

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

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Molly McGinnis, Atlanta, Georgia  
Ryan Larkin, Palo Alto, California

**Molly:** Well, my name is Molly McGinnis and this is my lovely counterpart...

**Ryan:** I'm Ryan Larkin...

**Molly:** We are here to meet all of these wonderful "Pres-Celebrities" that we have been hearing stories about over the years, and for myself I wanted to come and really hear the testimony and hear the witness of these people and what their journeys have been like and how their journeys continue to shape and reform the church, and to dialogue with them.

**Ryan:** Tell them how you come to this group; where you say you're from and what are your - how you're affiliated with this bunch.

**Molly:** Right. Well, it is a little bit difficult to identify my context, at the time. I grew up in Arkansas, and I now live in Utah, but I will be moving to Atlanta very soon for a call. And, I'm excited about that. First call. Will be getting ordained in the fall. And, I'm here before God pulled me out of the closet and into seminary at the same time!

And, I can't ignore that those two things were happening in my life simultaneously, and they have really shaped my ministry as a queer advocate and as an out queer pastor, and that is an identity that I am very intentional about making known and about cultivating.

**Ryan:** So, I'm Ryan Larkin, again, and I come as one of the pastors at First Presbyterian Church of Palo Alto. And I'm affiliated with this group, first through Presbyterian Welcome and its 2011 retreat - was my first. Certainly a major life shift. And, then I got a little bit more into the history that I've learned so much more about at this retreat, through the trials of Janie Spahr. I wasn't with her for all of them, but I made my way down to a training one month in advance of a San Antonio trial. And, her witness, the way the trials were run, her legal team, Janie herself, the hospitality of the people supporting Janie, the journey that they have been on as they have shared - meant so much to me early on in the journey through seminary.

That's what I've been thinking about here, that if I'd taken a seat on one of the panels and told the story to this group, I feel like I've come here mostly as an observer, mostly not a part of the history – but one who benefits from all of the work that has been done. And, this is specifically how I think my...

I was able to hear out of the blue at twenty-nine years old that I was called to ministry and had no idea what to do with that. And then, I did a little research and found out that this church I had known from birth, called the Presbyterian Church (USA), they still had a rule on the books that said, "It's not for you."

But I went forward, because I didn't know what else to do, I really couldn't do anything else, I had to go forward to finish up an undergrad degree when I had had all kinds of challenges as a student. And, I did that.

And then, in the summer before I began seminary, the work that is represented in large part by people who we've met here and like meant that 10-A, Amendment 10-A passed, and that I could walk forward with that.

And then I thought, well maybe one day I'm going to be ordained, but I'll probably be in a similar situation to Janie Spahr in the sense that I would be on trial, because surely if a couple came to me and we did all the counseling thing and they needed to be married, well I was going to marry them! So, I thought, well I can deal with that. But, now I don't have to. Now, the work that is largely represented in this room means that 14F is passed and that marriage now has a new and much more holistic and better definition.

And so, what it means is that all the challenges that come hereafter, there's this ordination process we're involved in, you're further down the road, I've got lots of steps left – and I can approach an ordination exam a lot like our heterosexual counterparts. I can approach the call process differently, but much more like our heterosexual counterparts. So, that as the trials of this journey come and all the joys of this journey come - they come to me in much different way now. A much freer way and a much more familiar way to that experience for all, because of the works that's been done, and so I'm thankful. So thankful.

**Molly:** So, Ryan and I went to seminary together, so this rapport that we have that is wonderful has come from several years of cultivation. So, we didn't just meet and hit it off like this.

**Ryan:** No, no you couldn't stand me in the beginning, as I recall!

**Molly:** No, I loved you from the "git-go" ...

**Ryan:** We met by a pool in Austin, Texas.

**Molly:** We did. We did. So we went to Austin Seminary, and I was a living in Nashville, after I graduated college because that's what an Arkansas girl does when she want to move to the big city. And I was floating around Nashville, I'm not a musician, I just really like it there – and I was applying for jobs, this, that and the other. Turns out nobody wanted to hire anyone with a Sociology Bachelor's – wasn't really finding my place in the world. I worked for the Census, for a while. That was in 2010. And, I waited tables, working like a dog, about fifty – sixty hours a week, and I had a friend of mine I worked with who had been a bartender since she was nineteen. And, she was in her mid-thirties. Her name was Amy. And, I loved Amy, and she loved her work. She loved being a bartender. That was her calling in life. But, I looked at her life, and I said, "I don't want to be doing that when I'm thirty-five."

And, I remembered I'd had some key people along the way, throughout my life growing up in the church who always said to me, "You know you're going to go to seminary, right? When are you going to go to seminary?"

And, I always said the same thing. I said, "I'm not going to seminary, Hebrew's hard!" Which it is; I survived. Barely.

I live a few minutes away from Vanderbilt Divinity School, and I called them up. And, it turns out in a few days they were having their open house weekend, and I said, "Well, can I come?" And, I went and I loved it. I called my campus minister from college, said, "Hey look, you're right. I'm going to seminary. Where else should I look?"

And, I went and I found Austin and stepped there and I fell in love. And, over the last four years, I've really found my voice. And, I'd like to say that I ended up in seminary because I wasn't doing anything else, but now I realize that it's because there's nothing else I would rather be doing with my life than ministry.

**Warren:** So talk about the energy that you have felt in the presence of the elders and the people that you heard about. Talk about - like -the feeling of that, just the sensation of it. And then talk about the motivation factor that's going to propel you forward in your journey from here.

**Ryan:** I have felt that I am, at the times when somebody is speaking into a microphone here, I feel like I am watching a brilliantly produced and very important documentary about civil rights history, gay rights history – and particular to the Presbyterian Church (USA). So, that's been amazing to watch live. Be filmed.

And, then, there's the break times when there's no stage and no microphone and then I get to interact with these folks from the documentary that so informs my life, their work, a documentary about that movement; and then I get to go and talk to

them and realize that not only are they saints and larger-than-life figures, but they're also people I can ask for advice, people who I can count among my friends, and my brain doesn't even begin to know how to process all that - but it is a really brilliant thing.

**Molly:** I echo what Ryan said about being in the presence of people who have made it easier, not easy, but easier to live my life as an out queer person, to be a pastor in this church that I love. But I also noticed a huge missing generation of people that were not represented here. People in their thirties, forties, some even fifties. And, I wonder where those voices are. And, I hope that we can figure that out and that the next time we have one of these gatherings those people are here and not missing.

**Warren:** How has this gathering inspired your voice in how you will use it? Talk about "move forward effects," so when you go back to your ministry in Palo Alto, as you prepare for your call in Atlanta - the things - I mean it's like marinade, so you'll be soaking in it indefinitely, but from your - from the perspective of right now when you are just in this it's kind of this, it's a like a post-euphoric place...mountain top time, so use your - check your emotional motivational meters and just give some reflection on how you think this energy will effect your flow forward.

**Molly:** Someone mentioned today when we were in large group that they're been some moments of really palpable grief, of feeling the presence of those who aren't here, but also all of the wounds that the people in this gathering carry with them that have been inflicted by the church. And, I hold that in a holy place. Because we are a resurrection people, and a necessary component of resurrection is that in order for new life to happen we have to die to our old selves and to the wounds and to the things that prevent us from living into God's call.

**Ryan:** You know, I think I am going to take something really practical away from this weekend, and that is that not every day, as I've found as a parish pastor - I'm sure that's going to be true as I work as a hospital chaplain, and just being a person in the world - not every day is going to be easy or brilliant - but if I can remember some of these stories, some of these people that I've met - you know it's hard to have - it's not going to be as readily available to me to have a bad day, when I think about some of these days, some of these stories, some of the things that folks were put through. You know, I can draw on that; know that I'm able to do something that was denied another. And so, those aren't guilt perspectives - those are just, that's energy. That's recognition and that's what it means to walk with the saints who have gone before you. So, I think, that goes with me from here.

**Warren:** Molly, I heard you say, when you took the mic, I don't even know what day it was, but you - all days run together - but you, in a rather "bad-ass tone" said, well you know, "It's not over." Right? It's not over because that for every four, I think it was four the number you used, that there are forty or whatever that aren't ordained.

In the perspective of that reality and the movement from right here talk, both of you, about your place in the movement and what you see for yourselves, not just for things that you're doing, but in terms of focusing and gathering of critical mass of your demographic into the conversation of the movement.

**Ryan:** I think we've got a challenge, Molly, different than people just a few days ago and a few years ago, and that is that we don't have the same kind of fight to circle around, and so what could, what was just true, was that you had limitations on your ability to be ordained, so that might make your stop or sidestep – or you know, you just had to use your energy for a different kind of fight. And then, also, around marriage, we've got to confront things differently now that marriage equality exists in the PC(USA). I mean something for our civil lives, as it also means for our ministries.

And, so, yeah, in this new day we've got to find new causes, and I'm ready for the challenge. I think there's many more productive uses of a pastor's energy than the old battles that were fought so well and so hard and for too long. But, now, we've got to not be comfortable, but get to work on what we now have time for, thanks be to God.

**Molly:** I think we're in a moment of "Holy Breath," as a queer community, as people who have been involved in LGBT rights and inclusion and welcome in the church for forty, fifty some odd years – and I don't feel like the fight is over, and I don't really feel like it's a fight, either. It's not a battle that has been won.

This is not some civil war. This is people's lives, this is people's callings, people's loves, people's families – these are people. And these people are extensions of God's own being. And I think what we have the opportunity to do now is we get to breathe and take a moment to draw out of ourselves – to recognize the power from within that we have built and brought to light and channel that energy, like you said, into other areas where people's lives are at stake. Where people's love is at stake – where their very person and their extension of God's Being is in danger of being left out, killed, starved.

And, we have the chance right now. We have a new privilege - and with that privilege of voice comes great responsibility. I sound like Spiderman! But, sometimes comic books – that's where it's at.

**Warren:** That's because you're superheroes!

"A new privilege and a new responsibility." That's awesome.

So, last question, maybe.

These video vignettes are going into a collection that's going to be used to tell the story of the movement, and so they will be viewed by people who are looking for rhythm, for that kind of rhythm, for that kind of information, that kind of inspiration.

So, I'm wondering if that's a closing, a closing thing that you could give a message to those in the movement, those who have already gone through it who need to hear; those who are thinking about going through, those who just might stumble on to it in an inquisitive way -- a message to the movement of the future.

**Molly:** I want everyone to hear that queer Christian is not an oxymoron. That we are here. That we are not picketing funerals. And threatening to burn down churches. And drafting homophobic, discriminatory, ageist, racist legislation. We're fighting against those things. We're fighting in love. Standing together. And, we invite you in.

**Ryan:** We are pastors. We are greater in number now because of the work done to make the church more inclusive. And, we are called to join with you, in your struggle. To walk beside you, provide you care, provide you love, when it's hard to find other places. Give us another chance. Call on us. Come around. If it, if you think there's something in and around, a pastor, a church, a Christian, a good person – reach out.

**Warren:** That's awesome stuff.