

Interview with the Reverend Ledlie I. Laughlin III by Clark Groome, Episcopal Diocese of Pennsylvania Oral History Project, Washington, DC, July 12, 2016.

CLARK GROOME: All right. You obviously, being the son of a priest, grew up as an Episcopalian. Where did you grow up?

LEDLIE LAUGHLIN: Well, I grew up moving around, but I usually—well, I began in Jersey City, and then for my early years, my father was the dean of the cathedral, Trinity Cathedral, in Newark.

CG: Okay. Jack Spong years?

LL: No, no, no. That would have been—

CG: Later?

LL: Bishops Rath and Stark.

CG: Okay.

LL: No, pre-Spong.

CG: Pre-Spong, yeah.

LL: But then for many years, Dad was the rector of the Church of Saint Luke-in-the-Fields, on the lower west side of Manhattan, and so that's where I think of doing a lot of my growing up, was in Manhattan.

CG: Was in Manhattan?

LL: Yeah.

CG: When did you begin to think that maybe you wanted to go into the family business? Or is it always something you were going to do, or not?

LL: No, much later. I didn't imagine it at all. It was only after college, and I was trying to figure out who I was going to be, and what I was going to be when I grew up. I had studied religion and East Asian studies at Oberlin College.

CG: That was your major?

LL: Yea, and I was immersed in the study of the Japanese tea ceremony in Kyoto. I began to pray, in a regular way, on my own, and really began to pray using scripture, and the Book of Common Prayer.

CG: Which were old friends to you, I would imagine.

LL: They were, yeah.

CG: In a way.

LL: Yeah, I'd grown up with them, but had left them. And then had a strong sense of the presence of God, and in a sense God saying, "Well, I was wondering when you were going to show up."

CG: [Laughs] Yeah!

LL: So my ministry has been almost entirely in urban settings. A couple of stints in very inner-city places—ran a shelter in Paterson, New Jersey. Was rector of a very troubled inner-city church in Jersey City. Also served as an assistant at a larger parish here in DC; that was at Saint Patrick's. And then also rector in Norwalk, Connecticut, and then, of course, for sixteen years in the Diocese of Pennsylvania at Saint Peter's.

CG: Okay, there was a year—from the Clergy Directory I've got your history, sort of. There was a year between Oberlin and I assume when you went to seminary. Was that the year you were in Japan?

LL: Yes.

CG: And that's when all of the—that's when God tapped you on the shoulder and said, "Okay, wake up, Buster. It's time?"

LL: Yeah. Yeah.

CG: What brought you to Philadelphia? Since this is about the Diocese of Pennsylvania.

LL: Sure. It was the people who were on the search committee of Saint Peter's. I had been in Norwalk, Connecticut, and Norwalk is a small city in its own right, but it feels a bit suburban in the way it functions.

CG: Suburban to New York? Or just suburban?

LL: Suburban in that it doesn't have sidewalks, and everything is—

CG: Oh, okay. It's a little far north for New York, isn't it?

LL: So my wife and I had determined that we either wanted to go to a small town, or we wanted to go to a big city.

CG: Philly won?

LL: Philly won, and it was a place that looked to me—the thing I look for is a place that feels like it's got a lot of potential. And I met the people in the search committee, and they were a very interesting, eclectic, faithful group. And I thought, Well, I don't know what all we'll be doing, but if I can do it with these folks, I'll probably be having a good time.

CG: Nothing wrong with that.

LL: And we went thinking we'd probably be there for ten years, because that would have gotten our youngest child through high school, and we stayed longer.

CG: Sixteen, right?

LL: Sixteen.

CG: Yeah. Did the fact that the place had a tremendous history, had its relationship I guess originally with Christ Church and all that—did the fact that it was a historic parish play any role in your—this is the history committee guy asking the question. It doesn't matter; I just didn't know whether that was an important part of it for you.

LL: It wasn't in accepting the call. I was surprised to find how, after I got there and during the course of my ministry, to discover how important the history was, and not that it was an important history, but how importantly it played into our ongoing life.

CG: It was a basis, or enrichment?

LL: Yeah. I think William White, looking down on me over the mantelpiece, and every time I thought I was mustering up a little courage to do something—

CG: There he was.

LL: —he would say, “Well, have you tried treason lately?”

CG: [Laughs]

LL: And I would sort of think, Okay, off we go.

CG: Which of course, he did.

LL: Of course, he did.

CG: Yeah. You arrived—well, let me go back, and we'll do this back and forth, because there's so much to cover. You were ordained the same year that Barbara Harris was elected bishop suffragan of Massachusetts.

LL: Okay.

CG: So you were right there as the church was dealing with some major issues: the reaction, both positive and negative, to women priests, the expanded role of gay and lesbian priests in the diocese, and in the national church. All those things were growing, and becoming issues during your time in the priesthood, but also particularly with the gay and lesbian issues, when you were at Saint Peter's. How did you see the church changing as you were—because there were a number of dioceses that wanted to split, and there were parishes within the

diocese that wanted to disassociate themselves with us, and with the diocesan bishop if he was too liberal, depending on the diocese—I mean, Pittsburgh, and Fort Worth?

LL: So, [sighs] I think from my earliest days, and deep in me, is an understanding that the gospel of Christ is a gospel that's proclaiming love, and love to all, and that it's ever calling us to radical inclusiveness, and reaching out beyond. So that was the lens through which I approached things. If that translates into theologically progressive, or socially progressive, then there it is.

CG: Yeah, because not everybody views it the same way you do.

LL: Of course not. And I will also say that both of my parents were social political activists, and when we were in Newark, that was during the time of the riots in Newark.

CG: Right.

LL: And when we went to Saint Luke-in-the-Fields in Manhattan, that was just a couple of year after Stonewall riots, and it was just around the corner.

CG: Sure. Yes, Saint Luke's was a big gay parish at one point, as I understand. It had a lot of gay parishioners.

LL: Yes, and that was during my father's—with his leadership. So I understood the church as an institution to be a place that, well, to use Martin Luther King, Junior's, term, it was too often ending up being the taillight, rather than the headlight, is called to be the headlight of social justice issues. I think that was not a reach at the Saint Peter's, Philadelphia, that I arrived at.

CG: I wouldn't have thought so.

LL: They were—

CG: Who was your predecessor?

LL: I guy named Tad Meyer, Wendel Meyer.

CG: And he was after Lee Richards, right?

LL: He followed Lee. Yeah, there was a brief tenured rector in-between the two of them who left under something of a cloud.

CG: But Tad Meyer was your predecessor?

LL: He was my predecessor.

CG: M-E-Y-E-R?

LL: Yes.

CG: All right, so you arrive at Saint Peter's basically at the same time that Bishop Bennison is starting his ministry there as the bishop. I guess he'd become diocesan in '98, after General Convention, because Bishop Bartlett wanted to take it through that. What was the diocese—not Saint Peter's, but what shape was the diocese in when you arrived? What was your impression of it? Where were there tensions, and where were there positive things going on?

LL: Well, I think I got mixed messages. On the one hand, I arrived—shortly after I arrived I remember hearing from a number of clergy who I just simply trusted, some my age, some more senior members of the diocese, who shared with me a concern that Charles had already broken their trust through a process of—ostensibly through a process of visioning, which he'd convened many members of the diocese, clergy and lay together, to gather ideas, all of which was part of articulating a vision. But then even before the process was finished, he rolled out his vision, and what became apparent to many who went through it—I did not; this happened prior to my arrival—was that the whole process was a sham, or that's how they experienced it.

CG: And a number of people—a couple of people have reported that in their interviews.

LL: So there was that. At the same time, the bishop had been newly elected, and he's articulate and energetic, and was speaking of things that were important in the lives of people. And I agreed with his determination that in order to construct a healthy organization, you need to have a compelling vision, and you need to have a plan, and you need to have a way of holding one another accountable. And so all of that sort of process project that Charles Bennison was undertaking was something that I was enthused about. And he tapped me early on to chair what came to be called the Abundant Life Committee, and it was a combination of evangelism and stewardship.

CG: It's an interesting combination, isn't it?

LL: At first it seemed like an unlikely combination, and I don't know whether it was just an efficiency that he was looking for, but actually there were a lot of parallels, and I enjoyed that for a time. I worked closely—Margaret Sipple was on the diocesan staff, and she and I were on that. Ultimately, though, I think Charles wasn't really interested in it succeeding, in that he maintained tight control over who could be on the committee, and he didn't appoint anyone to it, so he starved us out of existence.

CG: Just—just that simple?

LL: Yes, just that simple. I became aware that—without getting into the whys, but Charles was not a fan of there being diocesan committees and commissions that were issue-oriented.

CG: One of the questions, though, a lot of people have brought up about Charles, and I know him quite well, and I like him personally, but I

have questions about his period of time as our bishop, is that there was some influence on how he—how he administered the diocese, based on the fact that he was the son of a clearly autocratic bishop. And I wonder if you ever sensed that there was some competition, whether spoken or unspoken, between him and his father, like people said there was between Bush 43 and Bush 41, at certain points. Did you ever get that sense, that he was trying to out-bishop his father?

LL: I think I'd be wandering into psychological conjecture that's outside my—

CG: You're probably right, but I thought I'd ask the question. [Laughs]

LL: Yeah, I think I'll leave it alone!

CG: Okay, so as your time at Saint Peter's and Charles's time as bishop is unfolding, when did you begin to sense that there was real trouble in River City? I mean, I know it was 2006 when the Standing Committee said, "Resign," and that went public. I know that that wasn't the first time there was difficulty, and he didn't go then, and there was all the stuff that happened afterwards. When were you on the Standing Committee?

LL: Hm. I can't even tell you the exact year that I got on. I'd have to pull my own resume out.

CG: But you weren't there then, were you?

LL: No, no, no, I was not on in 2006. I served one five-year term.

CG: Okay.

LL: But I was part of—so Charles, as part of the visioning process—oof! I'd have to look at a calendar; I don't know the years. I want to say the early 2000s. He convened an annual leadership gathering, and

they were for several days, and the diocese had plenty of money in those days.

CG: It was at Hershey?

LL: No, no, no.

CG: No, not Hershey?

LL: No, not the clergy, no.

CG: Okay, sorry.

LL: It was at Rehoboth, or Cape May—Rehoboth. And there must have been about, I don't know, 75 people for a couple of days.

CG: All clergy?

LL: No, clergy and lay leadership of the diocese.

CG: Oh, okay.

LL: And it was to focus on developing the vision, and at this particular one Katherine Tyler Scott was—Charles had brought her in to be the facilitator. He often brought top-notch guest presenters. This was all part of the preparation of him launching the vision which became known as the Four Cs.¹

CG: Right.

LL: Of Cathedral, Campus, Congregation, and something or other.

CG: Jo Ann Jones couldn't think of a fourth one, either.

LL: During the course of that time, it was very clear that the assembled leadership was not on board with this process, that people had different questions and different concerns, and Charles was not listening to his gathered diocesan leadership. There was some precipitating moment in the course of the conversations, and a number

¹ The "Four Cs" are Cathedral, Campus Ministry, Congregational Development and Camp.

of people—I was not among them—called the facilitator aside, and said, “You’ve got to do something. This isn’t working. We can’t go forward with this.” She apparently went to Charles, and Charles sidelined her, and proceeded. So by that point it was pretty clear that he was going to pursue his agenda, regardless.

CG: Come hell or high water.

LL: Yeah, regardless of whether we were onboard or not. As events unfolded, I mean, what came to be evident to me and many others is that Charles effectively played leadership groups off of one another, and created competitions, set up—played power games, so that suddenly Diocesan Council was suspicious of the Standing Committee, which was suspicious of the Finance Committee, which was suspicious of some other group. And I guess I had segued from the now defunct—well, being the chair of the Abundant Life Committee, so that put me—including oversight of stewardship, which automatically gave me a seat on the Finance and Property Committee. So I served on the Finance and Property Committee of the diocese at a time, actually, when then ultimately Charles came to us looking for the resources to purchase Wapiti.

CG: And I can remember exactly when that happened, because I was on the vestry at Saint Paul’s Chestnut Hill, and he came out in February of 2003 and said, “Yesterday we bought Camp Wapiti.”

LL: Mm-hm.

CG: I was then secretary, so I think it was February 2nd. Don’t trust my memory—it’s too old for that.

LL: And the Finance and Property Committee approved that.

CG: Oh, they did? Okay.

LL: Yeah.

CG: But a lot of people thought, it's in Maryland. It's really expensive.

LL: Yeah.

CG: And we got a whole lot of stuff to do elsewhere. But there was no discussion?

LL: Well, it was part of that playing the different groups off of one another, because the Finance Committee, of course, was responsible for the *finances*, but not the *vision*. So it wasn't our call, as to whether or not this was consistent with—

CG: Yeah, because the vision was his.

LL: The vision was his, and theoretically the vision is to be held, embraced, and contained, if necessary, by convention, or in the absence of a sitting convention, then by council. And so we, as Finance and Property Committee, were basically the functionaries. And did the diocese have the resources? Well, yes, we did.

CG: But, did the—?

LL: So.

CG: It's a fascinating study, isn't it, the whole business of how Bennison operated in that period of time?

LL: It is.

CG: And it was originally, as I understand it—if my history is right, and I think it is, it was originally the thought of the Standing Committee that he was mishandling funds, without the proper approval. And that was the first attempt to have him inhibited.

LL: Right.

CG: And that didn't play either with Bishop Griswold, or with Bishop—I guess it was just with Bishop Griswold. At that point it was the PB.

LL: Right.

CG: Then the other business about what had happened with his brother in California came up, and that did, in fact, get him—Bishop Jefferts Schori inhibited him at that point. And probably legally, and I've talked to Bishop Daniel, who was the chairman of the—what is it called—the Appeals Committee, I guess, of the House of Bishops—it was beyond the statute of limitations and stuff, so he was not ultimately defrocked, and he came back. All through that period, there was concern about the fact that he really did believe in what he was trying to do, and yet in large measure, it was—as I understand it, it was causing the diocese a great deal of pain, and a great deal of discomfort, so that the request—and it came also from both of those presiding bishops—that he resign or retire, and it could all end, and the diocese could heal, never really struck him. And I don't understand what that was, because one-on-one, he could be terribly pastoral, as you know.

LL: Mm-hm.

CG: Do you have any idea what it was? Was he just hell-bent on getting what he wanted, or did he really believe it? I know one of the things he wanted to have happen when he came back was get the book published, which the Standing Committee, had thought, I believe, that it was going to be a Bennison book, which it turned out not to be. But he wanted to get that done. But I thought after that he was going to resign voluntarily, yet as I understand it, he was sort of pushed. Am I right about that?

LL: You've asked me quite a few questions in there.

CG: I'm sorry.

LL: So, let's back up.

CG: All right.

LL: Again, what Charles Bennison's motivations were are for him to say. But if you read, or if I, as a layman, read profiles of classic narcissistic behavior, Charles would fit that behavior, which is to say that I believe Charles often perceived, if not always perceived, himself to be the smartest person in the room. And arguably, he was.

CG: Often was.

LL: Often was.

CG: Yeah.

LL: Smart in some sense, if not necessarily relationally. But I guess what I experienced—so I don't know what Charles's motives were.

CG: Okay.

LL: I don't know how it was or was not tied into his father, or his whatever.

CG: I understand. That's all speculation.

LL: But what I do know is that the effect of how he exercised his leadership was to pit different groups against one another, and to perpetuate a continual state of flux, even chaos, so that key leaders and key governance bodies never quite knew where the others stood. That created a continual state of dis-ease, through which then Charles was able to move, with apparent effectiveness, to accomplish his aims. In my mind, as one who has come to define my ministry as being about nurturing health in the body of Christ, and seeking at all times to help the body of Christ, the church, grow in health, that it may be robust and courageous in proclaiming justice and mercy in the world, Charles had the effect of crippling, brutally crippling, the

Diocese of Pennsylvania, so that there was much of the time—I felt like I inhabited a couple of very different worlds. So, Saint Peter's, Philadelphia, was a pretty healthy congregation.

CG: Yeah.

LL: And the level of trust was extraordinarily high, and one of the ways that that was measurable was that we had a great capacity to hear new ideas from one another, and to take chances to exercise them, and move together. Some of them worked, and some of them didn't, but we believed we were being faithful, and that's what we were about, what we needed to do. And in distinct contrast to that, in the Diocese of Pennsylvania, Christ himself could have shown up in our midst and said, "Feed my people," and we would have looked with great suspicion, because we didn't trust one another. There was no trust in the system. We were not healthy. We had no capacity for mission, or capacity to take risk, and to me, that was sinful.

CG: And the longer he stayed after he was reinstated, or even before, I guess, the more the tension grew, and the frustration, I guess, is a better word than tension, grew about the leadership. Do you think if he had resigned, let's say, at the end of December the year that he came back from his inhibition—he'd been there from August to December, and said, "And then we'll bring in a provisional," and do all that stuff, do you think that that would have helped the diocese, if he had himself done it immediately?

LL: I don't know. It certainly couldn't have hurt.

CG: Because by then, you were on the Standing Committee.

LL: It certainly couldn't have hurt, but I do think that [pause]—so I took on an additional role after Charles left.

CG: You were his last Standing Committee president, weren't you?

LL: I was. But then after he left—after he left, the diocese still needed to do, the diocese then needed to do a huge amount of work, and I contend is still doing, even though I'm not intimately connected with it and haven't been for a year, of taking concrete steps to restore trust, and restore the sinews of the relationship, as the body of Christ, with one another. And the piece of work, one of the pieces of work, which I feel best about in my own ministry there was I began while he was inhibited—so I was the president of the Standing Committee during a bunch of the time that he was inhibited, and we certainly—we were hearing from the Presiding Bishop's chancellor, David Beers, that surely he would not be coming back. So we were laying plans for how we were going to bring about an effective transition.

CG: And then all of a sudden, there he was.

LL: During that time, we did turn to the work of healing within the diocese, and that's when I began what we called the gathering of diocesan leaders. It was a monthly gathering to which—initially we started small, and we expanded a circle, so that ultimately all of the people serving in leadership positions in the diocese were invited. It was an open conversation, once a month, to talk about issues and concerns that any one of us had. And it was a place to, because there had been so much mistrust, and so much, frankly, sharing of misinformation, so there was a lot of "He said; she said." And there we all were, and we could start to say, "Well, here's what I know." Or, "Here's what I'm concerned about." Or, "Clark, I heard through the grapevine that you were seen running naked down Broad Street."

CG: Somebody actually saw it?

LL: And you could say, “Well, in fact I was,” or, “No, that must have been somebody that just looked like me.” [Laughs]

CG: [Laughs] God, what a horrible thought that is for the people who’d have to see it!

LL: The main intent there was to create a safe environment. And the Standing Committee and leaders of diocesan councils stepped up and really—and that continued for quite a few years.

CG: Okay, let me go back to the time when he was inhibited for a minute.

LL: Okay.

CG: And as we were told with extraordinary frequency by the then-president of the Standing Committee, Glenn Matis, that the Standing Committee was the ecclesiastical authority in the diocese, which it was, and everybody knew it. They hired Bishop Michel, Rodney Michel, to come in and do the things that only a bishop can do. And I had lunch about a week or two before he was going to come in, and Bob Tate, rector then at Saint Martin-in-the-Fields—I’m just saying that for the record—said, “This is going to be everybody’s favorite uncle,” which is not a bad description of what a bishop should be, anyway, or part of what he should be. What was Bishop Michel’s—was Bishop Michel the beginning of the healing? Or was that the hope, that he would be the beginning of the healing? Because you obviously worked with him.

LL: I did. He was fine. I think he—favorite uncle works well. I think he gave us a—so to the extent that the bishop represents . . . by definition is a symbol of the unity of the diocese, then Bishop Michel gave us a safe person around whom to rally in his personhood, and in his

sacramental leadership. Because Glenn Matis made sure that Bishop Michel and everybody else knew that he wasn't—

CG: Really in charge.

LL: —that he wasn't really in charge, even if he wanted to, he didn't have authority to get into what I think are the more challenging process questions that would enable us to work on relationships.

CG: Okay, so that takes us to the next step. Bishop Bennison retires, nudged, I believe, a bit to do that when he did, and you were then still president of the Standing Committee. And in was brought Bishop Daniel, Clifton Daniel, who had a long history, and well respected in the diocese—in the national church. First of all, why was he the one that was selected? And what do you think he meant to accomplish?

LL: Let's back up. Let's back up, because let's talk for a few minutes about Charles's departure, because I think that's important.

CG: Okay. It's very important.

LL: [Pause] So again, for me, as soon as I got elected—when I was elected to the Standing Committee, I found that not only had the trust broken down between the different groups within the diocese, but that there was no trust on the Standing Committee itself.

CG: You mean internally?

LL: Internally. Glenn was the president. Glenn had announced before I showed up that he was not going to run for president again. There were a number of people who were serving on the Standing Committee who wanted to be president. At the first meeting I attended, Glenn did some sort of sleight of hand and got himself elected president, and people were really hurt. It was very clear that we needed to work on trust within. And for reasons I'm not sure,

maybe I just raised my hand at the wrong moment, or something like that, I got tapped with working on that issue. We had . . . [Pause] The Standing Committee was not functioning effectively during that time. They were meeting twice a month, and meetings were over four hours long.

CG: Ooh.

LL: They had a paid facilitator who was not exercising any effective leadership, and Michael Rehill had been hired as the chancellor, and he was basically—

CG: R-E-H-I-L-L?

LL: Yes, and he was effectively running things. And I say that because we worked on trust during that year, and when I was then elected president of the Standing Committee, we got rid of the facilitator, and Michael Rehill stepped down when Charles came back. Those were both very good things, in my mind. So I was elected president of the Standing Committee, the Standing Committee gave me this. Let the record show that it's a padded boxing helmet.

CG: A helmet! [Laughs]

LL: [Laughs] I think Paul speaks about “other armor that we should put on.”

CG: But this? [Laughs]

[End of Part 1/Begin Part 2]

LL: Much to our surprise, the inhibition was lifted, and Charles returned. [Pause] So we shifted gears on the Standing Committee, and we looked to explore opportunities to engage in a formal form of conflict resolution with Charles, wondering if that was a way through. We met with a number of professional consultants, and it seemed clear to

us that—I'm forgetting now what the specific reasons were, but that that was not likely to be fruitful as a path forward. That next summer, 2012 now, was General Convention.

CG: General Convention. That's when—

LL: That's when the canons were changed. The movers of those canons and the presiding bishop's chancellor were very clear with me that they did not want me to have a visible role in that process.

CG: Were you a deputy at that convention?

LL: I was a deputy at that convention, and they welcomed me into all the meetings and the conversations.

CG: That canon has come to be known, outside of that convention, as the Bennison canon.

LL: I'm aware.

CG: I know you are.

LL: So that canon then drew a parallel to existing canons, allowing for the dissolution of the pastoral relationship, this time between a bishop and a diocese.

CG: Yeah.

LL: And that changed the landscape.

CG: It gave the Standing Committee, or the diocese, more clout, didn't it?

LL: Absolutely, it did. Because the canon—whether it's for a priest in a parish, or a bishop in a diocese, it is not a disciplinary canon; it is a pastoral canon. It allows for the possibility that a relationship be fractured, or ineffective, in a way that is no longer fruitful for the well-being of the whole, and does not—prior to the passage of that canon, the only cause for which a bishop might be asked to leave were for heresy, or for a criminal offense.

CG: Had their hand in the till, or sexual misconduct, or something.

LL: And this said, if one can make the case that the relationship is no longer effective, then there you go.

CG: But that canon was never invoked, was it? Not officially.

LL: Not officially. It was not. Well, not by the Diocese of Pennsylvania.

CG: Right. It was mentioned, though, I'm sure, in conversation, as a possible—am I right?

LL: It was mentioned much more than in conversation. The Standing Committee of the Diocese of Pennsylvania was in close conversation—and this is a part where if something needs to be put aside, it would be this part, embargoed for a period of time, but the Standing Committee was in close consultation with the presiding bishop's chancellor. Actually, that's not correct. He, David Beers, could not participate with us, but we had counsel. Of course, this canon had not been invoked by any diocese as of yet. It was hot off the presses.

CG: It was brand new, yeah.

LL: But we crafted a letter. We, the Standing Committee, made the decision to exercise that canon if need be, and crafted a letter addressed to the presiding bishop.

CG: And you never needed to?

LL: Which we never needed to.

CG: Good. Fine.

LL: That's what everybody imagined happened.

CG: And also, you're not the first person who has said that publicly.

LL: Okay, good.

CG: So in terms of embargoing later, that's your call, but it's already out there.

LL: Yes.

CG: So Charles resigns.

LL: Right.

CG: You're the president of the Standing Committee, and you're looking for a guy to come in, or a woman—you're looking for a bishop to come in here as the provisional?

LL: So back, again, before we get to that, so the first thing—Charles resigns, and I'm all about restoring trust.

CG: Oh, okay.

LL: So the first thing that I make sure that we do is that we host, we set upon two different dates, where all the leadership of the diocese were invited to participate. This is in the fall of 2012.

CG: Right.

LL: And at the Standing Committee's invitation, everybody on diocesan staff, all the bishops-resident, including those active and those retired—

CG: Allen Bartlett, Edward Lee?

LL: Frank Turner, Rodney Michel. Frank Griswold was not there.

CG: Borsh? They were resident.

LL: Yeah. Then invited all the members of council, the Standing Committee, and chairpeople of governance bodies. So not the Commission on Ministry, necessarily, or the History Committee.

CG: Like, Finance.

LL: Exactly.

CG: Property, if there is a difference.

LL: And we had two meetings, I believe.

CG: Was this your idea?

LL: It was. Worked through—everything I did, I did by committee, so we worked it. So that's when we [sighs]—we orchestrated those meetings so that we could hear from the collective leadership what did they perceive that we needed in the diocese at that time? And we had in mind that we were going to be moving toward a bishop provisional. We had been in conversation on many occasions with Clay Matthews.

CG: At the national church?

LL: What's his title?

CG: Doesn't matter.

LL: Anyway, okay, it doesn't matter. He was Bishop Clayton Matthews, the presiding bishop's officer for pastoral affairs, oversees pastoral disciplinary matters with bishops, and also oversees the process of electing bishops when a diocese is in transition. So out of that, that gave us some language, and people were of great common mind about some of the characteristics that we were looking for in a bishop provisional. We actually were able then to do something different. Up until the Diocese of Pennsylvania, if a diocese needed a bishop provisional—and that was a fairly new thing to have anyway—Clay Matthews would identify a bishop, and say, "How about John Doe, Jane Doe?" And the Standing Committee could vote them up or down, but they only looked at one at a time, for reasons I'm not altogether sure of.

CG: Isn't that the way it works with interims, too, in parishes?

LL: Often, but I think it varies from diocese to diocese.

CG: Oh, okay.

LL: But in our case, Clay said, “I’m going to let you guys interview a few of them.” So we did. So several members of the Standing Committee, we appointed. At this point we were dividing our work on the Standing Committee. We had a heavy lift at this point. And I laid all this out in an address to convention in November of 2012, what we had done and what we were going to do. But we moved quickly in that discernment process. I wanted us [pause]—my perception and our perception on the Standing Committee had been that it had not served the diocese well during Charles’s inhibition to have an extended period of time in which the Standing Committee was the ecclesiastical authority. The Standing Committee at that time didn’t have any other choice; by canon, they were obligated to be.

CG: But you wanted to minimize the length of time that that would happen.

LL: We wanted to keep that period of time as short as possible. Charles stepped down—

CG: It was the end of 2012, wasn’t it?

LL: The end of 2012, and before the end of January—well, we had elected Clifton Daniel. So we interviewed—

CG: It happened very fast.

LL: We jumped on it.

CG: Why did you choose Bishop Daniel?

LL: [Sighs] Well, not surprisingly, what we were looking for, probably above all else, was someone who we experienced as trustworthy. And we perceived him to be trustworthy. They did not have to be a prophet; they did not have to be a top-flight CEO. Pastoral was good.

They needed to be trustworthy. We had a very strong group of candidates, as Dan Daniel was at the time. He was a—

CG: He was a diocesan.

LL: —sitting diocesan bishop. There was at least one other who we interviewed, and there were several others who were former—

CG: Who retired.

LL: And there was a sitting suffragan. That was clear, we needed someone—

CG: Who'd run the show?

LL: Yes. We did not want a suffragan. They needed to have run the show.

CG: Well, you certainly got a good one.

LL: We were aware that there was a challenge, in that Pennsylvania, being one of the larger dioceses—so like Dan Daniel, he'd been bishop, but East Carolina is a pretty small diocese.

CG: Yeah.

LL: But anyway, and then we moved into the healing work with a transition team, and continued that effort. That's a whole other next chapter.

CG: Yeah. It's very interesting. And he has certainly, I believe, been received positively, and my sense is from people who have said this, and maybe it's not true, is that he was able to call for the election of a new diocesan sooner than a lot of people anticipated, because of his leadership. Now, you've been gone for a year, so I don't know if that impacts on that or not, but do you think that that's possible? Do you think that that's a statement that's true, that he really was the right guy at the right time?

LL: I think he was the right guy at the right time. I don't know [pause] whether it was quicker than—I mean, there's a part of me that says no, it could have been even quicker than he did. But.

CG: He told me in the oral history interview that we did, "I love this diocese, and I'd love to stay here till I'm '72, but I'm not going to, because it wouldn't be the right thing to happen. He's also got other things he's doing. I think he's running General [Seminary], too, which is a complicated issue at the moment, as I gather. But during this period, and we're going to get back now to Ledlie. During this period, I understand you were at a finalist level in a couple of Episcopal searches.

LL: Mm-hm.

CG: Tell me about those, and tell me about how much watching what happened here with Episcopal leadership influenced the way you felt you might approach that job, had you gotten it?

LL: So, [sighs] I was in a bunch of Episcopal selection processes. I had the unfortunate timing sequence—I was moving rapidly through three processes all at the same time.

CG: [Laughs] Oh, God!

LL: And arguably could have found myself on the final slate of any one of the three, and had to make a choice, because I couldn't end up being—

CG: Bishop of three places? What were they?

LL: They were New Hampshire, Western Mass., and Rhode Island.

CG: All at the same time?

LL: All at the same time.

CG: This was New Hampshire after Gene Robinson?

LL: Correct.

CG: Yeah. And Rhode Island after Gerry Wolf?

LL: Correct.

CG: Yeah.

LL: And I pulled out of New Hampshire, and I pulled out of Western Mass., and hung in in Rhode Island, and was then not elected there, obviously. I then was also in the running in the Diocese of New Jersey, but removed my name from consideration relatively early on because that was in the throes of stuff going on in the Diocese of Pennsylvania, and that was—I knew at that point I was in over my head with Pennsylvania, and I needed to see some of that through.

CG: And you had to do that, yeah.

LL: And then later was a finalist in the Diocese of Massachusetts, and was also not elected there.

CG: Had you aspired to this, or is it just something that came your way? Did you want to be a bishop?

LL: At some point along the way, people—

CG: Because there are people in your trade that don't want any part of that.

LL: Yeah. No, I have come to see that I have ability for effective leadership, and certainly my experience as president of the Standing Committee of the diocese, arguably more than anything else, has given me that experience. So I felt that I could serve the church well as a bishop. I still do feel that, that I don't know that I'll ever be considered for bishop again, but had I been elected I believe that I would have been able to carry out the offices of that ministry well.

CG: And you were very open about that with your parish, weren't you?

LL: I don't think any more so than any other finalist is. I mean, Rhode Island is the first one that I was public about, and I just—I mean, my wardens knew, but nobody else knew until then all of a sudden it was like, well, okay, the Diocese of Rhode Island is going to announce the slate, so you better tell your congregation.

CG: Better tell your folks who's going to be on the website tomorrow!

LL: Exactly! And then it got—there were quite few people, and I would say that many within Saint Peter's were cheering me on. Hopefully not cheering me out, but cheering me on.

CG: [Laughs]

LL: But there was a perception that, well okay, he wasn't elected to Rhode Island, but he'll be elected the next time. And there were many who imagined and hoped that I would be in the election in Pennsylvania. I accepted the call here [St. Columba's in Washington, D.C.] at a time—intentionally—that was going to move me out of consideration for that, so I didn't even go down that path.

CG: My sense is, and this is just mine—I'd be curious on your view—is that what Pennsylvania needed, regardless of how well you or Frank Allen would have been qualified, is that it probably would be best for the diocese if they got somebody with no skin in the game.

LL: That was my perception as well.

CG: That's why—

LL: Lots of people said, "But Ledlie, you're great. What we need is we need somebody we trust, and you've been around, and we trust you." And I said, "I know, and I will look great until I'm standing next to somebody who you don't know, and you'll look at me and say, 'Man,

he's got a lot of muck all over him, from when he was wearing that boxing helmet.”

CG: [Laughs]

LL: “We're glad he did the job he did, but we need a new future. We don't need to go back to the past.”

CG: Which is why both Rodney and Dan have been so positive, because they didn't know much about the diocese until they got here, other than what they would have known. I mean, they were not connected to it in any way.

LL: Uh-huh, yeah.

CG: At least that's my impression. Speaking of Rhode Island, and I gather this is a family issue as well as something else for you, is the issue of slavery in the church, and racism, that first became an issue at the General Convention in Columbus in 2006, when Katrina Browne brought her movie, *Traces of the Trade* there. And your family was part of that. Tell us about that, and your reaction, and how you feel about all of that business, because that's an issue that is still clearly, if we watch the news in the last three or four days, clearly still not a settled issue.

LL: So I guess what I would say about that is that [pause] a number of things. Prior to anything about the DeWolf family, which is the Rhode Island, the ancestors, the slave-running ancestors, as the story told in *Traces of the Trade*—before Katrina launched into that story, I would say that I was involved in racial justice work all during my ministry, and purposefully—purposefully serving in racially mixed locations and congregations.

CG: Were you aware growing up of the family background in all of that?

LL: No. Katrina said it well somewhere, where it was like a—what did she say? It was a secret hidden in plain sight, is the way she described it at one point.

CG: It's a beautiful way to say it, right.

LL: I think I knew, but we didn't know, because we didn't ever talk about it.

CG: But we never talked about it. Yeah.

LL: No, if anything, the messages that I was getting were coming from the other side of my family. If there was a family member who called me to ordination, it would have been my maternal grandmother, whose grandfather was a man named Samuel Chapman Armstrong, who served as a general for the Union in the Civil War, and then went on to found Hampton Institute, in Hampton News, Virginia. When Katrina embarked upon this project, I was only starting—I can't even remember where I was at the time, or what responsibilities I had, but I made a determination that I couldn't go on the trip that was then recorded in the film *Traces of the Trade*.

CG: Your father went?

LL: Yeah. I wish I could have; that would have been a powerful experience. But Katrina did a very good job. So since only ten members of the family went on the trip, but she coordinated a whole weekend for a broader swath of the DeWolf ancestry together, in Bristol. She had lined up a whole bunch of Bristol historians and specialists in racial justice issues. Peggy McIntosh, the author of *Unpacking the Knapsack*, out of Wellesley College, was there. It was interesting. As I say, I was already committed to issues around racial reconciliation, racial justice, but once Katrina generated that film, I

jumped right on it. Of course, the church as a whole, thanks to Katrina's good work, she got lots of influential people, including Frank Griswold, to champion it.

CG: It's a small enough club, the Episcopal Church, that when you know people, that really does help.

LL: Oh, absolutely. So I have facilitated viewings of that film on numerous occasions, in Pennsylvania and elsewhere.

CG: Some of the conversations were filmed—

LL: At Saint Peter's.

CG: —at Saint Peter's.

LL: Yeah. Not in the original version of the film, but then there's an additional theological reflection piece, yeah.

CG: Yeah. What else do you want the people of 2050 to know about the Diocese of Pennsylvania while you were part of it, that I may not have asked you about?

LL: Goodness.

CG: We've covered a lot of territory, and it's been fascinating.

LL: [Pause] Well, I guess I would just say my hope is that—one of the things that I've seen in so many churches and dioceses is when things get tough, we necessarily, or not surprisingly, we turn inwards, and fret over our own stuff. And that keeps us from looking outward at the needs of the world around us, and then we fall short of being the church that we're called to be. And so I think so much of Charles's tenure was lamentable, because it kept us as a diocese focused on our own internal strife. It's tragic, because I don't think that was what he wished, and I don't think it's what anyone wished.

CG: And it wasn't what he inherited from Allen Bartlett.

LL: No. And so my hope and prayer is that with Daniel Gutierrez's consecration, ordination coming up this Saturday, that that diocese will be able to move to the next chapter, and turn all of its attention outward on the needs of the people in southeastern Pennsylvania, and get to it.

CG: Okay.

[End of Interview]