

**Alice Anderson**  
Charlottesville, Virginia  
Stony Point Center, Stony Point, NY  
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In Alice's words:

I was ordained in 1986 at Faith Presbyterian Church in Austin, TX and served there as the Associate Pastor until 1989. I went from there to Southwest Presbyterian Church in Detroit, MI where I served as Pastor/ Head of Staff from 1989 - 1992. I was the Associate Pastor for Social Action and Education at the New York Ave. Presbyterian Church in Washington, DC from 1992-2002.

I was called to Calvary Presbyterian Church in Alexandria, VA in 2002 as Pastor/ Head of Staff and was a candidate for Pastor/Head of Staff for the First Presbyterian Church of Rockville, MD in 2003.

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*Excerpts from Alice's interview:*

"We know you hold Rev. Anderson in high regard but if you call her, you will lose your building and all of your assets." [To the calling church by those opposing Alice's installation because she was a Lesbian.]

"I'm here today because I got a call from Janie Spahr saying that I needed to be here. And, I came. And this, indeed, has been a time of healing but also a time of great sadness. It's very sad what the church has done to many of us." [On being at Rock Stars and Prophets: Generations of Justice and Love]

"All the people there were young. They were folks I'd never met. People who had enthusiasm and excitement about what they were going to be doing in their ministries...and, at first I felt kind of angry, like these young people didn't know what we had been through, then I realized, we won. That the day has come that a new generation is in place who doesn't know what it was like to serve in churches where at any moment you might lose your job that you had to be very careful with who you shared what part of your life. That the day has come when we, as the people of God, can bring our whole gifts." [Recalled from one of the luncheon's at GA221]

"So, that day – even though the assembly passed this amendment – it became very clear to me that the church was alive, but it was alive outside the hall." [Following the passage of Amendment B in 1996.]

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**Alice:** Hi. I'm Alice Anderson. I live in Charlottesville, Virginia, and, I'm here today because I now live in Charlottesville, Virginia and don't live in Washington, D.C., where I used to live. And, the reason for that is that – a little bit more than ten years ago, after I'd been serving New York Avenue Presbyterian Church for ten years, it came time for me to leave. And I was called to be the Pastor/Head of Staff of Calvary Presbyterian Church in Alexandria, Virginia.

In the process of that call, it became important to me to share with the call committee the fact that I'm a Lesbian. I'd served churches at that point for sixteen years, and in every congregation I'd served I've been open about who I was with the people who knew and loved me, but things had come together in my life in such a way that everyone knew I was Lesbian; it seemed really important to make it part of the call process. So, I did, and the church called me. But, it didn't take very long before things started to fall apart.

The church I served at New York Avenue was a church two blocks from The White House where there were a lot of people who were involved in politics. In fact, a number who'd been involved in the Clinton Administration, but the new church, Calvary, was a church that also had a lot of people who had been involved with politics but they were part of the Bush Administration.

Somehow, along the way, I hadn't realized that the world had shifted. And, in the process of that call, there was a person who was quite concerned in the church that perhaps they were doing the wrong thing by calling a Lesbian. He happened to work in the Executive Office Building. He was the person who helped them decide, the helicopter operators, decide when George Bush should come down on 9/11 with his helicopter and return to Washington. And, he insisted that we needed to talk, and the only place that we could talk was in his office in the Executive Office Building, next to The White House.

So, I told some of my Elders from New York Avenue and they felt that they needed to come with me. They were people who also had offices in that building and they thought they could go talk to him as members of the same security council. And he, in talking with me, sat next to me - three feet away at the other end of the table and explained to me that he would do me no harm. So, we went forward, believing that I had satisfied his concerns, and we would move forward with this call, and that it was safe for New York Avenue to let me go. So, I did. I finished up there, and I think that Easter Sunday was my last Sunday with them, and I was to start at Calvary a week later. But in between, I was going to El Paso, Texas to visit my father who was dying of congestive heart failure.

I got off the airplane in El Paso and was met by my mother who explained to me that I needed to call the chair of the Committee on Ministry because something had happened. So, I called her and found out that in the less than forty-eight hours I had been gone from Washington, there had been charges brought against me for being a Lesbian and that there was a stay of execution on my installation as pastor of this church. Not only that, but the search committee was so angry about what was happening, that they all resigned – not just from the search committee but from the congregation! And, there was really nothing to go back to. The chair told me that what she wanted me to do was to step down; because we couldn't win this battle even though we were working hard to win the war.

So, I did.

Six months later, I was called to be the pastor of Rockville Presbyterian Church – First Presbyterian Church of Rockville, Maryland – and in the process there – the Committee on Ministry was willing to consider me being installed as the pastor of this church, but they had conditions on what that would look like.

They wanted my partner, Georgeann Wilcoxson and me to meet with every group in the church over the next three months in various kinds of ways, which we did. And, then, the day came when I was to receive my call, where I was going to preach, and there would be the vote. And, the week before that again, my father who had congestive heart failure, I flew home because I was called by hospice to go see him. And, I got back to Texas and discovered that during that week, there was a letter that was sent by some conservative members of the presbytery, who had been working with a man from California named Jensen (Paul Rolf Jensen) – and they had sent a letter to the Session of this church that said, “We know you hold Rev. Anderson in high regard but if you call her, you will lose your building and all of your assets.”

And, the person who had been the Chair of the Committee on Ministry, at this point, had become the Executive Presbyter, Cindy Bolbach. And Cindy wanted to make sure that no one could see the presbytery as doing anything illegal on my behalf – that it needed to be very clear they’d done everything to make sure the other side got their chance to be heard. So, she insisted that the letter saying they’d lose the building be sent to every member of the congregation, three days before the vote.

So, this letter was sent. Liberals in the presbytery decided that such a letter – that they needed a “counter-letter.” And they wrote a letter saying, “We’ll stand with you. Don’t worry. It’ll be ok.” That letter was not sent.

I was on the Committee on Ministry at that point, and I missed the meeting ‘cause I was in El Paso with my father. And, they decided – at that committee meeting on Thursday night before the Sunday of the congregational vote – that for this call and this call only – it was required that there be a 90% majority for the vote. Something that – I had never gone anywhere where it hadn’t been 100% - but – so the date of the election came...

Oh, they also required that instead of the interim pastor being the person that would clerk the meeting, that the stated clerk of the presbytery would be the person who moderated the meeting.

So, the day came for the election, and all the people who had gotten the letter who hadn’t come to church in many years decided to come. And, that day the stated clerk decided that it was inappropriate for any member of the search committee to speak, and he wouldn’t recognize them during the meeting.

The vote was taken. It was, I believe, 83% - it might have been as high as 87% - both miraculous numbers, given the conditions under which the vote had been taken. The clerk then left the building, without coming to tell me what the result of the election had been. And, I sat waiting in the pastor's office for some time before anyone came to let me know. Since that time, I have done many things trying to figure out where God is calling me and what I should be doing. I went back to school. I got a Masters in Education. I taught high school English in a rural county school. I've been the executive director of a non-profit mental health association in Charlottesville/Albermarle, and I've moved on with my life.

I sojourn with the Quakers now. That's why I said "clerk" instead of "moderate." I'm losing the language, in fact I've been sitting in meetings all day today where people talk all day long, and Quakers don't talk very much. So, I've kind of lost my ability to listen in that way for that long.

I'm here today because I got a call from Janie Spahr saying that I needed to be here. And, I came. And this, indeed, has been a time of healing but also a time of great sadness. It's very sad what the church has done to so many of us. At the time that this was going on, I felt a little bit like a dog that sometimes you know dogs get the mange and they bite off their feet or a part of their body. And, it felt like the church was doing that with me.

So, what the future holds for me, I don't know. It seems a new day in the church. I went to General Assembly this year, the first time that I had been back in the Presbyterian Church since all this happened. It was in Detroit, where I had served a congregation, Southwest Presbyterian. It seemed a good idea to go back to Detroit.

And, it was just amazing, my partner Georgia and I went to - I can't even keep up with the acronyms anymore - what maybe, MLP, or whatever it was, the gathering that we had been to year after year, and we didn't recognize anyone. All the people there were young. They were folks I'd never met. People who had enthusiasm and excitement about what they were going to be doing in their ministries...and, at first I felt kind of angry, like these young people didn't know what we had been through, then I realized, we won. That the day has come that a new generation is in place who doesn't know what it was like to serve in churches where at any moment you might lose your job; that you had to be very careful with who you shared what part of your life. That the day has come when we, as the people of God, can bring our whole gifts.

So, I'm excited for the Presbyterian Church. I don't know whether I have any future in it, but I believe that there may be a bright and hopeful future.

**Warren.** Wonderful.

**Alice:** So that's what I have to say. There are others things I could say...

**Warren:** So, choose one of those...

**Alice:** In 1996, the General Assembly had met in Albuquerque, New Mexico. And, I was a Commissioner from National Capital Presbytery. I served on the Catholicity Committee, and our job was to deal with all of the relationships – ecumenical and interfaith – and that simply – there was a very concerted effort to deal with – not only issues that had to do with gay people and the infamous Amendment B – that was passed at that assembly, but there was a real effort to reduce the relationships that the Presbyterian Church had. We were working on something called the “Consultation on Church Union.” And, there was an effort that was being made to remove the Presbyterians from the Consultation on Church Union and the National Council of Churches. So, I was on that committee.

I had been warned about what was going on in that committee prior to getting there by Glenda Hope, a woman I worked with in San Francisco. And, Glenda had told me that I just needed to use every kind of “polity trick” that I had to fight what was going on in that committee. My name is Alice Anderson, and we were seated alphabetically, so I was seated right in front of the moderator in the front row. And, every time she said anything, I kept saying, “Point of Order! Point of Order!” I knew my polity really well then, not that I do now. And, I got to the point where I was making a real nuisance and other people in the group started to realize that something was going on.

So two people came and talked to me that first evening, trying to figure out what I was doing. They were both stated clerks – one from New Covenant, Houston another – well, she’s now a stated clerk but, she was a lawyer who’s now at Hudson River – stated clerk – Susan De George. And, I told them what was going on and what I was trying to do, so we all started doing it together!

And then we came up with a compromise. There was a fellow named – Paul, I don’t remember his last name, but what we argued, ‘cause the sticking issue had to do with the bishops, whether Presbyterians could be part of the Consultation on Church Union if you had to have a bishop. So, we wrote up the very thing that I’d been taught in seminary that presbytery is the bishop. That all we need is a presbytery to choose who will represent us, and these groups where they will be meeting with the bishops of other groups. It passed! In fact, I was on – you know at GA they have these big halls, and these - they photograph you, and your image is like ten feet tall and your face is like ten feet tall – and I was up there leading discussion for the committee presenting our compromise on COCU (Consultation on Church Union) about the bishops.

And then, ten minutes later we turned to Amendment B.

And, it had come without me really knowing it was coming. I mean I knew that this was an issue at the assembly, but there was so much work to do to stay in the National Council of Churches, and that was why I was there.

So, the time came for discussion of Amendment B, and it was over very quickly. And, I was just stunned. I didn’t know what was going on. But the man who sitting next to me, picked me up. And the next thing I knew, he had moved me out of the area where I was sitting and handed me over to another person. And, this was in Albuquerque, New Mexico. I grew up in El Paso, Texas, a four-hour drive from Albuquerque.

And, I kept getting passed from person to person. One of the first people was Glenda Hope, another one was Marna Mackenzie from St. John's Church in Berkeley. Another was the youth minister from Highland Presbyterian Church, where I'd been a kid. Another was someone who'd had been at my baptism. And all of these people just kept moving me along, holding me, and – before I knew it – I was outside the hall. And I was surrounded by all the people who all my life had taught me about the Love of God. There they were. So, that day – even though the assembly passed this amendment – it became very clear to me that the church was alive, but it was alive outside the hall.

And, when I was ordained, it always seemed clear to me, I was – all the people involved in my ordination knew I was a Lesbian. And, as I struggled in the seminary about whether to go forward with this call: both the – to be a person who loves other people and to be a Presbyterian minister – how was I going to negotiate this and deal with this with the stance of the church. And, I felt that what I needed to do was to stay in the church so long as it was faithful. And, that day – I'm not sure that the church was faithful. But I did know that the church was present and faithful to me.

It seems that since that time a lot has shifted. And, it's unbelievable, as I was saying, at General Assembly, talking about General Assembly, to go there and see that we now can ordain gay ministers openly; that we now can perform weddings; when you've been away for ten years, it's hard to believe. But I hope that, indeed, the church is hearing the voice of God and stepping out on faith, and that in doing that we know that everything that will be well. All will be well, as God calls us into the future.

**Warren:** That's a wonderful cadence!

**Alice:** Good

**Warren:** Thank you!

**Alice:** OK!