

4-26-1999

## Interview with Deb Click

Deb Click

Kate Hitchcock

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### Recommended Citation

Click, Deb and Hitchcock, Kate, "Interview with Deb Click" (1999). *Interviews*. 12.  
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Interview with Deb Click  
Interviewed by Kate Hithcock  
Granville Baptist Church  
April 26, 1999

SIDE A

K -- This is Kate Hitchcock interviewing Deb Click on April 26th, 1999, around 2:30/3:00 at Granville Baptist Church in Granville. I just want to start out with some biographical information your age, where you're from and how you came to be here.

D -- Okay. Born and raised in Indiana. Grew up a farm girl -- to say the least. Went to Purdue, graduated from there -- actually I've got a Bachelors in Biology. And figure this one out -- jumped from there to going to seminary where I got my M-Deb(?) And I came to Columbus to do that. Um, and then third year of the seminary program, we were pastor training, at least in our tradition, Lutheran tradition, you do it in a church -- full year -- intensive -- living it. And so I was assigned to a church in downtown Newark. So, um, graduated, actually spent my first parish in Indiana and then the church in Newark was expanding their staff and I'd had a good experience. The senior pastor and I worked very well together, and they knew that and so... and in between there I had moved back to Columbus from some interim chaplancy work. And so they'd asked me to return to Newark. Served as their pastor for over 6 years and um, when I was ousted. And that was the birth of Prism Ministries. Being like a ? To the gay and lesbian community.

K -- And then you found this church?

D -- Of course I had worked with this church somewhat. In addition to working for the church in Newark, I was also the campus pastor at OSU Newark COTC and you can't work at a college setting and not work with some gay lesbian folk. And that was about the same time that First Baptist was going through the whole process of eventually being disfellowshipped. And so they were clearly the open friendly place in town, and I referred a lot of people to this place, long before I ever came here.

K -- Right.

D -- When I was ousted and consequently ousted, um, it was a natural place to gravitate to.

K -- Can you talk a little bit about coming out -- when you knew and when you -- how it actually was when you were ousted, or whether you came out, or how that all worked.

D -- Okay, um, In terms of my own coming out, that has been a process, um, and of course its always easier in retrospect to go back and say "oh yeah, that's what that was all about." Um, but in terms of actually going through it, I mean, I can look back into, easily junior high, and identify crushes and interests that I had no clue what was going on at that stage. Um, and by late high school I was actually, what I would now consider dating women and men, but I didn't identify my relationships with the women as dating or intimate or even on the same plain against some of

the concept. Colleges is where I first began hearing the term and the possibility, um, that same gender people could be in a relationship with one another. A termative relationship, not just a friendship. But actually it was going to seminary and in my studies as a pastor that I really came to terms with who I was.

K -- Really?

D -- A lot has to do with the soul searching that you have to go through in that, and its a four year grad school program; it's intense. And you do a lot of taking a part your life, your belief system, and putting it back together again, sorting out all of the chinks and cracks in it and um... you know, you're wrestling with who you are on a whole lot of levels. My first year I was working as a hospital chaplain, quickly finding out how I had to hold up under stress; handling crisis situations and you know, so you're over and over and over really looking into your very soul. At the same time you are studying the scriptures, you're learning them in their original languages, you're learning how to um, translate it, dig into it, reading what everybody has ever written about that particular passage. And so they kind of went for me, hand in hand -- my own process and my faith process. And by the end of seminary I was pretty sure who I was, what I was doing, um I wasn't real sure how that was going to work with being an ordained pastor.

K -- Right.

D -- Um, had many arguments with God about that one before I finally went through with that.

K -- Did you keep it from most people?

D -- Pretty quiet, um, which is my style anyway -- at least it was, until I forced otherwise. But um, there was a small community of us there in the seminary and of course, being in Columbus, we had access to the broader community.

K -- Right.

D -- Um, So I, that's where my culturalization happened, beginning to discover the music and the art and the drama and those components of the gay culture that I had not been aware of before. Um, came out to friends. Didn't, well I, let's see, when did I come out to my -- came out to my sister first. And I think that was a little beyond, I think I was actually -- I'd left my first church before I came out to her. Um, so that was a couple years beyond seminary -- 3 or maybe even after I was back here. I don't remember exactly when that was, I remember it was a very positive experience.

K -- That's great.

D -- Um, yeah my sister was wonderfully supportive and in fact, it brought down the last wall that had been between us, and that was her ? -- "I've always felt there was something there, I never knew what it was."

K -- Right.

D -- And then she knew. Came out to my mom and her husband, particularly my mother, just about a year prior to being outted in the community. And she actually did pretty well with that, I was amazed. I was very amazed, uh, she pretty much had suspected a long time and it just one day came up in casual conversation. Easy enough -- well it was hard, but it was a planned, oh my god, bite the finger nails, going into it kind of thing. It was there, the opportunity was there, and the flow of the conversation and I took it. Um, I lived, like I said, very quiet, if somebody thought I'd ask me, I'd answer honestly. That's been my policy from the getgo. But I didn't make a big deal about it, I didn't broadcast it, I wasn't obvious about it, um, there was a lot of things I didn't say. I didn't talk about my partner, I didn't talk about our children -- I just kept that quiet. Um, so I was in this, pastoring this church, 850 give or take member congregation. Small conservative faction within the church, and we're talking like a dozen people, got word of it and um, totally ignored the system that's in place to deal with any kind of concerns with the clergy. Went directly to the bishop and in a Lutheran church, it's a hierarchical system. And so there was, it was early January that my colleague told me that I had been outted. There was like a full week lull when nothing happened, we had no clue what was -- if anything was going to happen. Whether this was just going to blow over. Um, and then just this two week whirl wind of getting the call from the bishop and he immediately came in and terminated me.

K -- Wow. Did you have any support within the church or were...

D -- A lot of support within the church. Um, if, I firmly believe that if it had gone to vote, it never would have happened.

K -- Right, is that how it should have been done?

D -- Well, there are several branches in that system, it could have gone a couple different directions, but that certainly was one of them. There -- I have a colleague um, that's now a very publicized situation in Iowa. And Reverend Steve Sabin in Des Moines -- or in Aimes, Iowa. He and I were outted within 24 hours of each other.

K -- Wow.

D -- And our stories parallel right down the line until it gets to the point of the congregation and for a variety of factors, at that point our paths went different directions. The towns are very similar, although Aimes has the college in it, Newark doesn't so that's right there a little different type community. Um we had a son that at that point in time was a junior in high school and I did not want, one I was concerned for his safety, um, I also didn't want his senior year to be taken up with ecclesiastical trial and those were the choices I had. I could resign or face charges. And I chose to resign. Steve did the opposite, his girls are a little younger than our kid and he was in a position that he could go to trial. And that trial drug out for I would say almost a year and a half. And in fact, I mean he was finally, the outcome is written from the getgo, it's more an issue of forcing people to deal with the issue and study the whole topic and wrestle with it rather letting everybody just slide. And he chose to then, he was in a position to do that. Actually he's

still serving as pastor at his church -- his congregation has chosen to not release him. And um, and I haven't heard yet whether the bishop has chosen to press charges now against the congregation. It has certainly happened to some other Lutheran churches with that -- chose not to let their pastor go and then the charges were brought against the body rather than the individual, and some of those churches have now been excommunicated. There's other bishops in our denomination that are looking at the more creative alternatives. Um, one in particular, the bishop just declared the pastor vacant, he just hasn't bothered to getting around to filling that vacancy and then the pastor involved has just continued to serve.

K -- So, what's the movement like now, I remember when I came to one of the Sunday school meetings, you were talking about great things that were happening and um, I'm quite clear on what's going on.

D -- Well, it's always a three step forward, two back kind of journey. Um, there are ups and downs. Um, and even though there are separate denominations, what's happening in one influences another in various ways. If nothing else, we all watch each other's stories and take heart from the victories that are won. I tend to focus more on the victories than the losses so its sometimes hard to keep track of what all is happening. Certainly there are getting to be a small growing number of churches who are risking standing up to the large institution and calling, I'm aware of at least two openly -- one gay one lesbian pastors who've been called to churches, um, within the last, I'd say since the beginning of the year. So you know, that's in blatant defiance of the system.

K -- Right.

D -- You know, as I said, Steve's church has refused to let him not be their pastor and so continuing on that there is another church that the pastor was forced to resign much like me, he made the choice to resign rather than go through the trial. And a group of people got mad and left and started their own church and then called him to be pastor of it. So people are getting creative.

K -- Right, right.

D -- Um, as I said a growing number of churches are looking to call openly gay and lesbian clergy. Um, there's a group of churches out in the bay area, of course it's easier to do this out there, who are calling a pastor to serve as a chaplain to nursing homes in their area; and they're all contibuting to a common fund. They are intentionally hiring an openly gay and lesbian pastor to that. So it's, that's the exciting piece of this, and that list just keeps growing.

K -- Right. That's great. Um, can you go into detail about Prism Ministries and how that got formed and what it's doing and how it chose to help. I'm sure you have it all laid out.

D -- I different pieces all over the place. Prism is definatley a grassroots, we're still at the grass roots level.

K -- Right.

D -- Um, as I said when I was ousted, this was the only church in town that was a safe place to be. And initially I came to this church looking for a place, office space, to finish the counselling that I did at my other church. I did probably 90/95% of the counselling for the congregation. And when the bishop came in and terminated, it's terminated immediately. People showed up at church the next Sunday and I was simply gone.

K -- Right.

D -- A letter was sent out, but a lot of them didn't get it in time. And there was a lot of confusion -- I mean, I literally came out to 900 people in a week. I felt the people that I had been counselling with had the right and sit down and talk to me about what happen. Ethically you don't just terminate counselling situations regardless, you always put closure on it, or you end up creating more trouble for the person involved than anything else. And a number of those were children and I felt the parents had a right to come and to talk to me about that. I came here requesting the use of some space where I could meet with those people and put closure on each of those relationships. By the end of the church board meeting where I'd addressed them, they had said to me, now we're gonna give you a room -- an office. We know the ministry you've been doing covertly with the gay and lesbian community. We've committed ourselves to that community, but we don't have the staff resources to devote to it, nor the financial resources, but we can give you the building. And so they gave me this room which had been a storage room, when I started in here. Um, in fact this whole back wing that we have now taken over was predominantly storage space.

K -- I like your little teletubby.

D -- That was a gift from one of the, my counselees. Yes, actually that counselee, it was a couple that I'm going to be doing their union ceremony here this weekend in fact.

K -- Oh, that's great.

D -- They brought that in for me. So that was the start of Prism, they set up an account to receive donations for it and that's what I've lived off of for 2 years now. Um, this space is mine and if I need to hold an event or a large group meeting, I can usually use whatever else in the church that's available, which is now a core meaning of the church. Prism is however, set up as a separate ministry from the church. It gets kind of nebulous because we're under their umbrella, but we're moving towards our independence. Right now we're in the process of filing the legal hullabulloo that goes into incorporation and 501 C-3 status and all of that -- which is a non-profit. And by virtue of being a Lutheran in the Baptist church we have to be ecumenical. In our immediate commitment was this especially being the only show in town, we have no time to quibble over who's what. Um, we need each other's support. Theological debates are great fun, in fact, the diverse mixture of people who are part of Prism really adds to the flavor of it. And we can sit in a Sunday school class; there are people in Prism that range from, I think our most liturgical is Russian Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Episcopalian, Lutheran, Methodist,

Presbyterians through Nazarian Church of God, Independents, and we've got both American Baptists and Southern Baptists which are two very different flavor of faith. Um, we've got a few folks that come to more of the social events who don't identify even as Christian. And there are a whole lot of folks who aren't real sure what they want to identify right now, they are so burned by the church that, yeah they were raised such and such, but boy they walked out and slammed that door years ago.

K -- Right.

D -- And they may show up at our cookouts, or things of that nature, but they're not about to walk in fo Sunday school class, worship service.

K -- It's more for group support than it is for religion.

D -- Yeah, and a lot of folks get to that point. Um, when I was a pastor in a traditional parish, one of my responsibilities was evangelism, which is bringing in new people to the faith. Or at least to the church, often it ends up swapping from one group to the other, which I don't think is true evangelism, but that's another topic. We started Prism, and the floodgate opened. People are hungry, they've been cut off, they've been rejected. They're not sure they want it and yet they do. And a lot of people will come, as I said to a lot of our other activities. They just don't want the trappings of religion. We can sit around a camp fire in my backyard and have some very theological discussions, they just don't want to walk into a building that reminds them of the pain that they've been put through at some point.

K -- Yeah, I think it's hard in the rural communities especially, because that's a big part of it. Peopl get together at churches, and the church functions, and to lose that when you're living here.

D -- Religion is very core to rural culture. Even if you aren't real strongly affiliated, it influences how you think, who you interact with, and that's -- your social cut off from that.

K -- Right.

D -- So we've kind of become that for them. Um, and a lot of these folks will even come into these back rooms, but never step into the ? of the church. Take them months to get to that point. And, it takes a lot of patience, a lot of understanding. Yet, having been through what I've been through, I understand. You know, it's my call to the people. Because of that start, Prism has, like probably most grassroots organization, become what it needs to be in the moment. Um, there are some certain basic directions, as I said, we're moving towards independent status and non-profit and all of those structural things that have to happen. Um, but in terms of programming, it varies by what group is influxing at the moment. And initially we had a Sunday School class 25/30 people. We outgrew, we were meeting in the choir room there in the next room and it didn't fit. I never taught a Sunday Scool Class that I couldn't hold the entire class in what's one of the biggest rooms short of fellowship laws in the church.

K -- Right.

D -- A lot are mostly people who are just coming out, just coming to terms with their faith, you know sometimes they're the same and sometimes they're separate. Some people been out for years and they're just now coming to the faith stuff. Coming out to God essentially, not like God didn't know but it was the first they were aware of, they were just now coming out to God. Others are just coming out period, to anybody, themselves primarily. What we seem to get a pattern is a group comes in that's at that stage and we work them through for several months and then they integrate elsewhere, they integrate into the other programming of this church, or they're comfortable to integrate back into their own churches, still coming to other Prism activities for that support along the way. And that's ideally what I'd like Prism to be. I really don't want to start a totally separate competitive church.

K -- It seems to reach pretty far, I mean I feel like a lot of people come from different areas.

D -- We do. We've got folks, oh my heavens, um, just last week I was doing the data base. We have close, well right at 400 on the mailing list. That's a combination of e-mail and snail mail. About 200 of those are within range for contact on a somewhat regular basis.

K -- Like within Knox County or the area.

D -- Um well it, some are further than that even, but you know, we have one person that drives 2 hours to be here. Just looking for a place. And to me, that's almost out of range -- I mean no other church would consider that within range -- it is for us. Other people, because of the website, we have a lot of ongoing contact, via that. I mean, I don't, many I don't know where they come from. They may be half way across the country. In fact, we've had several on the website from around the world. And yeah, you do what you can and be there for them and answer questions and the like, but it's not face to face. For some people that's safer. They don't have to be as out as somebody and to worry about even somebody just slipping up and outing them and risking them losing their job or their family or whatever may be. So, you know, we've got a good size contingency. Yes, we cover, geographically, predominant bunch ranges from Lancaster, I think we've got one on down to Logan, north up to, we were Mount Vernon, now we're edging up into Mansfield, Mount Gilliad, and even over into Marion. We're getting into that stretch. Um, as far east as Zainesville, Coshocton, and then we go west to the edge of Columbus. So it's you go to the east side of Columbus it's almost easier to commute this way than to commute into Columbus. Traffic patterns. Or they're not looking for a city setting for a church. They're still country at heart, rural at heart and they may have had to gravitate to the city, either for community or just because of job. But their roots are still this way and they still want a small, rural type congregation.

K -- Yeah. How does the immediate community of Granville embrace the church or hasn't?

D -- In terms of First Baptist Church, I'm not sure I've been around long enough to give you the full perspective of that. Um, in terms of PRISM, it's been really, a pretty positive experience for me. Now I realize the church fought a lot of battles before I ever got here and broke a lot of ice for me. Um, some interesting things are happening within Granville, and of course Granville is very different than Newark. There's a pretty big gap in the communities. Shortly after PRISM



started, I was invited to join the local ministerium, the gathering of all the local pastors and church professionals, whether they're Christian education directors or organist, or whatever their title may be -- some ordained some are lay. And all of us in town get together once a month and do a variety of things. Sometimes we have a common speaker, sometimes we work on a common cause, uh, we host ecumenical services, ecetera. And I was fairly quickly after starting, invited to join their group. That in itself was amazing. That of course precipitated the study of the topic.

K -- Right.

D -- For nine months we wrestled with the scriptures and the theologies and the realities and some real tough, tough times. But at the end of that, we were able to come up with a statement of consensus on where we stood with this. Granted, it's not as near as far as I would like to see it be, but it's a lot further than I thought some of them would be.

K -- Right.

D -- And what it has done, it has freed us up to do ministry together. And that, that's the important piece. There's a lot of theology we don't agree on. We don't agree on baptism -- do you do it as an infant? Do you do it as an adult? We don't agree on the understanding of Holy Communion. We don't agree on the ordination of women, but that hasn't kept us from doing ministry together in the past, and this is no different.

K -- Right.

D -- So I've been free to participate in the ecumenical services, take leadership roles in that.

K -- That's great.

D -- Be a part of that group. And be respected even if they don't agree. That's powerful. Um, this summer the churches has an opportunity of coming up. The church across the street is undergoing a renovation and for most of the summer will not be able to use their own sanctuary. And so they have approached us to use ours. And so for part of the summer, we'll just have separate worship times, but we were discussing the possibility of towards the end of the summer, to actually worship together. And it's an interesting discussion right now because they're going to have to deal with the number of gay and lesbians in the congregation, particularly those coupled. And second, we are concerned about not outing those who aren't out beyond this congregation. Um, so we're looking at some different alternatives to both create a learning experience for some people and protect our people at the same time.

K -- Right, Right, that's important. Because you know how it was to be outted.

D -- Church board meeting tonight that is going to deal with a lot of that, so I can't really tell you all the resolution yet, but um, it's an exciting time. And it's exciting that they would ask us, of the other three churches on the corner, we're the one that they asked to do this.

K -- That's great. Have you had a lot of contact with the college?

D -- Uh hmm.

K -- A lot of people come here to the services?

D -- Actually, no. Certainly there's a number of Denison faculty and staff that are members of this congregation; this church started Denison. So the tie has been there for literally, generations at this point. But, I think we're seeing what's typical of most churches in college towns; most college students really don't care a whole lot about church right now.

K -- Yeah.

D -- Um, it's a natural stage of life. Even if they've been raised in the church, there's that need to go through a time of sorting out what they believe versus what their parents believed or what they were taught. They may try several different churches over the course of their college career. And they try nothing for awhile. That's normal. But right after PRISM got started, um, we approached Denison. As I said, we already have ties -- the church already has ties with them. Knowing that there is a large GLBT population, very large student group on campus. And the first few months, I simply volunteered my time and went up and met with the kids. Once a week, once every other week, when they met -- I just kind of was a presence. Um, didn't impose myself, I'm real conscious of not being the adult in the bunch.

K -- Right.

D -- Occasional would speak the word of caution or wisdom. You know, "you may not want to go to that particular bar cause it's a little rough." You know, something like that; um, as they planned events. Being there for different ones to come up to me as they're struggling with any number of issues; some of them not even related to sexuality, but....

-----END of SIDE A-----

## SIDE B

D -- ...See I was outted in February, and PRISM was started by the first of March. February 17/ February 24th, um, so it was the rest of that school year that I was at Denison on my own time. The out-going president, who is very supportive of GLBT concerns, set aside a stipend for me to continue doing it the next school year, on a regular basis. She saw the merit to what I was doing.

K -- Wow.

D -- Um, and so I did. And worked not only with the student group, also worked with the gay alumni group, and also with another organization on campus that is the advocacy group. Um, that was this school year. And for fall, it has now become a standing part of the budget. So that's pretty exciting; I'm not sure of any other campus that actually has a chaplain designated for

GLBT students. And that's a very strong statement to that group of their importance.

K -- You found a good community to make some waves -- and make a difference.

D -- Yeah. Students are not real sure what to do with me. Um, you know, still a lot of folks out there that think gay and Christian don't belong in the same sentence; that it's an oxymoron. And, for a long time I felt like I lived in two closets, one was I couldn't tell my church community I was gay, and I couldn't tell the gay community I was clergy.

K -- Right.

D -- Slowly we're bridging that. It takes a lot of trust building and I've sat in a lot of meeting with those kids before --(beep) the secretary will get that -- um, before I get somebody that approaches me with an issue.

K -- Now is your partner in the clergy as well?

D -- Yeah.

K -- Did you guys meet in school?

D -- No, um, she's been in the community longer than I have and, as I've said, I was also the campus pastor with the OSU COTC. And at the time that I was hired, she started to move forward with campus ministry and that's where we met.

K -- And you have children I understand, is that from a previous marriage, or ...

D -- Ah, those are hers.

K -- Those are her kids?

D -- Technically.

K -- Well, yeah, now they're both of yours.

D -- Now they're both ours, yes.

K -- That's great. So you guys work together -- I mean I know when I came to visit, you were talking about this program you had went on where she broke her arm.

D -- Yes, yes. Um, in January, the Lutheran... Within the Lutheran Church, let me back up a second, there are a number of advocacy organizations. One of them is called Lutheran Lesbian and Gay Ministers and is it specifically advocates for the clergy. It is the political, legal, and financial umpff behind the battle. And what they have done, is they started when a group in the area were um, actually the churches were excommunicated, they never even recognized their

ommission of the three pastors. They started out of that time and raised the money to keep those churches viable. Uh, one of those churches is now so viable they kick 10 grand back into the LLGM budget themselves in ten years time. Um, and so what they've gone to do is move beyond the bay area and help support a number of us who have been removed for this reason. They are the predominant financial support behind PRISM. They had a retreat in January of about 2, well, I'm trying to remember how many were actually clergy and how many were actually partners -- about 2 dozen of us at the retreat altogether. Um, not all of those were clergy so there were some partners present as well. But all of us had been through this. At least a fair number -- or I should say, at least all of us who had been through it have chosen to stay in the ministry in some capacity. There are a number who have been typically forced to resign and just, they disappeared. A lot of us have gone to form our own ministries, some have churches that as I've said -- stood up for them and they have continue to serve in those churches. Um, some are in secular jobs, but still with the dream to continue to be active in the battle.

K -- After being ousted so abruptly, did you experience any violence or anything?

D -- The only thing that came close to that was in the process of moving out of my church, I knew I was moving to here; we were in the process of trying to clean this room out, get it painted, turn it from a storage room into an office. And I had arranged with the pastor at the other church to just leave my stuff there and move it once, I'd have to move it home and back. Those arrangements were made, but they were evidently some folks in the church who did not find that acceptable and they went into my office one night and went through everything. Everything was cleared out. Um, I imagine in their minds they think they were helping, they boxed everything up, but it got to be kind of comical because they boxed everything up -- whether it was mine or not. Um, I really could have taken advantage of that and not returned to the church, a good number of things that belonged to the church -- a lot of it related to the computer. Um, and stuff that belonged to other people. You know, there was a seminary student that belonged to that church who had some things, some things in my office were stored -- there were things that belonged to the other pastor, there were things that belonged to the different educational programs. As a pastor, you have this stuff in your office, you're reviewing it, you're keeping up on what's going on in the classes -- they packed it all indiscriminately. They even boxed up my bag of recycle papers. The sad thing in all of that though; they went through my counselling files. That is confidential information, uh, a violation that is a fourth degree felony in the state of Ohio. And they not only went through them, the only thing left in the room, were those files and there were left open to strategic information. It wasn't even a random throwing them or something, they were very neat and laid open, pages folded back. Which created a dilemma. As I said, it's a fourth degree felony, we had the right to press charges, um, something we had to consider we had the responsibility of pressing charges. Surely they could point easily enough -- very few people had keys to that office and had them enforced (?), so it would have been a small group to choose from.

K -- Right.

D -- At the same token, do you drag a congregation through that kind of a bloody battle? And do you want that kind of publicity in the small community without a complication? So what I chose

to do, and actually the senior pastor and I talked this through and came to this together -- in conjunction with the county sheriff. We put notices in the bulletin and the church newsletter that those files had been violated.

K -- Did you notify the people whose files they were?

D -- Well, this was our way of doing it because there were so many in that church. Um, some of them I did notify individually, particularly the ones I knew were strategically opened and what it was open to. But we posted an announcement that, one, to let people know that they had been violated, and two, that if any of the information in those files was used against them, that charges would be filed. At this point, nothing had come up. Um, I think they were clearly looking for evidence on me, but I think they were also clearly looking for who else in the church was GLBT, and it was something that I have never written down.

K -- Smart.

D -- The interesting thing, in the course of all of that, within 24 hours of that happening, the steeple fell off the top of the church. And understand the significance of that for this community, or that church -- when they built the building, they wanted to raise a cross high enough to be a landmark downtown. And so you've got this huge stone tower, and out of that is a steeple and out of the steeple is a spire and off the top of the spire is this cross, so it towers pretty high. I'm sure it's still the highest downtown, but it was at one time. No thunder storms, no high winds, there was nothing that night to attribute it to. The congregation has used the symbol of just that spire on their letter head, t-shirts the youth group sells, the cookbooks the women's group sells, I mean it's the symbol for the church -- not a picture of the building, just a picture of that spire. When it landed, it landed top first, the cross was totally buried into the ground, out of sight, could not be seen. There were those who essentially blew it off. There were whole lot of people who saw that as a wake up call; that it was a providential act that they had buried the cross and what the cross stands for in terms of grace.

K -- Wow. I get a chill just thinking about that.

D -- Uh, I guess my colleague was quite a peace maker back -- he's always into churches for that purpose, um, was brought to that church for that purpose, I should say, years ago when there was a skism. For the first time 28 years of ministry, he preached a hell fire process (?) And I miss it because I wasn't there anymore. Um, but it rattled him that hard that he finally decided to speak out against what had happened.

K -- Wow.

D -- And call people into account. So, it was an interesting time, but in terms of any other violence, um, no. But I think a lot of that is because we kept it out of the media. LLGM kept saying there's no way it's possible, and I said watch me. They said particularly in a small town you're not going to keep it out of the newspapers -- I said watch me, and we pulled it off. And I'm not sure yet how we pulled it off, but um, my goal was to get our youngest out of high school

and he's now finishing his first year of college, so we're past that point. The kids are to a stage of life, they're safe. So.

K -- That's good.

D -- So, I pulled off what I wanted to pull off.

K -- Right.

D -- And it's a shame you have to do that.

K -- Did he still have to deal with a lot of problems that year, or, I mean it's hard for you to say, speaking for him, but.

D -- Um, in terms of the kids having trouble or anything? They've never said anything. Um, and it was hard, probably hard on us as parents to sit down and have a conversation with your kids suddenly about how to protect themselves and the whole time I'm talking to them, I'm thinking, it sounds like I live in the inner city. You know? Look over your shoulder, don't come into the house if there is somebody around that you don't recognize, don't open anything you don't know what it is. You know, this is inner city stuff. This isn't out in the hillsides of Licking County. Um.

K -- But you never know anymore.

D -- You never know. Um, yeah, some of the big husky football players at my other church came up to me and said, don't worry about your son, we'll keep an eye on him. So they kind of appointed themselves guardian, um, nobody ever reported to me that they ever needed to do anything, but you know, I know what peer pressure is like in high school. There are subtle ways of letting people know, "back off" even if it's just...

K -- That's great, it sounds like you did have support of the community, even though it was the dozen that gotcha.

D -- Yeah. Incredible support. Um, in fact, too much at a point in time. If there is any experience in my life where I have understood what it means to be a community of faith, be the body of Christ, it was that experience. Amazingly enough, we had 15 - 20 voice mail messages every day, we had that many or more e-mail messages from all over the country, and locally. We got to the point we just tell the kids to take a message, we cannot talk to anybody at this time. I would be on the phone for 5 or 6 hours every evening, just rolling -- call waiting one right into the next, right into next. Um, and that got to be exhausting, there was no time to really process what was happening and make some decisions, and as I said, sometimes we would just have to say nothing tonight, we've got to sit down and figure out what we are going to do next. Um, I heard from old seminary classmates I hadn't seen since we graduated, met people I've never known in my life. Three weeks after it happened, I was invited to speak at a national convention. And I walk into this gathering of 300 people and everybody knows who I am, I was just floored. As I've said, I've

always been a very quiet, low-key kind of person and I was suddenly just volted um, into the limelight nationally.

K -- Right.

D -- I wasn't quite sure how to deal with it at the time, sometimes still, I'm still not sure what to do with it all. But, you know, the support was wonderful, um, some of those people continue to provide some financial support to PRISM. There are a few folks in town, when I run into them, shun me -- small town, you can't help but run into folks -- far greater number come up, give me a hug, and I can't get away. You know. I just ran into a woman last night at the store that had not been back to the church since, and that just breaks my heart because that's not what it was about. Um, and if it could have been handled differently, my colleague and I tried to ask for -- we asked for but we didn't get it -- was six weeks. One, we were just at the start of Lent; he was looking at going there's no way I can do all this stuff in the next six weeks and survive. Um, so he wanted me to stay through Easter and then be done. I was willing to accept that, it would have been a rough 6 weeks to get through, knowing I was finishing, but it would have given us time to put closure. Um and to let people dialogue.

K -- Right, absolutely.

D -- As I said, they cut me off completely, they did eventually work it out that I came back for a farewell service that was held on a Sunday afternoon. So, you didn't have to be there. The church was packed. And this church seats over 300. It was packed. I was just floored. The nice thing about having it be a separate service was I lived to design it, for what I wanted to say to them, everything that I did for that service.

K -- Wow.

D -- Said my final message to them. And the scripture that I chose was the story, the end of Genesis where Joseph, you know he's been sold into slavery and he's now risen to power and his brothers have come to Egypt and they've now lived there with him for some years when their father dies. And they're afraid of the retribution and what he says to them is, you intended to harm me, but God intended for good. Cause I truly believe that's what happened. Um, PRISM started too quickly to not be providential.

K -- And look what you were able to do with that loss.

D -- Yeah, and for two years it's survived financially -- and I'm not saying we do it by much of a margin, um, to say the least, but we have survived. And when I look at the figures sometimes and know how hard it is to raise money for ministries, I'm just floored at what we've been able to do. When I look at the list of names that we have been able to reach out to. Knowing how many years I've lived in this community and tried to reach out to essentially these same people, not necessarily identifying them as sexuality, but just, inviting them to the churches. It didn't happen.

K -- Right, right.

D -- But now, I can't keep up with them.

K -- Are you looking to move PRISM ministries to a more city area, are you going to try and stay in a rural....

D -- PRISM has committed to being rural. One thing we've discovered is we have created a unique niche, or actually, I think God created a unique niche for us. There are very few gay anything in rural areas -- that's just a given.

K -- They're there, but they're not...

D -- They're few and far between, um, at best it's a few scattered bars, um, and that's about it. And, but very little in terms of services, um, support systems, anything of that nature, other than what's been done with the AIDS networks that have been set up -- those have better funding behind a lot of them. Um, PRISM is unique. One of the first things I did was try to find other people that were a) in rural settings and particularly ministries in rural settings -- they're not out there. What we're finding is people are calling us saying how we can start it in our area. So it's, it's doing it's own thing, and this is where the need is. Um, I sometimes get a little frustrated with listening to the city folk because it seems much easier for them -- there's larger numbers of them, more of a network -- same time, I guess they're also all competing with each other. We're out here, pretty much flying solo.

K -- Right, it's hard to blend in in a rural area than it is to in a city area.

D -- It's nice being so close to Columbus because we do have access to the resources. Um, I don't know that this would have worked in an area that was just totally removed from any kind of metro area. You know we, some of our activities are piling into Columbus for a concert, Big Man's Chorus, the Women's Chorus. Um, going out on Main, to dinner -- something. We take advantage of what they offer, we just get the car pool together and head for it. We facilitate people being able to one, know about it, and two, getting tickets for it. That's a cheap and easy role for us to take. And do it socially. Um, what makes it easier. But at the same time, there's still an hour trek into there, and as I've said, some people drive two hours just to get here. So.

K -- Right, right. No, but this sounds like a great thing that's gonna probably get even bigger and...

D -- There's days that I get impatient with it and want it to get bigger quicker, and more established quicker. Um, we're in a bit of a transition right now, it's a good transition, my assistant is um, he came on board immediately. He came up to me right after I started this and said, hey, do you want some help? He um, gladly. Um, (?) but he's donated his time for two years; he's now leaving to go to seminary, which is exciting. Uh, we have three in our group that, three -- two gay men and a lesbian who are studying for ministry. The hard part is, knowing what they're going to do when they get out.



K -- Right, right.

D -- Out of the studies, but a lot can happen in four years. So I'm excited for him that he's leaving and yet at the same time I'm losing my right arm in this. So there's going to be some transitions ahead for us, and we're just constantly acting and changing. Somebody will come up, they'll have an idea, they'll be a group of people that have a need, so we'll help them get started and get going with it.

K -- Sound pretty overwhelming.

D -- Some days.

K -- Yeah.

D -- Some days, and I work a second job on the side to survive financially, PRISM isn't that strong yet I expect then there to be a full time position. And as it gets real tough. But it always works, and it always amazes me how it works.

K -- I think it's a really great thing. Um, I don't necessarily have any more questions, is there anything that you want to talk about that I've missed or anything.

D -- The only thing that comes to mind is one I never finished answering when you were asking about January when we were at the LLGM gathering.

K -- Oh, that's right.

D -- Um, they brought together all of us to see all of us who have been through this. Chance to share our stories, what was more important is the chance to share our stories beyond the obvious story. Many of us had been in the same conference, but speaking in opposite-different workshops and never getting any time to talk to each other for any duration.

K -- Right.

D -- So we had heard each other's outting stories, but didn't know the rest of their lives. We had a chance to talk about our kids, our dogs, our hobbies, our dreams, our hopes; it was wonderful. We had a chance to grieve for the pain that happened. Carter Hayward, who is an Episcopal priest and theologian teaches at Episcopal Divinity School was the facilitator and um, she did an incredible job. She did not come in with an agenda, she developed the agenda as we were developing direction. And what came out of it was a predominant call of -- well up to this point our energy has been spent fighting the system. There was this awareness of, there's a whole of people out there who need us as pastors, ministers... we can't put all our energy into fighting the battle; we've got to put a lot of energy into doing ministry -- that's what we were called to do initially. Excuse me, we made that shift, it was a powerful piece -- recognizing that some are still set aside to fight the political battle and we are there for their support and their encouragement and to be with them in that. In fact, two of them were late getting to the retreat because they had

been addressing the conference officials. But many of the rest of us, are first and foremost pastors, not politicians, not legal beagles -- and we have ministry to get done. And so we started looking at how to coordinate the various advocacy groups within our denomination, filling in the gaps that aren't being covered to continue to empower us and facilitate the ministries that we're building. And when the church decides to catch up, great. In the mean time, there's a whole lot of people out there that are waiting and needing us and that's what we're putting our energy into now. It's exciting, it's good just to have each other for support and linkage. Most of us were cut off from collegial support when it happened. I'm probably one of the few that's still involved in the ministry of some sort. A few are. In fact one of the guys -- one of the California bunch -- was elected dean of his conference, I hear he's not even recognized as a pastor in the conference, but they elected him dean. Some bishop had to figure out what to do with that one. But it does say something for how his colleagues view what he has to offer, even though he's a gay man.

K -- Right. That's great.

D -- It was pretty funny when it happened.

K -- Any questions you have for me, or anything else?

D -- I'm sure there's a thousand and one things, but nothing is right off the top of my head.

K -- Okay, I can give you my number, or you have my e-mail too.

D -- I have you're e-mail, that's probably the easiest.

K -- Well thank you so much for this interview, I got a lot of great things out of this.

D -- You are welcome. Loved doing it.