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 2 VOICES of the Oral History Project of GLHSNC   
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 5 Telephone (415) 777-5455, #1   
 6 Interview with Kenneth Wright   
 7 Date of Birth: 1951   
 8 By Interviewer: Terance Kissack   
 9 Date: 7/20/00   
 10 GLHS OHP 00-003 - MCC series   
 11   
 12 Tape 1 of 1, Side 1 = 1S1:000-099   
 13 1S1:000-099   
 14 TK: Hi, it's July 20, 2000, we're here in San   
 15 Francisco and I am speaking with my friend Ken. Ken,   
 16 what's your full name.   
 17 KW: Kenneth Wright.   
 18 TK: Where were you born?   
 19 KW: I was born in Illinois, a small town, west of   
 20 Chicago, about 1,400, very small.   
 21 TK: That is very small. Outside Chicago? And did you   
 22 grow up there?   
 23 KW: Yeah.   
 24 TK: With your family? Mom, dad?   
 25 KW: Yeah, my parents, two sisters and a brother.

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1 KW: Yeah, like a lot of reasons, change. I visited   
 2 here in 1980 and I almost moved out then, but then it   
 3 would be hard to get a job and find housing. Housing   
 4 was too expensive. I found a lot of reasons not to   
 5 come and then through the '80s, I was with a lover and   
 6 then '88 I was visiting here again, I was single, and   
 7 I just decided I was going to do it.   
 8 TK: And when you were growing up, what was your   
 9 family's religious background?   
 10 KW: Presbyterian.   
 11 TK: And were you a practicing family, did you go to   
 12 church?   
 13 KW: Yeah. I went to church and Sunday School and all   
 14 that pretty much into my teenage years.   
 15 TK: And what about in college?   
 16 KW: No, after high school, not very much. For a while   
 17 when I lived in Elgin, Illinois, I went to the   
 18 Congregationalist Church but I never joined.   
 19 TK: So when you came to San Francisco, how did you   
 20 hear about MCC?   
 21 KW: I've known about MCC for a long time and knew who   
 22 the founder was and I knew people who I knew in   
 23 Chicago. And I wanted to try it out. A lot of it was   
 24 just social too. I came to San Francisco without   
 25 really knowing people. I wanted to get to know people

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1 TK: Are you the youngest?   
 2 KW: No, my brother's the youngest, I'm next.   
 3 TK: And when were you born, how old are you?   
 4 KW: 1951, so I'm 48 years old.   
 5 TK: And what brought you to San Francisco?   
 6 KW: No one thing, just I needed a change. I was   
 7 actually living in Illinois again at that time. I'd   
 8 come back from the Peace Corps and I planned on   
 9 spending about six months there. I got a temporary job   
 10 in the community college and then it became one year   
 11 and then it became five years and then it became   
 12 twelve years and then I decided it was time to move.   
 13 TK: Okay, so you went, you grew up in this small town   
 14 and then you went out to the Peace Corps? Straight   
 15 from high school?   
 16 KW: No, after college.   
 17 TK: And where'd you go to college?   
 18 KW: I went to college at Northern Illinois University   
 19 and I also spent a year in Mexico, the University of   
 20 the Americas.   
 21 TK: Is that where you did your Peace Corps?   
 22 KW: No, Peace Corps was two years after college. I was   
 23 in Guatemala.   
 24 TK: Okay, so you came to San Francisco for no   
 25 particular reason?

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1 and get involved, so that was why I came in, I was   
 2 really attracted to it. I came to the evening service   
 3 and there was some real good music which I liked. That   
 4 was one of the main things. I started meeting people   
 5 and, you know, I liked a lot of aspects of it.   
 6 TK: And I should explain, MCC is Metropolitan   
 7 Community Church. And which MCC congregation did you   
 8 first attend?   
 9 KW: San Francisco, the one on Eureka Street.   
 10 TK: Have you ever attended any of the others?   
 11 KW: In The City? No.   
 12 TK: But you have gone to some MCC services before   
 13 moving to San Francisco?   
 14 KW: I'd gone to a couple in the Chicago area, yeah.   
 15 TK: So, when you arrived, you went almost immediately   
 16 to MCC.   
 17 KW: Yeah, my first weekend here.   
 18 TK: Your first weekend here? Wow. And you say this was   
 19 as much for social kind of establishing community and   
 20 you found nothing?   
 21 KW: Yeah.   
 22 TK: So, you've been going there for - you started in   
 23 1989.   
 24 KW: Yeah, almost eleven years.   
 25 TK: And you said the music really drew you in?

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1 KW: Yeah, really the music program. A lot of the old  
 2 Protestant hymns, but without the guilt and without  
 3 the sexism that words have been changed to take out  
 4 sexist and words which inspire guilt in people.  
 5 TK: Does it remind you of your childhood?  
 6 KW: The music does, yeah.  
 7 TK: So you have a connection there. Have you ever sung  
 8 in the church or participated in the music?  
 9 KW: You mean in the choir? Not really, well a handful  
 10 of times, special programs they have, but I've never  
 11 been a member.  
 12 TK: But music is an important part of your experience.  
 13 KW: Yeah, definitely.  
 14 TK: So when you first began to go to the services,  
 15 what were they like, what were they structured like?  
 16 Lead me through.  
 17 KW: Okay, like I said, a lot of music, that was  
 18 important. Communion every week, which is unusual in  
 19 Protestant denominations. Using a lot of different  
 20 traditions and a lot of acceptance. There's nothing  
 21 like guilt and there's not a lot of structure, like  
 22 you have to believe this. That's important. In some  
 23 churches you say exactly what you have to believe. I  
 24 remember as a kid being puzzled over, the minister  
 25 told us we had to believe that the Father and the Son

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1 way, things that we try for a while, then we move to a  
 2 different way.  
 3 TK: Such as?  
 4 KW: Okay. In the early '90s, we have the healing  
 5 service at the height of the AIDS deaths which was a  
 6 rallying point of the church, especially then. I think  
 7 once a month we had a healing service, along with the  
 8 communion and individual prayer. It was kind of like  
 9 the laying on of hands.  
 10 TK: And did that fade away?  
 11 KW: Yeah, eventually it did. We do it once in a while  
 12 on the Wednesday service, but for some reason, it  
 13 ended up stopping. One thing, it was really heavy  
 14 because there were so many people sick and dying in  
 15 the '90s. It just got to be a little much sometimes.  
 16 That was the big change between then and now, just the  
 17 overpowering sadness of dealing with all that death.  
 18 TK: Tell me a little more about the healing services.  
 19 Who came to them?  
 20 KW: It was a regular service and it was just a small  
 21 portion during the communion. You could go for the  
 22 communion or for the healing prayer. It was any kind  
 23 of healing you wanted: mind, body, the spirit, if you  
 24 maybe had a problem with somebody you wanted to help.  
 25 1S1:100-199

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1 and the Holy Ghost were exactly (inaudible). I said  
 2 what a minute, you know, what if the father is like a  
 3 little bit more than the son? So there was none of  
 4 that there.  
 5 TK: The dogma? And so a service is familiar to you, it  
 6 is like the services you attended in your youth or is  
 7 it structured differently? I mean, who speaks?  
 8 KW: It's actually quite a bit different. Sometimes  
 9 there was kind of more conversation, participation,  
 10 the communion is there every week which is definite.  
 11 It's also the philosophy of communion that's  
 12 different, I think, than any other denomination I've  
 13 seen, because most roads have lots of rules, most  
 14 denominations have lots of rules on who can take  
 15 communion and who can't, and what you have to do  
 16 before and, you know. MCC, every week they say this is  
 17 communion, this is for all of God's children so  
 18 anybody who wants it is welcome to come. You don't  
 19 have to belong to this denomination or any  
 20 denomination. So it's welcoming and accepting of  
 21 anybody.  
 22 TK: Have you see a lot of change in the way that the  
 23 services are structured over the time? Maybe not a  
 24 lot, have you seen any change?  
 25 KW: There's sort of an experimentation, changing that

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1 Or it might be a physical problem or just anything you  
 2 wanted to deal with. A lot of it was focused on AIDS  
 3 but it wasn't only that.  
 4 TK: And you participated in those?  
 5 KW: I went to them, yeah, I went to them all the time.  
 6 TK: You mentioned the laying of hands, was that  
 7 something that you remember specifically from those  
 8 services?  
 9 KW: Yeah, and we didn't call it that but it was  
 10 similar to that, yeah.  
 11 TK: What are some of the other innovations in services  
 12 that you've seen come and go, or come and stay?  
 13 KW: I guess there weren't that many changes in the  
 14 service itself. In the church a lot of the changes  
 15 have been the increased social activism in the '90s.  
 16 In the early to mid '90s, we were so focused on AIDS,  
 17 that was pretty much what we did as far as social  
 18 activism. AIDS, ministering to people who were sick  
 19 and in the hospital and memorial and funeral services,  
 20 visiting people, you know, establishing support  
 21 services there. I think by the mid '90s, we branched  
 22 out. We started the feeding program for the homeless  
 23 people and, of course, the Youth Shelter started  
 24 recently, needle exchange, that's a few years old.  
 25 TK: So these all began in the mid '90s? Was there a

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1 change in the congregation?  
 2 KW: That's one of the big things. The congregation  
 3 changes very fast. I've been with them eleven years  
 4 now and I'm one of the probably ten or maybe fifteen  
 5 people that were going there when I came in '89. For  
 6 one thing, sometimes people come and they get upset at  
 7 something and they leave. There are people coming in  
 8 from all different denominations and belief systems  
 9 and some people think that we're too liberal. There's  
 10 always something people are unhappy about but it's  
 11 also, a lot of times people come, gay people come who  
 12 have been kicked out of their own churches and told  
 13 they can't be gay and Christian. And they're dealing  
 14 with that, they need to get over that, they need the  
 15 healing. They come to MCC and once they've established  
 16 that it's okay, then maybe don't need it anymore. Or  
 17 they come for some problem in their life, a physical  
 18 problem or just some emotional problem and they get  
 19 what they need and leave. So that's fine but that's  
 20 part of the turnover.  
 21 TK: And do you think the composition has changed? What  
 22 was the membership like when you first began? Was it  
 23 mostly men or mostly women?  
 24 KW: It was more men when I came and more white. So  
 25 that's been a big push to increase diversity. We had

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1 at least one woman pastor and that's a call to bring  
 2 more women in. As far as people of color, there's more  
 3 than there used to be, but it's still it's  
 4 predominantly white so that's another issue. I know  
 5 when I came in '89, the church was in the middle of a  
 6 big controversy. There was an assistant pastor, her  
 7 name was Lynn, I don't remember her last name. But it  
 8 turned out that she was actually not a minister which  
 9 she claimed she was. And she also claimed that she was  
 10 attacked in some hate crime and somebody had cut her  
 11 and somebody had written something on her garage. It  
 12 turned out that maybe some of it was true, but the  
 13 tact was fake. So it was some of it or all of it was  
 14 fake. And she was going through some psychotic  
 15 episode. And in the middle of that, MCC had been  
 16 behind her and the community, there was a march in  
 17 support of her against hate crimes. And so it was a  
 18 big scandal when it turned out that she'd faked the  
 19 crime and she wasn't even a minister. And I came just  
 20 in the middle of that, you know, and this was in all  
 21 the national publications, Advocate, and all the gay  
 22 magazines nationwide. And one of the things that  
 23 impressed me is that we faced it. So often with things  
 24 like that, people try to cover it up and not talk  
 25 about it, and so Jim Mitulski, the minister, did

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1 interviews with the press and we talked about it in  
 2 congregation and I think some kind of discussion  
 3 groups, especially for the women, since some of them  
 4 felt that they were blamed for it. So that was one of  
 5 the big things that I noticed about it that we would  
 6 face issues instead of hiding from them.  
 7 TK: Is that continuing?  
 8 KW: I think so, one of the things then, in 1990  
 9 something else happened which was a split. A lot of  
 10 things happened in '90. For one thing we were  
 11 firebombed in the summer of 1990. Turned out there  
 12 wasn't too much damage but it was a big issue that  
 13 somebody would want to do it, although it probably  
 14 wasn't a homophobic thing. Because that same weekend,  
 15 several synagogues in the Bay Area had been  
 16 firebombed. And at the time we were the home of,  
 17 what's the name, Shahar Zahad, they were meeting at  
 18 MCC, so it was probably an anti-Semitic thing, I don't  
 19 think it's even solved.  
 20 TK: So Shahar Zahad is the GLBT Jewish congregation.  
 21 You shared a building with them?  
 22 KW: Yeah, for a brief time they used the building.  
 23 That's was of the other things of MCC San Francisco,  
 24 it's kind of a community center. There are a lot of  
 25 meeting rooms and we rent space, usually very cheaply

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1 to political groups and 12-step groups like AA and  
 2 (INAUDIBLE) and I don't know, there's a whole bunch of  
 3 them that meet and sometimes social groups and dance  
 4 things. So it is kind of a gay community center. But  
 5 let's see, shall I just keep going? In 1990, one of  
 6 the people who was instrumental in starting the 7  
 7 o'clock service, which is more the gospel service,  
 8 there's a lot more service.  
 9 TK: On what day is this?  
 10 KW: It's Sunday, yeah, 7 o'clock. The morning service  
 11 at 11 is more traditional Protestant, more sedate, and  
 12 the 7 o'clock is more singing with a lot of gospel.  
 13 The guy who was instrumental in founding this was the  
 14 music, I think he was music director, Jack St. John.  
 15 He also was very open about being a recovering drug  
 16 addict. And somewhere in '90, he went back on drugs  
 17 and became a public thing. You know, he talked about  
 18 it publicly. But he was let go from the job as music  
 19 director because of this happening and saying he would  
 20 go into a program which he didn't I understand. But he  
 21 was let go. And he started another gay congregation  
 22 called, "Worship and Praise" or something like that.  
 23 1S1:200-299  
 24 So he started a congregation and a few people split  
 25 off from him that wanted to be with him or had felt

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1 that he'd gotten a bad deal when he was let go. So  
 2 that affected the congregation for a while, you know,  
 3 both in attendance and money and some hard feelings  
 4 but, again, it was something we talked about openly  
 5 rather than let it go. And eventually that  
 6 congregation closed down and some time later he came  
 7 back and he's now working with the music program  
 8 again.  
 9 TK: Oh, so he's back now?  
 10 KW: Yeah, he's been back a few years I think.  
 11 TK: Is that the only split that you've seen during  
 12 your?  
 13 KW: There's always people going off. Golden Gate MCC  
 14 split, that was I think in the mid or late '80s, it  
 15 was a little bit before I came. I believe they wanted  
 16 to do more social activism than we did but, again,  
 17 this was before I came so I don't know.  
 18 TK: What are the relations like between MCC Golden  
 19 Gate and MCC San Francisco?  
 20 KW: There was a lot of competition. Some time in the  
 21 mid '90s, Golden Gate hired our assistant pastor to be  
 22 their minister and, like I say, we wished them well  
 23 and all that but there was a little competition. Some  
 24 of the women went with her, some of the people but,  
 25 you know, more women went with her. Eventually that

1 congregation went down. It's now in the process of  
 2 closing down and Golden Gate has come back to MCC, to  
 3 MCC San Francisco so that we've reunited and I think  
 4 there's going to be more outreach in the Tenderloin. I  
 5 believe there's going to be a service, I think, once a  
 6 week in the Tenderloin but I'm not sure exactly what's  
 7 happening with that. Anyway they're back together  
 8 again.  
 9 TK: So it sounds like it's like it's a malleable  
 10 organization, splits and joining.  
 11 KW: Oh yeah, always something happening.  
 12 TK: And there seems to be, you've mentioned maybe once  
 13 or twice, that there's some tension between men and  
 14 women in the congregation. I mean, that's a general.  
 15 Is that what you experience or?  
 16 KW: I don't really feel it, I've heard about it  
 17 different times and, of course, there's always been  
 18 the issue of it being dominated by men but we have  
 19 more women now and we're conscious of having women in  
 20 leadership roles, you know, balancing the committees  
 21 and any of the leadership things. And we have some  
 22 men's programs for the women and others for the men.  
 23 So we do a lot of things together but we also have  
 24 stuff that - things.  
 25 TK: How do you feel about the turn toward more social

1 activism?  
 2 KW: It's positive, I like it, it's important.  
 3 Sometimes we overreach but most of the time we  
 4 overreach actually.  
 5 TK: What do you mean?  
 6 KW: We're always looking to do more. A lot of that's  
 7 Jim Mitulski and if we have some money, we spend it,  
 8 and then we come up short. So we take a lot of leaps  
 9 and fail but for the most part, they work out well.  
 10 TK: Have you been active in some of these social  
 11 programs?  
 12 KW: Somewhat, I'm not a leader, I'm not in the inner  
 13 circle of the church which, in some ways, I think is  
 14 good. So many people jump in and they become leaders  
 15 and they're active in everything and then they either  
 16 get burned out or angry and then they leave. I always  
 17 go and I volunteer once in a while.  
 18 TK: What kind of things do you do? What things have  
 19 you done?  
 20 KW: I have worked a little bit in fund-raising,  
 21 sometimes supervising. We supervise the gates at  
 22 street fairs and we get a portion of the money and,  
 23 let's see, what else have I done? Oh, not a lot, work  
 24 on the building once in a while.  
 25 TK: So the congregation takes kind of an active part

1 in all aspects of the church?  
 2 KW: Oh yeah, there's a real active volunteer group  
 3 there.  
 4 TK: But you've kind of had an arm's length  
 5 relationship to the leadership or to the leadership  
 6 positions, or am I mischaracterizing it?  
 7 KW: I don't know if you could say that, it's just that  
 8 I'm not real active, I'm just somebody to call and I  
 9 come once in a while but I'm not always volunteering  
 10 for all the committees and to speak up and all that.  
 11 TK: How often do you go to church?  
 12 KW: Once a week, that's part of my schedule, Sunday  
 13 night.  
 14 TK: What do you go, the 7 o'clock service?  
 15 KW: Yeah.  
 16 TK: Is there much interaction between the 7 o'clock  
 17 service and the 11 o'clock service?  
 18 KW: No, that's funny because once in a while, I go to  
 19 the 11 o'clock service just to see people that I  
 20 almost never see because people tend to go to one or  
 21 the other.  
 22 TK: How do you see that breaking down? What are the  
 23 reasons for that?  
 24 KW: Well, I don't think it's bad, I think some people  
 25 like to go in the morning, some in the evening. A lot

1 of it is the style of service you feel comfortable  
 2 with.  
 3 TK: I want to talk a little bit more about the social  
 4 life of the church. You said that was one of the  
 5 reasons that you kind of joined. Is that true for a  
 6 lot of people?  
 7 KW: I think so, yeah. Yeah, a lot of people really get  
 8 involved, it becomes, you know, a big focus of their  
 9 life. That really doesn't happen with me, you know, I  
 10 don't use it like all my friends, dates or something  
 11 like that.  
 12 TK: But it does provide a network?  
 13 KW: Definitely, yeah.  
 14 TK: And you mentioned some social programs that the  
 15 church operates. What kind of things, men's programs  
 16 and women's programs, are you familiar with those?  
 17 KW: Sure, I go to them, like last time - we have a  
 18 midweek prayer service every Wednesday, which I go to  
 19 once in a while. And often there's some kind of a  
 20 program after that. Last time it was the author, Peter  
 21 Allan, talking about his book.  
 22 1S1:300-399  
 23 So there's a lot of authors that come in or famous  
 24 people come in and talk, or political leaders. That  
 25 often happens on Wednesday night.

1 TK: How many people usually go to those? I guess it  
 2 varies.  
 3 KW: It varies. I went to see Gore Vidall a few months  
 4 ago and had to stand up way in the back in the  
 5 doorway, it was jam packed. Sometimes it's only 10 or  
 6 20.  
 7 TK: And the people that show up, are they mostly MCC  
 8 congregants?  
 9 KW: Probably at least half MCC congregants and there's  
 10 half from the community that just heard about it.  
 11 TK: Is that common at MCC events that a lot of  
 12 noncongregants or non-regular church-goers show up and  
 13 participate?  
 14 KW: Oh yeah, that's the idea. Yeah, we want people to  
 15 be able to come in.  
 16 TK: And how do you encourage that?  
 17 KW: (laughs), sometimes they're advertised on posters  
 18 or put in the B.A.R. or the local newspapers, word of  
 19 mouth is another way people find out.  
 20 TK: How big do you think the congregation is right now  
 21 as we speak, or your impression of it?  
 22 KW: It's so hard to say the number. I believe that we  
 23 have something like 500 members. When I joined in  
 24 October of '89, it was 200. So it's grown a lot but  
 25 those numbers don't tell the story because we have a

1 lot of people who come, you know, some come every week  
 2 and participate and volunteer and, you know, give time  
 3 and money and never join. Some people join and then  
 4 don't come back. Some people are in and out so the  
 5 numbers are deceiving. I wouldn't know how many, like  
 6 the count.  
 7 TK: But in terms of the size of the services, have you  
 8 seen an increase since you began?  
 9 KW: Yeah. One of the problems is with the 7 o'clock  
 10 and, I think, with the 11 o'clock too, it almost fills  
 11 up which means you're running at capacity which means  
 12 you can't get that many more people because people  
 13 don't feel comfortable. So for a long time, we've been  
 14 talking about a new church building. That has been one  
 15 of the big issues for probably six or eight years  
 16 anyway.  
 17 TK: Is that a conversation that the whole membership  
 18 takes part of?  
 19 KW: Yes, off and on, we find something, we talk about  
 20 it and the Board talks about it and then it falls  
 21 through and then we find another place and talk about  
 22 that again.  
 23 TK: How do you see your relationship between the Board  
 24 and the leadership, I mean, do you know who the Board  
 25 members are?

1 KW: I know most of them, yeah, and I'm a friend of Jim  
 2 Mitulski, I've known him for a long time. I don't go  
 3 to Board meetings, I thought about running for the  
 4 Board, but I didn't do that. Unless there's a big  
 5 issue, I'm not involved, so I'll maybe talk to one of  
 6 the Board members about it.  
 7 TK: So it's a very informal kind of process.  
 8 KW: No, the Board meetings are formal but if you have  
 9 a concilia (phonetic), you can talk to the minister or  
 10 one of the board members about your feelings.  
 11 TK: And you've done that?  
 12 KW: Oh yeah, a few times.  
 13 TK: On what issues?  
 14 KW: Oh Jeez, probably the most recent one was do a  
 15 little affiliation. There's a push to have this  
 16 congregation do affiliation with United Church of  
 17 Christ so we would continue to be an MCC congregation  
 18 but also be the United Church of Christ congregation  
 19 which opens up plethora of things there.  
 20 TK: Like what, how does it?  
 21 KW: Okay, one of the issues with MCC is we've always  
 22 been ostracized by the United Church, it's called the  
 23 Worth Council of Churches, I think it's called. They  
 24 come to visit us a few times in the past. I know at  
 25 first they said we couldn't join them because they

1 didn't believe we were a church because we were gay,  
 2 okay? And then they came and visited and they decided  
 3 we were a church but then we couldn't join them anyway  
 4 because it would cause dissension with all the  
 5 homophobic congregations. So we really put it in their  
 6 face so we applied for the status and we always got  
 7 turned down which showed them up for being very  
 8 homophobic 'cause they couldn't give any reasons at  
 9 all. So even the Muslim organizations were allowed  
 10 into the Council as observers and we couldn't even  
 11 come in as that.  
 12 TK: So this is a kind of convention of Christian  
 13 congregations?  
 14 KW: Right, that was supposedly accepting any kind of  
 15 Christians but they won't accept us.  
 16 1S1:400-425  
 17 TK: And that continues to this day?  
 18 KW: Yeah, it continues to this day. I don't know too  
 19 much about it. I'm not sure if we continue applying  
 20 and I'm not sure, but one of the things is if we  
 21 became a United Church of Christ congregation, then  
 22 we'd get the respectability and then we'd get, you  
 23 know, a seat at the table.  
 24 TK: And your feelings on that are?  
 25 KW: No, we shouldn't, I don't think that we should

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1 figure? Maybe I'm mischaracterizing that. Is he a  
 2 compelling figure?  
 3 KW: Yeah, he is. He's very intelligent, very  
 4 ambitious, he's an excellent speaker. And what we've  
 5 noticed in the last few years, he really is a good  
 6 politician. He has been helped by P.R. people but he  
 7 knows exactly what to say to get the good sound bite  
 8 in, in the newspapers and a good shot on TV. He knows  
 9 just how to choose the words which will be published  
 10 and get the last word.  
 11 TK: It's a good skill.  
 12 KW: Oh yeah.  
 13 TK: Does he use that persuasive quality in the church  
 14 within the congregation?  
 15 KW: I think so, yeah. In the last few years we've had  
 16 so much publicity that, you know, you go in there and  
 17 you see TV cameras and okay, what happened now,  
 18 somebody made a statement about AIDS, the Pope said  
 19 something against us again or the marijuana issue. I'm  
 20 a teacher and every once in a while one of my students  
 21 says Mr. Wright, do you go to church? I'm like okay,  
 22 we've been on TV again. That must be what it is.  
 23 TK: Where do you teach?  
 24 KW: (inaudible) Middle School, yeah, it's just right  
 25 down the block, yeah.

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1 because we're a unique congregation and I don't think  
 2 we should compromise to make them happy.  
 3 TK: And other members of the church feel that it'd be  
 4 a good idea?  
 5 KW: Some do. But also one of the things, the direction  
 6 of MCC in the past, well almost 15 years, is really  
 7 been a lot of Jim Mitulski who's senior pastor. And so  
 8 a lot of the ideas come from him and people follow,  
 9 and this is one of his ideas, one of the few that I  
 10 don't agree with.  
 11 TK: But it's not the only idea you've spoken to a  
 12 Board member about?  
 13 KW: Not true, actually I can't remember, I may have  
 14 talked about -  
 15 End of Side 1, Tape 1 of 2  
 16 1S2:000-099  
 17 TK: And you were saying that the Rev. Mitulski has a  
 18 real strong position in the church?  
 19 KW: Correct. I think most of the things we've done  
 20 have been due to his leadership, most of the emphasis  
 21 on AIDS ministry which a lot of it was, you know,  
 22 because we were there, people came. He emphasized that  
 23 a lot and the movement to more social service things  
 24 and political activism, and that's all Jim.  
 25 TK: What do you think makes him such a compelling

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1 TK: 'Cause we're on 17th between Sanchez and Noe. And  
 2 how does Rev. Mitulski deal with dissension?  
 3 KW: That's kind of a problem. Sometimes they get mad  
 4 and people leave but I can't blame them too much  
 5 because there's so many different kinds of people and  
 6 different beliefs and people going through too much.  
 7 That's one of the big issues of the church that  
 8 there's such a big turnover. And we talked about ways  
 9 to slow that down, I mean, you can't stop it. Like I  
 10 said people leave because, sometimes people move,  
 11 sometimes people die, sometimes they leave because  
 12 they've got out of it what they want, so that's fine.  
 13 But a lot of times people leave angry and it'd be nice  
 14 to minimize that. I don't think you can stop it, I  
 15 don't know what we can do actually.  
 16 TK: Why do people leave angry? What's angry about  
 17 them?  
 18 KW: Oh, people get angry about how the money was spent  
 19 or a sermon or a reorganization or something that  
 20 happened on the board. You know, things that happen in  
 21 most churches but more here than most think.  
 22 TK: How the money was spent. What money, the money  
 23 that's collected?  
 24 KW: Yeah. There might be a social program they don't  
 25 like or.

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1 TK: How much of the resources of the church go to the  
 2 social programs?  
 3 KW: I don't know really. Most of the biggest amount  
 4 goes into salaries, of course, and we provide a lot of  
 5 things like "go to it" (phonetic) music, we have a  
 6 full-time "go to it" music which is unusual in a  
 7 congregation of that size.  
 8 TK: What's the name of the director?  
 9 KW: Bob Crocker. And he also does the music program at  
 10 the Harvey Milk Academy which is just a block over. We  
 11 do a lot of volunteer things at the Harvey Milk  
 12 School. We give supplies to the kids that are poor,  
 13 can't afford them. We have volunteers that come in  
 14 read to the kids, I think it's once a week, help out  
 15 with activities and field trips. And one of the things  
 16 is with the music thing being cut at the elementary  
 17 schools, now we give them music programs.  
 18 TK: So you've stepped into the role of a benefactor?  
 19 On an individual level the congregants play along to  
 20 your role? They go, and then also as an institution?  
 21 KW: Right.  
 22 TK: Have you ever participated in any of that?  
 23 KW: I'm trying to think, I don't think actively. I've  
 24 donated things, donated money and things.  
 25 TK: A busman's holiday, you're a teacher.

1 KW: Yeah, right (laughs).  
 2 TK: So maybe you got more than your fill.  
 3 KW: It's a real good activity. I confess that I do  
 4 have some sort of misgivings. The fact that we're a  
 5 gay activist congregation, we're helping these kids  
 6 which is fantastic. But when you have that kind of  
 7 volunteerism going to the schools, what happens if a  
 8 far right congregation says we'll do the same thing,  
 9 and influence the kids. So that's another issue  
 10 nobody's ever really talked about.  
 11 TK: Does the church, MCC, get along with other  
 12 congregations in town? Is there much ecumenical  
 13 activity?  
 14 KW: We work on the Gemstone a lot that we've tried  
 15 reaching out to other congregations. Once in a while  
 16 we have a guest minister or once in a while Jim tries  
 17 to sign other churches on for social activities. It's  
 18 not always successful but sometimes it is. One of the  
 19 things was the medical marijuana in 1996, around that.  
 20 When, you know, we have medical marijuana clubs in  
 21 town for people with a medical need for marijuana  
 22 suffering from cancer or AIDS and when one of those  
 23 closed down, John Mitulski, to make the point and it  
 24 make it available, gave away marijuana from the pulpit  
 25 to people who had the cards. That was another strong

1 statement. It's something else a few people got mad  
 2 about too. When you do innovative things, people get  
 3 upset and other people like it.  
 4 TK: Is that the opposite of the Champ or what did the  
 5 Medical Marijuana Advocacy group. Are they MCC?  
 6 KW: I don't think so, they could be, a lot of things  
 7 are. I mean, I don't think the offices are, they  
 8 probably met there.  
 9 TK: What were your feelings on the medical marijuana  
 10 activism?  
 11 KW: Within MCC? I thought it was a good idea,  
 12 definitely.  
 13 TK: And so there's a feeding program which serves who?  
 14 KW: Homeless people. I think it's twice a week now.  
 15 People come in - that's got a lot of opposition, had a  
 16 lot of opposition from the neighborhood. I think it's  
 17 kind of calmed down now.  
 18 TK: What were the?  
 19 KW: Bringing more homeless into the neighborhood,  
 20 encouraging people to be homeless so they'd get free  
 21 food, you know. That what was stated, not my opinion.  
 22 TK: How long has that been going on?  
 23 KW: Several years now, maybe three or four years,  
 24 probably three.  
 25 TK: And what are some of the other social programs

1 there?  
 2 KW: Well, the Queer Youth Shelter. That was started at  
 3 Golden Gate MCC. Jim was actually the interim pastor  
 4 there for the last few months when they didn't have a  
 5 pastor or before they combined. And they got City  
 6 funding for a youth shelter in the winter.  
 7 1S2:100-199  
 8 And the funding for that ran out and so there was a  
 9 small scale shelter funded by MCC and volunteer  
 10 donations, which is going on now.  
 11 TK: And where is that located?  
 12 KW: It's actually in MCC, in the building.  
 13 TK: At Eureka?  
 14 KW: Yeah, I think there's six beds now so it's a small  
 15 scale.  
 16 TK: Was MCC San Francisco involved, the congregation  
 17 now I'm speaking of, in the fight over getting the  
 18 Queer Youth shelter?  
 19 KW: Yeah, a lot of the congregation was in the  
 20 original fight in getting the youth shelter at MCC  
 21 Golden Gate. There was a lot of harassment, like  
 22 people reported tiny code violations like a door knob  
 23 wasn't right or something, for the shelf wasn't  
 24 permanent for the shelf that was put in. There was a  
 25 lot of harassment and a lot of volunteers and

1 (inaudible) speaking for the congregation. When it was  
 2 moved to MCC, there really wasn't any controversy, any  
 3 public controversy, because I think it's the number of  
 4 beds. If you have six beds or under, you don't have to  
 5 get the permit. And since we weren't asking for any  
 6 kind of City funding, we just did it.  
 7 TK: Is it the only time that MCC has gotten City  
 8 funding that you know of?  
 9 KW: Oh no, we've gotten City funding. Gosh, there's  
 10 all kinds of funding. Technically there's MCC church  
 11 and there's MCC foundation which is currently called  
 12 that, yeah Metropolitan Community Foundation, which  
 13 is, you know, legally separate. And with the feeding  
 14 program we've got federal funds and I believe City  
 15 funds and there's all kinds of grant money that comes  
 16 in.  
 17 TK: So MCC Foundation is the agency, in a sense, that  
 18 runs these different programs.  
 19 KW: Right, I believe that's how it is. It's new, I'm  
 20 not sure exactly, you know, the connection. There's  
 21 just been a recent thing to kind of separate them out,  
 22 which is which.  
 23 TK: Is the congregation involved in the Foundation at  
 24 all?  
 25 KW: It's all the same thing, I mean, as far as we're

1 they visit.  
 2 TK: And you've taken them to the service with you?  
 3 KW: Oh yeah.  
 4 TK: That's fun?  
 5 KW: That's good.  
 6 TK: Have you ever been back to your parents'  
 7 congregation when you go visit? Do you go to church  
 8 with your mom when you go?  
 9 KW: She lives in Iowa and I've found a few times she  
 10 goes to a Presbyterian Church and I've gone with her a  
 11 handful of times, yeah.  
 12 TK: So for you, you don't feel there's much of a sharp  
 13 distinction between at least the tradition of  
 14 Presbyterianism that you came out of and MCC's  
 15 practice.  
 16 KW: Oh, for me I don't see any huge schism from what I  
 17 came from. In the Presbyterian Church, there was  
 18 always kind of a split between the activism and the  
 19 conservative. I remember in the late '60s, around  
 20 1970, the Presbyterians gave money for Angela Davis's  
 21 political defense and that upset people. But really,  
 22 when I was a kid, they weren't into that hate stuff,  
 23 homophobia, which they are now. Most of the mainline  
 24 congregations are into that. If I can go with this,  
 25 MCC was founded as a refuge church like the black

1 concerned it's the same thing.  
 2 TK: I'd like to maybe talk a little bit more about  
 3 your relationship with your family now, in terms of  
 4 your membership in MCC. You mentioned a couple times  
 5 that people come to MCC because of being thrown out or  
 6 a particular congregation or having kinds of burdens  
 7 of guilt. Did you come to MCC with that?  
 8 KW: No, I didn't really have any of that. Growing up  
 9 with my family and from the congregation, I saw some  
 10 of the ugly political things in the church, but I  
 11 never had any of the, you know, you're going to go to  
 12 hell or you're a bad person. I never really had any of  
 13 that. We were talking about that at an MCC retreat one  
 14 time like how our religion is different from our  
 15 parents' or family's, and I basically said mine is  
 16 about the same. Nobody in the family was really  
 17 dogmatic or into any of the hate stuff. So I didn't  
 18 really have, you know, any big adjustments or I didn't  
 19 have anything to run from.  
 20 TK: Have your parents been to an MCC service?  
 21 KW: Well, my dad died right before I joined but my  
 22 mom's been several times. And my sister, her husband  
 23 and kids have been also.  
 24 TK: Do they live near here?  
 25 KW: No, they live in Minneapolis so they come when

1 congregations in the 17 & 1800's, with the idea of  
 2 because of discrimination, it was going to be a  
 3 separate church, but it wasn't supposed to be  
 4 permanent. It wasn't a denomination for several years  
 5 because in the late '60s, early '70s, things, laws and  
 6 attitudes were changing and we just assumed it would  
 7 be just a few years before we were all accepted and  
 8 the anti-gay rules were over and we would have gay  
 9 marriages, domestic partnerships. But by the '80s,  
 10 that had all changed and most of the congregations  
 11 were taken over by the far Right and they made  
 12 specific rules against gay, lesbian and bisexual  
 13 ministers and congregations. And now, of course,  
 14 limiting gay marriage and any kind of gay unions. So  
 15 that's a big change.  
 16 TK: And how do you think how MCC has reacted to that,  
 17 the rise of the Christian right or the radical right?  
 18 KW: Well, by example, for one thing, the fact that  
 19 we've got our good reaction, we do engage them, often  
 20 engage its leaders in conversations and debates,  
 21 sometimes on TV and radio. He's been on all kinds of  
 22 talk shows, and there are other ministers too. Penny  
 23 Nixon, they've been on talk shows. When a congregation  
 24 or a religious leader makes a statement like, other  
 25 ministers react. A couple weeks ago when the Pope made

1 his homophobic statement, Penny Nixon, one of the  
 2 pastors, made a statement reacting to that. And she's  
 3 the only religious leader I know of in the whole world  
 4 that reacted to that, which is amazing.  
 5 TK: And this was in reaction to the Pope's comments  
 6 regarding Pride Rome 2000, the World Pride  
 7 Celebration?  
 8 1S2:200-299  
 9 KW: Yeah, the World Pride Celebration in Rome.  
 10 TK: How did Penny react from your perspective?  
 11 KW: (slurs rapidly) from my perspective, she reacted  
 12 exactly right denouncing that kind of homophobia and  
 13 saying that leads to gay bashing, crimes against gay  
 14 people, and how could a religious leader make a  
 15 statement like that?  
 16 TK: How long has Penny been in the Church?  
 17 KW: She's been there a while, maybe at least five or  
 18 six years and she was, I think, a Presbyterian  
 19 minister but she was with us a while, maybe part-time  
 20 and maybe volunteer, and then she was hired, so five  
 21 or six years at least.  
 22 TK: Do you find that there's many Presbyterians in  
 23 MCC?  
 24 KW: I don't think to ask but, yeah, I guess.  
 25 TK: So people don't necessarily identify by what

1 TK: Representative, more or less, of the makeup of San  
 2 Francisco or does it seem to draw on any particular  
 3 communities of color?  
 4 KW: The switch tended to be more people from the  
 5 Castro which is more white. I'm not sure who that is  
 6 anymore but we still have a preponderance of white.  
 7 TK: And how does that break down in terms of the  
 8 services if you've noticed at all? You say you've been  
 9 to the 11 o'clock, and then the later. Is there a  
 10 variation can you tell?  
 11 KW: I haven't noticed actually.  
 12 TK: Do you see yourself as a part of a larger MCC  
 13 church now, equal to the Presbyterians, or do you  
 14 thing of it as a somewhat different?  
 15 KW: It's a little different. We don't have that much  
 16 dogma, and each MCC congregation is different. Ours  
 17 tends to be very Unitarian, you know, not Unitarian  
 18 but more towards that, more accepting of a lot of  
 19 traditions. Other MCC congregations in smaller towns  
 20 and different regions tend to be more traditional  
 21 Christian. You bring your bible or you follow, you  
 22 know, different tradition, the more Catholic, the more  
 23 Protestant. But it's more eclectic, again, more like  
 24 Unitarians. And that's Jim Mitulski a lot too.  
 25 TK: Have you visited other congregations?

1 tradition they came out of?  
 2 KW: No, no, most don't, I don't.  
 3 TK: But there is a kind of syncretic tradition at MCC,  
 4 there's a borrowing of practices from other churches?  
 5 How was that developed? Is it the membership, do you  
 6 think it comes from the membership?  
 7 KW: More the leadership I would think.  
 8 TK: They bring in traditions from the churches they  
 9 were raised in.  
 10 KW: Yeah, definitely.  
 11 TK: You said earlier that there were increasing  
 12 numbers of women in MCC San Francisco and also  
 13 increasing numbers of people of color. When do you  
 14 think this trend started? Has it been a steady  
 15 increase?  
 16 KW: It's been steady but slow. As far as minorities,  
 17 women, it's been up and down. Charlotte Sutherland,  
 18 who was a minister in the early '90s, made a real  
 19 effort and brought more women in. Then she left, it  
 20 went down a little bit. Maggie Tenna has brought more  
 21 in, and Penny Nixon now. So it's up and down, it's  
 22 just more or less steadily growing.  
 23 TK: And when you said people of color, you mean  
 24 African-Americans?  
 25 KW: African-Americans, Asians, Latino.

1 KW: Yeah. Let's see, which have I been to? Des Moines,  
 2 that's where my mom lives there, you know.  
 3 TK: And was that more of a kind of traditional?  
 4 KW: A lot more traditional I think. It tended to be  
 5 people from Des Moines, you know, they don't move as  
 6 much so I think they were more rooted in Des Moines.  
 7 One thing I noticed when they had the communion, they  
 8 said any Christian can take communion. And, of course,  
 9 with us it's anybody at all can take communion.  
 10 TK: So you're really embracing the Unitarian kind of  
 11 character?  
 12 KW: Yeah. When I joined, I took the membership classes  
 13 but pretty soon after I moved out in September or  
 14 October of '89, one of the things that impressed me,  
 15 like I said, as a kid if I would (inaudible) the  
 16 rules, you absolutely had to believe this exactly.  
 17 And, you know, to join the church, you have to believe  
 18 that Mary was a virgin and, you know, the stuff that -  
 19 and they gave us some background of the congregation  
 20 and some of the rules, I don't know if you'd say  
 21 rules, but some of the basic tenets, and Mitulski  
 22 said, okay, these are the things that a majority of  
 23 the people at this meeting voted on. So most people in  
 24 MCC believe some of these things - okay, that's good.  
 25 TK: So it was presented as more a kind of welcome

1 wagon than a - I mean, they're telling you about the  
 2 congregation?  
 3 KW: Right. But there was no pressure saying this is  
 4 exactly what you have to believe.  
 5 TK: And tell me a little bit more about this  
 6 introductory meeting. What was it like? Was it a  
 7 single day workshop?  
 8 KW: It was, I think what I did was four days, I'm not  
 9 sure. It was more than one for a couple hours at a  
 10 time. Some of it was about the history of, you know,  
 11 how MCC got started and some of the things we do and  
 12 some of the things we believe.  
 13 TK: Or at least a majority.  
 14 KW: A majority, right, I mean, it is a Christian  
 15 denomination but the idea is to embrace the  
 16 traditional Christian denomination and accept the role  
 17 in modern society with special ministry to gay and  
 18 lesbian people.  
 19 TK: Tell me a little bit about what - you say you go  
 20 to the service on Sunday at 7? And when you arrive,  
 21 kind of walk me through it if you will. Or what are  
 22 your favorite parts and what works for you and what  
 23 doesn't?  
 24 KW: Okay, let's see. When I first came out, I'll tell  
 25 you about that 'cause that was an important time, I

1 came in, there was real, real powerful music.  
 2 TK: And this is back in '89? So this service has been  
 3 around since 1989?  
 4 KW: Yeah, I believe it started in '88 maybe. It wasn't  
 5 brand new, but it was fairly new when I came. There  
 6 was the first, maybe 10 or 15 minutes of singing.  
 7 Again some new songs and some traditional, a real  
 8 active congregation, real beautiful music that  
 9 attracted me most of all. And even then, the social  
 10 relevant sermons. One thing I wasn't used to services  
 11 going an hour and a half, that bothered me sometimes.  
 12 It's long. And the community prayer, I remember  
 13 looking at my watch and counting how many people are  
 14 talking. It's got to end now.  
 15 TK: What's a community prayer?  
 16 KW: Just you hold hands and it's quiet meditation and  
 17 people say whatever they want to, they give thanks for  
 18 something or they ask for a prayer for the  
 19 congregation, say what's on their minds.  
 20 TK: They speak out?  
 21 KW: Yeah, right.  
 22 TK: What do people ask for generally or what are some  
 23 of the things that you remember?  
 24 KW: Oh, some people ask for healing or protection on a  
 25 trip or some people give thanks for something which

1 has happened in their life.  
 2 TK: So you arrive and you just jump right into the  
 3 service or do you hang out with your friends?  
 4 KW: I know a lot of people so I tend to arrive at the  
 5 last minute so I don't hang out too much. But I'll  
 6 often sit and talk and catch up with people for a few  
 7 minutes until the music starts. But after the service,  
 8 we have coffee upstairs so I stay a few minutes for  
 9 that.  
 10 TK: What's that?  
 11 KW: Oh, just coffee. You talk to some people you  
 12 haven't seen, try to welcome new people.  
 13 TK: Oh, so it's also a way to kind of introduce new  
 14 members?  
 15 KW: Yeah, it's something where we fight against being  
 16 perceived as unfriendly. That's a battle, to make sure  
 17 people feel welcome.  
 18 TK: Do you see it as a battle?  
 19 KW: You mean for me or?  
 20 TK: No, I mean, how does that manifest itself?  
 21 KW: I've heard a lot of people say that they came  
 22 there and nobody talked to them and this is over the  
 23 years, and people didn't know their names. Again, it's  
 24 hard 'cause you get so many new people, you don't know  
 25 names. You know first name and last name. You don't

1 have any way to contact people, or you don't want to  
 2 call somebody and say hi, how you doing? 'Cause they  
 3 think that you're saying why weren't you in church  
 4 today? No, I'm not telling you to come to church. One  
 5 of the real bad things is during the '80s when so many  
 6 people were getting sick and dying, you just note that  
 7 somebody wasn't there. And the reason they weren't  
 8 there was they'd gotten sick and you didn't know that.  
 9 And so, a lot of times there'd be a notice in the  
 10 Bulletin, so-and-so died and you didn't know until you  
 11 saw a picture of who it was. So that's one of the  
 12 disadvantages of a congregation. It's big enough and,  
 13 like I said, there's enough movement in and out but  
 14 when you don't know everybody, it's hard to keep track  
 15 of people.  
 16 TK: How was that like when you first arrived, during  
 17 the, I guess you were saying there were a lot of  
 18 people passing away?  
 19 KW: It was hard. I lived for twelve years close to  
 20 Chicago so AIDS wasn't new but just living here and  
 21 with the gay population is more concentrated.  
 22 1S2:400-425  
 23 And at MCC it was more concentrated yet. Well it's a  
 24 gay congregation, of course, and because a lot of  
 25 people come when they have a need. So that means a lot

1 of people come when they get sick, so there was a real  
 2 high percentage of people with AIDS. It was hard, it  
 3 was really sad, it was also really moving. Like I  
 4 mentioned the healing services and people sharing  
 5 about the illness, doing community prayer, asking to  
 6 pray for somebody who'd died. I was talking to Jim  
 7 about this a while ago, about how heavy those days  
 8 were, and Jim Mitulski probably gave more funeral and  
 9 memorial services for AIDS patients than anybody in  
 10 the world. During the early '90s, often there'd be two  
 11 or three a week. And we were saying considering it had  
 12 happened, would we have wanted to avoid it? We both  
 13 said no. It happened, you know, we didn't, you know,  
 14 we wouldn't have wanted to be any place else. But it  
 15 was  
 16 End of Side 2, Tape 1 of 2  
 17 2S1:000-099  
 18 TK: So we were talking about the memorial services.  
 19 KW: I was going to say that most memorial services are  
 20 during the day. I usually go to MCC at night. And so  
 21 for a long time whenever I would go to MCC during the  
 22 day, when I would sit down if I were at the 11 o'clock  
 23 service or if I were there for a political meeting or  
 24 something else, I would feel this real overpowering  
 25 sadness because I thought I was at a memorial service

1 because I was sitting there during the day, and that's  
 2 the way I associated it.  
 3 TK: Did you go to a lot of the memorial services?  
 4 KW: Yeah. I wasn't really somebody who was right in  
 5 the center of it, but I went to quite a few.  
 6 TK: What were they like?  
 7 KW: They were all different but most tended to be very  
 8 honest and upbeat besides all the sadness, talking  
 9 about the person and being more open, laughing about  
 10 him.  
 11 TK: Is that what you mean by honest?  
 12 KW: Yeah. Well, the fact of acknowledging the person's  
 13 sexuality, acknowledging the person died of AIDS and  
 14 acknowledging partners and lovers and former lovers,  
 15 and something about the lifestyle of the person. He  
 16 used drugs or if the person went to sex clubs, number  
 17 one time that was my (inaudible). You know, talking  
 18 about the person the way they were.  
 19 TK: And who would speak?  
 20 KW: Always the minister said something but there were  
 21 all different - most of the time, I believe, there was  
 22 a time for sharing with friends. Anybody who knew the  
 23 person would get up and talk about him, which was  
 24 usually very nice. There was one, the last one I went  
 25 to actually, was a little bit too much into verbosity

1 and honesty. This was a 12-step, in was in the AA.  
 2 They wanted to acknowledge that which was great  
 3 because he'd done fantastic things.  
 4 TK: Do you remember his name?  
 5 KW: Yeah, Tony Rioni. Yeah, he was active in  
 6 Democratic politics and a lot of AIDS work, you know.  
 7 He was in the news a lot, but it was so long and  
 8 people kept remembering things. Okay, you made your  
 9 point, now it's over.  
 10 TK: Was he a member?  
 11 KW: Yes. He joined a few years ago. He came pretty  
 12 regularly until he got sick.  
 13 TK: Is he the only political figure who's been  
 14 associated or a member of MCC that you know of?  
 15 KW: Oh god, no. Let's see, one thing we have a lot of  
 16 political figures who come during campaigns or when  
 17 some issue's coming up. We usually invite candidates.  
 18 Jim, obviously, is a political figure now. We have  
 19 quite a few people who run for like Central Committee.  
 20 We have a lot of activists. And I'm trying to think of  
 21 like famous politicians or city-wide politicians, I  
 22 can't think of any. Well, most of them make an  
 23 appearance every now and then.  
 24 TK: During campaign time?  
 25 KW: Yeah.

1 TK: And can any politician come and speak more or  
 2 less, address the?  
 3 KW: No, if somebody invites them, we invite them.  
 4 TK: And who makes that decision?  
 5 KW: I believe it's Jim. I don't know, he might bring  
 6 it up with the Board, but I think it's Jim and Penny.  
 7 TK: Let's, taking this excursion into politics, but I  
 8 want to return to the memorial services and to those  
 9 early years when you were first a member. How did it  
 10 affect people who weren't ill or who at least didn't  
 11 have full-blown AIDS?  
 12 KW: Some of them said it was too heavy and too sad and  
 13 they quit. I didn't feel that way. I was glad we had  
 14 it, but it was too much for some people.  
 15 TK: And how would they react, I mean, what was the -  
 16 when you say too heavy, could you?  
 17 KW: Sure, okay. That could be a few more hours but  
 18 each end of the week, there'd be an announcement of  
 19 another member or a couple members who'd died and  
 20 somebody else was in the hospital. I remember one  
 21 time, what was his name? Patrick, there's this guy who  
 22 had AIDS, his lover had died and he was getting sicker  
 23 all the time. He had neuropathy so he couldn't walk  
 24 too well, he became blind and he had really lost a lot  
 25 of weight but he still, he sat in the front row, and

1 he still came and he took communion. He said that he  
 2 was going to take his own life and he announced that  
 3 at the community prayer. And that was so heavy that,  
 4 you know, it was a lot. I remember kind of laughing  
 5 because after the community prayer, there's a real sad  
 6 song, an emotional song, "When at Peace at the River."  
 7 I thought oh shit, everybody's going to cry when they  
 8 play that and so he played it real fast. I thought  
 9 okay, good, good thinking there.  
 10 TK: Did he take his life?  
 11 KW: Yeah, he did. Yeah, he was accompanied, he might  
 12 have been accompanied by somebody from MCC, I'm not  
 13 sure.  
 14 TK: And was there a visiting program, you said? There  
 15 was a visiting program for people who were sick?  
 16 KW: Yeah, we use to have deacons and one of their jobs  
 17 was visiting people in the hospital and taking  
 18 communion to them.  
 19 TK: You don't have deacons anymore?  
 20 KW: No, I don't know exactly what happened with that.  
 21 Also for a while we had an AIDS minister half-time,  
 22 that was his job. That was eliminated, it just seemed  
 23 like everybody was working with AIDS so.  
 24 TK: Was it divided up? The people who left, were there  
 25 any kind of common, did they share anything in common

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1 reasons?  
 2 2S1:100-199  
 3 You say that when you first arrived, it was social  
 4 reasons.  
 5 KW: Well, not all social, but that was one of them.  
 6 Spiritual reasons and some social and some, I don't  
 7 know if you'd say political, nah, I guess it's more  
 8 helping out. But there is a real political aspect to  
 9 it too.  
 10 TK: In what sense?  
 11 KW: Confronting politicians - first of all politicians  
 12 who are leaders who put down gay people. That's a big  
 13 thing, or speak against Domestic Partners or Civil  
 14 Rights protection, or the people who bash the homeless  
 15 or politicians who try and stop needle distribution or  
 16 cut funding for AIDS, this type of thing.  
 17 TK: So you see the political activism is drawing you  
 18 to MCC?  
 19 KW: Yeah.  
 20 TK: And do you think that that's a sentiment shared by  
 21 a lot of them?  
 22 KW: Yeah, a lot of people stayed.  
 23 TK: So you have a core of friends there, people who've  
 24 been?  
 25 KW: Yeah.

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1 or?  
 2 KW: I talked to quite a few people. I don't think  
 3 there was a common thread. Some people were unhappy  
 4 with some little decision which had been made, they  
 5 felt left out. Some people said they got what they  
 6 needed, some people said it wasn't friendly, you know.  
 7  
 8 TK: (both speak at once).  
 9 KW: The only thing I can think of is they said it was  
 10 too emotional, just coming and hearing about deaths  
 11 all the time. They wanted something more upbeat, you  
 12 know, they didn't want to church and get that down.  
 13 TK: And this has changed?  
 14 KW: It's changed a lot. Well, for one thing, we  
 15 always, the numbers kept going up during this time  
 16 too, so people left but they came. It's changed a lot  
 17 just with the lower death rates since about '96, '97  
 18 which is, of course, part of the protease inhibitor  
 19 just 'cause of the peak, you know. It was predicted  
 20 because the people got infected in the '80s, but a lot  
 21 less death, a lot less illness and, again, that  
 22 allowed us to branch out more and do social service  
 23 and things we talked about.  
 24 TK: And how do you think that MCC ministers to your -  
 25 you go there now for spiritual reasons or for social

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1 TK: And you meet these people outside of the church as  
 2 well?  
 3 KW: Sometimes, not a lot. I don't have a lot of close  
 4 friends, but I have a lot of people that I talk to,  
 5 maybe go to coffee with, get together once in a while.  
 6 And I have some friends that I've met there that no  
 7 longer go there too.  
 8 TK: How important has MCC been in building your  
 9 network of friends here in San Francisco?  
 10 KW: Medium. That's kind of a cop-out, but I have a few  
 11 close friends that I've met there, but I don't count  
 12 on it. You know, I don't count on it for all my  
 13 contacts, you know, I don't always go to the activity  
 14 or the volunteer thing.  
 15 TK: But you've been there for a long time?  
 16 KW: Oh yeah.  
 17 TK: It's your professional life center?  
 18 KW: Yeah, that's it.  
 19 TK: Actually I want to go back a little bit, 'cause  
 20 I'd like, it might be interesting to fill in some of  
 21 the when we were first began. You left high school and  
 22 you went to University. You went where?  
 23 KW: Northern Illinois University in Illinois but I  
 24 spent my sophomore year in Mexico.  
 25 TK: And what did you major in?

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1 KW: I majored in Spanish and political science.  
 2 TK: How did you end up in Mexico for the year abroad?  
 3 KW: I'd always been interested in Spanish. I like to  
 4 travel. And my roommate in my freshman year was from  
 5 Mexico and I visited with him and I just decided to go  
 6 down.  
 7 TK: Were you out?  
 8 KW: No.  
 9 TK: Did you have any gay identity at that time?  
 10 KW: No, not really, no.  
 11 TK: So when did you come out?  
 12 KW: In my early twenties.  
 13 TK: After you left college.  
 14 KW: Yeah, at the end of college.  
 15 TK: You hadn't had any boyfriends or anything in  
 16 college yet if you weren't out. And when you left, you  
 17 went into the Peace Corps to Guatemala, but you  
 18 weren't out.  
 19 KW: Yeah, I was out to friends by that time, yeah.  
 20 TK: And how was that like, I mean, in terms in what  
 21 was the acceptance.  
 22 KW: What, gay life in Guatemala?  
 23 TK: No, in the Peace Corps.  
 24 KW: There was still in the Peace Corps, there was  
 25 still an executive order saying something like if the

1 director finds out that a volunteer has engaged in  
 2 sexual perversion, he'll be kicked out. I don't know  
 3 of any time it was used while I was there, it had been  
 4 in the past I know.  
 5 TK: And so you came back to the United States when  
 6 from Guatemala?  
 7 KW: I think actually I was in Guatemala and then in  
 8 Costa Rica. I came back end of '76 and I finished my  
 9 degree before but I didn't have teaching certification  
 10 so I went back to my old college, finished that out,  
 11 and then I got the job in Elgin, Illinois, close to  
 12 Chicago. That's the one that was supposed to be  
 13 temporary and then I stayed until twelve years.  
 14 TK: It was a small town as well?  
 15 KW: Kind of, it was like 65,000 but it was close to  
 16 the city so it was kind of a small town but then it  
 17 had the effect of Chicago too. I spent a lot of time  
 18 in the city.  
 19 TK: And that's when you first went to an MCC  
 20 congregation is when you were there or in Chicago.  
 21 KW: I went to one service at MCC. It wasn't in Elgin,  
 22 it was in a nearby community. I just went once; I  
 23 didn't like it.  
 24 TK: What didn't you like about it?  
 25 KW: It was just a very cliquish unfriendly group.

1 TK: Did you go to other services at the time?  
 2 KW: MCC?  
 3 TK: No, were you going to church when you were in  
 4 Elgin?  
 5 KW: Well, yeah, I went to the Congregational, which is  
 6 the United Church of Christ, off and on for several  
 7 years. I never joined it; I attended for a while.  
 8 TK: So you were here in '89. Is there anything I'm  
 9 forgetting to ask you about MCC, something that I'm  
 10 leaving out?  
 11 KW: No, I can't think of anything.  
 12 TK: You're sure?  
 13 KW: No, I'm not sure.  
 14 TK: All right then - well  
 15 End of Side 1, Tape 2 of 2  
 16 End of Interview.  
 17  
 18  
 19  
 20  
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 22  
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 24  
 25

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