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**Title**

Bishop Zachary Jones Oral History Interview and Transcript

**Date**

July 1, 2010

**Extant**

1 hour 50 minute interview (two files) and 1 transcript

**Abstract**

In this oral history, LGBT activist and founder of Breaking Ground, Bishop Zachary Jones, discusses finding his spiritual home at Unity Fellowship Church as a gay Black man. He discusses his work with AIDS ministry, and establishing a Black church in New York.

**Biographical**

Zachary Jones was born and raised in Los Angeles, California in 1958. He was the youngest son of seven children born to Maggie and Frank Jones. Early in his life, his mother knew he had a strong call to God and to the church and encouraged his spiritual pursuits. He has been active in church ministry since he was a youth. As a teenager, he held his own Bible studies and was licensed as a pulpit minister in 1978 at the Mount Moriah Baptist Church.

Yet, Bishop Jones was religiously explorative because after his licensure with his local Baptist congregation, he moved his membership and affiliation to the Pentecostal denomination. He later joined West Adams Foursquare Church in Los Angeles, a largely black congregation within the predominately white denomination. This community encouraged Bible centered practice and instruction and while attending this church, Bishop Jones entered and graduated from Palos Verdes Bible Seminary, where he received his license in Systematic Theology.

While at West Adams Foursquare Church, Bishop Jones decided that he needed to live his life fully as a gay man. As a teenager, he had wrestled with his sexual orientation and family/religious expectations. His oldest brother Larry is gay and as a youth, Zachary would

hang out with him in the Hollywood gay community. These were contentious times as his family and religious communities were not supportive of gay persons so Zachary spent those early years fantasizing about a time when he could live sexually free. He made the first step towards this freedom by coming out to his mother and entering a self-imposed religious exile while he discerned what being gay meant for him socially and religiously.

During this self-discovery period, Zachary tried different religious communities such as the Metropolitan Community Church, but he felt that these experiences were too white and foreign to him. Although he has a religiously eclectic background, he did not find a spiritual home again until he visited Unity Fellowship Church. Unity Fellowship Church Movement, Inc. is a movement that is dedicated towards fighting homophobia and injustice for all. It was founded and headquartered in Los Angeles by Archbishop Carl Bean.

Initially Zachary was drawn to Unity Fellowship because of its work with the Minority AIDS Project, a group he was already volunteering with after his partner died from AIDS. During those early years, Unity Fellowship was a small congregation serving the needs of black gays and lesbians. Zachary eventually became more involved in the church, driving Archbishop Bean to do hospital visits and teaching Sunday School. He entered full-time ministry in 1987 when he was appointed Assistant Pastor of the congregation. He served in that capacity for five years when he was sent to New York City to form and pastor the first Unity Fellowship church, Unity Fellowship of Christ Church- NYC located in Brooklyn, New York.

When he moved to New York he discovered that the area was in need of a stronger black voice to speak to the oppression facing their community. Thus, he founded a congregation that has a social justice ministry that prides itself on taking the concept of “church” outside of the regular Sunday service. After actively serving as pastor of the NY congregation, he was elevated to elder of the church. He joined the denomination’s House of Bishops and became the Administrator and Senior Bishop of the world-wide Unity Fellowship Church Movement, Inc. in 2007.

Outside of the church, Bishop Jones is the founder of Breaking Ground, a lesbian, gay, and transgender, not-for-profit, youth educational organization. He is an activist for lesbian, gay, and transgender issues, such as violence, homophobia, and HIV/AIDS. He is a board member of Gay Men of African Descent (GMAD) and is also a founding member of New York State’s Black Gay Men’s Network. Finally, Bishop Jones finds fulfillment and contentment in being a husband, father, and jazz pianist.

### **Scope and Content**

In this oral history, LGBT activist and founder of Breaking Ground, Bishop Zachary Jones, discusses finding his spiritual home at Unity Fellowship Church as a gay black man. He discusses his work with AIDS ministry, and establishing a black church in New York.

This interview was conducted by Dr. Monique Moultrie, 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/zachary-jones>

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### **Languages**

Collection material is in English

### **Cite as**

“Bishop Zachary Jones | Oral History”, LGBTQ Religious Archives Network,  
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**Digital finding aid created by Sarah McCall, 2023**

### **Tags**

Unity Fellowship Church Movement

Bean, Carl | Black

AIDS

Clergy Activist

Racism

New York

New York City

Jones, Zachary

EXHIBIT Rolling the Stone Away

