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Title

Yvette Flunder Oral History Interview and Transcript

Date

February 28, 2011

Extant

1 hour 9 minutes interview (two files) and 1 transcript

Abstract

In this oral history, Yvette Flunder discusses reconciling her same gender attraction with the fundamentalist pentecostal religion she was raised in. She discusses starting City of Refuge with the goal of centering same gender attracted people, and the denominations they have aligned with.

Biographical

Rev. Dr. Yvette Flunder is founder and Senior Pastor of the City of Refuge UCC and Presiding Bishop of The Fellowship, a multi-denominational fellowship of 56 primarily African American Christian churches. She was born and raised in San Francisco, California in a middle-class family that was heavily active in the Church of God in Christ denomination. Raised a devout Pentecostal, Yvette even attended the Church of God in Christ's Saints Academy in Lexington, Mississippi for high school. She recounts an insulated religious life with all activities and ministries focused in the Church of God in Christ where she was a teenage evangelist missionary. As a young adult, she returned to San Francisco where she graduated from the College of San Mateo and began a career in social justice ministry that continues in her ministerial work today.

She experienced a self-imposed exile from the Church of God in Christ as she was conscious that being same gender loving and an active member of her denomination would cause conflict. During this sabbatical, she continued working towards social justice with careers providing services for the elderly and those living with HIV/AIDS. Theologically, she found herself opening to new theologies as she knew that she was in right relationship with God just not the Church of

God in Christ. This led her to say yes when Bishop Walter Hawkins of Love Center Ministries asked her to come and preach for them and she joined their church and remained a member for almost ten years. Yvette was later ordained by the Bishop Walter Hawkins and went on to served as Associate Pastor and administrator for the Oakland-based Love Center Church. In 1984, she began performing and recording with "Walter Hawkins and the Family" and the Love Center Choir. She remained with Love Center until 1991 when she felt called to plant a church which became City of Refuge.

This church saw itself as uniting a gospel ministry with a social ministry, and it created an environment that celebrated same gender loving people. Seeking to respond to the needs of the AIDS epidemic, the church also opened Ark of Refuge, Inc., a non-profit agency that provides housing, direct services, education, and training for persons affected with HIV/AIDS in the San Francisco Bay area, throughout the United States, and in three countries in Africa. City of Refuge has coined themselves as an African American "Metho-Bapti-costal" church, and they are aligned with United Church of Christ. In addition to this alignment, they have also planted several City of Refuge churches across the globe. As more churches wanted to align with them they started The Fellowship in 1999. Bishop Flunder was consecrated Presiding Bishop of The Fellowship in 2003.

Bishop Flunder is also an ordained Minister of the United Church of Christ and a graduate of the Ministry Studies and Master of Arts programs at the Pacific School of Religion, Berkeley, California. She received a Doctor of Ministry degree from San Francisco Theological Seminary in San Anselmo, California. Her Doctor of Ministry project provided a framework for her work in the AIDS and transgender communities and for her activism in marriage equality. From this work, she published *Where the Edge Gathers: A Theology and Homiletic of Radical Inclusion* with Pilgrim Press. Her theological activism continues through her work as a Trustee and Adjunct Professor at the Pacific School of Religion, Berkeley; board member of the National Sexuality Resource Center; member of the Religion Council for the Human Rights Campaign; and numerous other committees and boards.

Personally, she enjoys her familial relationships with her wife, brother, daughters, and grandsons. She especially appreciates having reconciled with her mother who eventually left the Church of God in Christ to join with her at the City of Refuge serving as their prayer leader. She and her wife Shirley have been together more than twenty years, and she finds great contentment within her interpersonal and pastoral relationships. Her fulfillment comes through seeing "marginalized and disenfranchised people find their way to full faith and confidence in God, and in a God that is not punitive, in a God that is not angry and dismissive, but in a God that loves us and embraces us and welcomes us and invites us." Yvette pursues this goal of a radically inclusive love through her singing, preaching, teaching, and pastoring.

Scope and Content

In this oral history, Yvette Flunder discusses reconciling her same gender attraction with the fundamentalist pentecostal religion she was raised in. After coming out, she was asked to sing with the choir at the Love Center which at that time was focused on using music to carry the

message. Flunder agreed she soon became an assistant minister there, but goes on to discuss starting City of Refuge with the goal of centering same gender attracted people with justice issues rather than musical recording being the primary concern. She also describes choosing to align with a denomination, United Church of Christ, rather than remain an independent church

This interview was conducted by Dr. Monique Moultrie, an Associate Professor of Religious Studies at Georgia State University, and author of *Hidden Histories: Faith and Black Lesbian Leadership*. She conducted this interview as a consultant of LGBTQ-RAN as part of the oral histories project.

Access

Open to all researchers.

<https://lgbtqreligiousarchives.org/oral-histories/yvette-flunder>

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Languages

Collection material is in English

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Tags

United Church of Christ/Congregational Church

City of Refuge

Black

AIDS

Clergy Activist

Racism

Trans activism

California

Flunder, Yvette

The Fellowship of Affirming Ministries (TFAM)