

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

Lisa L. Larges

Candidate for Ministry in the Presbyterian Church (USA)
Minneapolis, Minnesota

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

From Lisa's interview:

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Fights that we've have between our various organizations, the disagreements about what being out and not being out, etc. all of that meant.

And, in the early days back in the – tensions between gay men and lesbian woman, and then between gays and lesbians and bisexual and transgender folks – we have had to work through all of those things, and we've certainly hurt folks within our community and our straight allies, along the way, too. And, so I don't want our history to overlook those internal struggles.

Lisa: I'm Lisa Larges. I am a Candidate for Ministry in the Presbyterian Church under the San Francisco Presbytery. I've been a Candidate since June 6, 1986.

Currently, I live in Minneapolis, and I'm a part of [Lake Nokomis Presbyterian Church](#).

When I was in seminary in the late Eighties, I went to San Francisco Theological Seminary, and the AIDS crisis there was, in some ways, at its sort of most terrible peak. And, I got involved doing some care and counseling and that kind of thing, and anyway – the crux for me was there was a saying back then: "Silence = Death" and, obviously, all of these mostly young men, gay men, were dying and their voices were being, in fact, permanently silenced.

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And so, it became clear to me that I couldn't remain in the church and stay in the closet, as I had intended to do. And, that for my own sanity and my own health I at least needed to be – I needed to be out. And, if that meant not being a part of the church – that was perfectly fine with me.

And so, and it got to a point where I was ready to drop out of the process, altogether. I graduated from seminary in '89 and the Committee on Preparation for Ministry in the Twin Cities area finally caught up with me, maybe a year later, and so, I decided that I'm not – in any way – a rock the boat kind of person. But, I just decided that I was so tired of the church not having any ownership of its really outrageous policies.

Back then, the policy was that: it was the *definitive guidance* of the church that self-avowed, non-repenting, practicing homosexual persons could not be ordained to ministry or to the offices of the church.

But, all of us who were LGBT, many of us – a lot of folks I knew – were either just quietly dropping out of the process or continuing in the process and remaining silent. And, so the church never had the beautiful opportunity to hear from us. So, I wrote to the Committee on Preparation for Ministry a letter, coming out to them, essentially, and that was sort of a start of my process in the Presbyterian Church.

The committee eventually, to my utter surprise, affirmed my call to ministry and voted to certify me ready to seek a call. And, then the Presbyterian FACT voted to concur in the committee's judgment. And that started a judicial process, this was back in 1991. And, the other thing that that did for me is that it got me in touch with people from around the country, from Presbyterians for Lesbian and Gay Concerns and More Light Presbyterians – the MLCN – the More Light Church Network (at the time). And, that was amazing and plunged me into this movement.

I came on the board of Presbyterians for Lesbian and Gay Concerns in '93. Also, my case went to the Permanent Judicial Commission at the same time as Janie's did. And the church, the PJC, in 1992 voted that I couldn't seek a call to ministry. I could remain a Candidate, but I couldn't seek a call to ministry as an openly lesbian woman. And, so that's how it sort of got launched.

In 2002, I started working with That All May Freely Serve with Janie Spahr, and, honestly, these twenty-years, now, since '93 really – has given me my life's work and has given me my life's work and has given me this community of people to be connected with. The cost that the church has taken on our community has been absolutely horrendous. And, at the same time, in my own life the opportunity to

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form these deep friendships with so many extraordinary people is a gift that the church gave me, for which I am incredibly grateful.

My own process continues. The Board of That All May Freely Serve saw my position and Janie's position as called positions. And so, I went back to the Committee on Preparation for Ministry to seek to be certified ready to receive a call, so that I could, in fact, be ordained to my work with That All May Freely Serve. The committee turned me down, and then eventually the church had approved a process – it affirmed the process of “scrupling” – the General Assembly did, by which a person could make a statement of conscience if they had a serious disagreement with a part of the Book of Order. The presbytery could then, on a case by case basis, determine whether that scruple or statement of conscience was significant enough as to not permit somebody from doing ministry in the church, or whether, in fact, that person could continue in ministry with their statement of conscience noted.

So, I did do that and that took us back into the vortex of the judicial process, which took eight years, really, to resolve itself. And, by the time that process finished, the judicial process finished, I was ready to leave my position with That All May Freely Serve. That was 2012.

And, so, I remain a candidate for ministry.

The other two points I want to make along the way are that this movement, like all movements, has had an internal cost among us, as well. We've certainly, in addition to being battered by the church, we've done our own share of battering of one another, and for a lot of us for whom this work has been so significant – it means that we can dig ourselves into doctrinal positions or dogmatic positions from time-to-time and that has hurt us along the way – and maybe helped us, too.

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And, finally, I simply want to return to what this movement has given me. I really, I have met such extraordinary people and the gift of friendship that I've gained along the way and of spiritual mentorship has certainly changed me forever. The spiritual disciplines in my life that are good and positive and healthy I've gained because I've

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been a part of this community, and I've had teachers who have taught me about what hospitality means, about what it is that everybody has a place at the table, about loving those who persecute you, and about caring for one another. And, I can't be anything but grateful for having been a part of this. And, I think that's all I have to say.

Warren: Do you mind if I ask you a couple of questions?

Lisa: Yeah! Go ahead...

Warren: So, there are a few striking things for me about your story. First of all, is about the choosing between identities. The identity as you had related it to your call and your identity as a person, and as a person who was proclaiming/claiming their own sexuality and their own full identity. If you could double-click that for a minute and talk about, just kind of give some more detail to the extent that it's comfortable about that struggle, that moment of decision that when you're left or right the time that you actually had to choose and did.

Lisa: So, by the time I finished seminary, I was twenty-four years old or so and still pretty young and full of all of the insecurities of a twenty-four year old. And, I certainly, as I said before, I had a lot of nice qualities, but courage wasn't necessarily one of them. And, I certainly was a person who wanted to avoid conflict at all costs. But, the AIDS epidemic in San Francisco was so powerful, so radicalizing in a way, and made it so clear to me that we had to take care of each other. And, it also made it so clear that my connection with the church – I just – for myself, I no longer had the privilege of staying in the closet, and for my own path that would be damaging for me.

And, so that's why I initially came out to the Committee on Preparation for Ministry. And, the other thing that happened then, especially when the Committee on Preparation for Ministry met and affirmed my call to ministry, it gave me my call back. I was certainly ready to set it aside, and it gave me my call back. And, along the way it became clear to me that I was called to the process of being a Candidate for Ministry and of being faithful to that process.

And Janie would say, "You know, you have to be willing to be curriculum for the church, and if you're not ready, if you're not willing to be curriculum, if that isn't your call then it's going to kill you, and don't do it. But, if you have this internal sense that you are called to be curriculum for the church, to be the live person with the human story through which the church can come to understand the real effects of its oppressive policies, then you have to follow that call."

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And so, from my work in this movement I have more than anything, certainly more than feeling called to ministry, I have felt called to this process. So, again, that's something that I got from this movement and from this community of beautiful people was that sense of calling.

Warren: Last question is your reflections on this gathering, you mentioned the internal struggles which, your know, by one - forest fire is good for the forest but bad for the people who want to live there, what do you see - there's been a lot of talk in the sessions about the concept of reconciliation - as it relates to the process in terms of ministry. In terms of the reconciliation of the groups, I'm feeling, my observations at this gathering is both celebrating and healing, also. I wonder if I could just get your reflection on that aspect of all of you being together.

Lisa: Well, that's such a good question. And, you know, I think that the larger church now has approved ordination and approved that its pastors can marry same gender couples in instances where it's legal. I think that the church wants to just move on, and I sort of imagine that it's the same for a lot of us, that now that we've sort of come this far, we are reluctant to go back and look at the way we wounded one another, but my guess is that some day it would make a big difference to the health of our community and the health of our movement and the depth of our faith if we could do that.

So, you know, I guess the other part of that is I can start. And, I can certainly say that I've had my own times of self-righteousness and for my gay and lesbian sisters and brothers and with whom I've differed about strategy - about being out or not being out, if I've ever - which I'm sure I have - caused someone to feel they like didn't belong in this movement or they weren't doing the right thing, I ask their forgiveness. And, for our straight allies and others in the movement with whom I've had serious disagreements about strategy, I can only say now that I understand how deeply you were trying to be faithful and how much I was trying to be faithful, too. And I am sorry that we didn't do it better. That we didn't do it in a way that caused less harm to each other, and that I'm sorry for the ways in which I challenged your integrity.

And so, for all of those folks, too, I ask your forgiveness And, I hope that we can model what forgiving one another can mean.

Warren: Amen. Thank you, Lisa.

Lisa: Yeah, thanks...