Excerpts from Oral Histories:

(Available on LGBTQ-RAN's Website)
(Organized by Last Name)

- **Maria Elena Castellanos Interviewed by Mark Bowman**

https://lgbtqreligiousarchives.org/oral-histories/mari-castellanos
(1:03:56-1:05:08)
"I was the program director [of Metropolitan Community Church, Fort Lauderdale]. Now, what happens is HIV/AIDS all over the place. All over the place. This was the church. We were just burying people right and left. And I...I mean, I was not a clergyperson, but I was a member of the staff, and everybody was doing AIDS work. And I remember going with my little Episcopal Book of Prayer to a VA hospital in Miami to see my first AIDS patient to do a pastoral visit. And man, I just...I did everything you could possibly do to a human being who is sick from a religious perspective. I prayed, I blessed him, I anointed him. I just didn't know what to do. And I kept on going back to see him. And he's the person, this man really taught me about how you take care of the sick and dying, because he was in that."

- **Dr. Ibrahim Farajaje Interviewed by Monique Moultrie**

https://lgbtqreligiousarchives.org/oral-histories/ibrahim-farajaje
Part 2 Audio **(26:15-31:14)**

"Yeah, I mean, I think that...D.C. was very...D.C. is where I felt like I came into my own, where a lot of my pieces as artist, activist, spiritual leader all started coming together through the crucible of HIV, through the HIV pandemic, because I really am – and I have to say this, because this is one thing I do want documented – [laughs] – I was the first religious scholar to address HIV as a religious and theological issue, and the ethical imperative to be involved in it.

When I...I had – I'm going to get choked up now – I had a student who came out to me in maybe my second year teaching, who came out to me and then, at the end of...and wanted to do a PhD. Who wanted to do a PhD in queer studies and religion, what have you. And he kind of disappeared from sight. And then I found out he was in the hospital, and then I found out that he was dead. And I was just horrified. I was just horrified. And of course nobody really spoke directly about it, and I just asked. I said, "Was he in the HIV ward?" "Well, I had to put on this suit to go in there." And I said, yeah, okay, fine, thanks. That answered me.

And I started thinking like, well, you know, the black church has always said that it's on the front of everything, it's on the front line, and so this is the issue for now. This is the issue facing our community globally; we've got to get on it. And of course I knew, with

trepidation – [laughs] – that to talk about HIV, I was going to have to talk about sex. And so I developed a course which I think has been duplicated in other places since then, but without giving me any credit for it. But developed a course for how African American religious leaders should respond to HIV.

So first of all, all the students in the class had to be trained as an HIV test counselor, they all had to have an HIV test. And people with HIV would come into the class to speak. We had a...I organized a D.C.-wide healing service, so bringing people from different HIV agencies in, different churches, getting gospel musicians to donate their time and come and sing at the service.

And did a chapel service as a performance piece. [Turning the regular chapel service at Howard University into a play in which students followed a script; chapel attendees were both audience and part of the play.] That's where I brought my Swiss theatre training in. We did a chapel service. The HIV class led the chapel service. But nobody knew that it wasn't the real chapel service, and they were...because I had people just stuck in the congregation, and when the student preacher started preaching, and he was talking about

HIV, one woman jumped up, and like, "I'm sick of hearing about this stuff! I didn't come to church to hear about this, that mess, and those are sinners anyway!" And she stormed out, and then someone else [goes storming]. And so the people that weren't in the class were like, "Oh my god, what is going on here today?" And it was a story of a family that was very prominent in the church and the son, who had been like the minister of music, died, and then everybody told the pastor if you bury him, that means that you approve of HIV, you approve of his lifestyle, and the congregation is not going to accept that.

And it was based on the story of Antigone, who had to defy the law of the state to bury her brother, and so it was told through this woman who's in negotiation with the pastor. And the pastor undergoes this thing. It was called conviction, a healing stream. He spends his night, like, in prayer and fasting and weeping and everything and comes out of it like, you know, I don't care if they take my bands away or whatever, this is what I have to do. And so we had like a mock funeral, and at the end, for the viewing, before the casket was closed, everybody went up, and what nobody knew was that in the casket I had placed a mirror so that when you stepped up to look at the dead person you saw yourself."

- **Rev. Yvette Flunder Interviewed by Monique Moultrie**

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

Part 2 audio (10:50-14:45)

“Well, the DMin project, which ended up being Where the Edge Gathers, was a decision that I made about deciding to go beyond my master’s degree and do a Doctor of Ministry degree so that I could have a framework around which to organize my thoughts and experience in terms of working in the AIDS community and for working in the transgender community and working around marriage equality. And I wanted to be able to – and this was, in many ways, in fact it was 2005 when I wrote that book – in many ways an opportunity to do this work before marriage equality became the big whoopdidoo that it is now. It wasn’t happening like that when I started writing that book and when I was studying at San Francisco Theological for the DMin program. But I felt like it was something that needed to be dealt with as a justice issue, actually, to be honest with you, also as a theological issue and a health issue, because of the experience I had working in the African American faith community and how detrimental it has been to our community to live this dichotomy of being told by people that you are promiscuous and substandard and evil and everything for being gay, but also being told that you can’t have a monogamous and sane relationship.”

- **Rev. Renee McCoy Interviewed by Monique Moultrie**

https://lgbtqreligiousarchives.org/oral-histories/renee-mccoy

(51:45-54:32)

“No, it was never a job. It was, you know, it was what you do. People were dying. This strange disease hit, and my friends were dying. You know, it wasn’t, it was, NCBLG [National Coalition on Black Lesbians and Gays] was national at that point. We had groups around the country. We had the Detroit Coalition. People were dying out of there. We had the New York Coalition, and people were dying. And my job as a pastor has always been to protect life. So there was no inconsistency. I was working with homeless women, and HIV was there as well.

Before I started the church, and I guess it all kind of mashes together, ‘cause I was doing the church, I was doing the Coalition, and I was working at the shelter, you know. We were...the Olivieri Center was right like two blocks from Madison Square Garden, so that was what my life was. What else do you do when people are dying? And people in my church were getting this disease. We were the only black church really that was dealing with gay stuff. So I look out—I mean, we never got really big, you know. But folks knew that that was what I did. And so when folks were dying, and I lived in Harlem, and I could see people dying, I did a lot of work with substance abusers on the streets of Harlem.

And whether they came to the church or not, they knew what I did, so they would call and I would do what I needed to do... So it was never—I mean, it wasn’t a career path. It was just ministry... Yeah, I mean, I worked at the center for homeless women. That was what paid the rent. But HIV stuff, people were dying.”

- **Duncan Teague Interviewed by Dan Royles**

(Part 1 18:38-26:20)

https://lgbtqreligiousarchives.org/oral-histories/duncan-teague

DAN ROYLES: So would you talk to mostly African American groups?

DUNCAN TEAGUE: Yeah, because we had three outreach workers. We had a gay outreach worker, we had a Black gay outreach worker, and we had a youth Black outreach worker. So it was presumed that the white gay community was being taken care of, which they were, and that I was going to do the Black gay community. And then of course, because of the reality of where we were at the time, that meant everywhere in the Black community, because we were everywhere. At least, that was my thinking. And so I ran myself ragged, and I didn't have a program on paper, and that was not helpful. And there were other people who really wanted autonomous Black gay AIDS work, especially in Atlanta, and some of those people were not exactly helpful to me. They may have actually been detrimental, because my work was interracial, and through Black and White Men Together. And there was a divide, at least conceptually in people's heads, about who Black and White Men Together was, and who the other Black gay community were. And I now know that that was theoretical, that many of us floated all over the place, and that had we been willing to work against some of those divides in a different way, things might have also been different. But the big thing—the big thing—was back then we had no support from any of the mainline institutions from the Black community. Not an iota. They did not want to touch AIDS. Not the Black church, not Black educational institutions, and certainly not the government. We had a governor who actually threatened AID Atlanta. They really wanted the gays to die quietly in some corner and leave them alone, because it was causing them to break all these Southern taboos around sexuality, and especially homosexuality—and disease. This is not the first terminal disease to hit the South, but polite folks don't talk about that. When I think about it, we did monumental stuff. Crazy, monumental stuff. Because there was really nothing logically that said any of this was going to work in the culture we were operating in.

DAN ROYLES: When you say there was a perceived divide between BWMT and the rest of the Black gay community, what is the nature of that?

DUNCAN TEAGUE: First of all, it's a misnomer to say "Black gay community." There were communities of men who had sex with men who were out and open and never went into the white gay community because of racism. There were men like me who floated all over the place because we dated interracially, we were given access to the white gay community without as much hassle. There were those of us who were a humongous community of

transplants, who didn't have to worry about aunty or momma or grandmomma finding out what we were doing down here because we were away from home. And then there was the community that thought Black men who date interracially are traitors, are not being real to themselves, not supporting the real Black community, all sorts of craziness. As though we somehow appeared out of the ether on the edges of white gay community and didn't come out of the Black community. And the irony was this: so I'm a part of Black and White Men Together and that's how I'm really developing my leadership and connections. But I'm also starting to develop in other ways, too. And there was really a need for an out Black gay organization, and one of its first organizing meetings was in my house, where my white lover, out of understanding and his maturity, went in the bedroom, shut the door, and read his book for the two-and-a-half hours that we were meeting or whatever. We, men and women were forming the African American Lesbian and Gay Alliance. That's the kind of ridiculousness that flies in the face of that perceived divide. I knew at that time, and still could name, well Charles Cummings—Chuck will forgive me for outing him in this—Chuck was very much a part of BWMT, but he was very much the author of the ad in Creative Loafing that helped us have our first meeting. He's in California. And Crawford Jones, who was co-author of an article that we wrote, which was really sort of naive and misinformed, but it kick-started a whole lot of attention, that went into the Gay Center News. Good lord. And they accidentally printed it twice in the same issue. So it went everywhere, and oh my God, the flap I took for that. Because we put out an article about why there are no Black gay organizations in Atlanta. And what we really should have put was the word out in there, because there were Black gay organizations, but you had to go to the bar where that organization was connected to, and you had to talk to the people who were in that organization to get in, because they weren't in any of the papers. And that organization that started was the African American Lesbian/Gay Alliance. That was a confluence of some of that bubbling up. It wasn't just me, but it was some men like me doing HIV and AIDS work, who wanted to see another kind of organizing happen. There were some folks who were hooked in with the National Black Gay and Lesbian Leadership Forum. I'm sorry, that didn't exist at that time—the National Coalition of Black Lesbians and Gays with Gil Gerald. They were talking about starting a chapter in Atlanta, and AALGA got that energy. And then there was the old party networks of the gorgeous, middle-class Black men who knew they needed to start doing something around HIV and AIDS. Marquis Delano Walker was our first male co-chair who was on the Board of AID Atlanta as an out man living with HIV and Carolyn Mobley, who was "the Black lesbian" of Atlanta at the time was the female co-chair."

- **Reverend Carl Bean Interviewed by John Selders**

From unpublished transcript of oral history interview of Reverend Carl Bean by John Selders, July 2008. Donated to LGBTQ Religious Archives Network. This quote is under Fair use exemption of copyright.

[Reverend Carl Bean advertises a Bible study in a Los Angeles paper.]
"Reverend Carl Bean, openly gay black pastor, invites all to study, biblical study group around gays and lesbians and Christianity." Several of them [the bible study attendees] ran [away from the bible study]. . . Oh, no, no, that's too open, that's too out.

"I go to West Hollywood. I start hearing about this sickness [later identified as HIV/AIDS]. I try to get all the information I can get about it. I hear immediately that 60 percent of the children with it are black. Sixty percent of the women with it are black. I said, my people don't know this. I've got to go home to my people.

[Because of his activism, he was asked to speak in a scholarly panel on HIV/AIDS.]
I said, "Look, I'm new at this. I don't have a lot of research or anything like that. But I can tell you what it's like to be black and homosexual and frightened. And to be . . . [the] one institution you love turns its back. And I know that's what God is calling me to do, is let them know that God hasn't turned his back on them. I don't know how I'm going to do it, I don't know what I'm going to do. Right now I just visit hospitals and tell them God loves them. I hug them. Hold them. And I got a phone that they can call that they can talk to them. And people are responding."

So that was that. The next call came from USA *Today*, a relatively new paper at that time. They did, I think it was "Six Who Made a Difference." And they had chosen people from around America that had gotten involved in this virus. I was the only black one. I didn't even know, again, about how big that paper's distribution was. Out of that, in my NIMH context, [National Institute of Mental Health contacted him] 'we would like to know why and how you as a black church got involved. We can't get other black churches to get involved. So we want to help finance your work.'
So we named it The Minority AIDS Project. I just told my little Bible study group, "Look, I just go to hospitals. When they asked me in the article, I just said 'The Minority AIDS Project,' I didn't really have a name. But I don't want you guys to feel you have to (face it?)."
"Oh, no, no, no. We want to help." So that was born out of that Bible study group, really.