

**LAWS Project  
Interview #M8  
Christ Chapel  
Pastor Michael Cole  
August 8, 2002**

Q: I wanted to start by hearing about your church. Tell me about Christ Chapel itself, and about this church, and then about the- what did we decide? Seven?

A: Seven churches? Yeah. Well, we started almost twenty-one years ago, in December it'll be twenty-one years. And we started with seven people for a Bible study, and grew from my living room to a garage, and from a garage to a storefront, and from a storefront to the chapel we're in now. We have seven other churches that've spun off of our church, and we're like loud Baptists. I was brought up Foursquare-Assembly of God, so they're about half as loud as I used to be. We like music, God's music, and we preach the Word. Everyone's invited to our church, we don't exclude anyone. And we preach the Word, we don't preach lifestyle. First I started with MCC, which is a- actually started church of the gay movement. And were with them for quite a while, attending church, and so they sort of got me on line with the 'God loves me,' and once I realized God loved me then I needed to be sure I could get back to where I was before I thought he didn't. And so that's why I'm very- I believe that my ministry is to enrich people or to inspire them to live today. I believe in salvation, and we offer salvation every Sunday, but salvation really doesn't help us if we don't know how to live in it each day. And so that's pretty much what my ministry is. And that's about it.

Q: What does it mean for you to live in it each day?

A: That God loves us, but he requires from us certain things. And just because we're gay, or just because we're straight, or just because we're Black, or whatever it may be, doesn't make any difference to how we're required to answer to God. We live our lives that way. Not into a lifestyle, but into Christ. And so I think it's important that Christ become first. Lifestyle, color, even the way we think, must come second. And so that's kind of where we're at.

Q: Tell me about starting the church. Is there a reason that you didn't, for instance, stay within MCC? What really drove you to start this one?

A: Well, I had been with MCC, and again let me emphasize that MCC really saved my life, okay? And I'm very supportive of MCC. But there became a problem with inclusive language, with political things that just were hard for me. And so I stepped aside. Well, there were a number of us that just weren't going to church. And so that's kind of how it started. It wasn't in conflict with, it was actually because none of us were really going to church. And I have very good rapport with Reverend Troy and the different pastors at MCC.

Q: So you started, then- did you start here in Long Beach?

A: Uh-huh. We started in North Long Beach, in my living room. And there were, like I say, there were seven of us. And they thought we were starting a church; I thought we were

having a Bible study. And the following Sunday we had twenty-two or twenty-one people. And within just a few weeks we were in my living room, my kitchen, my bathroom [laughs]. And it was a zoo! And so we- in back of the house I was living in I had a double garage. And a couple of people came over that are contractors, and within like a week turned it into the most beautiful little chapel you ever seen in your life. And then we were there until one of the neighbors turned us in for having church in our garage! [Laughs.] So then we had to go to a storefront, we were in North Long Beach then. And we were there about a year and a half, and then found this little place. And it's been a blessing.

Q: So this was '81 that- you said twenty-one years?

A: '81 we started, yes. December of '81.

Q: And then moved in here-

A: We've been here eighteen years. Yeah.

Q: And then when did the first new churches start to spin off?

A: About, let's see, they just celebrated their tenth year, so probably right at ten years, we'd been going ten years. And the church's- I had some awesome people, who were really called to the ministry, and they really, they worked very hard in this church. I mean, I don't ordain ministers just 'cause you're nice or just because you think you have a ministry. All of our churches are solid. Three of them are on their tenth anniversary, two of them, I believe, are on their third anniversary. So they're solid. They're solid churches with good pastors that are really dedicated to their community.

Q: So the earliest ones were which?

A: Christ Chapel of the Valley, Christ Chapel of Denver, Christ Chapel of Laguna were the first three. They all went in one year. Boy, that was a rough year! [Laughs.] And then following that was [pause] San Diego and Colorado Springs. Did I name them all?

Q: I'm trying to think.

A: I think I did.

Q: I think we got- so that's five. So it was-

A: Yeah. And then we have a church that came out of our church but did not take on the Christ Chapel name. The pastor came out of our church. And that is Open Door Fellowship Church.

Q: Now, that's also local, isn't it?

A: Yes. Yeah. He's in Bellflower. But they started in a, sort of, in a split. But he actually, in my opinion, is my pastor. I kind of go to him. He's an awesome man, and has a really good church. So we're kind of real close.

Q: Where do people do their seminary training, who end up being your pastors? Or do they train mostly just with you?

A: Most of them, in fact all of them that have come from here, I went to LIFE Bible College, over in L.A. But most of them here have worked here in the church, ministered here in the church, worked under me, have taken classes through computer and that kind of thing. Lillian, she went to a college up in Ontario, and I think still is. So it's kind of a- I think education is wonderful. And I'm glad I've got mine, but I don't think it's a must. I think you have to know the Word, and you have to be solid in that Word, but you know, to know theology of all these things like that, I don't think that's *that* important.

Q: I imagine, too, given the tradition that the Christ Chapel churches are stemming out of, and yet given that probably your pastors are at least partly open- are all of your pastors gay or lesbian?

A: Yeah. They are, all of them.

Q: So I would imagine that that would be tricky, too, to find a college or a seminary that would be-

A: It's very difficult. The Valley church is working on putting together a school, a seminary, and they're working on that, and I have one lady in our church who's working on a type of a Bible workup in the computer. So it's out there. You know, and of course MCC has a very big school, a good school. But you kind of have to go along with them to go there. Just like you do in any other school you have to be at.

Q: Where would you see yourself as distinguishing the Christ Chapel movement from MCC? What makes them different?

A: Probably I very seldom deal with gay issues from the pulpit. I may use the word 'gay' or 'homosexual' three times through the year. It's just not, you know, my pastor, when I was being brought up, didn't talk about being heterosexual. He didn't bring his sex life into the church. There is a need to know that it's okay to be gay. But that isn't the main reason we need to come to church. So, sometimes we do some seminars and things like that on it, and Bible studies on it. But I think the difference, the main difference is, outside of inclusive language, the main difference is, is that it is not the main issue of my ministry. I have a number of straight people in my church. How uncomfortable would it make them feel if I was standing up there doing all this gay stuff? You know, and I think that my hope was that anybody who came through the doors of this church would feel welcome. And feel at home. And I think if you're preaching the word of God, and the open word of God, then you can do that. Once you separate into men and women, and children, and gay and straight, and all of that, you exclude certain people immediately. And I try not to do that.

Q: Can you say a little bit about how you understand the Bible, and your relationship with the Bible?

A: I was hoping you wouldn't ask that! [Laughs.] I am the worst on this.

Q: I'm not asking for theology, just your thoughts.

A: Okay. Let me tell you what happened with me, and then maybe you'll understand where I'm coming from, and maybe even the church. I was brought up a Christian. I mean, I was saved when I was six years old, my grandmother laid hands on me and said I would be a minister. I always wanted to be a preacher. I mean, I grew up, when other kids were playing fireman, I was preaching. Or taking an offering one or the other, you know. And I really- I enjoyed it. I loved it. And I would sit in church and just be mesmerized by certain preachers that were visiting, or even the pastor I had. And so when I got into- I knew I was gay at a very young age. Very young age. But I just thought I was and it really wasn't that big a deal. As I got older I realized it was a very big deal, and then as I realized that I was the thing they were talking about in church that was so bad- I remember I was going to San Francisco. I was sixteen, and I was going up to San Francisco State College for a thing they were doing there that I wanted to go- well, I just wanted to go to San Francisco, you know. I lived in Roseburg, Oregon, it what kind of like, whoo! You know. Nobody's gay in Roseburg, Oregon. [Laughs.] And so I went to San Francisco, and my grandmother, big Bible lady, she said, 'You've gotta be very careful there.' She says, 'There are Sodomites.' Well, I thought they were a religious cult, like the Mennonites and that kind of group. So I figured I was okay. Later I found out that that was the reason I was going to San Francisco for. [Laughs.] But I found that I couldn't be comfortable in my church, I wasn't even comfortable in my home. And my folks were very supportive. So I kind of just gave God up. God was a part of my life. And I prayed. And I always tithed. Again, old Pentecost, you know, it's almost as important as salvation. And so I tithed, and I still prayed to God, but God was over here, he wasn't in here. And I must say, though, that when everything gets bad, if a kid is foundationed in Christ, when everything gets bad, no matter how far away from God they get, they come back. And I praise God for parents that put their kids in churches and in Sunday school. Because no matter what, it's always there. And I would come back to God when things got bad, and I'd walk into churches and every time I walked into a church, it would seem like they would sing 'Just As I Am.' I'd burst into tears and run out of the church. And one Sunday I had happened to hear about Troy Perry. And he was at the Encore Theater in L.A. And I would like to say that I went there because I was spiritually moved. Actually I met a guy on Saturday night that said he was going to be there. And I went in. And I set down. And nothing fills the hole, I mean, drugs, alcohol, sex, whatever it may be, doesn't fill that gap when God isn't there. When you don't have God there. And I set there and Reverend Troy began to preach. And I filled up. And there was no question. From that point on I never questioned whether God loved me or didn't love me. Now, I did go through a time where I said, 'Okay, if homosexuality is wrong, then take it away.' Because God has healed me, God is real in my life. So take it away. And for a long time I didn't do anything. I mean, if I even saw somebody gay, and in California that's rough, I'd walk the other way, you know. I just didn't- and if I'd think about it, I would try and stop.

God didn't take it away. So when I rededicated and recommitted my life to God, I realized that if it was that bad, if it was so disgusting to God, then he would have at least somewhere along the line, lightened it. And he didn't. So I have never questioned whether or not God loves me or God is concerned about me being a homosexual. *But I do* believe, very strongly, that he requires from us the same kind of living that he does everyone else. And so that's kind of my way of going into God and being gay. It's a little different. There's all these scriptures and everything that we have, and great theologians who just do wonderful, wonderful work with it, but to me it was very personal, and never, ever have I doubted, from that point on.

Q: Was that before you went to MCC that you made that decision, or-

A: I did it at MCC. I didn't decide to preach at MCC; I was still out partying and having a good time. But I was going to church, and I was making changes-God was making changes. It took a whole lot, quite a few years, before I realized that the calling I had as a child was still there. I still didn't feel real worthy of being a pastor. And there's scripture in the Bible that says, you know, a pastor's double responsible. Well, I didn't want to be double responsible! I was having enough trouble just being responsible for me! And so that's kind of how it went.

Q: But when you realized that God didn't condemn you, that was before you went to MCC?

A: No, that happened the very first Sunday I went to MCC. Very first Sunday.

Q: So, could I say then that, or maybe, if this is too simple, tell me. That you came out but you kind of came out without God and then came back to God? Or-

A: Well, as God being a personal God in me, yeah. I never, ever gave God up. I have a friend who says, you know, they scream and yell at God. And they get angry at God. Well, I never, ever got angry at God. I figure, you know, first off, he created me. Second, if he made the Grand Canyon and I'm getting ticked off, it can be really ugly. You know. So I deal with God very personal. And he was there when I needed him, you know, I could talk to him, but he didn't really talk back. And I knew I loved him but I didn't feel he loved me. But I knew he was there. And then that moment of revelation just brought it all together.

Q: So, at some point, someone surely has said, 'Okay, but what about Leviticus? What about Romans? What about-' How do you answer that?

A: Well, I have a big ol' book from MCC, actually- [laughs]. No, I don't. I have a ton of books that I could hand them. Because, you see, knowledge is great. And you can fight all these scriptures. I mean, you can really lay 'em out and say, 'No, it meant this; no, it meant this; no, it meant this.' I am probably not going to change the mind of some fundamentalist, just because I can say 'These mean these things.' Even if I could prove it, chances are I'm not going to change their mind. So I would say I would give somebody the information, but I still urge them- and I think the only way you can come to grips with it totally is individually, a revelation, a realization of who God is for you. And then that God would put into us the

understanding that first we're not second-class Christians. There are no- you're either Christian or you're not Christian. And that we are responsible, we can't get away with certain things just because. We are accountable for everything we do. That answer that?

Q: Yeah.

A: Oh, okay!

Q: Yeah. I'm wondering also about the people who come into your church. Do you see people coming here kind of in the same state that you were when you first came to MCC, are they more comfortable with themselves and with God by the time they come here?

A: Well, yes and no. See, back then being gay wasn't as open. There were not- you know, you couldn't get in your computer and go and read all the things that they have on it. In fact, when I was a kid, you could be put away in a mental institution for life. For the rest of your life. And so you did feel second. You didn't feel worthy. Now, I think that through the media, through documentaries, through education, more and more of our young gay people and lesbians are more well. Not as sick as I was when I went in. And yet we get people from fundamentalist churches, like me, who still have that same preaching done to them, and they're broken. And you see- I can sit here on a Sunday morning, look out over the congregation, and I'll see a few new people. And I'll see some poor little guy there, sitting there, or a little girl, just the tears running down their face, and they cry through the whole service. I can almost guarantee you they come from a fundamentalist church and God is just moving on their hearts. You know? And I don't knock the fundamentalist churches. I mean, if it weren't for them I wouldn't be, again, where I am today. But I think that we offer something more real. And especially something more for today. You know, things do change. I mean, the church I went to, the women didn't cut their hair, they couldn't wear makeup, it was pretty much all the women couldn't do things. The guys could pretty much do everything they want, which is the way the world used to be back then. Now, you go into a Pentecostal church, you got women with blue eye shadow, green eye shadow, and hair clear out to here! It changes. But the word of God doesn't. It stays the same all the time. And I think that when you go back and look at scripture, we need to remember that it was written in a certain time. But the scripture itself is still the same, the meaning of the scripture. Lust. Promiscuousness. Good word. The way we treat people and react. That's the same. It never changes. It's never changed then, it's not going to change now. And so yeah, we see some real broken people. But I have to say that through the media, through documentaries, through teaching, I see a lot more healthier, young gay and lesbians than I've ever seen before.

Q: Well, that's good news.

A: Yeah. It really is. I think also the AIDS issue has really made it even better. People become friends, they talk. Women got involved with the men, to help. And we became a stronger unit rather than just separate groups. And I think that makes for health. And in my church I'm, like I said, about fifty-fifty; I have about as many women as I have men.

Q: Why do you think that is? We started to talk about that before, and you talked about some of the patterns in other churches-

A: This is my own idea; you need to know that. [Laughs.] I don't want to make any minister mad at me. Often, for whatever reason, if you have a woman pastor it seems that there are more women in the church, mainly, probably, because they feel more comfortable. If you have a male pastor you may end up with a fifty-fifty, or you'll have mostly men. I'm not sure why that is; I don't know. But I've always been, like I was telling you earlier, I've always been a lot more comfortable around the women in my church than I am the men. And so I don't know if that's a reason, but again, I do not separate. I don't have women groups and I don't have men groups. Everything we do in this church is, everybody can come to it. There's never anything that we do that excludes anyone.

Q: And in terms of the gender patterns, you're seeing this mostly in gay and lesbian churches, or do you think that holds for straight churches- ?

A: Well, no, if you have a straight church, if you want to put it that way, you have families. You know, you've got a wife and a husband and kids. So you end up with a fifty-fifty automatically. So I don't think that's the case. And in a lot of churches you've got men and women as pastors, like the wife and husband will work together. But when you don't have families, then you've only got one person representing your house, and so I think that's what the difference is between, say, my church and the Baptist church or another church.

Q: So it's more that it tends to be a church of singles?

A: No, no, not singles, but if you're a double you're still the same sex. [Laughs.] So it's like that. You very seldom get a man and a woman; you either get a man and a man or a woman and a woman. Like I said, though, I've got a number of people who are very straight that are very active in my church. And again I hold truth to that that it's because it's not the issue of our church.

Q: Is there anything in particular that you find people are seeking this church out for? When they show up and you welcome them, do they say why, you know, 'I was attracted because-

A: [Laughing] Because the pastor was wonderful! No, I think- When we started, there was MCC. That was it. We were more free-spirited. With our music, with my preaching, I'm surely not the most conventional preacher. You know, I have fun. I thoroughly enjoy preaching. And I think at that point there were only two shows in town. And so people who wanted a little more free spirit were here, and there. Now there's about ten churches around us. And I think, again, we're preaching the Word, we're a friendly church, and we're pretty much free-spirited in our music and everything like that. So I think, comfort-wise, people who would come here would be comfortable with that. I don't think any church can ever meet everybody's needs. We also have an AIDS food store, that we've had for, I think, sixteen years. And we get a lot of men, women, and children that come to the food store coming to church. And so with that we sometimes get their families. And so there's a lot of reasons, I think, that churches survive. And that's what you do: you survive. And I think it's

not that we're preaching a different thing or teaching a different thing, it's just the way we do it. If somebody's not comfortable here, thank God there's somewhere else they can go. Used to, there was nowhere. If you didn't like what was going on in the church you were in, you had nowhere to go. You couldn't change!

Q: I've been interested that Long Beach actually supports, well, as far as I know, three and maybe more that I don't know about- three churches that are relatively similar theologically that minister to gay men and lesbians. And that's yourself, Open Door, and Glory Tabernacle, which is right around the corner almost, right? What is it about Long Beach?

A: Well, we sort of moved into the backyard of MCC, so we can't gripe if anybody moves into our backyard. But yeah, there are a number. Actually, I think there's about six churches, if not more, within the Long Beach area that reach out to gays. Yeah. And lesbians.

Q: And what church background are people usually coming from that come here?

A: Well, when the Catholics come, their eyes are about this big when we start to sing and clap and scream. Most of our people- I'll tell you what. They come from all over. I'd like to say they call come from fundamentalist churches; they don't. But a person who comes in here from a fundamentalist church would probably feel more comfortable right off the bat, just because of the songs we sing. You know, we sing the old songs that they're used to. But I believe they come from everywhere. It's just, will they stay long enough to be comfortable? We don't scare 'em off, you know, anyway. [Laughs.]

Q: So, I also said I was going to ask some questions about women. Let me start by asking you whether- and I know that you don't separate, so if this is an irrelevant question please just tell me. But whether you see the women who are part of your congregation or women who are coming into your congregation as having needs that are in any way different from those of the men?

A: [Pauses.] I think so. Not in a big way, but I think in a social way. I think that you have a number of women who come in who are either angry or very afraid of men. Who have authority problems, you know, that have been beaten down. But I got guys that come in, men that come in, that are the same way. But women have had to go through so much, just being a lesbian, being a woman, many times failed marriages, abusive husbands and parents, it takes them longer, I think, to realize God loves them totally. But when they do, they believe it stronger than the guys do, I think. Because there has to be so much torn away. I don't believe in bandaging. Just 'cause you change a word or you relate to something different doesn't cure you. It just bandages you up. You need to get rid of it. You know, I can't be angry because of what happened to me twenty-five years ago. I can't! Because that gives me an excuse to act a certain way that's not right. And if you get rid of it, you're free from having to do that. And for a lot of people, both men and women, it's very difficult to break those chains. But yet, when you see it happen, you see them blossom, you see them come out, hug a guy. Or a guy will go over and greet a woman. And you know, *you* know where their situation is. Maybe nobody else does, but you do. It's like, *wow*. You know, just like shocks all over your body.



Q: Are there particular ways that you as a pastor, or the church in general, addresses those needs that you see women come in with?

A: In counseling I do, to a certain point. I'm a preacher, I'm not a psychologist, and I surely, like I said, I have enough trouble just taking care of my own little problems. But I've been with enough people to where I can say, 'Well, this is happening and this is happening, maybe.' I often refer them to therapists or counselors. The church, I believe we deal with many of the issues by not separating. Because you can't be in a circle with a bunch of people and be upset with everybody because they're a man or a woman. Or because you've got this problem and they don't. We all come in here with problems, and we all come in here with baggage. And I don't know if one is worse than the other, but they're all destructive. And until we get rid of that baggage, we really can't go on with our lives. There's no growth. And so I think I deal with it, again, going back to, you gotta live every day. And I think that helps. Again, sometimes, I probably miss some people. For whatever reason. And for those, I hope, you know, I pray to God that they find somewhere or find someone that can meet their direct need. But I try not to let anybody who comes to me with a problem, slide. If I don't know, I try and find out. And again, it's not just women. It's people who come in church in general. And it's not just gays. If you were in a fundamental, you know a regular church, a Christian church, you have the same thing. It's just *hid*.

Q: So do you think you do more pastoral counseling than somebody in a regular Christian church?

A: Yeah, I think I do, because I'm dealing with so many different things in their lives. Again, everyone's different, and it's not just a family; sometimes it's a family plus relationships past, and all of that. So I do do a lot of counseling. And more of my counseling is with women than with men.

Q: Why do you think that is?

A: [Pauses.] I don't know. I have no idea. But just, as I was thinking as we were talking, if I were to have to put it into a more or less, I would say more. And I'm not sure why; I really don't know why. Something I'll have to look into.

Q: I was curious about the baptism, too, having been at the baptism service when I visited. I've noticed in other churches that it's especially the rituals that just have been so important, so touching, so life-changing for people. And I was thinking about the water baptism. What do you hear from people about that experience, especially in light of some of the trauma that they may have gone through with their own churches growing up?

A: Well, most of our people, it's really interesting, that's a good question. Most of our people come in not understanding where God is with them right now, right then. And they come to that realization and they're starting to live for the Lord, their lives are starting to change. And baptism, you know, goes clear back to the beginning. They have probably been baptized before, many of them. But they're baptized again, by their choice, because they feel

renewed. They feel new. And they want that old relationship, they want that old- it's a habit, kind of. You know, it's something we remember from the past that's really good. And so, 'I want to do it again. Only with a real heart. I want to renew.' And so many of our baptisms are restoration baptisms, where they have been filled with the Spirit, they realize that God loves them, they're a new person. Totally different than maybe what they even walked through the door.

Q: So it's a real affirmation of-

A: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. It's not like, 'Gee, I'm saved, let's get baptized.' They probably were saved a long time ago. And, you know, there are some who are saved, you know, right here in church. But a lot of people have already been saved. And so it's a real, just saying again, 'Man, this is who I serve.'

Q: I was really interested by the communion service, too. MCC's communion has always seemed really powerful to me, the way that it's almost a laying on of hands [A: Yes.] at every communion. But I've never seen it done with everyone participating in the consecration, with everyone participating in the breaking of the bread, with everyone eating together, with everyone drinking together. Does that come out of a particular tradition, or is it your innovation?

A: Oh, no. Not at all. In fact, we used to do it like MCC. [Laughs.] Because that's where I was, you know, and- I went into some scripture, that was number one, and found that that's not what Christ did. So that kind of put a doubt in my head. And then we got so big that if you have people come up and you pray over them, you're talking about a twenty-five minute communion. [Laughing] We started [510: unclear word] so I could get to the restroom before the other Christians get out of church! So anyway, I really don't but that's- We started doing it that way for the fact that communion should be between you and God. We offer salvation, we offer a return to the Lord, a restoration, we offer healing at every communion. We open up our altar after church, if anyone would like to come and be prayed for. But communion is a time between you and God, where you are accepting the body of Christ, you are accepting his blood. And we find that two things happen when we do it the way we do it. One is, we're back to personal. And the other is, we're back to family. It's not an individual up here; it's a family. Because you have individuals and you're praying for them, everybody else is talking. Or wiggling around, or doing whatever. This becomes very united, so you have your independence and then you have the united part of the family. So that's why we do it that way. But now, in my church that's the way they did it too. In the Assembly of God church that's what they did.

Q: I wonder if that also, just in light of how many people come out of their previous church experiences feeling really unworthy of contact with God, I wonder if that also really affirms their worth, 'cause they're not being- they're serving themselves communion. Do you see it that way?

A: I think so. I never thought of it too much, I don't think, but yeah. I think it's real important, again- well, I guess that is what I feel. I feel it's very important that we are individuals with

the Lord. You have to be. You know, I don't want a sheep that's just part of the flock. I want a sheep that can stand on its own, and be its own person, but also then fit in to the family. And so I think you're right, I think it does give- because you go to some churches, you can't touch the host, I mean, my God, you know, or if anything drips down your chin you've got to burn it, you know. It's very simple. God is really very simple. We make him extremely complicated.

Q: Let me just close by asking you to- Tell me a little bit, as if I were the person, or as if the audience were the person, which is really what I'm getting at- what you would say to someone who was just coming out of one of these more harmful church backgrounds and coming to Christ Chapel, about herself, say, as a lesbian or himself as a gay man, and about Christ Chapel itself.

A: Well, first I would try to-

Q: Can you say it as though- tell me, okay?

A: Oh, I don't know. I'm not good like that!

Q: Well, pretend that I'm wanting to come into your church.

A: Okay. I would say: First, I want to encourage you with your courage. You had to go through a wall to get here. And we're not for everybody. You know, I'd love to tell you that this is a place you need to be. Because I'd like to have the church build clear out to the sidewalk. But we're not for everybody. But we're worth looking over. You know, don't make a rushed decision. Talk to our people. Listen to the services. Let God talk to you. Nothing's worse than being a rubber tree in a petunia patch. And if you need help, I can help you, I'm open to it. So can everybody else in church. We offer, what I have said though the past, we offer a family, a group. There are no individuals. We offer healing, spiritually, physically, and mentally. And we trust in the word of God. And we teach in the word of God. And the issues that you may have, and the problems and situations you may have gone through, the word real important here is you've gone through 'em. And now what we want to do for you is encourage you to let go of that. To encourage you to trust, encourage you to open up. And not everybody in church is wonderful, just because they come through the door and proclaim to be Christians. We make big mistakes. And there are some people, just because they say they're Christian- their lives are a mess. But the majority of the people care. Even if-

[End side 1; begin side 2.]

A: And I explain how I believe what my ministry is to you. I'm not going to be a great theologian to you. You know. We have Bible studies, we have all that kind of stuff, and education on the word of God. And I think that's real important. But on Sunday morning, that's not what you're going to hear from me. You're going to hear what the Word has to say, and a logical way to live by it. And if that's what you want, if you want to live for Christ, if you want to be renewed, if you want to be not bandaged up but healed, then this is a

place you might want to be. But if you want to be bandaged up, and patted on the head, and bring your little mess in and start another little mess, it won't work. You know, if you're bringing anger from another church, go back to that church and take care of it. Don't come in here and bring it to me! That hurts you and it hurts the church. And if you're a part of this church, anything bad that happens, anything bad that's sad, it's you that's responsible. You're part of that family. And the family's only as strong as the weakest link. So we don't want you to be the weakest link. And we'll work with you, and we'll love you. And even if you make mistakes. Even if it takes you twenty years to get rid of it, there'll be some of us there that'll rejoice in that twentieth year.

Q: That's end of my questions. Is there anything that we haven't touched on, that you wanted to talk about?

A: Lord, I don't think so. That's the longest thing I've ever done! You moved me. I didn't realize I would get- There are things that happened in my life that are so meaningful, and I don't think about. And when you have to talk about them, sometimes it's very- you forgot. I forget. I forgot how lonely I was without God. And I wasn't without him, but I forgot that. Sometimes it's good to remember it because you want to relay that to your people. You know, I wasn't always here. I used to be there. So.

Q: Where some of them still are.

A: Yeah. And, at least they're in church. You know, I get people that'll say once in a while, they'll say, 'Well, did you know what so-and-so did?' Well, I did that! You know. And you did that. They're not where you are! And it would be nice if everybody was. If everybody did what I told 'em, my life would be so much better! But Lord! You know, I keep forgetting sometimes that I was the one- I walked into church looking for a guy. You know. How can you be upset with somebody who does that? So, yeah, I think you made me kind of go back and remember why. So I thank you.

Q: Well, thank you. Let me just ask real quickly too, I'd forgotten to ask. Did you grow up in this area? You talk about L.A. and then you talked about Oregon-

A: No, I actually grew up in Oregon, in Roseburg and Medford. Small town. Small, small town. And then I moved to- I actually moved to San Francisco right after I graduated. And then moved down to L.A. and went to LIFE Bible College, and I had, I worked on a T.V. show for a while and I was a- well, I can't tell you about that. I had other jobs. [Laughs.] And then moved to Long Beach, and this was where I've stayed. I love it. It's a wonderful town. And it's a good community, gay and lesbian community. Awesome. When all the other places are in a mess, Long Beach takes care of itself. I mean, they didn't even have a food store in L.A., and we had one here in Long Beach. Without the help of APLA, which is big, big money. It's supposed to go through the whole county. It doesn't. We still fed- we feed a hundred and forty-some people every two weeks with two weeks of groceries. So Long Beach is very solid, and it's a good town to live in. And we're a good church!

Q: So you moved to San Francisco, you said, after you graduated high school?

A: Yeah. It was the place to go.

Q: And your grandmother warned you about it.

A: Oh, she did! She did. [Both laugh.] It was awesome. I cannot tell you how truly unbelievable it was to come from a little town where you had no education on it, and to San Francisco that was just so wide open. You know. And I was just as cute as all get-out, you know. Back then.

Q: So what year was it that you moved to San Francisco?

A: Sixty-three.

Q: Sixty-three.

A: Yeah.

Q: Things were building.

A: Oh, it was unreal. It was fun. I've had a very good life. I mean, truly. Both in the church and out of the church. God blessed me even when I wasn't in church and involved with him. I've had an awesome life. And I thank God that it's ending in this area rather than the arena I was in before. But I've truly had a wonderful life. I like being gay.

Q: Me too. [Both chuckle.] Well, thank you again.

A: Thank you very much. I hope this works.

Q: Oh boy, so do I.

[End of tape.]