachel Waltner Goossen  
Date: December 6, 2017  
Place: Denver, Colorado / Lawrence, Kansas (via telecommunications)

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Interviewer: Okay, this is Rachel Waltner Goossen and the date is December 6, and I am interviewing Theda Good in Denver, Colorado. And Theda, I think we probably know lots of people in common, but I know very little about you, actually, other than what I've read in the church papers. So just so that I can sort of situation your story a little bit more contextually, can you just give me some biographical background about yourself, where you grew up and something about your education? And then we'll get to more recent things about your ministry, if that's okay.

Good: Sure, right. That's fine. Yeah, so I was born and raised in a conservative Mennonite community in the Lancaster, Pennsylvania area. I was not allowed to go to Lancaster Mennonite High School because it was too liberal, so I went to Faith Mennonite High School. And I would say half the students were conservative Mennonites and half were Beachy Amish.

Interviewer: Okay.

Good: And higher education was not important to my family, and so going to college wasn't something I really thought about much until one of my high school friends was talking about going to school and I thought hm, I wonder if maybe I should think about that. But my first year out I didn't do anything about it. And then the following year other friends were considering going to college so I thought, well, why don't I try it?

So I went to Millersville University one year just to prove that I could actually do college. And so I did one year and then I quit because I wasn't really sure why I was going. And yeah, then over time I—I eventually did end up going to Messiah College. Got a bachelor's degree. Behavioral science was my major, with a concentration in family studies.

Interviewer: Okay.

Good: And then...so that happened. I think I graduated when I was 27. And then it wasn't until I was 37 that I decided to go to seminary, and I went to Eastern Mennonite Seminary. So I have my master's of divinity.

Interviewer: What kind of work were you doing in that intervening time from your late 20s to your late 30s?

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Good: My 20s were basically spent—okay, first of all I grew up on a farm and my dad started a trucking company when I was a kid, and so as I grew up that company expanded, so I always had work at home when I wasn't trying to figure out how to be in ministry. And most of that ministry exploration was trying to do things—I did a few things with Eastern Mennonite Missions, and so yeah, I spent probably three or four years in and out of Eastern Mennonite Missions.

And when I wasn't doing that I was home working for my dad on the farm and in the trucking company in the office.

Interviewer: Was your family, they were, they considered themselves to be in the conservative Mennonite organization or were they part of one of the old MC conferences?

Good: It was part of Lancaster Conference.

Interviewer: Oh, Lancaster Conference, okay.

Good: Yeah, Lancaster Conference.

Interviewer: But it sounds like, given that you went to high school with a lot of Beachy Amish kids, it was at the conservative end of Lancaster Conference probably, right?

Good: Yes. Yes, it was.

Interviewer: So I have to ask you then why did you see yourself as being someone that could position yourself for ministry? Because I'm guessing you didn't see a lot of female role models that way.

Good: Yeah, yeah. My call story is pretty much kind of sensing a call in my late teens, early 20s, but not sure what to do with it because I didn't have any role models. And so I thought missions because that was the only other place that I saw women. And I think early on the hope was that maybe I could marry a man who was called to ministry—[laughs]—you know, be a minister's wife. Yeah, that was sort of earlier stages of trying to figure things out.

I remember when I—I remember the first woman and the first sermon I heard from a woman was at Diamond Street Mennonite Church in Philadelphia, and it was Arbutus Sider, Ron Sider's wife. And when I heard her preach I thought, oh, there's nothing wrong with that, God's using her. And so that was like huh, okay, maybe I can think about this differently than how I had been raised.

Interviewer: Was she connected with Eastern Mennonite Missions? Did they serve some time in Africa or something like that?

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Good: You know, I'm not...I don't know their story. I just know that I happened to be at Diamond Street one Sunday when she was preaching.

Interviewer: And you might have been a teenager then or early 20s?

Good: I was 19 or 20, yeah, because it was through—I was with Eastern Mennonite Missions in Philadelphia with their youth program, Youth Evangelism Service program, and it was the training. I was preparing to go to Italy with Eastern Mennonite Missions and Virginia Conference.

Interviewer: Was the expectation if you were going to go be a missionary that you needed some additional higher education training?

Good: Not initially. I mean, initially I was just in the youth program, and kids that did that were either before they went into college, during college, or after college. And I did it, I did two terms of service that way. And it was after that that I realized that if I was to do anything else with Eastern Mennonite Missions I needed a degree. And so it was through that process that I realized I needed to have some degree, yeah. And I had accumulated classes off and on throughout that time, so when I did go back I had five semesters left to do at Messiah. I had picked up enough credits other places.

Interviewer: And when was it that you finished up Messiah? You said you were in your late 20s, I guess, or mid to late 20s.

Good: It was 19...I graduated in 1994, and I was, I think I was 27 at the time. I'm 50 now, if that matters. *[Laughs.]*

Interviewer: Okay. And then was it a pretty easy decision to choose Eastern Mennonite Seminary when you were 37 years old and deciding to go to seminary? And do you remember what your aspirations were at that point when you chose to go there?

Good: I should back up and say just before, before I went to seminary, through Eastern Mennonite Missions I did a pastoral training program. They had a program that trained pastors and missionaries, and I did that. And then I was hired at ACTS Covenant Fellowship, which was a church in Lancaster City. It was part of Lancaster Conference and part of Church of the Brethren. And I was on pastoral staff there part-time basis.

And they requested my ministerial license. And because Mennonite was my background they decided to do it through the Mennonite church rather than Church of the Brethren. And had we gone Church of the Brethren it would have pretty [much] been a straightforward process because the Church of the Brethren at that time was already licensing and ordaining women. But that wasn't my background, so we tried to go through Lancaster Conference.

And at the time that my name was put forward two other women were also put forward, so the bishop board was looking at three women for ministerial licensing. And the bishop board at that time decided—they voted no, that we couldn't do that, and then they also decided to put a five year moratorium on even talking about women in pastoral ministry. And I think it's no—I think we should note at that point that Ervin Stutzman was the moderator of Lancaster Conference during that time.

Interviewer: I was reading the open letter exchange between you and Isaac—

Good: Oh, yeah.

Interviewer: —Villegas, and you mentioned that in your open letter response that was published to Isaac that you had been denied in the mid 1990s, early to mid 1990s, license, and that was in Lancaster Conference, and that Ervin was moderator at that time. And then how did this work? They put a five year moratorium on discussion within Lancaster Conference about licensing or credentialing of women pastors, was that what it was?

Good: Yes, that's exactly right. Yeah.

Interviewer: Any memory of who those other two women were that you were up with? It's not super important, but I'm just curious if there are people that have gone on to have illustrious careers as pastors anyway or if it's sort of a lost opportunity.

Good: I'm not remembering exactly. I think Addie Banks might have been one of them. I could—that's something I could look up and get back to you if you would like me to.

Interviewer: That might be okay. I mean, I'm generally interested in how historically women in different Mennonite contexts who had aspirations for ministerial or church leadership have been systematically denied, so that is a piece of the story, you know, that—I don't know these women. I don't know Addie at all. But it would be interesting to know those stories, because I think a lot of Mennonites just are pretty oblivious to what patriarchy has—*[laughs]*—the effects of patriarchy on ministerial and church leadership in our whole denomination's history, going back a long time but also in our lifetime.

Good: Yeah.

Interviewer: So yeah, if you don't mind, that would be—if it's not too much trouble that would be great.

Good: Okay.

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Interviewer: Did Ervin Stutzman as moderator have any role that you remember in this? It sounds like the bishops made a decision. And then was he a lay leader at that point or what?

Good: No, he was—so he was the leader of the bishop organization.

Interviewer: Oh, he was the leader of the bishop organization.

Good: Yeah.

Interviewer: Did he have a title at that point of bishop? Was he a bishop?

Good: He was, yes. Uh-huh. So he would have Keith Weaver's position now. I think it's called moderator. I'm not completely remembering the structure, the titles and so forth. But Ervin was the leader of the bishops at that time.

Interviewer: So communications that came to you, for example, that your credential was going to be denied, that might have come from Ervin or he would have made statements about that even if he didn't communicate with you directly?

Good: Mm-hmm. It would have gone to the church because the church requested the licensing.

Interviewer: Okay, to this ACTS Covenant. And ACTS Covenant was a joint church of the Church of the Brethren and the Lancaster Conference?

Good: Yes.

Interviewer: And where was it located? Is this somewhere in Lancaster County?

Good: Yeah, Lancaster City. It was in the city. They did not have a church building, but we rented space from the rec center.

Interviewer: Okay. So how did that affect you? That was not welcome news, I'm sure.

Good: Yeah, it was pretty disappointing. I felt a really big letdown. It sort of felt like yeah, from there my ministry experience kind of unraveled in that context.

I was also in my 30s, and I was going through a really hard time in life, so... I mean, my...I started wrestling with my sexuality in my 20s, and because of the conservative nature of the community it just wasn't a safe place to talk to people about that. And then I went, in my 30s our family experienced a lot of hardship. My two-year-old nephew was killed in a tragic accident with the family, and then I was wrestling with my sexuality, and I ended up really trying to figure out how I could sort of live a normal life during that time.

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I was very depressed. I was friends with this guy, and sort of out of desperation and depression we decided to get married—[laughs]—which was a bad decision made at a really bad time in life. And then six weeks after my wedding my father died. And all of that—and that was 17 months after my nephew had died, so that was just a lot of loss all at once. And so—

Interviewer: So you got married. That was also in the mid '90s or early '90s, somewhere like that?

Good: It was 2000, the year 2000.

Interviewer: Okay.

Good: My nephew died in '99, I got married in 2000, then my father died in 2000. And I stuck around. Because of my father's death I kept working at the family business another two years.

My marriage didn't last. And I knew that I needed something to change in my life. And through the encouragement of a pastor friend I decided to go to seminary.

Interviewer: Were you actively part of a congregation at that time?

Good: Yeah, I was part of James Street Mennonite Church at that time.

Interviewer: Also in Lancaster?

Good: Yes, in Lancaster City. And it was part of Lancaster Conference.

Interviewer: Okay. Did the dissolution of your marriage bring to the fore your sexuality and the identity of that in any more profound way or not so much?

Good: No. Not at that time. I was still, you know, I'm still wrestling with life and sexuality. I went to seminary and the last thing I wanted to think about was my sexuality.

Interviewer: I see. Okay. So you went to the seminary at EMS then in like 2002 or something like that?

Good: Two Thousand Three, yeah.

Interviewer: Okay. And did you aspire to—were you still thinking missions perhaps or some other kind of ministry?

Good: I was pretty open. I wasn't necessarily thinking missions. I was hoping that given the time frame of three years to complete a master's that I would have enough time to figure out what's next.

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Interviewer: [Laughs.] It sounds like something a lot of people have thought over the years.

Good: Yeah. [Laughs.]

Interviewer: Okay. How were those years for you, the three years at EMS?

Good: They were pretty good. I think it was a good place for me to be to kind of heal from past experiences of the last, you know, five years previous to that.

It was a struggle because I still was in the closet. EMS was not a safe place for me to come out. There was a particular professor, Mark Thiessen Nation, who, when he talked about difficult issues the church is dealing with, he always talked about homosexuality. And the way he talked about it, he had a little bit too much energy behind it for me to think that what he was saying was something I should believe in. And then, of course, those of us who are dealing with sexuality, we usually find each other. And I had a friend who was also dealing with the fact that she was a lesbian, but she was married to a man and had three children.

And so we kind of journeyed through seminary together. And so she was a very safe person for me to talk to, to process with. And I think it was in my senior year and I finally decided that I needed to embrace, open myself up to embrace the fact that this is who God made me to be, and I don't know what that means for me, but I need to be open to wherever that might lead me.

Interviewer: And that would have been processing pretty much on your own and then with this one woman friend, right?

Good: Yeah.

Interviewer: I mean, it doesn't sound like you were studying queer theology in your seminary classes or—

Good: No.

Interviewer: Uh-huh, yeah.

Good: No, that was not... Those sorts of classes were not provided for us at all at that point. Ervin was still the dean there, and Ervin had crafted a statement that said that the seminary stands with the confession of faith, all of the faculty are on board with that, which I don't think was absolutely true.

I think in retrospect I'm very sure there would have been a handful of professors that I could have come out to and it would have been fine. I just wasn't ready. I just wasn't ready to do that. And I was single, and so there

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was no partner in the picture, so it made it easier and more convenient to just stay in the closet.

Interviewer: Do you remember thinking in those terms about being in the closet? I mean, that language, I think, was kind of in our culture at that point.

Good: Mm-hmm, yeah.

Interviewer: Kind of keeping your identity private and...

Good: Mm-hmm.

Interviewer: Uh-huh, yeah. You thought of it in that way?

Good: Yes, I did.

Interviewer: I'm sure there was a practical dimension to that, too, if, by the end of this three years you were going to be seeking some kind of ministry position—

Good: Yes.

Interviewer: —to be private about your sexual orientation you probably were figuring would be helpful as opposed to letting people know your orientation, right?

Good: Yeah, yeah. And I wasn't partnered, so I didn't know what the future held, if I would ever find someone again or yeah, I just didn't know. Yeah. For a long time I tried to convince myself that I was bi, and if I'm bi then, you know, I was still hopeful that maybe I could fall in love with a man. But that didn't materialize, either, during seminary years.

Interviewer: I guess there probably were not any openly gay male students at EMS at that time.

Good: No. No, there weren't. My friend that I referred to, one day in class, it was a Mark Thiessen Nation class, and she got so frustrated, so she actually came out in class. But it was interesting because a lot of the students didn't get it, they were just so naïve to what she was saying.

Interviewer: Okay. [*Laughs.*]

Good: And then she ended up talking with Mark Thiessen Nation, and they agreed that for one of her presentations in class she could tell her story. So then in a different class she literally told her story and then came out very, in a very explicit way she, you know, revealed her sexual identity.

Interviewer: And you were there for that?

Good: Yes, I was.

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Interviewer: That must have been one of your more memorable class periods.

Good: It was. *[Laughs.]* Yeah, it was.

Interviewer: What happened after you graduated? Were you looking for work then at that point?

Good: Yeah, I was. I was interviewing at three, with three different congregations in three different cities. I felt like I was open and willing to move to any of those locations, but in the end what I discovered is it all felt really lonely to me to be single and a solo pastor and moving to a new area. So in the meantime I had picked up some temporary work at the university, at EMU, and when I came back from my final interview the provost asked me how the interview went. And I said, well, the interview went fine, but I'm not feeling drawn to go to that church and be their pastor.

So she asked me to be her assistant, assistant to the provost to EMU. So I ended up taking that position. And my immediate task was to plan graduation. And I was three or four months behind because the assistant to the provost had left earlier in the year, and so the position had been vacant for several months before I stepped in. So I ended up contacting the person who had left that position, and that person was Dawn Kreider, who is now my partner.

Interviewer: Oh, okay.

Good: So that's how we got to know each other. *[Laughs.]*

Interviewer: I see. Was she still living in the area or had she—

Good: No.

Interviewer: —she had moved away?

Good: She had left EMU. She was tired of living in the closet. She moved to Denver, Colorado to work at the University of Denver.

The University of Denver has had partner benefits since the mid '90s, and she was thrilled to find a place where she could live openly as a gay person and...yeah. So then I contacted her with questions about the job, and then we got to know each other, and it became personal, and we realized we wanted to be together, and that was ten years ago.

Interviewer: Oh, okay. That's so interesting. So let's see, if you graduated from EMS in about 2006 or so, is that about right?

Good: Yeah, that's right.

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Interviewer: Okay. And so that...you then fairly immediately met her and the relationship blossomed and so forth, but at a distance, right?

Good: Yes.

Interviewer: She's in Denver, you're in Harrisonburg. By the way, I have to tell you one of the people we know in common is my aunt has taught for a long time at EMU and I'm sure you knew her.

She's retired now, but her name is Barbara Fast. Barb Fast in the art department is my—

Good: Yeah, uh-huh.

Interviewer: —my aunt. Her husband John is a music professor there. And they're both retired now.

Good: Okay, yeah.

Interviewer: But you probably had some dealings with faculty, you know, and so—

Good: Yes, yeah, Mm-hmm, and—

Interviewer: So I get to Harrisonburg once in a while because of my family there.

Good: Oh, okay. Uh-huh, yeah. Dawn would know them better since Dawn worked at EMU for 15 years.

Interviewer: Oh, I see.

Good: I was not even there a full year. I realized I didn't want to stay, and so I—

Interviewer: Okay. Did you...you left the job then and went to Denver? Is that what happened?

Good: Yeah, I did. Yeah.

Interviewer: So was there then more of a—I don't know if the appropriate word is coming out in your life at that point to family, or to other friends, or to yourself, or how did that shake out?

Good: Yeah. Now, you know, having someone made it feel like it was worth—that I was ready and I really wanted to come out, because I was so happy and I wanted to share my joy with people. I was still very reluctant to come out to my family, but I eventually did over... I told my sister before I moved, but I didn't tell any of the rest of the family before I moved. And then eventually told them.

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And now I have little connection with my family. I mean, I have two brothers that I don't have any communication with and I have a sister that I talk to every now and again. And I talk to my mom about once a week out of respect for her being my mom.

Interviewer: But in other words your immediate family of origin did not accept or support that in you, is that right?

Good: Yeah. Mm-hmm.

Interviewer: Okay, so there was some pretty direct communication that was sort of rejecting?

Good: Yes.

Interviewer: Of that identity that you told them about?

Good: Mm-hmm. Yeah. Yeah, there was a family meeting and my brothers told me that I was no longer invited to family functions.

Interviewer: Oh.

Good: Yeah. It's pretty clear that the theology-philosophy behind that is the tough love that Focus on the Family teaches.

Interviewer: Oh, I see.

Good: The cutoff, the—and it reminds us a lot of the shunning of the Amish in the old order Mennonite tradition.

Interviewer: Was Dawn, did she have any similar family dynamics or not at all?

Good: Yeah. She has no contact with her parents. They don't even want phone calls or birthday cards or anything.

Interviewer: Wow.

Good: But we do have—she's really close with her sister, and she has a relationship with her brother, but it's not one that they keep in touch with very frequently.

Interviewer: It sounds like you have that in common, though, to some extent, navigating really pretty painful family rejection, or at least lack of support, at the least, but probably deeper than that.

Good: Yes. Right.

Interviewer: Wow. I'm sorry to hear that. That must have been difficult, then, and probably still feels difficult years later.

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Good: Yeah.

Interviewer: Ten years later.

Good: I mean, it has its moments. You kind of get used to it after a while. But there are those moments when there's that longing and, you know, you wish for deeper connection with family.

Interviewer: Right. Yeah, and I'm sure you find ways to compensate with friends and other people that you maybe adopt as family, right?

Good: Mm-hmm, right. Yeah, we—

Interviewer: That must be how it works.

Good: Yeah. Now we get to choose our family. *[Laughs.]*

Interviewer: Yeah, okay, okay. So what did you do vocationally when you got out to Denver then? That would have been in like 2004 or something like that, or 2005?

Good: I came in Two Thousand—so I graduated from seminary in 2006 and I moved to Denver in 2007, the summer of '07.

Interviewer: Okay.

Good: Yeah. So I've been here ten years. Yeah. So I struggled to find meaningful employment. So do you want a list of everything I've done? *[Laughs.]*

Interviewer: *[Laughs.]* Okay. A variety of things.

Good: Okay, the first job was driving a city bus. And then I worked for a motorcycle, scooter, watercraft company selling motorcycles, scooters and watercraft, so that was sales.

I delivered—another job was delivering pizza boxes for a printing company. I also did my CPE here, Clinical Pastoral Education, so I did that.

Interviewer: Was that through University of Denver or some other school there?

Good: It was St. Anthony's Hospital. It was a Level 1 trauma center, and that's where I did that. I just did one unit. That was three or four months long. Then I worked for Everence for a year. But the office was in Fort Collins, and I lived in Denver, so after a bit the commute was just too brutal. It was an hour and a half to get there and about two hours to come home.

Interviewer: Yeah, that's too long.

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Good: Yeah.

Interviewer: I'm going to excuse myself. I've got a growling dog here that I'm going to let outside. Hang on.

Good: Okay, sure.

Interviewer: It's just going to take me a minute or so and I'll be right back. [*Dog sounds.*] Okay. Were you part of the First Mennonite Church at Denver in those years?

Good: Yes. Yeah, we started attending First Mennonite pretty much right away. First Mennonite did not have a welcoming statement, so it took us a while to figure out if it was a safe place. The pastor at the time was Vern Rempel, and he thought it was better to talk to people about things that you differ in rather than making statements, and so he was opposed to having a welcoming statement.

And so he did not lead the church through that process of welcoming. And I think they really missed out on knowing and understanding what it means to be true allies. And when you don't have a welcoming statement the burden of proof is on us to figure it out. And even after I was pastor there I had people make comments like oh, we don't need a welcoming statement, we have you. And they didn't realize how hurtful that is. And I didn't want to bear that burden because creating a welcoming statement is a burden the church should bear, not the LGBT community.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Good: I tried on a number of occasions to help them understand the importance of a welcoming statement, and I know some people wanted it to happen, and there were those who resisted it. Yeah, they still don't have one at this moment, but I think they're working on one.

Interviewer: Okay. So that's interesting that even though—we haven't really gotten to the point in the story yet where you became their pastor, but once you became their pastor that wasn't something that just fell into place, it sounds like. That was—

Good: Right.

Interviewer: —still somehow a struggle. Okay.

Good: Yeah, mm-hmm.

Interviewer: So they weren't part of—or maybe they were. Were they part of the Supportive Congregations Network?

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Good: No.

Interviewer: They weren't?

Good: No. A church actually can't be part of that until they have a welcoming statement that sort of passes the test that Brethren Mennonite Council has prescribed.

Interviewer: Yeah, okay. I don't think I've been to the First Mennonite Church of Denver. Is that a sizable congregation? When you were there, like when you came, let's say, back to this ten years ago when the two of you were starting to go, would it be 100 or 150 people on a Sunday morning?

Good: Average attendance was 230 ten years ago.

Interviewer: Okay.

Good: But it had really declined, to the point when I left it had really declined.

Interviewer: I see.

Good: Average attendance had dropped below 150 when I was leaving. And a lot of that had to do with being in pastoral transition for two and a half years.

Interviewer: Yeah. So how did you go from doing these various kinds of vocational things, and getting the CPE training, and being somebody who was attending with Dawn at the First Mennonite Church of Denver to actually being called into ministry? What was that process?

Good: I want to start by saying that when Dawn and I got together I really thought that that was sort of the nail in the coffin for my chances of ever being in ministry. I sort of made the assumption that Mennonite Church USA would never welcome me as a pastor. And so I was...yeah, it wasn't something that I was still clinging to. But then First Mennonite here in Denver started talking about hiring—it would have been a third pastor position. And they were describing the job description, they were describing the kind of person they wanted to hire, and it really felt like they were talking about me and describing me.

And one Sunday we went home after a congregational meeting and I said to Dawn it sounds like they're talking about me, I have to apply. And so it was in the context of local church that I was a part of that I felt that call being reignited again. And I had no idea what the church would do with it, but I felt like I just had to try and see what would happen.

Interviewer: And were you successful then with that application, or getting into the hopper for that?

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Good: Yes, yeah. Yeah. The church did—I mean, I know they interviewed people from across the country, and it wasn't like they, you know, saw my application and just said oh, let's just hire her.

But I know they did a thorough search. Even inviting people to apply. But in the end the search committee ended up agreeing to invite me to be their candidate.

Interviewer: What was the position title for that particular form of ministry?

Good: Pastor of Nurture and Fellowship.

Interviewer: Okay. Did that have some responsibilities for things like Christian education?

Good: No. It wasn't Christian education. It was mostly pastoral care, doing a lot of—spending a lot of time with the older adult population, looking at end of life issues, doing grief workshops I did. And then also paying attention to community life.

So small groups, fellowship events, annual camp retreat, and preaching on occasion.

Interviewer: And this was a new third position. They already had two pastors.

Good: Yes. They had had someone in this position earlier, but they—and then they hired a children and youth faith formation pastor, and, I mean, if you want to get technical, that was the third position. But then in the meantime the person that had my position left. And they did change the job description a bit and gave it a different title, so technically I was the first person to be pastor of nurture and fellowship. But it wasn't completely a new position, it was just that someone had left.

Interviewer: Okay. So were the issues of—was the issue of credentials going to come up then again with this kind of position, and were you thinking about that? Because you weren't credentialed.

Good: Right. I think initially I didn't really care about credentials, I just wanted the job. And the church...I think they waited a year before they even requested my credentials, and so I was in the position for a year doing what I was doing and then they decided to ask for my licensing. And that's what took Mountain States Conference into a big process of discernment, trying to figure out if they were going to be willing to license me or not.

Interviewer: So time-wise, do you remember which year you took this position before all the whole licensing question came up?

Good: Yeah, I took it in August of 2012 was my start.

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Interviewer: Okay. You must have been pretty happy to have a job and a job in ministry.

Good: Yeah. Yeah, I was. I was thrilled.

Interviewer: Okay.

Good: Sort of a lifelong dream that I thought would never happen.

Interviewer: Yeah. So the way things work is Mountain States as the regional conference would be the body that would license you, right?

Good: Yes.

Interviewer: It wouldn't be a situation where First Mennonite of Denver would license you. Is that correct?

Good: Correct.

Interviewer: It needed to come from the regional body.

Good: Yes.

Interviewer: Okay. There's some published things about that because some of that's been reported in media and so forth, so I have access to those. I guess it would be helpful to know did that feel already, from that point on, when the conference was asked to credential you and you were—I guess you weren't married, or marriage wasn't legal. Had you had some kind of a commitment ceremony or something like that by that point?

Good: Yeah, we did. We had had a church ceremony in 2008, and then two years after that we signed domestic partnership, which we could do in Denver City, in Denver County, and then...yeah, then everything else we could do legally happened after I was in the job.

Yeah, 2013 is when we did civil unions because that's all that the state of Colorado would allow us to do. And then later that same year, when we found out that the government was going to honor marriage no matter where it took place when you filed your taxes, we decided to get legally married in Santa Fe, New Mexico.

Interviewer: Oh, I see. So what year was that, the New Mexico?

Good: That was still 2013.

Interviewer: In 2013, yeah.

Good: Yeah. So civil unions was May of that year and then our legal marriage was November of the same year.

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Interviewer: Okay, yeah. Because by that time marriage was recognized in New Mexico, but not in Colorado. Was that what the dynamic was at that particular time?

Good: Yes, uh-huh. And in fact New Mexico it was by county. It wasn't even the whole state. But there were certain counties that were recognizing legal marriages.

Interviewer: Yeah. And that wasn't ever revoked, right? So once you got married in Santa Fe, New Mexico, in 2013, that's been continuous since, right?

Good: Yes.

Interviewer: Okay, so you have had four years or something like that, four plus years of that—

Good: Yes, of legally married.

Interviewer: —with steps leading up to it over a bunch of years, it sounds like.

Good: Uh-huh. Yep, yeah.

Interviewer: Ooh, complicated. [*Laughs.*]

Good: Right.

Interviewer: Of those various points along the way, even back to the church ceremony in 2008, was that in Denver?

Good: Yes. It was at First Mennonite in Denver.

Interviewer: Oh, okay.

Good: Yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Good: Yeah, I like to say that as a gay couple we don't have many perks in life except to declare our love for each other on numerous occasions. [*Laughs.*]

Interviewer: [*Laughs.*] Okay. Sounds like all of these were kind of joyous, or very joyous.

Good: Yes. Mm-hmm, yeah. Oh, we get to do it again—oh, and again. [*Laughs.*]

Interviewer: [*Laughs.*] Did you feel fully accepted as a—now you've been using the term gay. Did you also use the term lesbian or queer?

Theda Good

Good: Yes. I use them all.

Interviewer: You use them all, okay.

Good: Yeah. It depends who—yeah, sometimes it depends who my audience is. I actually think I—I actually prefer queer to gay, but yeah, it's...I realize that, I don't know, for whatever reason, I used gay today.

Interviewer: I'm actually trying to be careful about asking that question of everybody I interview. And queer comes up a lot as people's favorite term. I mean, that's definitely been very interesting to me that that is definitely a part of the language that's being very, very highly embraced these days.

Good: Yeah.

Interviewer: Not by every single person I've interviewed, but far and away that is what people wish to self-identify, or at least one of the words that they would choose. So from the time, from 2008 when the two of you had your church ceremony there at First Mennonite through when you were hired was being queer something that was a pretty comfortable—and you were accepted within the church? Or did you feel like you were constantly having to navigate that and that people were critical or anything like that? Was that part of your experience?

Good: No, we didn't receive any criticism or negative...any outright negative pressure from anyone because of our relationship. People still don't realize that we—we still didn't necessarily feel comfortable sitting in church with our arms around each other like other couples do. We still navigated that, thinking like what is appropriate here, what isn't, are we free to do this or not. So yeah, I mean, we... For the most part people were very affirming and accepting of us. And we...they had—there had been other—there had been a gay man in the church earlier, you know, a number of years ago, and so we weren't necessarily the first queer people that the church knew.

Interviewer: So the man had been openly gay earlier?

Good: At least his small group knew he was gay. I think everyone did know, but I'm not sure. He had also been married to a woman who passed away, so yeah. But that was still part of that church...a lot of people knew, yeah.

Interviewer: Well, that seems like that's a good position to be in, where, by 2013 or, let's see if I've got my timeline right here, by—

Good: I was hired in '12.

Interviewer: —by 2012 you become Pastor of Nurture and Fellowship, and, you know, obviously were...had been open and out for years, and people were accepting of that at the congregational level.

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Good: Yeah.

Interviewer: And then at the Mountain States Conference level did you start to deal with people putting up roadblocks about the credentialing there or was that also relatively smooth to go through the credentialing to get that license?

Good: No, that was not smooth. Yeah, that's where we sort of hit some rough waters. The conference decided to do a listening process, and they had four different locations, and each church was allowed to send, I forget, I think it was two or three representatives from their church to these listening locations. And you were—the churches were assigned which location they were to be part of, and you had to submit the names of who was going to represent the church there. And I guess I made the assumption that I would be able to go to all four of them.

And then I was told that no, I'm not welcome to go to them, but if I wanted to go and represent my church at one of them I could. And I just, I thought that was ludicrous that they were ask—they were suggesting that I represent my church when, in reality, I represented the issue being talked about. And I was hoping for a more open and authentic sort of conversation about this where people would talk with me, not about me.

And so I was really disappointed with how that process was designed and carried out. The ministerial council is the group that had designed the process, and I had one of the persons from the ministerial committee call me and plead with me to come to that one meeting that I was invited to, and I refused. I just said I am not coming to one unless I'm going to all of them.

And he tried to persuade me and talk me into it, and I just said no, I'm just not doing it. I stuck to my principles on that one.

Interviewer: Well, I'm sure you realized there they would be speaking about you and not to you, right? I mean, that was a big distinction for you.

Good: Yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah. Was it quite an elapse of time from those regional four meetings throughout the conference until a decision was made about to grant you the credential?

Good: Yeah, there were months that went by. I'm losing track of that timeline of how long it took from when the church requested my licensing until they had those conversations until I was licensed. I'm not remembering that timeline. I do remember I was licensed on February 2<sup>nd</sup> of 2014.

Interviewer: And did that take place in the Denver congregation at First Mennonite?

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Good: Yes.

Interviewer: Had that been decided by conference ministerial staff people in Mountain States or had there been some sort of vote at all these listening sessions, or how did they come to a decision that they were going to grant you this credential?

Good: The ministerial council made a recommendation to the leadership board and the leadership board affirmed the recommendation.

Interviewer: Okay.

Good: So the delegates and those who went to the listening sessions, they did not get a chance to vote. It was not designed or set up to vote on.

Interviewer: Okay.

Good: And that's where a lot of the conservative churches were really disappointed because they thought it should—they thought it was a big enough decision that it should have been taken to the delegate session of our annual meeting, and it wasn't.

Interviewer: Uh-huh, okay. It was handled in a different way, and so that caused some consternation among critics.

Good: Yes. So far there's been three churches that have left the conference.

Interviewer: Okay. Over a several year period?

Good: Yes.

Interviewer: And where they used this as their rationale? This and probably some other things as their rationale for leaving the Rocky Mountain States Conference, or Mountain States Conference?

Good: Yeah. One church had always been on the fringes, so this was kind of like the final straw.

Interviewer: Yeah. Did you get personal communications from people from throughout the conference during this time like we're with you, or sort of hateful things or...? I mean, did you go to the mailbox and...or open your email and never know what there was going to be during that time?

Good: Yeah, I got mostly affirmation. I mean, the amount of feedback I got was overwhelming support. I got very little direct negative feedback. Yeah, it was... I think conference got most of that negative feedback directly to them because they were making the decision. And it felt, in many ways I

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appreciate how that...how they handled that, in that they took the brunt for the decision.

And it wasn't even so much First Mennonite being the brunt of the decision, it was the conference that got most of that criticism.

Interviewer: So in some ways the ins and outs of First Mennonite Denver could sort of click along without it being super disruptive to what was happening there in the congregation.

Good: Yes.

Interviewer: Is that correct?

Good: Yeah, absolutely.

Interviewer: Interesting, okay.

Good: And I think that was an advantage even for me as a pastor to be in Denver. I wasn't in some sort of Mennonite mecca. And so I could really focus on my work and just keep going about my weekly duties, and my daily life wasn't really inhibited or hindered because of the process.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah. Well, that's good.

Good: Yeah, mm-hmm. It was good and it was kind of this affirmation and reminder that no one can keep me from being a minister.

Interviewer: Yeah. Did you ever wonder if that license would come through or not or did you have some sort of sense of confidence through the whole process that you would get that credential?

Good: I wasn't sure. I was...I guess I was hoping that there was enough of people involved in the decision process that I—I guess I did have some level of confidence. What I thought might happen is that they would create a separate category for me and sort of claim that, you know, they're going to hold Theda's credentials in the shoebox under the bed rather than it just being part of the mainstream credentialing process.

And so when they came through and said that they would license me, and there were no strings attached, I was really blown away because I just thought that they would try to come up with a way to appease the conservatives and create something that the conservatives would feel like they could not accept, you know, like oh, they don't have to accept Theda's credentials because it's over here on the side, it's kind of like a subcategory. So that part did surprise me. And it was—they were very specific that it was licensing towards ordination.

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Interviewer: Yeah. One of the things I found in media was the *Huffington Post* did a short story on that. It's not very in-depth, but they quoted a few people, including Joanna Harader from here in Lawrence, Kansas, with a very positive, you know.

And somebody, I can't remember who it was, that said this now is going to cause problems in the church, you know. So *Huffington Post* did a story. And it did say in there that Theda Good declined to be interviewed for this.

Good: Yeah. [Laughs.]

Interviewer: I don't know if you remember that. But it's interesting that there was national attention, because it was being billed as the first time in Mennonite Church USA that an openly LGBTQ person was being licensed toward ordination.

Good: Yeah, yeah. I turned down an interview with a journalist from *Time* magazine. I just, I felt like—I didn't feel like accepting those sorts of interviews would really help to move the conversation forward in a good way in MC USA. I think maybe there will be time for those sorts of things at another time, I don't know, but I just wasn't willing and ready to do it at that point.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Good: And part of it was I knew that it would be an embarrassment to my family if that ever happened.

Interviewer: Uh-huh, okay. Yeah, you have to juggle different, in a sense, pressures, right?

Good: Yeah, mm-hmm.

Interviewer: Those were kind of pressures coming at you that weren't probably all that welcome, even though this news was good news for you.

Good: Right.

Interviewer: So you continued on in your work at the church and then ordination came a couple of years later, right? That was in 2016?

Good: Yeah. Yeah, December of 2016, a year ago.

Interviewer: And I had a chance to, you know, *The Mennonite* covered that and so forth, so I've had a chance to read that. I remember you saying in the interview in *The Mennonite* that while there was this sort of sense that this was a first and so forth that you viewed yourself as an ordinary person and

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appreciated the support of your congregation, but that you weren't sort of seeking limelight or things like that.

So there's some humility that comes out in the statement. That must have been a lot to kind of figure out what public statements to make when people are kind of honing in on what you think.

Good: Yes.

Interviewer: And then going to publish it in the paper.

Good: Yeah.

Interviewer: Was there media attention in Denver, like *The Denver Post* or...?

Good: No. I think...the coverage of my ordination was far less than the coverage of my licensing.

Interviewer: I see, okay. Why do you think that was?

Good: I don't really know. You know what? It might be that in general society people don't really get the difference between licensing and ordination, and so a ministerial credential for them might just be, you know, one might be the same as the other.

And I know like some people do get that confused, and when they... There were some times, I think, where people, when things were published that said I was ordained when really it was just a license. I think they just don't get our system.

Interviewer: How did you feel about that? Like for you was...? Obviously getting the credential was pretty important, that initial license in 2014, so that you could continue your work at the church, so that's an extremely practical thing that you kind of needed, so I'm sure you valued it. Did you value ordination then two years later in a really quite different way? Or for you were these distinctions not that big of a deal?

Good: I really did value ordination. For me it was the final act of some justice in an unjust system.

I mean, for years and years women weren't able to get ordained. Now women can get ordained. And so for years and years—I mean, there's been really lovely, wonderful pastors that have had their credentials taken from them when they came out as queer. I hope you get to interview some of them.

Interviewer: Yeah, I'm thinking about one I did interview a year ago, and that's Paula Northwood up in Minnesota. I don't know if you ever knew her.

Theda Good

Good: I didn't, no.

Interviewer: She had her credentials taken away in the mid 1990s, and that was before the merger, so she was part of General Conference.

Good: Okay.

Interviewer: You know, she was originally from Ohio. But yeah, she had her credentials taken away in like '96. She's now a minister in a Congregational church in downtown Minneapolis, so she's thriving. She's absolutely thriving. But it's actually quite a painful story.

Good: Yeah, mm-hmm.

Interviewer: Well, it is so interesting that just in the last I don't know what, year and a half or so suddenly there are LGBTQ people pastoring Mennonite churches, and you won't be famous for long because there are other people that can get talked about, and that must feel really great.

Good: I've been eager for company. [*Laughs.*]

Interviewer: [*Laughs.*] Okay.

Good: Yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah, okay. Now your intention is to stay in a pastoral position somewhere? You're candidating to be a pastor somewhere?

Good: Mm-hmm. Yeah, I just, I candidated this past Sunday at First Mennonite in Bluffton, Ohio.

Interviewer: Oh, really? Okay.

Good: And I'm waiting to see how the church votes this coming Sunday, so—

Interviewer: Wow, okay.

Good: You're catching in my week of advent. [*Laughs.*] Waiting with expectation.

Interviewer: Yeah. Well, best wishes with that. That would be quite exciting. I'm sure you'd love to make that move and to go to that congregation and be in a college town. A lot of wonderful folks at Bluffton.

Good: Yeah.

Interviewer: Oh, that's really great. Well, very exciting, yeah. I'll watch for news of what happens with that.

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Good: Okay.

Interviewer: That's neat to know. Some of the questions on my form that I wanted to ask you about more specifically... Number four I don't think we've talked about too much, your connections with Brethren Mennonite Council and Pink Menno or maybe Brethren Mennonite Council. You brought up Carol Wise. My sense is they've been extremely supportive of you. Have you also been quite active with them in various ways?

Good: Yeah. I'm on the board of Brethren Mennonite Council and I'm also part of the Inclusive Pastors leadership team.

Interviewer: Okay. I was going to ask that. Okay. Is your intention that you will continue to be involved in that organization as things sort of unfold going forward? You're pretty committed?

Good: Yeah, I am. I'm very—I feel very committed to both of them. You know, it's like being the poster person of this issue was never something I would have wanted to sign up for, but it's like it found me, and now I really feel called to be involved. And one of the ways of making sense of moving from Colorado to Ohio is knowing that even in conservative communities there's LGBTQ folks that are living in the closet even in conservative environments, and so hoping to bring a lot of light and love to those people as well.

Interviewer: Yeah. Have you had much contact with Pink Menno? That tends to be somewhat younger folks, but not exclusively, I know.

Good: It's not a group that I keep in regular touch with. Joanna does more of that. But when Pink Menno was starting, Luke Miller—not Luke. What is his name? Luke—

Interviewer: Luke Yoder?

Good: Luke Yoder.

Interviewer: Luke Yoder, mm-hmm.

Good: Yeah. He was part of First Mennonite in Denver when he and his sister Jen had come up with this idea of Pink Menno, and Luke has been an incredible ally.

But he has really backed off from leadership and has given the leadership over, and wants to see the younger generation take over. It has a—Pink Menno has a much more loose structure, if any structure at all, and so it's not a formal organization, in many ways, and the leadership seems to change a lot. And it usually, they're usually organizing around convention.

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And in between they might have some points of connection throughout the years, but it's not as intentional as—like Inclusive Mennonite Pastors leadership team, we meet essentially once a month by Google Hangout, so we're very intentional about meeting, and staying in touch with one another, and trying to figure out what we should be working on next.

Interviewer: Uh-huh, okay. I didn't realize you met that often.

Good: Yeah.

Interviewer: Is that a video conferencing thing with Google?

Good: Yes, it is.

Interviewer: Okay. Yeah, that's good to know. I'm going to ask you the question number seven on my sheet, which is how has your theology changed over time as a result—and that assumes it has changed. And some people have told me that their theology has always been pretty—*[laughs]*—pretty consistent over time. So, you know, I don't know what comes to your mind when you see that, but...

Good: Yeah, I would say that for me there was—because of my other crises in my 30s there was a significant shift to mysticism and becoming much more comfortable with less certainty about belief, about God, about doctrine.

I still believe in the centrality of following the life and teachings of Jesus.

Interviewer: But you're saying that all dates, or much of that dates to your 30s, not necessarily your coming out or connected with being such a publicly visible person in the Mennonite church through press stories and all—I mean, that predates that.

Good: Yeah, it does. But it's not like my struggle with sexuality just began when I became a minister, either, so it...yeah.

Interviewer: Okay, yeah. All right. I have a question number eight, but before I ask that, that has to do with MC USA and what's happening with them these days. Just a couple things. I am looking, as part of this research, at the whole set of issues around the Ministerial Leadership Information form, the MLI that pastors use.

But Sam Voth Schrag told me he thought you didn't ever really come to ministry through using the MLI. Is that correct?

Good: Actually, I did.

Interviewer: Oh, you did?

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Good: I was actually able to use it both times.

Interviewer: Oh, okay.

Good: The first time I used it I wasn't flagged because they weren't flagging queer people yet. I think the MLI became an issue when I was licensed. And before that the broader church didn't know that Denver Mennonite was hiring a queer pastor.

Interviewer: Yeah, right. Okay, so when you used the MLI to get that position back in 2012 or whenever it was.

Good: Twelve, uh-huh.

Interviewer: So you did use that. And I know that that form doesn't ask about sexual identity. There's no question about that there.

Good: Right.

Interviewer: And so you were able to use it.

Good: Yeah.

Interviewer: And then you said you used it both times. You mean you use that now when you've been candidating and going to Bluffton?

Good: Yeah.

Interviewer: Uh-huh, okay.

Good: Yeah, so I'm not exact—Sam would probably have a—is Sam still part of the board, do you know?

Interviewer: He went off the board in 2017, but he's still—so he's no longer on the executive board right now, but he is involved in some other things, like I think he is chair of the resolutions committee for the denomination, so he still has some significant leadership things. I think he's also on the search committee to find a replacement for Ervin, that sort of thing. But he's not on the executive board anymore. His term ended.

Good: Okay, yeah. So I don't—he might know this better than I do, but at some point someone, I think as executive staff, made a decision that queer folks can now use the MLI system, but conference ministers need to request queer MLIs as opposed to us just being part of the regular pool.

Interviewer: That's correct, yeah.

Good: Yeah. So that's how I was able to use the current MLI system in this most recent engagement with Bluffton.

Theda Good

Interviewer: Okay, so you're...you don't have to say on the MLI that you're queer because you're so well known, so—

Good: Right. They just know. *[Laughs.]*

Interviewer: So the conference, you're saying the conference ministers around whatever conference that Bluffton's in, they would have requested yours?

Good: Mm-hmm.

Interviewer: Because you think your MLI would have gone on a kind of smallish pile of queer candidates—

Good: Yeah.

Interviewer: —and then there's this other big pile of everybody else.

Good: Mm-hmm.

Interviewer: And because the people in Ohio were interested in potentially a queer candidate, then you got on—yours got out there, do you think that's how that...?

Good: Yes, mm-hmm.

Interviewer: So are you conjecturing that or did somebody at Bluffton on the search committee tell you that, that that's how that had worked?

Good: No, it's sort of known that—

Interviewer: It's known.

Good: Yeah, it's known. Our joke is that the queer MLIs are in Ervin's sock drawer, because we have to be at a separate place.

Interviewer: *[Laughs.]* Okay.

Good: *[Laughs.]* We have to put humor in this to stay sane through this stuff.

Interviewer: Okay. So there is a movement afoot by—I mean, you probably know this because you're part of the Inclusive Pastors leadership group—but Joanna Harader and some other people have been trying to be in communication with both conference pastors, but also in touch with Terry Shue and Nancy Kauffmann and people like that at the denominational level—

Good: Yes.

Interviewer: —really protesting this business of the two list system because it's not fair.

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Good: Right.

Interviewer: Because, I mean, even though it might have worked out for you in the Ohio situation with Bluffton, or let's hope it works out, other people it's difficult to kind of get their names out there if conference ministers have to ask, right?

Good: Right.

Interviewer: There's an unfairness about it.

Good: Yes.

Interviewer: So have you been in on some of those sort of discussions with the Inclusive Pastors of how to kind of push against this new policy?

Good: Yeah, we've talked about it a bit, but Joanna's part of—we kind of have a subgroup that's working with the Reconciling Minister.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah, and she—

Good: We call it...yeah. We call it the—

Interviewer: She's on that team.

Good: Yeah, we call it the Reconciling Ministers Project. And they are actually doing more work with that, and Lloyd Miller. I'm not part of that.

Interviewer: You're not part of that, okay. I'm pursuing that a little more with Joanna and with Lloyd because I think that's extremely interesting that we do have this two list system and that people are pushing pretty hard against that as fundamentally really not a fair system.

But that's interesting to me that you have been able to successfully candidate at least in two places, maybe even more that you didn't end up working, with the MLI not being a complete barrier and obstacle to your ministry, right?

Good: Right, yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah, that's really interesting. Okay, another—

Okay, so back to my list of questions. I wondered about that question number eight. I suppose that you probably were at the MC USA conferences in recent years, the Kansas City in 2015 and then down in Florida this last summer.

Good: Yes.

Theda Good

Interviewer: And I think I saw that you and some other people did a workshop or something this last—in Florida. Did you co-lead a workshop with some colleagues, too?

Good: Mm-hmm.

Interviewer: So you've been really involved at the conference level.

Good: Yeah.

Interviewer: How does that strike you in terms of what's happening in terms of justice for queer people in the church these days in this particular denomination?

Good: In many ways I kind of go back to—when Pink Menno started one of their tag lines was we already—we're not asking to be invited to the table, we're already at the table. And so for many years we, queer folks and allies, are functioning as if we do belong fully, and so we do participate when and where we can.

I think the denominational structure as it exists has a long way to go in being fully welcoming and fully including for queer folks. But I think when we get together there is so much joy, and so much laughter, and so much good energy around what it means to be queer, what it means to be Mennonite, what it means to claim our Anabaptist heritage that it's kind of a reminder that yes, we are the church. And in some ways we're not waiting to be invited in. But at the same time we still have this struggle that there is this structure that we have to work in and around that is still very exclusive and hurtful to us.

So the work is not yet done, and yet at the same time we find ways of being together in other places. I don't know if you've heard of—we had a meeting called Fierce, Fabulous and Sacred in Chicago a few years ago.

Interviewer: Yeah, I've heard about that from a bunch of people already. It keeps coming up.

Good: Yeah. It was fantastic. Yeah, it was fantastic. And so I envision a denomination that looks more like that someday. I think it's fascinating that we have started using the language of foundational documents—and I say we, and I mean actually like Ervin and the executive board—and they put the confession of faith in this list of documents as foundational. And I find it so ironic because this is not the first confession of faith, nor should it be the last.

And I guess I don't understand people's thinking when it comes to clinging to this one document, and it's already more than 20 years old, and it really should be updated. And people, I'm sure the conservatives would be very fearful of that process. And for those of us on the more

progressive side, I'm sure that the next document won't be progressive enough. *[Laughs.]*

But I would like to see a different structure in MC USA. And I would like to see, instead of a confession of faith, I would like to see it more simplified, doing something similar to Mennonite World Conference, although personally I don't agree with all of their statements. I think there's seven or eight.

I kind of like the simplicity of Palmer Becker, who says that Jesus is the center of our faith—what is it? Community is the center of our life and reconciliation is the center of our work. Like I like to keep it that simple.

Interviewer: Yeah, okay.

Good: I could buy into that.

Interviewer: Yeah. Have you ever thought about leaving the Mennonite church for some other denomination? I certainly have interviewed people who either were pushed out and kind of had to go, or have made that choice, or are in the middle of making that choice, so I wondered if that's come up in your thinking as well.

Good: Yes. In fact the last few months, since I left First Mennonite in Denver, I have actually looked at United Church of Christ. I've looked at their openings.

I just...I'm... I've been an associate in my last church and the church I'm moving into I will also be an associate, and in those roles I'm more primary pastoral care and administration versus the preaching pastor. I don't really long to be that person who has to plan worship and preaching every week. That's just not where I find deep gladness in my work. I find more deep gladness in pastoral care and more of big picture administrative tasks. So—and that being said, looking at other denominations, I didn't necessarily see a job description that I thought would be life-giving for me.

Interviewer: But it's interesting you thought about it enough to—

Good: Oh, yeah. Yeah, my next step was to actually meet with someone in the United Church of Christ, but I never got that far. I mean, this church with, this possibility of Bluffton was emerging, and mushrooming, and blooming, so yeah, I kind of stayed with it.

Interviewer: Okay. Yeah, those are—and that says something about maybe the pull on Mennonite and Anabaptist community and life for you, too.

Theda Good

Good: Yeah, yeah. I identify very much with sort of the core values of what it means to be a Mennonite.

Interviewer: Looking back on my sheet, yeah, you've already answered question number nine by giving me some names. And it sounds like maybe there would be a possibility of you to send me the email of your friend in Colorado who I didn't know.

Good: Yeah.

Interviewer: Number ten, you must have your own personal archive. *[Laughs.]*

Good: *[Laughs.]* Yes.

Interviewer: So just know that I'll be working on this study for certainly the next year. I'm on an academic sabbatical right now this semester. Where I teach is a place called Washburn University in Topeka, Kansas. And so I've been working on this quite a bit this fall. Starting in January I'll go back to teaching at my university and so I won't work on this in any really sustained way again probably until summer. But one of the things I'm getting ready to do in 2018 is I'm going to be the Menno Simons lecturer at Bethel College here in Kansas.

And that is something, it's a series where they invite people to come give a series of lectures on some theological or historical topic. And I'm planning to structure all three of my lectures around the idea of a denominational home for LGBTQ people in Mennonite contexts. So I'll probably do one lecture about people like you that have navigated staying in the Mennonite denomination with queer identities, another lecture on people that have moved out and gone either to United Church of Christ or somewhere else, Unitarian Universalist or wherever they've gone that is perhaps a more progressive denomination where they're openly welcome in more ways than they are in Mennonite contexts.

And then I'll probably do another lecture that really tries to dig into this issue about pastoral leadership and how the executive board in Mennonite Church USA and the staff, denominational staff, have kind of used this MLI process in ways that have been—well, I mean, it's obviously a really complicated story, but you can use that in a way that puts barriers in front of queer people or you can use it in a way where there aren't significant barriers with that MLI, and so I want to sort of explore that. So those are three ideas I'm kind of working with. Eventually I think I'll try to publish some of this as articles. But I don't have any real fast timeline to do that. This is my big project this year and next year and going forward. I have found it just so utterly interesting.

And one thing it does for me is get me in touch with a lot of really fascinating people across our denomination, but also I've been reaching

out to people in Canada, so there's a very sort of similar set of stories. And so far I've really enjoyed connecting with people in British Columbia and Winnipeg and in Ontario of various ages and genders. So my interest is not just exclusively what's been happening Mennonite Church USA, but more broadly these North American Mennonite and Anabaptists contexts.

So just to give you a little idea that I'm not trying to wrap this up quickly. I hope to kind of keep working on it. So if you would at some point run across something in your files or think it's something that I might like to see, either something you've written, some reflections or some letter that somebody has sent you that you think might have bearing on my project I'd be glad to receive that.

Good: Okay.

Interviewer: Sometimes people send me things and sometimes they don't, so just whatever. But even in the future. And your address is going to change, I think, but my address will not. I plan to be here with the same email for a while yet, so it should be easy to stay in touch, I think.

Good: Yeah. Well, I will keep this email address. I consider it my personal one.

Interviewer: Oh, okay. That's good to know.

Good: I will check with Brethren Mennonite Council, but they are working on an oral history project, and they just sent me four CDs of videotaped interview of me and my partner.

Interviewer: Oh, really? Okay.

Good: I need to ask them if it's okay, but I'm thinking it might be helpful to you to have them.

Interviewer: That would be wonderful.

Good: Or at least have access to them.

Interviewer: That would be wonderful, yes.

Good: Okay. I'll ask them permission for that.

Interviewer: Yeah, I knew about that project, and I know—I mean, they've been doing that for a little while, so even on their website a person can access sometimes short little pieces, and I've sort of dipped into that. But this sounds like a pretty extensive set of interviews that—

Good: Yeah, this would be unedited. [*Laughs.*]

Theda Good

Interviewer: Okay. [*Laughs.*] All right. Well, I'd love to have access if that's something you can send to me, if they give you permission. That would be really great. And I'm glad they're doing that work, too, because, I mean, that goes on beyond our denomination. There's so many Church of the Brethren people that are connected in that way as well, so yeah.

Good: Yeah, yeah.

Interviewer: Okay, great.

Good: I'm familiar with the queer pastors in Canada because we have a queer ministerium which is a Facebook group.

Interviewer: Oh, really?

Good: And the Mennonites in Canada started it and invited us from MC USA to be part of it.

Interviewer: Oh, how nice.

Good: Yeah, it's kind of fun.

Interviewer: That's really great.

Good: Yeah.

Interviewer: I mean, just—I always feel like people I interview here in the United States I'll probably meet at some point because of, you know, Mennonite Church USA conferences and things, and the Canadians that I've been connecting with I think oh, they're so far away, I don't know when I'll ever meet them. But they just seem really quite wonderful, too.

Good: Yeah, mm-hmm.

Interviewer: Yeah, well, that's great. Good to know about that. My last question on my sheet is just utterly open-ended, and the reason for that is I, you know, in many cases like this with you I'm interviewing you, but really didn't know you personally ahead of time, so perhaps haven't asked all the questions that you hoped I would, or there may be some other perspective that you want to lay out there yet, or get something out.

Good: Yeah. Well, the only thing that comes to mind at this point is thinking about how trans might fit into this story. But from what I—I'm not aware that there's been any trans person that has sought ministerial leadership and/or credentialing.

That being said, it doesn't mean that that hasn't happened and they just haven't identified themselves. But I don't know, it's just one thing. I think

what it means to welcome trans into the Mennonite church is something that we have a long way to grow in.

I really appreciate the work that Brethren Mennonite Council has done. They've created a Trans 101 training that can be accessed on their website. And another thing that Brethren Mennonite Council has done is created, oh, I'm not sure what they're calling it, a dictionary, but kind of a dictionary of queer language that is really, I think, really helpful. But I think a lot of churches don't know about it. A lot of them don't know what the resources are that are there.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewer: That's really fantastic. So I can see why, even though you never—you said to me earlier you never would have asked to be kind of a poster child for this, there have been some really pretty wonderful repercussions in terms of relationships with people.

Good: Uh-huh, yeah. There have been.

Interviewer: That's super. Okay. Okay, anything else?

Good: Not that I can think of.

Interviewer: Okay. Well, you know how to reach me, then, and I'll look forward to that email. And thank you also, when you sent the consent form you said it would be all right if I use your name in the study, so I'm going to assume that that is fine. And thank you for giving me that permission. I appreciate that.

Good: I appreciate the work you did on "Defanging the Beast." And I...so yeah, I read that and have really appreciated your work, so yeah.

Interviewer: Thank you very much. I'm glad I did that. It was actually that work that led me into this current project because after I wrote "Defanging the Beast" I had an opportunity to do a little more work about the topic of the women survivors who had been so courageous in calling Yoder out, and I realized while I was focusing more on them, on those women who had, many of them, been at seminary, for example, that quite a few of those women actually did not pursue going into church ministry or going into church leadership positions because it was such a hostile environment for women at that time, you know, in the '80s and '90s.

Good: Yeah.

Interviewer: And that just really made me angry to kind of realize that. But I also realized that probably many Mennonites just have no idea that—like they just assume that the reason we haven't had very many Mennonite women

pastors is just because, you know, women haven't wanted to do it or something, and it's not the case. I mean, women, like you told me earlier, these women in Lancaster County in the mid '90s were being actively denied opportunities.

And so when I sort of made the connection in my own mind of LGBTQ people also being systematically denied leadership, it's just like I can't not look into that, I have to look into that and then try to let people know this is really a justice problem just as much as the issue over women's leadership in the, you know, 1970s and 1980s. It's just a continuation of some of the same crap, really.

Good: Right. *[Laughs.]*

Interviewer: *[Laughs.]* And they're not unrelated.

Good: Right. Oh, no.

Interviewer: They're different stories, but they're linked. I think they're linked.

Good: Yeah.

Interviewer: I think the denomination can do much better than it has done.

Good: Yeah.

Interviewer: So that's my motivation. So if I hadn't done that Yoder project I'm not sure I would have ever come to this. You know, I might be busy doing something else.

But I'm really glad that I've had this—because I have found this to be a really pretty upbeat and life affirming project because so many of the people that I'm engaging with are at a point where it's actually quite optimistic and hopeful. So that has been really nice, compared to the Yoder research, where sexual abuse is a pretty dark topic, and—

Good: Yes, it is.

Interviewer: —that can wear a person down. Whereas I have not found this project to be that in any way. It's been in some ways the opposite. SO that's been kind of cool.

Good: Good. All right.

Interviewer: All right, well Theda, this has been a delight, and I wish you well with the Bluffton. I hope you hear some good news pretty soon, and you can make your—

Theda Good

Good: I hope so, too.

Interviewer: —make your plans. And best wishes to you with the transition, too.

Good: Thank you.

Interviewer: All right.

Good: And all the best to you in this work. Thank you for doing it.

Interviewer: Oh, you're so welcome. It's my pleasure. Okay.

Good: All right.

Interviewer: Bye-bye.

Good: Bye-bye.

*[End of recording.]*