

Rock Stars and Prophets: Generations of Justice and Love Interview Series
A Ministry of That All May Freely Serve

Stony Point Center, Stony Point, NY
April 8 – 11, 2015

Interview of: Tricia Dykers Koenig

Interviewer: Warren Cooper

Transcript with revisions:

Tricia:

I'm Tricia Dykers Koenig, and I live in Cleveland Heights, Ohio.

When I got involved in the Movement, I was a Commissioner to the General Assembly in 1991 in Baltimore, Maryland. The big issue at that Assembly was the Human Sexuality Report, and I was not happy with the way the General Assembly dealt with that or with the way Presbyterians in general were dealing with the report.

It was very shocking to me, as a Christian, to hear other people sitting in church, talking about Children of God the way they were talking about Lesbian and Gay people (at that time it was probably not Bisexual and Transgender, because it just wasn't as much on people's radar), but my experience in the General Assembly was so shocking that I needed to educate myself about the issues around homosexuality, in particular, when I got back home to my family and my church.

The other experience at the General Assembly that was kind of formative for me and has led to my ministry now is that I felt very alone at the General Assembly in my viewpoints. I was very much in the minority, although I knew other people who were at the Assembly who agreed with where I was coming from -- and I assumed that almost all of the ministers had been to seminary and had learned to interpret the Bible pretty much the same way I had -- so I didn't understand how people could be talking the way they were talking, even though at that point I hadn't done much of any research about homosexuality and the Scripture, and that kind of thing; that came later.

But I can remember (this is before cell phones, right? 1991) standing at the edge of the convention center in Baltimore at a bank of pay phones talking to my husband on the phone saying, "You know, we need to join the Witherspoon Society or something because this place needs organization!"

It would have been easy for people to find that I was progressive and to reach out to me to bring me in to some sort of process for dealing with things at the GA, but I didn't get connected with that.

I've learned that there were things happening, but I didn't know about them and nobody tried to bring me in. So, I was part of the demonstration that happened that we've heard about with the cross and nailing – and I was one of the commissioners that got up out of my seat and walked with that group, but before then I didn't know there was a group. And, that was too late. It was after everything had already been decided at that point.

So, my job now is with the Covenant Network of Presbyterians. I got involved in the movement before there was a Covenant Network, and I was in a project called *Unity Through Diversity Project* that led up to the 1996 General Assembly. I was on the PLGC Board and then the MLP Board after PLGC merged. In fact, the conversations about merging those two organizations – Presbyterians for Lesbian and Gay Concerns and the More Light Churches Network – happened in the library of my church on Easter Weekend in, I think it was 1999. I was one of the representatives from PLGC to the talks about the merger. And, we had it Easter weekend because it was hard to find a time. I was serving a church at the time. I said, "Well, I'm not preaching on Easter, my husband is doing that. I can't leave town, but if you all want to come to Cleveland, then we can do it at my church," and that's what we did.

But, at any rate, during my involvement in the movement prior to my working for Covenant Network and in my job now, I would have given anything for the organization that reaches out to commissioners to put commissioners together with each other so that they can work on making those changes from the beginning, instead of having to take half the General Assembly to figure out who it is you want to work with.

So, a lot of the work that I do is that sort of organization, and it really came out of my experience at the General Assembly in '91 feeling very isolated, wanting to work with other people to accomplish a goal, and not knowing how to do it, because I didn't know who the other people were. So, that's a lot of my motivation for the organization that we have been doing at the General Assembly since. Well, we tried to do it in '95, '96, and '97 etc. and we did some of that – but we've gotten a lot more sophisticated about it.

One of the reasons that I was offered the job that I was with Covenant Network was that I was doing some of the kind of grunt detail work about figuring out who all those commissioners were: who do we know in Presbytery X who can tell us who the commissioners are from that presbytery and whether they'd like to hear from us or not. It's just a very laborious, detail-oriented, time-consuming type of thing to keep this database in the days before I knew anything about computers and here we have lists, people and that kind of thing. There weren't that many people who had the patience; I was also – had a really great opportunity – because my husband and I

were co-pastors serving a church, splitting one job, and my kids were starting to get a little older at that time; I had time between the PTA and serving my church and the presbytery to do a lot of volunteer work, where people who were working full-time didn't have that opportunity. So, it was a really great chance for me to put some patience to work and a few skills to try and do some organization so that we could really harness all the person power of the people who – at the General Assembly – who want to make a difference but don't know how if they're going feeling isolated. So that's a lot of the stuff I've done over the years; there's a bunch of other stuff, along with but...

Warren:

How long have you been with Covenant Network?

Tricia:

I started in the fall of the year 2000.

Warren:

So, I am interested in your reflection and also projection concerning the meeting that began the coming together that was at your church...

Tricia:

Well, not of the Covenant Network, at that time...

Warren:

No, of the More Light... in the beginning of the coming together of those groups...

Tricia:

Those two groups, yes, right.

Warren:

So eventually the -- there was conflict around strategy and that kind of thing; I'm interested in your reflection around that; and also focus on that subject looking into the future using whatever inspiration should come in the gathering here.

Tricia:

I'll see if I can do that justice. When I started working through with the *Unity Through Diversity Project* I didn't know anything about national level politics on this kind of stuff, and it made sense to our little group that this was a project that the More Light Churches Network and Presbyterians for Lesbian and Gay Concerns should do together. So we had a plan and we were going to suggest it to these two organizations. The boards didn't really used to meet together, but they were going to meet at the same time in the same place, some overlapping and some separate, and a bunch of people said, "Oh, they'll never do that. They'll never agree to work together."

Well why not? Because it makes so much sense. But they did agree to work together, and that was actually one of the experiences I think that led to the merger that happened later because we had some experience working together.

And, we wanted to hire a staff person. Up to that point, there was no staff person for either one of those organizations, at least not that I'm aware of. It was all the board volunteering.

We wanted to hire a field organizer and we thought it would be easier to hire somebody if it was one organization and not somebody working for two organizations.

So interestingly then, the Covenant Network came along in 1997 – this merger was '99 – so MLP, then, at that point was working, and I was a strategy person for PLGC/MLP, so I ended up working a bunch with the people who were emerging and beginning the Covenant Network. They used some of the information that I had developed – because I continued to do commissioner tracking in '97, and the Covenant Network people (the people who became the Covenant Network) used some of that information to accomplish what they did in 1997. So, I was working with them. And, we had some differences of opinion at that point between MLP and the Covenant Network, not a whole lot, but during the time when I was on the MLP Board, we didn't always agree within the board about what the best strategy was, what's the fastest way to move forward.

In my view, it's always the fastest way to move forward – and the most effective way. But the most effective way to move forward is not necessarily always a straight line. So sometimes, you know if you run real hard in a straight line and there's a wall there and you run into it – then you have to pick yourself up and not be woozy before you can figure out the way around that wall.

So we did have, there were times in the history of the movement where we had some differences of opinion about the best strategy for moving forward. Particularly, in the early 2000's.

During the time when the Theological Task Force on the Peace, Unity, and Purity of the Church was working, it was our view in Covenant Network – that it was not a real opportune time to try amend the Book of Order; and that came from our experience in 2001 when we had worked really hard, everybody together, to try to get an amendment through the General Assembly and we did! Then at the same time, the same Assembly had recommended the Task Force be constituted.

The idea of the Assembly was, we need to get this [ordination standards] resolved, but then we need to think about how we are the church together, too, at the same time. We don't want to wait on either one of these things. But the existence of the Task Force was used as an excuse for not resolving the [ordination] issue, and my view, shared by the Covenant Network Board, my view as a person who'd come over

kind of from the PLGC perspective was – until this [PUP Task Force] gets resolved, it's going to be used as a talking point against any kind of an amendment. We're going to have no good luck.

So we tried to do other things that only a General Assembly could do – an authoritative interpretation, rather than an amendment during that time. There were some – not everybody in MLP – but some who felt you have to go for everything every year as a matter of principle. So that was some of the difference in strategy, and there were some difficult times during that period. Some before that, too. Some of the Covenant Network people, not all of them, recommended a moratorium [prior to the Task Force years], some of this is a little bit – I haven't thought about these things for a while for a while so it's interesting– but going forward...

We've been pretty much on the same page, I think, strategically, all the organizations since about 2008. And at that point, we in the Covenant Network felt, now is really the time to push forward – we started being – we started that way in 2006 – I think there were still some issues around the Theological Task Force that reported in 2006, but since 2008, we haven't had any strategic differences. And I don't expect that we will going forward. It's not something that seems likely to me.

We've had really good working relationships since about that time, about 2008, because we've shared the same specific goal for that year. I think we've always had the same goals out there, but how you get there – we've had some differences of opinion about.

So, there's been a bunch of other things in terms of the ways we've tried to work strategically at the General Assembly and before... When people ask me what my job is, if they want the really quick thing, sort of the political organizer for the Covenant Network. Sometimes we focus on the local organizing; it's not as much national, but we need to build this infrastructure, but lately it really has been focused on the General Assembly. So, if you want overtures that go to the General Assembly somebody has to help shepherd those, sometimes write them, get them passed in presbyteries, then you have to get it passed at the General Assembly, and then if it's an amendment you have to get the presbyteries to pass it afterwards.

So part of my job is to manage all that stuff and there's a lot of different ways we go about it depending on what stage that we're going to.

But I definitely want to make sure we are respectful of other peoples' interview time so...

Thank you so very much...