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Title

Theda Good Oral History Interview and Transcript

Date

December 6, 2017

Extant

1 hour 34 minutes and 1 transcript

Abstract

In this oral history, Reverend Theda Good discusses her journey becoming ordained as a woman Mennonite minister, during which she met her partner, and worked in numerous pastoral positions. Regarding both womens' ordination and queer marriage, she discusses the gradual steps it has taken to achieve equality.

Biographical

Theda Good was born in Ephrata, Pennsylvania, into a conservative Mennonite community, a part of Lancaster Mennonite Conference. She attended Faith Mennonite High School. Theda's family and church community did not place any priority on higher education and so college was not an aspiration for her. However, after several friends began considering college, Theda began to think, why not give it a try? She attended Millersville University for one year. Several years later in 1994 she earned her bachelor's degree from Messiah College majoring in Behavioral Science with a concentration in family studies. At the age of 37, Theda entered seminary and earned a Master of Divinity degree from Eastern Mennonite Seminary.

After graduating from high school, Theda spent much of her 20s-30s working on her family's farm and trucking business. Being part of Lancaster Mennonite Conference, she had intermittent involvement with Eastern Mennonite Missions and lived in Italy. During her early missionary time, Theda heard Arbutus Sider preach in Philadelphia and realized that women could be in ministry. While she worked part-time on the pastoral staff at ACTS Covenant Fellowship, the leadership requested Theda's ministerial licensing from the Mennonite bishop board, which was led by Ervin Stutzman, and was denied along with two other women.

This rejection came during a hard period of her life. Theda was struggling with her sexuality and her young nephew passed away in an accident. In the midst of her depression and desperation that she was feeling at the time, Theda got married to a man in 2000. Shortly thereafter her father also passed away. Her marriage did not last long.

In 2003, Theda started seminary. She was still struggling with her sexuality at the time, but she knew that seminary was not a safe place to come out. Thankfully, she found a classmate who was also a lesbian and forged a much-needed supportive friendship.

After seminary she interviewed for ministry jobs but ultimately accepted the position of assistant to the provost at Eastern Mennonite University. One of her first tasks as assistant was to plan graduation, leading to a necessary contact with the previous assistant, Dawn Kreider, who would become Theda's partner.

In 2007, Theda moved to Denver to be with Dawn. Shortly after moving to Denver, she came out to her family and was met with rejection. She held many different jobs while in Denver. She completed a unit of Clinical Pastoral Education at St. Anthony's Hospital. Theda and Dawn also attended First Mennonite Church of Denver.

In August 2012, Theda began the position as Pastor of Nurture and Fellowship at First Mennonite Church. Pastoral care including visitation, grief counseling, end-of-life discussions, and small groups were the core of her ministry. Theda was in this position for about a year before the church asked for her credentials. Denver was part of the Mountain States Mennonite Conference and after a lengthy deliberation they granted licensure to Theda on February 2, 2014. This decision would cause theologically conservative churches to break away from the conference and the denomination. In December 2016, Theda was ordained in the Mennonite Church; she recalls seeing this as another step "towards justice in an unjust system."

In 2008, Theda and her partner Dawn held a commitment ceremony at First Mennonite Church in Denver. They signed a domestic partnership in 2010 and were legally married in Santa Fe, New Mexico in 2013.

Most recently, Theda works as the Pastor of Connections at First Mennonite Church in Bluffton, Ohio. She also is part of the Brethren Mennonite Council and the Inclusive Pastors leadership team.

Scope and Content

In this oral history, Reverend Theda Good discusses her journey gaining ordination as a woman in the Mennonite Church. When she was ordained in 2016, while open about her lesbian relationship, conservative churches left that conference. She describes meeting her partner, and working in numerous pastoral positions. Regarding both womens' ordination and queer marriage, she discusses the gradual steps it has taken to achieve equality.

This interview was conducted by Rachel Waltner Goossen, professor of history emerita at Washburn University in Topeka, Kansas, and author of *Women Against the Good War*:

Conscientious Objection and Gender on the American Home Front, 1941-1947 (University of North Carolina Press, 1997).

Access

Open to all researchers.

<https://lgbtqreligiousarchives.org/oral-histories/theda-good>

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Languages

Collection material is in English

Existence and Location of Originals

This tape was given to the Mennonite Church USA Archives by interviewer. Per a cooperative agreement, MC-USA transcribed the interview and agreed that the recording and transcript would be hosted on the LGBTQ-RAN website.

Cite as

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Tags

Mennonite Church USA

Ordination/clergy

Clergy Activist

Brethren-Mennonite Council for LGBT Interests

Good, Theda