

Interviewee: Annabeth Roeschley
Interviewer: Rachel Waltner Goossen
Date: September 5, 2017
Place: Washington, D.C. / Topeka, Kansas (via telecommunications)

Interviewer: And I'll just say for the record here this is Rachel Waltner Goossen. I'm in Topeka, Kansas. This is a Skype interview that I'm having with Annabeth Roeschley. And are you in Washington, D.C.?

Roeschley: Yes, I am.

Interviewer: Okay. She's in Washington, D.C., and the date is September 5 of 2017. And first of all, thank you so much. It was really nice talking with you by phone last month, but now I've been looking forward to talking to you a little bit more in-depth. And like we emailed yesterday, the questions that I had sent you earlier, I came up with those a year ago as a very general guide so that people would know ahead of time the kinds of questions I'm interested in, but it's not really my intention to go through that from one through ten in that kind of order. We can just have, really, a conversation.

And since we've never met personally and we don't really know each other, even though I guess we have a little interesting common history in Illinois, it would be nice if you would just say a little bit about maybe yourself growing up, some biographical things through your Bluffton years, and what brought you to Washington, D.C.

0:01:14 And then I can jump in and ask questions. But why don't you just start and we'll go from there?

Roeschley: Sure, yeah. So yeah, as you know I grew up, I spent my entire growing up years on a farm in central Illinois. I attended a small rural Mennonite congregation that was part of the General Conference Mennonite Church at the time called Flanagan Mennonite. When I was in...when I was a junior in high school, I think, around the time that the Mennonite Church USA merger was happening, my home congregation merged with a neighboring rural Mennonite church that was part of the MC, Mennonite Conference and formed a new body, I guess you could say, called Prairie View Mennonite.

0:02:14 So that would be the home congregation, sort of, that I think of, sort of, when I think about my growing up church, although that merger came with some parts that have been awkward and painful and more negative, so when I really think about kind of the formative years of my childhood in the Mennonite church I think of the original Flanagan Mennonite. And then also around that time my mother, Jane Roeschley, was responding to

a call towards pastoral ministry in the congregation, so she accepted a position at the Mennonite Church of Normal in Bloomington-Normal, Illinois.

0:03:08 And so then we were kind of bicongregational through my high school years as we became more connected with that congregation. And increasingly, as me and my siblings attended Mennonite schools and were supported in that through Mennonite Church of Normal, when we return home now we are attending that church with my mom and dad now, too. So there's kind of been a shift in sort of that central Illinois geography in terms of where I think of home church in Illinois as being.

Interviewer: That's actually something you and I have in common, was benefiting from that amazing scholarship fund of that congregation at Normal to go to Mennonite school.

0:04:00

Roeschley: Oh, yes.

Interviewer: Did you get a large support from them as someone going to Bluffton?

Roeschley: Yeah, we...yeah. I can't remember the details. It was a little... I think what we did, in part because I didn't, like it wasn't like I had grown up in that congregation, but then all of a sudden I was the kid of the pastor. I think we've ended up, I mean, as you're kind of supposed to, like kind of considered it a supportive loan, and have paid back into the fund to kind of [increase] that. But regardless, yeah, I mean, they... Yeah, I was very lucky in attending Bluffton. Between Bluffton scholarships and aid and then the remainder being helped by church and family.

Interviewer: So when did your—

Roeschley: Remind me—excuse me—remind me your connection.

0:04:58

Interviewer: Oh, at Normal. My dad, who's no longer living, his name was James Waltner. He was a pastor there in the '70s and in the '80s.

Roeschley: Oh, okay. That's right, yeah.

Interviewer: And so I was a preacher's kid growing up there all my junior high and high school years. And that scholarship thing that was founded to support the kids who go to Mennonite colleges of their choice, that scholarship thing came into being right around the time that I was in high school, so I was a very early beneficiary. I went to Bethel. I was a very early

beneficiary, and all my church friends also that went were early beneficiaries. But I know they've kept that going over the years. It's—

Roeschley: Yeah, it's—

Interviewer: —pretty significant, actually.

Roeschley: It is. I know of very few Mennonite churches that are able to, to that extent, you know.

Interviewer: Exactly, right, right. So just so I have a sense of the time frame, your mom started being at normal, say, in the early 2000s, or...?

0:06:00

Roeschley: Yeah, I think that was 2001. I graduated from high school in 2003. So I don't...yeah, my experience has more been having a parent that's a pastor as an adult and young adult and not as a typical P.K. Although she was involved, increasingly involved in broader church ministry with the conference and stuff through my growing up years, but...

Interviewer: And then when you went to Bluffton—and by the way, you mentioned siblings, so are you the oldest or where are you in your birth order of the kids in your family?

Roeschley: My sister is three and a half years behind me and I have a brother who's seven years behind me. They both have been away for school, but we all went to Bluffton, incidentally. [*Laughs.*] There's a long tradition of that in my family.

0:07:01 They've both settled for now back in the Bloomington area, Bloomington-Normal area.

Interviewer: So you went straight to Bluffton then in 2003 to about 2007?

Roeschley: Seven, yeah.

Interviewer: And tell me about that. What were you studying and so forth?

Roeschley: Yeah. I studied...I couldn't totally decide between communications and religion, and Bluffton has—had, I think they still have—a program that at the time was called Communication in Church and Nonprofit Organizations, so it sort of allowed you to pick a primary major either in communication or religion, but essentially kind of double major. And there were, yeah, some courses geared specifically towards sort of nonprofit organizational concentration.

0:08:06 And I did a minor in Peace and Conflict Studies. Spent a semester in Northern Ireland and traveled some in the area. And also participated in the Ministry and Career program. Are you familiar with that?

Interviewer: Yes, I am.

Roeschley: So I was there, I was in that program the summer of 2006 and had the wonderful opportunity to be in Madison, Wisconsin at Madison Mennonite. And that was, that fell, I guess, in between my junior and senior year. [*Phone sounds.*]

0:09:05

Interviewer: Okay, lost you for a bit.

Roeschley: I'm back.

Interviewer: Yeah, okay. Anyway, Madison. Wisconsin between your sophomore and junior year, that summer.

Roeschley: Between my junior and senior year.

Interviewer: Oh, okay.

Roeschley: And that's a touchstone when I think about certainly my... I don't even feel like I can fully call it my call to ministry, but definitely my path. And perhaps more importantly, just my sense of being potentially whole as a person, and as a person in the church and as a person of faith.

0:09:59 I know on paper that program, you know, you're kind of supposed to go through it and then discern a call to ministry, and like you go into ministry or you don't. And that has not really been my path, and that's okay. But that fall, after that—so I was in Northern Ireland in the fall of 2005, back at Bluffton for a semester, and then at Madison.

And kind of up until that point a large part of, I think, my college experience and the academic work that I was doing in religion, in the religion department and communications was really helping me deconstruct my faith in the ways that were really important, and I think central to how I understand myself as a person and as an Anabaptist.

0:11:03 But yeah, also in ways that were really—felt really tumultuous at the time. And so I was kind of at a point where I had done a lot of that deconstructing, but not really reconstructing, and wasn't really sure if there was—because I hadn't fully experienced Mennonite communities that seemed to have the kind of breadth and depth of theological openness and imagination that I felt like I was being led to in my interpretations and reading other interpretations of scripture and Anabaptist writing and stuff.

So Madison was a place to me where I thought, oh, there are communities that are thinking and acting and being in ways that seem to make sense for what I'm discovering.

0:12:02 So I hold that community as a place that helped give me a glimpse of what that could be like. And I would say similarly in coming out to D.C. and, you know, over time finding Hyattsville Mennonite, and really finding both a sense of community and a place as a leader in that congregation that that's been a similar community that has really shown me... You know, and especially ten, well, 15 years ago those felt like especially kind of like these life-giving places where love and justice were happening specifically on the margins of the Mennonite church, that those...a place like MMC or Hyattsville felt exceptionally rare.

0:13:04 There were far fewer congregations that were welcoming or, I don't know, I just feel like challenging the institutional [ways] that I see increasingly congregations and now conferences really challenging parts of our denomination and the board to move forward, for lack of a better word.

And I mean all that really broadly. Like I know the subject here is like the LGBTQ community and the queer aspect of my identity, but, you know, what I'm saying about how those congregations have helped shape me I mean in a much broader way that that, especially because at that time I wasn't...I didn't identify as queer to myself.

0:14:00

Interviewer: Yeah, so very foundational in terms of your own theology and putting Anabaptism into practice. Was that part of it for you?

Roeschley: Mm-hmm. Yeah, it was putting into practice, but in like a social justice framework that also fit with social justice teaching outside the church and the ways that oppression, forms of oppression intersect, and the ways that collective liberation gets lived out within the church, but beyond that. I think, I don't know, my experience in Mennonite community up until that point didn't...there wasn't like a feminist, let alone a queer rendering of the gospel, right?

0:14:55 So a place like Madison was living out faith and justice in ways that fit with—yeah, definitely at the time I would have called that like a feminist theological, spiritual framework.

Interviewer: Did you seek Madison out because you sensed it might be a congregation like that or was that just luck of the draw? How did that...?

Roeschley: I think our campus pastor or whoever was placing had a sense of where might be a fit and made that. You know, an urban congregation that was really geared towards social justice would be...might be a good fit for me.

Interviewer: Great. So you talked about how your path has not been quite what ministry inquiry tries to channel people to do. Did you feel like you maybe had some experiences either with preaching or doing pastoral care or other kinds of things where you did start to sense either people were telling you you would be—you should feel a call to ministry or they felt you were called? Did that kind of thing come up during that summer?

0:16:14

Roeschley: Oh, yeah, definitely. I mean, I—so I was actually thinking, on your paper it's question number two, but I started listing congregations and church institutions that have had a role in particularly my call to ministry and my path to ministry, and there's like 12 that I wrote down right off the bat, right?

Interviewer: Okay, wow.

Roeschley: So I've been, you know, I feel like that has been something that's been a nudge like almost as long as I can remember. So in all of those central Illinois congregations I was being encouraged to do various things in leadership and stuff, you know, like whether it was leading songs, or helping with the youth group when I was in high school, helping with the younger kids, teaching Sunday school, leading worship.

0:17:17

And then, you know, I was active in various campus groups at Bluffton, and...yeah, then there was Madison, and so... And then even like... So in my adolescent years I got really involved with the youth group that a lot of my friends were involved in. It was a very evangelical church that has since left the Mennonite denomination. And looking back I'm totally appalled at the kinds of theology and yeah, the teachings that were going on, and still are.

0:18:00

But yeah, even through that, you know, I take away parts of that that really affirmed me as someone who could be a leader in the church. Granted, I wasn't a queer feminist at that time. *[Laughs.]* But, you know, those...I have to name them when I think about communities of faith that were nudging me to consider something like church leadership and ministry. So yeah, definitely in Madison.

Camp Friedenswald has also been a place, a significant, I think, touchstone place for me. I landed there after my first year of college, when I was really kind of at rock bottom, and I would say even before the experience at Madison I found kindred spirits at Camp Friedenswald, particularly on staff, who I felt like oh my god, there are people asking the same kinds of questions as me, I'm not alone.

0:19:04

And that was different than finding that in a congregation. I think that's what stood out to me at Madison, like oh, this is actually like a real church

versus a bunch of college kids on staff at Camp Friedenswald. But that was a sort of saving grace summer for me personally. And then I returned the following summer and co-led the whole worship team and designed the whole summer curriculum, right?

So like these are... It's always been kind of an active hobby, if you will, church. So I don't know if, you know, my latest venture into seminary will end up feeling just like a hobby. I hope not because I have a sense that it's really a kind of next building block onto deepening my vocational path.

0:20:00 But it's always... I think I mentioned this to you on the phone. I really appreciated that my career and jobs thus far have given me a wide range of experiences, and I anticipate that wherever I land after seminary will be some sort of combination of social justice work, maybe entrepreneurial, but I don't see myself landing in a traditional pastoral position. But I guess we'll see.

Interviewer: Yeah, that's the thing, you don't now know what the opportunities are going to be, and which you're going to embrace and which are going to just sort of seize you, and it's going to be neat to find that all out. I know you said to me on the phone that the degree you're going for is an MDiv, right?

Roeschley: Uh-huh.

Interviewer: That's the plan. Are you going to be in school full-time for three years? Is that their program or is it a little more [mixed] than that?

0:21:05

Roeschley: Yeah. Well, it could be flexible. That's what I'm going to try to do. Hopefully I can figure out a way to work in there and make it work, but that's the goal.

Interviewer: Yeah, neat. So you mentioned that you had not come out to yourself yet when you were at Madison, and you were pretty far into your college years. Did that kind of thing happen then significantly later, or—and also, how did starting to think of yourself however you thought of yourself in terms of sexuality and changes that happened, was that also pretty mixed in with your sense of call to church and ministry or was that quite a different part of your life? I don't know how you could possibly answer such a convoluted question, but...

0:22:06

Roeschley: No, that makes sense. I don't think that it was intertwined with a call to ministry, in part because I sort of feel like—I mean, given everything I was just describing about how there's sort of always been this nudge or

call, if you will, present in my life that I've been responding in various ways to, like that just seems like it's sort of always been there. So it's not like that was emerging kind of at the same time as my understanding of queerness was emerging.

What I would say, and I said this ten years ago, was that my understanding of myself as a feminist and then kind of eventually as queer was definitely intertwined with a massive reshaping of my theological beliefs and that as I...

0:23:22 Like by the end of college I was saying that it's Anabaptism that helps me be a feminist, and it's feminism that helps me be an Anabaptist. Sort of finding the kind of radical fundamentals of Anabaptism, and that was a [significant] thing that I took out of my Bluffton experience, along with a lot of the feminist and womanist writers who were, yeah, just like completely enlarging my scope of what the Christian tradition can be, and is, and has been.

0:24:06 Like kind of pulling all of that together helped me be both of those things more fully. And then I think I also mentioned to you on the phone I spent two years at WATER, the Women's Alliance for Theology, Ethics and Ritual. And that's really where—that was through my voluntary service. Man, my time at WATER was really then where I think the queer theologians came in, and queer ethics, and I was really interested in those two years in redefining and frankly just shaping, in general, a sexual ethics because that, I felt, has been a part that was hugely lacking in my upbringing in the Mennonite church spaces and communities that I was a part of, I thought just was so sorely lacking.

0:25:15 And WATER was a fabulous place to engage in that work personally, and more godly. I mean, that was something that I had focused on kind of with, particularly with young women while I was there, with work around relationships and sexuality. So that understanding of my own identity [as] queerness was happening during that time, and, you know, it for me has been an evolution. That's kind of the best way that I can describe it. But it was definitely then influenced and shaped by religious spaces and writers and thinkers, along with, you know, general theorists, queer theorists and a lot more.

0:26:11 But that's always sort of been a grounding in helping me figure out who I am and how that makes sense in the world, let alone in the church.

Interviewer: It sounds like you were reading both theology and religious things as well as being influenced by, well, all sorts of, you know, feminist and womanist readings as well, and probably during college, but then continued that during these two years, right?

Roeschley: Yeah. Well, and in D.C. then really pairing that with like this vibrant LGBTQ community that suddenly I was meeting, and finding, and being friends with, you know.

0:27:03 And it just, it's not like I was always seeking that out. I mean, sometimes I was, but it was also there was just so much more in Washington, D.C. that I was experiencing and interacting with just out of, like, the sheer fact that it's here, you know. Community can be so much more naturally diverse in many ways.

Interviewer: You identify yourself now—so you're talking about ten years ago in these comments, or something like ten years ago, probably—but you identify yourself now as queer, and that's been an evolution.

Roeschley: Mm-hmm.

Interviewer: And has that been even...have you used other words like lesbian or really not? Or bisexual or anything like that? Or queer is something that has really worked for you even through this whole evolution?

0:28:06

Roeschley: Yeah, well, at the beginning it was sort of like I don't know what I am, but I know I'm open to dating women, right, and kind of wasn't putting a label on that for a while. And eventually, yeah, I don't remember exactly when, but queer started to make sense for me. Lesbian felt kind of archaic, and so... And even bisexual kind of rooted in a binary that, you know, doesn't fully capture what I experience and believe and imagine around like how our gender is constructed, and just my lived reality, my just personal gender, but also in many people in my community who are trans, or gender queer, or, you know.

0:29:05 So queer is kind of a catchall for my sexuality and just speaking to how I know gender to be makes sense, makes the most sense.

Interviewer: So were you active in, let's say, the Hyattsville church through all this D.C. time, even from the MBS days ten or 11 years ago, or did you finally find yourself being drawn to Hyattsville? How did that relationship work out?

Roeschley: Yeah, I was...I feel like at the beg of MBS, maybe the first year, I was sort of dividing time between—there's another Mennonite congregation here, Community House Church, that I would go to sometimes.

0:30:00 Like I wasn't ready to just like fully jump in with Hyattsville. I kept being drawn back for the music, especially when I didn't necessarily feel like going for other reasons. And, you know, it wasn't—going to church every Sunday wasn't a priority then, and frankly it's like the kind of place where

it's okay I'm not there every Sunday now, you know, like it's a place where that's okay. So yeah, there was sort of...it was a slow start, a slow burn with Hyattsville. [*Laughs.*]

But I think I was asked to preach for the first time towards the end of my second year of MBS, which, in hindsight, feels kind of quick. And I think by that time was regularly on the worship leading schedule and helping with music every now and then.

0:31:03 We have a requiem choir that forms every fall, and that's been—to perform for All Soul's Day, and that's been one of my favorite parts about that congregation, and like one of the highlights for me of kind of the liturgical year, so that's...yeah, just things like that that really started to feel like oh, this is a special place.

And I have a lot of respect for Cindy Lapp, the pastor there, who I met my senior year of Bluffton, and who kind of was a timely inspiration for how I ended up at WATER, because that's a community, an organization that she had worked at many, many years ago and is still regularly involved with.

0:31:55 So Cindy is a person who has, when I look back on it, really kind of significantly influenced a lot of what has happened in my life after college. Also, yeah, we talked a little bit about Michelle Burkholder, our associate pastor.

But yeah, the last few years in, like, living in this era where all of a sudden it's normal to have a queer pastor, realizing when Michelle was called and affirmed to our church that, just kind of having this stark moment of, you know, this is not even something that I had let myself imagine, right? Like it was so out of the realm of a possibility in the Mennonite church that I hadn't even dared to imagine that I could even have a pastor who was an out queer person.

0:33:07 So it's been really humbling and...yeah, I think that, like, that wasn't like this huge light bulb moment where, you know, the light came down from heaven and said, Annabeth, like go to seminary. It hasn't been like that. But that's been just sort of a constant source of energy and affirmation and a model, really, that's kind of helping me imagine what could be possible.

Interviewer: So I haven't contacted Michelle yet, although she's someone that I want to for my project, but I assume you've had conversations with her about this, right?

0:33:58

Roeschley: Yeah, yeah.

Interviewer: Because this happened in her life it helps to make it maybe happen for other people in different ways, maybe circuitous ways, but nevertheless.

Roeschley: Yeah.

Interviewer: She knows that?

Roeschley: Yeah. We, Michelle and I, co-led a Hyattsville retreat last year that was for people in our LGBTQ community, and it was specifically focused on sexual identity and spiritual identity and spiritual call, so got to explore a lot of these kinds of themes and stories in a really lovely setting in West Virginia.

Interviewer: Yeah, that's great.

Roeschley: Yeah, you know, I mean, Hyatt—like just that Hyattsville story has been this, like, moving, prophetic witness in my life. [*Choking up.*]

0:35:07 I think I'm tearing up because there's approaching a few months where I'm going to be away from this community. I don't know how familiar you are with Hyattsville, but it's kind of been this, like, I don't know, rebel stepchild in the Mennonite church. I remember growing up and kind of like hearing about Hyattsville, you know, as... They've been a welcoming congregation for—we've been a welcoming congregation for 31 years now. And, you know, Hyattsville was disciplined in 2005 after 20 years of being welcoming, all of a sudden, you know, in the aftermath of like the '80s and '90s, and sexuality [and a suit] in the Mennonite church that fell apart in Allegheny Mennonite.

0:36:14 So, you know, this...when I first came to this congregation that discipline was still really fresh, and so it's been this story of figuring out what it means to live with that, and do we live with that, and many, many times where it's like okay, we're asking ourselves do we need to find another place to be that fully accepts all of our members and accepts us as a congregation.

And kind of at each juncture it's like this sense of let's stay and try to keep being in relationship. And, you know, what we've kind of miraculously, it feels like, experienced through that is this shift—I mean, that has had pain in Allegheny, as like many congregations have left, but like now, you know, that we were reinstated after a process of reconciliation that was very murky and ambiguous.

0:37:22 And, you know, it's like now it's 2017 and the conference has blessed the licensing towards ordination of Michelle Burkholder, and it's like kind of stunning that this is where... But like, you know, I really, I take a good Mennonite pride in Hyattsville's prophetic witness to the conference, and being a congregation that...being a congregation that is staying in

relationship with the larger body when many of the loudest voices of hate would only show up when Hyattsville was on the agenda and have thus broken ties. So yeah, I think there's a lot to be learned in that story.

0:38:16

Interviewer: Is there a church history anywhere about Hyattsville?

Roeschley: Yeah, there's a fabulous history book that was written at the 50th anniversary of HMC. [Gene Miller], I believe. Jean...I think Miller. I can't remember if it was Gene Miller or [Gene Stoltzfus] who authored that.

Interviewer: Okay. Do you know what the title of that is? That's something I could probably get on interlibrary loan here.

Roeschley: Not off the top of my head, but I can follow up with you.

0:39:06

Interviewer: Yeah, that would be good. Just any kind of citation you can send. I can probably figure out the rest. But yeah, my library is pretty good at getting me anything I want, including stuff like that.

Roeschley: That's awesome.

Interviewer: Yeah, that's great. When was that 50th anniversary? Did that include this disciplining and all of that? Or was that written...? I don't know how old this church is.

Roeschley: Yeah, so it—yeah, unfortunately now I guess it's really dated because it was before... That would have been in Two Thousand...the early 2000s, probably, when the 50th. But it chronicles the process that HMC went through in the '80s when a longtime member of the congregation, who happened to be gay, wanted to become an official member, and that's sort of what led to Hyattsville embarking on a study of human sexuality.

0:40:09

And that's like what had laid the groundwork for now having this mature congregation that is where it's at in 2017. And a side personal note, although I think that this is another touchstone in my story, is that a great-aunt of mine, Sally Roeschley White, who would have grown up in Fremont, Illinois, in the house that I grew up in, was a significant shaper and leader during that process and kind of throughout Hyattsville's early years. She, unfortunately, passed away before I moved out here.

0:41:00

But she has kind of increasingly been this, like, icon in my family past as someone who knows rural central Illinois and also knows Washington, D.C. and Hyattsville, and has kind of moved from a more conservative,

closed-minded community to a much broader worldview and vision for the church. And so yeah, she's kind of like a—[laughs]—yeah, just one of those spirits that I've almost come to know better as she has been gone because I now am closer geographically to my [unintelligible] 0:41:46 family members in this area and kind of her legacy in my congregation.

0:41:53

Interviewer: Neat. Did her life overlap with yours? Did you know her personally when you were younger?

Roeschley: Yeah. I mean, I would have known her growing up as a kid, but she was always this great-aunt way out in Washington, D.C. But I know that she is like wholeheartedly in my cheering section now, you know.

Interviewer: [Laughs.] Yeah.

Roeschley: Even though she's not here.

Interviewer: That's wonderful, yeah. And earlier when you were speaking about being pretty immersed in WATER at that earlier time when you were in D.C. that you, in addition to finding your way to Hyattsville, although it took a little time, you were in a pretty vibrant LGBTQ community. And that, I assume, was probably some Mennonite people, but also maybe lots of not Mennonite people or not people in churches, right? I mean, that must have been a much broader group.

0:42:51

Roeschley: Yeah. Mostly not Mennonite. WATER is run by two theologians who come from the Catholic tradition who identify as lesbian, so right off the bat there were them. But yeah, many others in the WATER community. And just as I got more involved in, like, kind of the nonprofit social justice activist scene in D.C. was really where I started to find a lot of friends. And, you know, there would have been queer people in Hyattsville, but not a lot of people who were peers at that time.

Interviewer: So did it feel like you had your feet in several worlds?

Roeschley: Mm-hmm.

Interviewer: Like sort of one Mennonite church-y world and then this vibrant LGBTQ community that was probably kind of a moving, shifting body of people, right? I mean, groups like that aren't too staid.

0:44:08

Roeschley: Yeah.

Interviewer: And they maybe grow, right, because you have friends, and then you have friends of friends, and it grows. Is that kind of what happened?

Roeschley: Yeah. I mean, I still surprise people when they know me in certain contexts and then find out that, like, I go to a Mennonite church and I'm still active, right, because there's just so many people that don't have experiences where progressive, you know, justice work and communities at all intersect with progressive religious communities that are seeking justice, and so those can be very, very separate for people. And, you know, then all of the, like, assumptions that come with being Mennonite that I'm sure you've gotten in your probably professional life from time to time.

0:45:00 But yeah, I think especially early on it was...you're right, there was kind of what felt like a weird divide there.

Interviewer: Were you associated with anything like Brethren Mennonite Council? Were they part of your sort of reaching out to connect with people, too, or not so much?

Roeschley: Well, not in, like, directly helping me find people. I felt like through MBS and being in D.C. and kind of the MBS connections with the other volunteer corps, like my social network and spiritual network were growing really healthily.

0:45:56 But BMC is significant. They had a board meeting that was hosted at Hyattsville I think in 2009, and I went, like I went to a potluck that was happening with that. And that was really my first interaction. I think I had sort of known of BMC, but that was really my first interaction with them. And there met someone from the D.C. area who did not go to church but that identified as queer—oh, actually, it's Kate Becker. I can say that to you. You know Kate.

Interviewer: I know Kate, yeah.

Roeschley: So Kate's now like a very, very good, longtime friend, and that was essentially because we met at a BMC thing at Hyattsville Mennonite.

0:46:57 And increasingly, I think through my work with Pink Menno, I have gotten much more connected to BMC folks. There's a lot of overlap between BMC and Pink Menno, especially around organizing at convention, so both of those are dear communities now.

Interviewer: When did you start getting connected with Pink Menno?

Roeschley: At the beginning of Pink Menno in 2009. I attended the Columbus convention, which was... I have really clear memories of kind of the internal struggle at that convention, feeling like I'm not able to be fully out in church settings, but I want to show up and wear pink certainly as an

ally, and I think this might be me, and it's easier to, like, try on an identity that's not straight in my world in D.C., but how does that translate to a Mennonite convention in Columbus, Ohio?

0:48:13 But kind of feeling like the beginning stages of feeling visible, like for my own self, I mean, which is like almost a, I don't know, textbook example of like what the visibility of Pink Menno in 2009 was trying to do in Columbus, right, was like make that visible. But again, that was kind of me getting involved and—I mean, I was helping, like I was part of, I was after hours meeting with some of the core organizers and starting to get involved and find a leadership role while I was also doing that work personally.

0:49:01 So there again is an example, I think, of how I'm like sorting it out for myself, and that is alongside a leadership capacity in the church.

Interviewer: Were you coming—I don't know if you even use the phrase “coming out.” As I've interviewed people, I find some people really embrace that and some people it doesn't seem like it applies to them or they don't prefer to use that, so I don't know how you feel about it. But my question is were you coming out in some way or another to your family around this time, or had that maybe happened earlier, or how...?

Roeschley: Yeah, it hadn't happened. I...that was probably happening like a year later when I was having those conversations with my family.

0:50:02 Yeah, I don't have like a hard and fast coming out moment. Like it just, again, happened over time with various parts of my family and extended family and broader community, like over years, really. But when I think about coming out, you know, certainly having those conversations with my parents, which I think were happening in like the spring of 2010 mainly because I had, like, a relationship, a significant relationship that ended with a man, and then I was dating someone new, and eventually I wanted to talk about that with my parents and [that, so]...

But yeah, that was hard. There was lots that was hard about that. And so that stands out to me as like a moment where I was coming out, but that's like not even fully out, right, to the broader Mennonite or Illinois world.

0:51:10 It's been, you know, really easy, I think, in a lot of ways to kind of have D.C. feel really far away from some of the communities that I feel from home, and it's like there's not always a reason to talk about your sexuality, you know?

Interviewer: Other people aren't necessarily, either, so... [*Laughs.*]

Roeschley: I know, right? [*Laughs.*] But it's been more important as, like, I am now in a partnership with someone of seven years, and it's just like a much easier,

more natural, normal part of my life and, you know. It's not something that I want to keep from people back home.

0:52:02

Interviewer: So it sounds like your partner has come with you, let's say, to Normal, or to the church or...yeah. Okay.

Roeschley: Yeah. She's Jewish, so there's a lot that we share. There's a lot that we share in common that I find overlaps more than with some people in a different end of the Mennonite church spectrum, frankly.

Interviewer: *[Laughs.]*

Roeschley: Theologically and in other ways. But yeah, there's a deep appreciation for our respective religious communities, and we share some of that together. And don't make it—haven't made it back to Illinois a whole lot, but [by now] moving there, so that will happen [onward].

0:52:57

Interviewer: Yeah. There have also been these huge cultural shifts, broader and legal shifts that have been happening, you know—

Roeschley: Yeah. Oh, my god, yeah.

Interviewer: —marriage equality and all that. So have you been—I mean, you've been an activist in some ways by being involved with Pink Menno in the Mennonite church. Have you been an activist in some of these broader secular movements in D.C.?

Roeschley: Yeah, I wouldn't call myself an activist on that level with the national stuff that's happened around LGBTQ rights. And frankly, more of my activism in D.C. has been pretty hyper local, like in my neighborhood, around affordable housing, around [justice] and safety for survivors of sexual violence like in...

0:54:00

So sometimes on a national level, especially when I was working at an organization that did that, but like more specifically just like with, you know, the 50 people that were living in the building that I was working in, right? So yeah, despite living in the center of it all in Washington, D.C. I've...you know, I'll go to rallies and vigils occasionally kind of on the big scale, but yeah, it's been more in a neighborhood and like very community focused level.

Interviewer: And it sounded from our phone conversation like you had made a shift what, two years ago or something, from nonprofit world to more of an entrepreneurial or business job.

Annabeth Roeschley

Roeschley: Yeah.

0:54:56

Interviewer: And is it a hardware store or a business like that?

Roeschley: Yes.

Interviewer: When I think hardware store, to me that's very local also, right?

Roeschley: Yeah, yeah, yeah, it is.

Interviewer: Yeah, okay.

Roeschley: Yeah, so there's still a lot of, like, kind of community building, for lack of a better word, that has gone into my job, which is largely then now like small business development and working with other local businesses and organizations and schools in the D.C. area to kind of work with them as a business customer. But yeah, it's also like, our staff is like a small family. And it's run by this 64-year-old lesbian.

Interviewer: Really.

Roeschley: So yet again I find myself working for... Like I think back to WATER and it's like man, I just can't escape this. [*Laughs.*]

0:55:57

No, it's like she's a big reason why I decided to try out this, like, new venture and kind of departing from the nonprofit world. She's just this, like, wacky, fabulous force that I thought it would be cool to be a colleague with.

Interviewer: It sounds like you're giving up some pretty wonderful communities, both—

Roeschley: Yeah.

Interviewer: Not that you're giving them up, but you're moving away from Hyattsville, and then it sounds like you really enjoy the people you're with at your job as well.

Roeschley: Mm-hmm. I do, and if, I think if...yeah, there's been, you know, I think especially since that terrible last November, after the wonderful event of the Cubs winning the World Series. [*Laughs.*] That's also in my blood. That's like right up there with being, you know, going to Bluffton as being a kind of [*unintelligible*] 0:56:57 in the rest of the family.

0:57:00

Yeah, it's sort of like what am I doing with my days and my time. And I, like, there's like a value and ethical base to what I feel like I'm doing with

Annie's Ace Hardware. It's like work I believe in. And it, you know, there's, like there is a disconnect from yeah, just some of the broader ways that I like want to be a part of movements that are both grounded in like social justice and anti-oppression frameworks and like have spirit and soul. and have a source of like spiritual center, and like the power of religious communities to organize against like all of the fascism and white supremacy, etc.

0:57:58 So, you know, I think it was like sitting with a lot of that over the winter and kind of combined with a sense of at some point wanting to try out being in the Midwest again that sort of made this moment in time like one where I could say I could—there's this really cool, wonderful school in Chicago that, like not only affirms me as a queer person, but would challenge me academically and give me a theological framework, and is geared towards LGBTQ people in religion. Like all of it just sort of felt like it could come together if I could choose that, you know? I forget what your understanding of Chicago Theological Seminary is. Do you know people there?

0:59:01

Interviewer: You mentioned to me your friend that you had been at Bluffton with on our phone conversation.

Roeschley: Oh, yeah, Jason.

Interviewer: Yeah, who you said is now doing a PhD there, or finishing up one or something. And you and I had that little conversation on the phone. But honestly, I have no knowledge, no direct knowledge of Chicago Theological Seminary. I've never been there. I don't know if I know anybody that has gone there. I can't remember if I asked you is it a consortium of several denominations together like UCC or something like that?

Roeschley: No, it's in the UCC tradition. It's a consortium with the University of Chicago and Garrett and a couple—yeah, like there's the Methodist seminary there, so it's part of that consortium. But it is a UCC—

Interviewer: It's a UCC school, okay.

0:59:57

Roeschley: But they—or and they specifically equip people for nontraditional ministry, which is like AKA the entire last ten years of my career, so that's why it also feels like a really good fit.

Interviewer: It sounds like you maybe didn't look at any other schools to apply to.

Roeschley: I did, but I didn't want to live in New York, I didn't want to move to the West Coast. I probably could have been happy getting to know Nashville as like a city. Like Vanderbilt was on my list. But, you know, this is...at this point in my life, in our lives, with me and my partner, you know, it's like unless there's an opportunity that is just like the absolute dream, you know, it's hard to make a significant change kind of for one single factor, right, like one...

1:01:01 So moving to a place where we didn't know anyone or have any community to go to school is possible, but it just is much less desirable. Community is really important to me.

Interviewer: And you must have friends, and maybe your partner does, too, in Chicago from all kinds of things, right? Maybe some of your Illinois roots, but other things as well.

Roeschley: Yeah. There's less of a community, though, in Chicago than I would like. It's more the proximity to people in central Illinois, and then like actually in Goshen and southern Michigan. You know, there's a couple of really kindred spirits there from college, mainly.

1:01:57

Interviewer: Yeah, I'm going to be interested to see what, you know, what nontraditional ministry looks like for you down the road. I'm sure a lot of people are interested in seeing that. Because it sounds like actually planning worship and being part of worship has been very important to you. I mean, you've mentioned that quite a bit.

Roeschley: Yeah. And life-giving.

Interviewer: Yeah, right.

Roeschley: But also like, I mean, I think it looks like a lot of what I've done with perhaps, you know, a much deeper, stronger queer, hopefully Black theological foundation, right? So like the five years that I was at the District Alliance for Safe Housing, you know, accompanying, advocating survivors was like that's ministry, you know what I mean? Like I didn't call it that, but—

Interviewer: Yeah, that's what it is.

1:02:58

Roeschley: —that's like the kinds of choices that I have found myself drawn to be. And, you know, I'm not sure how directly I will engage trauma survivors, but historically that has been like a lot, most of like where my nonprofit work has led me, so... I just, I imagine some kind of combination of all of

this. And if it's like in an organization where I'm drawing on my skills now in this whole business world, like I see that as being really useful as well. Particularly for, like, not-for-profit organizations that are trying to also be somewhat self-sustaining, which, I think that model is growing, out of necessity, but also because I think it's a really smart one.

1:04:04

Interviewer: Yeah. Yeah, there's a lot of room for creativity, isn't there?

Roeschley: Mm-hmm.

Interviewer: Are you planning, or have you given a lot of thought to what kind of church community you might hook into there? There are...there's mega Anabaptist congregations, I think. I don't know where you're going to be living, exactly, but Chicago has some to choose from.

Roeschley: There's kind of like only one that I feel like I would consider, because it's definitely the one that, like, is the queerest. It's just like what I think people think of when they think of like a welcoming congregation in general, is Chicago Community Mennonite Fellowship.

1:05:00

Which, just to like cycle it back around to all of these themes, so that used to be Oak Park Mennonite, and one of my mom's very first kind of assignments, if you will, in her call to ministry was being called to be an interim pastor there in the early '90s. And Oak Park is kind of like a Hyattsville, at least in my world view.

These were like congregations that I, like, knew were a little different, and it had something to do with, like, the gay issue, right? But I didn't have all the details and I didn't understand what all of that meant, you know, growing up. But it was actually through that time and my mom—you know, she was doing that remotely, like a couple days a week, from 90 miles away.

1:06:06

But that was like where I think I started asking—like I think that's like how I even first came to know that gay existed, because it was...I knew that there were...there was like something wrong in my childhood brain with that church, and I would like ask my mom—I mean, I was like ten, you know. I was like pretty young. And so it was kind of through my asking questions around that part of church, right, that I even came to understand like about sexuality as something other than straight.

1:06:59

Interviewer: Mm-hmm. Yeah, that's interesting that now you may have a chance to be more connected, if it works out for you to do that.

Roeschley: Yeah. I don't know how it'll all pan out, again, geographically, based on where we'll be. Stuff is very—Chicago is very, very big compared to what I'm used to here.

Interviewer: You've been part of the MC USA leadership and things that were happening this summer in Florida, so I'm sure you noticed that one of my questions on my sheet, it's number eight, was what expectation do you have of MC USA regarding LGBTQ concerns going forward, optimistic, pessimistic. Obviously you're not unengaged with—

1:07:54

Roeschley: Yeah. The first thing I wrote down was I expect to be let down. *[Laughs.]*

Interviewer: *[Laughs.]* Okay.

Roeschley: So no, I would not say that I'm optimistic. I'm not optimistic of the institution of Mennonite Church USA. I think it's like especially as a queer person, but even beyond that just in kind of not taking the lead on the most radical kinds of social justice issues. Like to me just sort of it's like we're behind, and I don't have trust in the way that power is arranged and used right now in Mennonite Church USA in terms of like on the executive level.

1:09:00 The people, so to speak, or like the heart of our denomination, you know, I think I came away from Orlando feeling all the more affirmed that there is like a growing spirit among us Mennonites to be gradually pursuing a path of justice and love like across the board on so many different issues, and with so many different communities, and like people who see how all of that intersects, and that, like, the injustices done towards LGBTQ people in our denomination have been deeply painful for people in that community and it's like ultimately not solely about that. Like it's been this wielding of power, and sometimes a scapegoating of queer people into an issue as like our denomination was, as the merger was happening.

1:10:06 And yeah, as like various entities have kind of power played around kind of who's in and who's out. And, you know, I think especially in Kansas City and leading up to that denominational leadership catered to some bullying behavior in our denomination. I mean, I'm obviously giving you my completely, like, my version of history here, but... Yeah, it's like I don't...I see all of that in such a bigger picture that like makes me pretty disheartened.

1:10:57 There would have to be a really fundamental reshaping of power and polity in our denomination for me to feel more optimistic about how we're going to deal with LGBTQ people. Because when it's not LGBTQ people, it's going to be some other group, you know. And it has been. Or some other issue. But there are so many places where I am optimistic, and that's,

you know, as I was mentioning earlier, places where there's congregations and conferences that are standing up and living into what the spirit is calling them to be and do. And that's, I think, where I have the most hope for institutional change.

1:11:56 I think what we modeled in Orlando as far as like a different way of convening ourselves in the delegate assembly with the Future Church Summit is really helpful. I am not holding my breath that, like, we'll do that again or that—I mean, maybe we will, but, you know, like I feel like I've been burnt so many times, largely through people in my queer community who are more directly affected than I have been in what I've been trying to do thus far that, like, trust is not given, it's earned. So we're definitely not at an earned point with Mennonite Church USA.

Interviewer: When you talk about people in the community, you mean Mennonite people or people in the broader friend circle, and support circle, and community that have been at the receiving end of injustices? I wasn't sure if you were talking about Mennonite.

1:13:00

Roeschley: In that right there I meant specifically in the Mennonite church.

Interviewer: Okay. Yeah, I mean, that's an interesting point with my research because I started this thinking I was only going to interview people who have left the Mennonite church because they have had bad experiences. That was my project. And that was a year ago, and now what I've found—I guess by now I've interviewed a dozen people or so, maybe a little bit more—there's not that clear trajectory of people being in and then moving out.

1:14:02 That happens for some people, but some people who weren't raised Mennonite have come into the Mennonite church thinking this was a progressive denomination, so they're trying to get these boundaries where it works for them to be in the Mennonite church, they're LGBTQ identified, and then there are people like you, who I wouldn't have thought initially I would have interviewed, but you're finding ways and have found ways to be born and raised in the church and to stay in the church even though there's clearly a lot of pain around what has happened with people. So the project has gotten way more interesting and more nuanced and more complicated than what I ever initially thought it would be, which is, I mean, for me that's really exciting.

Roeschley: Yeah.

1:14:56

Interviewer: But also, as time goes along, I mean, people's lives have trajectories and it's tricky for me as a historian because I'm trained to write about things in

the past, maybe more than 50 years in the past, or maybe 40 years in the past, or maybe long ago. And you can kind of like encapsulate that because you're writing now about something then. This is a very different enterprise for me because there's so many...there's so much movement.

Roeschley: Yeah.

Interviewer: Even within individual people's lives, let alone what might be happening for a whole denomination. And also I haven't limited myself to only talk to people who are in MC USA, but I've also talked to Canadians that are in different conferences. And some of the dynamics are the same, but the place is not the same, and the polity even is a little bit different in Canada. And so yeah, I'm just sharing it's an interesting thing to think about, you know, even describing like what has happened in ten years.

1:16:03 I mean, even the last ten years that you've been in D.C. there have been changes in the Mennonite church and changes with con—I mean, I appreciate you talking about changes within not only congregations, but whole regional conferences have really changed, some of them.

Roeschley: Yes.

Interviewer: So it's good.

Roeschley: And that I really mean. Like that is...I am optimistic about that. And I think if, you know, I think if MC USA could be a little bit more like Canada and, you know, adopt the way of truly like relating to each other in a way that, yeah, was more relational and less, what's the word I'm looking for? Dogmatic is the word coming to my mind, but that's not really what I'm looking for.

1:17:03 You know, in a way that allowed us—and I think that was like part of kind of like why the Future Church Summit was timely or that it was kind of allowed to happen now is because we're sort of trying to say okay, what are the things that we are together, and like let's focus on that, and then, you know, people and congregations and conferences could be blessed and empowered to like live into the unique aspects of what they are called to be and do.

And if that is different than another conference or congregation, like that that's okay, and that, you know, what matters is sort of the stuff that we have in common. But of course, you know, at the end of the day everyone draws those lines in some pretty different places.

1:17:59 But, you know, what we've just seen is Mountain States Mennonite, and Central District, and now Allegheny, and Hyattsville Mennonite, and others that are just, like we're just—and this is, I think, what probably inspired me particularly about Pink Menno—is it's sort of this, like, we

are here, we are the church, and we're going to keep being this and doing this, and the institutional change is really slow, it's sometimes very toxic, but that's not ultimately where the heart of our life and spirit and mission, if you will, as a church is. Like it's in all of the ways that we worship and are community and are community to our existing neighbors in Washington, D.C. or wherever.

1:18:59 Like it's kind of that vibrant living out of a just church now, like on the margins, that is...like that is inspiring to me. And that's what I see—I do see that happening, and that's like why I have remained connected, is because I've been connected with Pink Menno, and BMC, and Hyattsville, and, you know, places where I feel like my vision of church is happening, you know, with a lot of problems, and always ways to get better, but...

Interviewer: Uh-huh, yeah. There's some part of that that you just said that makes me internally feel like in some ways you've been really lucky.

Roeschley: Oh, gosh, yes. I feel that way, yeah. Yeah, I mean, I didn't...if I wouldn't end up at Hyattsville and I wasn't at a place that felt like I fit, like I wouldn't have, I just wouldn't have gone. Like that wasn't a priority.

1:20:10 Like organized religion was way not a priority to me when I moved here, so...

Interviewer: Do you use the identifier Christian to apply to yourself? Is that a meaningful part of your identity?

Roeschley: I feel better as identifying as an Anabaptist. And, you know, it's part of the Christian tradition. And I think that—so like one of your questions is making me think of this, and it's a little bit like the Anabaptist feminist thing.

1:20:51 Like another big piece of my journey that has like kept me sane and frankly kept me engaged in the Anabaptist church is having a religious and spiritual community that's so much broader than that. And that was definitely, there was an infusion of that at WATER. But, you know, I kind of always think that if I wasn't a part of this Anabaptist tradition that's both cultural as well as, you know, theological at this point that like I could easily be Unitarian. Like that's sort of more where my theological convictions probably align better. But it has also felt right to like do my work in a community that I know best.

1:21:57 But, like, man, the Mennonite church drives me nuts, so, like, having friends and colleagues and teachers that are part of Mennonite church, and like that's spiritually important to me as well as practically important. Which is another reason why CTS is a good fit because that's totally the ethos there. They don't feel overly Christian to me.

Annabeth Roeschley

Interviewer: Yeah, it's interesting. If it's a UCC church it is Christian, right? I mean, UCC is a Christian denomination. But they must pull in lots of other people, certainly as students, but maybe on their faculty, too, draw in lots of other people.

1:23:04

Roeschley: Yeah. Oh, yeah. They have a whole—in addition to the Center for LGBTQ Religious Studies, they have a Center for Black Faith and Life and a Center for Islamic, Jewish and Christian Studies, so faculty, you know, in all of those, and it's...yeah, that's a core emphasis. I think they have a student at the seminary, at least one student at the seminary right now who's atheist, so—and getting an MDiv, right? Like how fascinating is that?

Interviewer: Hope that person is still there when you show up. You can have some conversations.

Roeschley: Yeah, I know. Me, too. [*Laughs.*]

1:23:56

Interviewer: That sounds really interesting. I haven't really been looking at my questions here, but let me do that really quick to see what kinds of things we've just completely skipped over. I would be interested in, on the number three, you said you had a list of ten to 12 different Mennonite congregations and institutions. If you'd want to, like if we can email after this, because there might be one or two things you're going to send me anyway, I'd love to see that list. Because you mentioned some of those, but probably didn't mention them all. And on number six you said you're more comfortable identifying yourself as Anabaptist than Christian. You identify yourself as Mennonite, I assume. You're part of a Mennonite congregation. So you embrace that language.

Roeschley: Mm-hmm.

1:24:58

Interviewer: And do you, I mean, when you look ahead do you think it's very, very, very likely you will continue to identify as Mennonite, Anabaptist going forward through the seminary experience or theological school experience and then beyond, or is that difficult to sort of spin out? Because you're probably only in your 30s, right, so you've got a lot of living to do yet. Do you ever think about that?

Roeschley: Oh yeah, I do. I think it's...I feel like pretty confident right now that I'll continue to identify as Anabaptist Mennonite and remain connected to kind of the Mennonite church broadly, and like will attend or be part of a

Mennonite community in anyplace that I'm living if it exists and if one is a fit.

1:26:00 But I don't anticipate having my primary work kind of day-to-day life centered in the Mennonite church. But I can't really imagine where that would be in a way that's going to like kind of hit on all the cylinders that I'm trying to [continue] that, so...

Interviewer: And that's interesting. Even though you earlier identified the licensing and movement and the leadership of Michelle Burkholder as being super influential to you to kind of open up possibilities, right? So there's someone that, I assume she does do all her day-to-day work, right, she's fully employed at Hyattsville, right? That is a...?

Roeschley: She's part-time.

Interviewer: Oh, she's part-time, okay. Yeah, I need to talk to her more about her professional life and stuff.

1:26:59

Roeschley: Yeah, no, it's not a matter of like it not being possible. It's just like I don't want to do that. That's not like where I... When I picture myself kind of doing ministry in a general sense, like it's not contained within the Mennonite church, and it's more like intersecting with other faith traditions and like outside of the church where good work is happening. I think I'll continue to probably end up leading in different ways in Mennonite churches and perhaps in the denomination, particularly around like Pink Menno and BMC stuff, but... But I need something that's bigger and more dimensional than I often find in...

1:28:00 And I don't feel like I want to pastor a congregation. You know, that's not a desire right now.

Interviewer: I wonder if, in the UCC tradition, they license and ordain people to do ministry for social justice work and nonprofit. They probably do. Do they?

Roeschley: I don't know that for sure, but I would imagine that they do, especially because of like a... I mean, there's a concentration, an MDiv concentration that is like blended with social work at Chicago Theological.

Interviewer: Yeah, it'll just be really interesting to sort of see what many other people are doing who you're going to meet, what their paths are. But then also how—I mean, for some people things like licensing and ordination is just extremely important for their ministry, like they embrace that and want that.

1:29:07 And then I have definitely also interviewed people not just for this project, but for other projects, too, in the Mennonite context, where licensing and ordination is just not that central to their sense of being called or doing good work or whatever. So yeah, I mean, there's whole layers of things that you're going to probably encounter and be giving more thought to, I would imagine, down the road.

Roeschley: Yeah. I mean, it's interesting that you say that because I, I mean, I've obviously been thinking about that with myself, especially given the kind of discerning whether or not to go to seminary. And right now I feel like yeah, that's not like hugely important, like that doesn't feel like a big goal. But I also think about what...kind of the way that I've kind of come to various new understandings theologically, and of myself as a person and my own identity, and where I fit in the church.

1:30:13 Like that's sort of...it's kind of, yeah, like this process of evolution, right, and this, like, image that keeps coming, and the language, and so... And how much of what I don't think I'm interested in is because I haven't imagined it yet, and like how much of that is because, you know, for most of my life queerness and church were not together, right? So, you know, I'm with you, and you were kind of saying like it will be interesting to see where this turns out, because I want to be open to things that might not seem desirable now because they might not have seemed that possible.

1:31:06 But knowing what I know that's kind of what I would say about ordination and pastoral ministry, or congregational ministry, I should say. I think about things like hospice and kind of pastoral care in some of those other settings, and I feel like that could be very likely.

Interviewer: Okay. I'm thinking maybe we wrap this up, and then promise to be in some kind of email communication with each other. One of my questions on number nine was are there other people that I should be contacting.

1:31:56 And I know really early on you were hoping I would broaden out both in terms of race, but in terms of a big spectrum of sexuality identification. And I'm just starting, you know, I'm about to go on this big trip to Spain, so it's not like I'm going to do this in the next month and a half, but when I get back to this project in November I will start to contact men, which I haven't done yet, except for one guy who transitioned from being a woman to a man.

And he lives in Florida. He's theologically trained. I think he's not part of a Mennonite church anymore, but he used to be. He grew up Mennonite. And he has promised now to participate with an interview, which I'm thrilled. So that's going to happen. And now I have a name from you of your friend who's at Chicago Theological Seminary. I probably could contact him if you think that would be a good idea. I don't have his

contact information, so that might be something that...I don't know if you would feel comfortable giving me his...

1:33:05

Roeschley: Yeah. Did I not send you...? I thought I sent you a whole list after we talked. I could be wrong. I'm going to do a quick Google search here. I have this memory of writing down some names and comments and emailing some stuff.

Interviewer: Maybe that came when I was traveling or something, because the things I've printed out from you don't have that.

Roeschley: Yeah, I just found it. I'm going to—

Interviewer: If you could just resend that. Thank you. Okay, so that would have had—oh, yes, that included people like...oh, I just lost your video. Can you hear me?

Roeschley: Oh, yeah, I can hear you.

1:34:03

Interviewer: Maybe I don't need to get your video back because I think we'll wrap up here. That included yeah, probably five or six people, didn't it? Oh, there you are. Now I see you.

Roeschley: I just sent it to you again. And Jason's on there.

Interviewer: And Jason's on there, okay. So I will follow up with those individuals. And then if you think of others. I mean, as time goes by you may learn of new people that you don't even know now but that you think would be interested in being interviewed. I'd be glad for you to just continue to send me suggestions.

Roeschley: Sure.

Interviewer: And diversifying out is a goal, so that would really be great. I would like to do that. So thank you for that.

Roeschley: Sure.

1:34:57

Interviewer: Are there documents you have? That's one of my questions, too. I have interviewed two people already for this project who wrote whole master's theses putting their own sexual identity and what was happening for them at that time in their lives with Anabaptist theology, so some people have

sent me massive scholarship that they've done, you know, generally unpublished, but really pretty fascinating stuff. I don't know, you probably have things in writing either from academic stuff or from your work with the church with Hyattsville, or sermons you've given. Some people have emailed me sermons that they've given that were very important to them in terms of how they put theology together with wanting to communicate with their sort of beloved community.

1:35:56 Those are just some examples. Some people have sent me letters that they have received from Mennonite institutions once those Mennonite institutions learned that they were queer. I mean, I've started to accumulate just a really kind of interesting little archive of my own just on what people have felt that they wanted me to see. So I have no idea what you've got, and it might take a little more thinking on your part than just saying off the cuff right now. But just know that I would receive anything you might want to email me or send me as attachments or that kind of thing.

Roeschley: Yeah, I don't...there's not like a major body of work, you know, like a thesis or anything. But I did a big project in undergrad, but that was more...it was less about queer identity and more about feminist identity and kind of the non—I mean, it was a lot of work around nonbinary and how that shows up in theology and academia.

1:37:09 So in some ways that was—I mean, I see that as sort of a foundational piece for myself, and then kind of like expanding the gender sexuality spectrum. Yeah, I mean, I've done stuff with Pink Menno. So yeah, I can think about it and if there's stuff that feels particularly relevant I could send it to you.

Interviewer: Okay. All right. And one of the questions here is that number 11. That's a really open-ended one. But it's kind of nice to end with that because since I haven't known you, just kind of getting to know you a little bit, there probably are things that you thought we maybe would talk about that didn't come up or that you'd like to express. So that's just an open-ended kind of catchall question that it's kind of in your court if there's stuff you want to comment on, or say, or anything, that's what that's there for.

1:38:13

Roeschley: Okay. Yeah, I mean, I feel like some of that came out in our initial conversation because we were kind of talking more about the limits of, like, LGBTQ when put side to side with gender, and how there kind of needs to be a deeper synthesis and queering of gender when we talk about, and imagine, and reach out to the LGBTQ community.

- 1:39:08 Yeah, and I guess the other thing that's coming to my mind we touched on some in our initial conversation, too, is that there's been this whole generation, if you will, or generations of people who have been kind of lost to the Mennonite church, and there's like...that's hard to fully wrap my mind around, and like how do we do that justice, or how do we give honor to that. And it's, you know, like Carol Wise, for example, is someone who can speak really eloquently to this, but just like in this era of what feels like, and is, in some ways, remarkable change, both in society and even in the church.
- 1:40:07 Like on one hand change feels like it's happening agonizingly slowly, and yet when I look back over the last even eight years since 2009 in Columbus, like I'm also kind of amazed at where some things are at. And so it can be tempting to sort of just get caught up in all that and look at all of the progress without really—I mean, A, like thinking about the cost and kind of who's been lost and who's been harmed, but also—well, and who has done the harming. Yeah, but also to like have this false sense of we have arrived somewhere.
- 1:41:01 And that's why, I mean, I think this is why I kind of like ultimately don't feel overly optimistic, because this is not just about gay and lesbian people becoming members, and this is not just about queer people becoming ordained, right? Like queer justice has to be intersectional in a way that is just like would revolutionize our church, right? I mean, it would revolutionize society. And that's like really big, you know. And yet it's all connected, so it's small in the sense that like we can encounter things like sexism, and racism, and classism every single day and find ways to [unintelligible] 1:41:55.
- 1:41:59 I feel like I'm starting to ramble. But when I think about the church, like there's this caution to, now that in this moment there's not a bunch of vocally conservative people who have left, and there can be sort of this era where we gained some institutional change, and yet like where are we, you know? And have we ultimately restructured the kinds of systems and like have we dismantled the kinds of power that make it possible to allow a prominent theologian to sexually abuse dozens upon dozens upon dozens of women and get away with it? And then, you know, like the kinds of power structures that allow queer people to disappear quietly?
- 1:43:00 And that, like, still undermine the work of people of color. It's like... That's what I want to keep my eye on. That's what, like, queer justice looks like to me in our church and beyond. Which, you know, you're not, I get it, your project isn't like how to get a roadmap to do queer justice in the Mennonite church. Like you're talking to individuals about their stories. But that's like central, you know, for me, like when it gets to this call for our church.

1:43:51

Interviewer: That's your story. I mean, you're naming what's pretty central to your own story, but it's—

Roeschley: Yeah, which is a lot of people.

Interviewer: It's a lot of people's story.

Roeschley: Yeah. But just, I think, to clarify that it's, like I'm really glad ordination, for example, is much more accessible, but that's not the be all end all, right? And like none of these little minor achievements is. And it's so... Like this is happening where, like, leaders in the church take on this rhetoric to me personally, to groups like Pink Menno and BMC, where it's like kind of this you should be grateful for where we've come, you know, like you got this and this, so what's the big fuss? Can't we just put this all behind us, right? Like that's problematic, to put it simply.

1:44:57

Interviewer: Yeah. It's interesting that you mention Carol Wise speaking eloquently about this because I have a long, long audiotape of her talking with me in Minneapolis last October about this very thing, yeah. *[Laughs.]*

Roeschley: Yeah! *[Laughs.]* Yeah, you don't need me to sum that up for you. Let me just—everything Carol said, ditto, okay?

Interviewer: Yeah. No, but, I mean, but you're articulating it in slightly different ways than she did, but thematically it's the same.

Roeschley: Yeah.

Interviewer: But like hearing Pink Menno and BMC people hearing from denominational, other denominational people that you should be grateful for this change, you know, those are words in your mouth. She didn't say it that way. So, I mean, it's nice for me to hear these things—it's helpful for me to hear these things articulated by different people differently.

Roeschley: Mm-hmm.

Interviewer: So thanks for the...thanks for that addition to what you've been saying.

1:46:08

Roeschley: One more thing. I feel like we need to go. But I would also add that any kind of ongoing struggle of the, like, good queer versus bad queer dynamic is also something Carol would talk about. So like those of us that are extra willing to challenge all of these layers of power and oppression

that cut beyond gender and sexuality, and to do that in ways that are really out there, and vocal, and challenging, and it makes people uncomfortable, like it's a lot harder for denominational leaders to kind of work with that and stomach that. And so—I mean, it's the same thing like outside of the church as well, right?

1:46:58 But there is a pattern of kind of the church accepting the minority that is—and this is, you know, this happens with people of color as well—you know, like accepting the minority that is most palatable. And that's another thing that we all need to be mindful of and like willing to challenge. And it's directly connected to like how change happens. And who we bring along when there's like moments for change and welcome.

Interviewer: When you think of the good queer versus bad queer dynamic are you specifically thinking about things like Pink Menno and events in Kansas City two years ago or—

1:48:00

Roeschley: Yeah, that would be a really good example.

Interviewer: That's an example, right. I was there. I mean, that is very visceral and—

Roeschley: Oh, yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah, I was there.

Roeschley: I actually wasn't, but was actively involved in a lot of things.

Interviewer: Okay. If you think of more concrete examples in addition to that one and you end up writing me with things like the citation for the Hyattsville Mennonite book history, and you want to embellish anything, that's fine, too. I'd be glad for more thoughts that are put into an email. Not that you have to do work, but if you feel like it.

Roeschley: Yeah, thank you. I appreciate having that question open-ended to kind of keep the conversation going.

Interviewer: Yeah, this has been so interesting for me to interview people. And some interviews I've managed to do in person, which has been great, because I've talked to people in—you know, I live close to Missouri, but Kansas people, Missouri people, and then my trip up to Minneapolis, I interviewed three people up there.

1:49:06 The in person are really amazing. But even the Skype interviews are just so interesting to me. I always feel like I would really like to know this person better. It's too bad about all these geographical distances, you know, because it—

Annabeth Roeschley

Roeschley: I know, yeah.

Interviewer: I mean, Facebook and things like that are really helpful, but I've enjoyed... So it's opening up kind of a new community to me just of people that I feel I have a lot to identify with, in many ways. Being Mennonite is a big one, but that's not the only thing I'm identifying with in these interviews with folks. So yeah.

Roeschley: Yeah, I mean, there's like, I feel like if we had another two hours I would love to hear more about your spirituality and relationship with the church and challenge to the church.

1:50:03 I mean, there's like a whole host of questions I could ask you. So maybe if we're ever in the same place again.

Interviewer: Yeah, that would be great. I have Illinois connections, too. My brother and his wife live in central Illinois. My family lived in Normal and all of us moved on except for my brother, who married somebody local from Normal, and so they've always stayed there. And so I do get to Illinois, but not super often, but I've got a sibling there. So yeah, Illinois is easier for me than some other far-flung places, I think.

Roeschley: Yeah.

Interviewer: Okay, well, this has really been great. Thank you again so much. And that we could kind of spread out these conversations even from August into September kind of around our travel schedules was really helpful. And I know your transition coming up, it's obviously, this is really huge what you are doing, to leave D.C. That's very evident.

1:51:03

Roeschley: Yep.

Interviewer: It looks like you're doing it for some really well thought through reasons, and also have tons of support, you know, with you at both ends, the D.C. end and the Chicago or Illinois end and all of that. I hope things go well for your partner, too, because I guess she's not going to be in theological school, so she must be changing jobs, or is there something different?

Roeschley: Yeah, she just graduated in May with a master's in urban planning, specifically looking at the equity and justice in kind of urban planning, and so is making somewhat of a career shift, but is going to be doing that work in Chicago.

Interviewer: Great. Well, that will be yet another just really interesting set of changes, so yes, lots going on.

1:52:01 I'll expect to get some kind of email, one of which would need to be the scanned form. And at this point it's fine for me for you to not be really very clear about whether you want your name used. If I don't get permission to use your name then I probably would use a pseudonym and then see how that feels to you when I wrote things up. If you want your name used that is of course fine, too, so it's just completely your decision on that. And if you don't really know yet, you can just kind of indicate that to me, too.

Roeschley: Okay. Yeah, I'm not sure I know yet.

Interviewer: Okay. Fine.

Roeschley: But I'll still sign the form and send it to you.

1:52:54

Interviewer: The audiotape part, at least, is important for me. And then I'll need to at least make my own note on there that I really don't have permission at this point to use your name, and so I've got to, you know, I of course will honor that, too. So it helps me to keep track of who has told me what in these interviews to have that paper.

1:53:12

Roeschley: Sure, yep.

Interviewer: All right, okay. Well, after next Monday if you email me you might not hear anything for a really long time because—

Roeschley: Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Interviewer: —I'll be trooping around in the mountains and in villages. But down the road that will all change and I'll be back in the States by late October.

Roeschley: Have such a wonderful pilgrimage.

Interviewer: Oh, thank you. I believe it will be amazing. And best to you. And let's—I'll look forward to being in touch these various ways. I'll look forward to our next encounter, Annabeth.

Roeschley: Yeah. Take care, Rachel.

Interviewer: If you see Kate anytime soon please tell her hi from me.

Roeschley: Oh, I will see Kate, yeah. Will do.

Interviewer: I'd be happy—she comes back to Kansas every so often, so I'm hoping I'll see her here sometime, too.

Annabeth Roeschley

Roeschley: Yeah.

Interviewer: All right. Thank you so much.

Roeschley: Yeah, thank you. Take care.

Interviewer: Good night.

Roeschley: Night.

1:54:19 [End of recording.]