

Candace Hardnett

- 15:10:01:08 [Eric Darling]: And go ahead. Excellent. Okay.
- 15:10:06:18 [Mickey Youmans]: Lemme get my headphones on.
- 15:10:10:11 [Candace Hardnett]: And just for clarification, I'm looking straight at you and kind of.
- 15:10:13:12 [Tom Kohler]: Yes.
- 15:10:14:09 [Eric Darling]: Ignore our, our presence completely.
- 15:10:15:13 [Candace Hardnett]: Wonderful.
- 15:10:16:09 [Tom Kohler]: And just clarification, the only affirmation I can give you is visual, not verbal.
- 15:10:21:07 [Candace Hardnett]: Okay.
- 15:10:21:16 [Tom Kohler]: And so I'll be doing like this, but I won't be saying, I won't be going and Oh, that's interesting. And I won't be doing that. Okay. I'll be completely visually kinda giving affirmation. Okay,
- 15:10:32:20 [Candace Hardnett]: No problem. Great.
- 15:10:34:00 [Tom Kohler]: Okay. Well thank you for being with us this afternoon.
- 15:10:37:16 [Candace Hardnett]: Thank you for having me.
- 15:10:39:03 [Tom Kohler]: We really appreciate it. We're gonna start off, start out by just asking if you give us your full name and also spell it as well.
- 15:10:46:10 [Candace Hardnett]: Absolutely. Candace Hardnett. And it's C-A-N-D-A-C-E, Hardnett, H-A-R-D-N-E-T-T.
- 15:10:57:04 [Tom Kohler]: Thank you. And then your preferred pronouns would be
- 15:11:00:10 [Candace Hardnett]: She, her.
- 15:11:01:03 [Tom Kohler]: Thank you. And then do you mind talking a little bit about yourself, where you were born and kind of, if not in Savannah, kind of how you came to Savannah and that sort of thing.
- 15:11:09:13 [Candace Hardnett]: Absolutely. I was born and raised in Remington, Virginia, actually. Fauquier County, Virginia. Well, actually not raised completely there until I was about nine years old. I lived in Fauquier and then my mom and stepfather moved us to Spotsylvania County and then later on to Culpepper

Candace Hardnett

County, which is all around the same little area there. And so I've grew up in Virginia and Northern Virginia and ended up going down to Florida. Life... college and, and life took me as far south

15:11:42:13 as Florida and made a little pit stop in North Carolina there for school for a little while and ended up going and joining the Marine Corps after nine 11 and joined the Marine Corps March of 2003 and went to basic training right across the bridge here at Parris Island. And then ended up going, being stationed in California for all five years of my Marine Corps

15:12:09:17 career, Twenty-Nine Palms.

15:12:12:02 [Candace Hardnett]: And then Camp Pendleton ended up being, getting involved in ministry while I was in the Marine Corps. I was actually a squadron lay leader there and was involved in the church that I was a part of in San Diego for quite some time and felt as I was getting out of the Marine Corps that it was time for us to venture out and to start a ministry of our own. And, and through prayer and trying to figure out where the Lord was gonna take us, Savannah was dropped in our spirits, both

15:12:43:12 my wife and I, Erica Hardnett is her name... Heard, Savannah loud and clear, and brought Savannah as an, as the option that we thought that the Lord was sending us, both of us unknowing of what the other would say, ended up confirming to one another that Savannah was the location that we should go and start ministry. Now, of course we did some, as I would call it reconnaissance work. Wanted to make sure that, first of all, that there was nothing like what we would

15:13:14:19 offer already established here. I don't believe in duplicating efforts. And had there been something already established, certainly we would have if we were to come at all join forces and, and been a part of that. But there were no African American congregations that were at the time that were servicing the needs of the L-G-B-T-Q community. Any African American church was that we found also had a very strong stance against homosexuality,

15:13:45:08 transgender people and so on and so forth. And any L-G-B-T-Q affirming ministries that we found at the time were also not servicing the needs of a and, and to just put it, frankly, the Black church and the, the vibe and the, and the culture that is so richly ingrained in our faith communities just was not being represented. So that's how we got here.

15:14:09:23 [Tom Kohler]: And what year was that? Did you actually showed up on the doorstep?

15:14:13:08 [Candace Hardnett]: We got here August of 2008.

15:14:16:19 [Tom Kohler]: So you've been here a little while.

Candace Hardnett

- 15:14:17:15 [Candace Hardnett]: Oh, we've been here quite a little while. Yes.
- 15:14:20:20 [Tom Kohler]: Absolutely, yeah. I I I don't wanna go back, but I do wanna go back actually. Any chance you come from a military family?
- 15:14:27:00 [Candace Hardnett]: You know, my grandfather served in the United States Army. Now I did not get to meet my grandfather. He and my grandmother had my mother at older age. They, my mother grandmother was over the age of 40. She was about my age, about 44. My grandfather, 10 years her senior. And so by the time I came along, they were quite old. My grandfather passed away two weeks after my birth. But it was very much ingrained in me as a child, the service to the country that my grandfather did. And it was ingrained in me then also that I too might pursue a career
- 15:15:01:03 in the military to do the same.
- 15:15:04:03 [Tom Kohler]: What was your specialty?
- 15:15:05:14 [Candace Hardnett]: Well, I was a computer geek. I was, they have actually phased out what I did be, but I was a T-B-M-C-S systems administrator. And so in other words, I ne... networked computers together - a specific system that would look at the air, what was happening in ground and air and be able to put those two things on one screen so we could see the troops on the ground as well as the troops in the air and be able to offer assistance to those individuals as they needed.
- 15:15:36:04 [Tom Kohler]: How did you meet your wife, if you don't mind my asking?
- 15:15:37:23 [Candace Hardnett]: Oh, yeah. In San Diego, there's a church there, it's called Christ Chapel of North Park. And I ended up going to a pride celebration and they were in San Diego and they were a part of, had set up a booth there and were outreaching to the community. And we, I met the church there. I didn't really meet my wife. I met the church and got interested and ended up attending, attending later on. And over the course of probably one of the first people I did meet was Erica, honestly, after
- 15:16:12:09 being there and we became fast friends, accountability partners and, you know, a couple of years later started to date and the rest is history.
- 15:16:24:11 [Tom Kohler]: Absolutely. That's great. And then tell me a little bit about being in Savannah. So you come in 2008 and you've done a little recon, and what are the first few, few years like here? I mean, what's kind of the developmental story of, of what you've, you know, what you're doing today?
- 15:16:39:08 [Candace Hardnett]: Sure.
- 15:16:39:16 [Tom Kohler]: What's the journey?

Candace Hardnett

- 15:16:40:17 [Candace Hardnett]: Yeah, well we, you know, we, we wanted to know who's doing what and what the need is. And I'll be honest, when we first reached out to some folks, and, and this time MySpace was the, was the social media of the day. And folks on MySpace were all, yes, come, we will, we'll, we'll be there. We came, and I have yet to this day met one of the people from MySpace that said that they would really love for us to be here. We kind of started from scratch and, and not a bad thing. We, we set
- 15:17:14:14 up at a pride event. So happened that about a month after we got here, pride was happening. So we set up at a pride event right there in Johnson Square and met some folks and took some names and email addresses. At that time, we didn't even have a building.
- 15:17:32:04 [Candace Hardnett]: We didn't have a concept of a building, being honest. We didn't have money for a building, you know. But what we did have, we had a living room. And so we opened our living room for Bible studies and conversations and we had several people start to attend and, and become very interested in, well, when will we start having an actual church service? And from there we tried out some hotel rooms type of deal and such a blessing. One of the members of the community name is V. Dorian
- 15:18:04:22 had an aunt who had a building right over there on Victory. I can't remember the cross street, but it was called the Decisions Business Center. It was just a little building. And she said, y'all are welcome to come here. And we set up the building as a church sanctuary every Sunday. And her name was Ms. Eleanor and God rest her soul. She passed away just last month, matter of fact. But she opened those doors to us and, and we started having service
- 15:18:32:22 with members of the community that we had met from that pride celebration and more people started to come, people from the neighborhood and got to the point where we started to be able to bring in a little more money and moved over to Windsor Forest from that point. And the Windsor Forest, I can't remember what it's called, over on Greenbrier, I believe it's what it is, Windsor Forest Hall is what it is. And started having church there. Now there was already a church established there. In fact, we know the pastor
- 15:19:04:07 and he's a really nice man. And so we'd have service after his church service. And we moved around to eventually got to the Muse Arts warehouse where Jin Hi Rand and Mark had a theater that had since closed.
- 15:19:23:23 [Candace Hardnett]: And when it closed, we had to find another location. But for many years, I would say that's when we really established ourselves as a church community in that Muse building. And we would hold services on Sundays and eventually ended up moving to Telfair Road, which wasn't far from the Muse. After the Muse closed, then COVID happened and that, that put a little damper on in-person worship service. And we moved

Candace Hardnett

- 15:19:55:15 to an online platform to which we still keep today. Now we'll go back a little bit because one of the first things that we did do even way back in 2008, 2009, was to broadcast our online, our services. And so I looked at that as going back to the basics, honestly, going back to our roots. Whenever we had to go back online, we knew how to do it. 'cause that's what we did to begin with.
- 15:20:21:18 [Tom Kohler]: How would I how do you describe yourself? Denominationally?
- 15:20:25:14 [Candace Hardnett]: We're non-denominational? A bit interdenominational, I would say in the sense that if people are coming with traditions that, that are still resonating with them, that we certainly affirm those Christian traditions and, and belief systems. I don't believe in telling people what to believe. I believe in allowing people to have the information and for them then to decide for themselves via scripture. You know, I believe in a, a firm foundation and, and the
- 15:20:57:01 word of God. But beyond that, we can look at many passages and from one denomination to the next, someone may believe that being baptized, you do it in a certain name other than another name, another may believe in sprinkling versus submersion. And I certainly am not one to dictate to someone that it must be done this way. I believe that it is in our own hearts as, as God speaks to each one of us individually to make those
- 15:21:27:02 determinations.
- 15:21:29:05 [Tom Kohler]: If I were to come to church, what, what, what would it look and feel like?
- 15:21:34:05 [Candace Hardnett]: Well, I would hope it would feel like home to you. I want Agape to, to feel like heaven. I've always said, and when we get there, it's gonna be everybody. It should look like everybody. It should feel like everybody, everybody should be welcome. So when you walk through the doors, you will find people as dressed up as any, you know, liturgical service of the Roman Catholic faith. If you, if you, so if, if you come through the doors, you might see someone in a full suit and a vestment, but at the same time, you may also find someone in a pair of
- 15:22:06:10 shorts and a t-shirt. And we don't mind, we affirm both, you know, depending on, and we do that because we don't know the, the story of, of what's happening. Someone may be struck by the spirit to come to church, and we don't want the hindrance to be, well, I gotta go home and shower and, and change first. If, if you, if it's a Sunday morning at 11:55, church starts at noon and you're passing by and it spirit so leads you to
- 15:22:36:12 come through the doors, well come on in. And if you didn't have anything on, we'd drape a little towel over you and you sit, you right there and we'd still have a, a Holy Ghost good time with you. So...

Candace Hardnett

- 15:22:46:16 [Tom Kohler]: And on a given Sunday, how many, how many people are in, in church? What does it, I mean, yeah...
- 15:22:51:09 [Candace Hardnett]: We've, we've dwindled quite a bit. You know, just being post-COVID. Now, at one point my answer would've been, you know, anywhere from 40 to 50 people. Pre... even previous to that, I might have even said 70 when we were over in Windsor Forest and in the Muse. Now we're probably looking at about 15 to 20 now. Our online community is still thriving. Online at any given Sunday, we'll have, you know, between 20 and 30 extra online people that have tuned in, rather whether it's live and
- 15:23:23:19 they're watching along with us during the live broadcast, or will tune in later as some are in different time zones. We have folks all the way in Africa that are watching our services on a weekly basis. Folks in London watching our service on a weekly basis, folks in Hawaii, and I know that's still America, but it is a five hour difference. Waking up sometimes at 5:00 AM to be a part of the service and other times needing to sleep in a
- 15:23:49:23 little, little bit and maybe catch the service a little later.
- 15:23:54:15 [Tom Kohler]: And then if I were to, you know, if I were to come to service, would it be you, you mentioned Black church earlier. I mean, tell me what it feels like. Tell me what it's like to be in the room?
- 15:24:12:01 [Candace Hardnett]: Yeah, energetic. I mean, it's, it's upbeat. It's, it's, it's free. You know, we don't mind if someone wants to stand up, shout, hallelujah, put your hands up. Or if you wanna quietly worship in your pew, you are free to do either. No one's gonna look at you strange for either direction that you take, you know, very much family oriented. We have a lot of families that are part of the church. We don't have many
- 15:24:43:02 kids. We don't have the capacity to actually run a full, you know, children's ministry, which would require adults to leave the service to go and do like a children's service. But there are children present. Try to make it as entertaining as possible for 'em so they don't get too bored with me. But yeah, it would feel warm. One thing I can say is that every person that's crossed through the threshold of Agape says that they can feel the love that we have, not only for one another, but for the newer
- 15:25:15:12 people that we're meeting. We're very interested in the people that come through the doors. We wanna know their, as much as they'll tell us, you know, their life, where they're from, what brought 'em to us, and you know, what they're looking for. And you know, all of those things. 'cause we truly believe in sowing into folks and, and having their lives also impact us in a positive way. I feel like we can learn from absolutely every person from every walk of life. And that's kind of the goal there.

Candace Hardnett

- 15:25:45:16 [Tom Kohler]: What kind of, what sorts of stories do you hear from people about why they've come to your congregation? I mean, are there I'll leave it at that. Yeah. Why do people choose to come to be with you?
- 15:25:58:16 [Candace Hardnett]: You know, a lot of times people are, people have a love for God. They wanna know their creator. They're looking for a place where they can feel comfortable no matter what they look like, who they love, what their family dynamic is, or what they've done in their past and feel comfortable. One of the things that I I try to stress is that we are to be non-judgmental. My past brought me through a very different path
- 15:26:29:05 than some, some folks, some pastors. I've been in the world, you know, I've been, I was in the Marine Corps. There's a lot of culture that comes with Marine Corps, you know, and, and that's very much opposite in many ways to who I am today. I'm not ashamed of that past. Previous to the Marine Corps, I also had more history, again that I'm not ashamed of, but rather it's different than who I am right now. Which means that when people sit before me and come to our church and, and
- 15:27:01:03 perhaps are trying to make a change of life, whether that is through some form of substance abuse or whether that is bad relationships or you know, whatever the case may be, that I can truly look at someone and say to them, in all honesty, I've probably been exactly where you are. I understand I'm not passing judgment on you. Let's see, you know, here's how I, you know, got out of this, or here's what, where the journey led led me. How can I
- 15:27:30:21 help you to do something similar? Where can I help to lead you, to support you to do the same? That's, that's my goal, you know, to use my past even to help folks, you know, get to a place of peace. 'cause honestly, that's, that's what it is. Honestly, for me. It's been a, a, a peaceful journey. It's getting to a place of peace.
- 15:27:55:12 [Tom Kohler]: Do you, do you hear, do you hear horror stories from people about the, about well even...
- 15:28:00:09 [Candace Hardnett]: Yeah.
- 15:28:00:21 [Tom Kohler]: You hear horror stories?
- 15:28:02:07 [Candace Hardnett]: Absolutely.
- 15:28:03:00 [Tom Kohler]: You mind talking about that, what people are bringing with 'em as far as the way they've been treated at other places?
- 15:28:07:18 [Candace Hardnett]: Absolutely. I've had folks, gosh, I've had folks sit before me crying and say that with the children that are struggling, whether that be with abuse, substance abuse, or you know, some form of, as teenagers do struggle and been blamed, well, you know, your son or daughter would not be going through

Candace Hardnett

this demonic attack if you weren't a lesbian. You know, if you weren't gay. I've had people tell me that they

- 15:28:42:21 were brought forward in a full service church service to be prayed over and embarrassed in front of a congregation about their sexuality or gender identity. I've had people having to get married... Men, and this is especially with some of the male congregants that were forced from the church to marry as a way to correct their sexuality. And if nothing more,
- 15:29:10:03 if it can't be corrected, at least you can put on the facade of being straight. I've heard, you know, all and all of these things are so damaging. People come in so hurt, very mis... and, and don't have a lot of trust when it comes to, even, even me, someone that is sitting in a church setting, of course. And, you know, even to the point where there are some people that won't come to church because it triggers them, it's harmful still. And even
- 15:29:40:06 if it is a church like ours, it's very harmful. It's still triggering to them. And so there are people that are a part of our church that have never been to our church because of that.
- 15:29:59:17 [Tom Kohler]: Help. Help me understand a little bit then about when you hear these sorts of stories. I mean, what, what do you do?
- 15:30:08:12 [Candace Hardnett]: Yeah, listen, I listen, I, I try my best to now, now, one, one thing I I don't have direct, I would say experience with is the, the feeling of that homophobia within church. I didn't experience that. I, I later forced myself to experience it. And I'll explain that in a second, but the church I grew up in was in Northern Virginia. And even though we were in a rural community, it's very well known in that area
- 15:30:42:00 that, that you don't bite the hand that feeds you. And in many ways, being in Northern Virginia also means a very progressive type of area, even in the rural communities and a lot of L-G-B-T-Q people attend churches and to, you know, to start downing people based on sexuality would be just horrible. I mean, we had so many people within the congregation that, and of course back in the eighties and we're talking the eighties here, it
- 15:31:10:06 wasn't a big thing anyway, but, you know, everybody knew that whoever and their friend or roommate, you know, and that's just kind of how it was. It was the culture of the church and how we grew up. And so I didn't experience the sermons of gay people are going to hell. I didn't experience any of that as a child. And I, like I said, I think I said I ended up denouncing Christianity at the age of 12. So I left the church. And so I missed that whole portion of time between 12 and 24. So we're talking
- 15:31:42:02 between 1992 to 2004. I missed that portion of time where the, the rise of anti-gay church happened. And when I came back into church, it was an L-G-B-T-Q

Candace Hardnett

affirming church that I came into. And so I did miss that. And, but I, I knew right then, you know, as I was coming back and as I knew that God was leading me to become a pastor, I said, I'm gonna have to experience

15:32:09:20 this one way or the other.

15:32:11:05 [Candace Hardnett]: And I thought being in the Marine Corps would've helped. 'cause you know, I served under Don't Ask, Don't Tell. And, but I told. (laughs) The problem was I couldn't keep my mouth shut. And I was like, well, forget what the law says. Hey y'all, just so you know, this is who I am. And they said, we know hard and, and kept on moving and, and no one cared because the culture of the Marine Corps even changed long before the laws did. So even my higher ups knew what was up. They just didn't care. And so, in any case, I, I was like, well, I gotta figure this out. You know, I need to experience what this feels like. 'cause how am I

15:32:45:11 ever gonna minister to somebody if I've never even gone through it? I went and I went to Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary for school. First started off at Liberty University for my undergrad and religion. I had to be closeted there, of course, because was.

15:33:03:02 [Tom Kohler]: Jerry Falwell?

15:33:03:15 [Candace Hardnett]: It was on, it was, it's Jerry Falwell, Lynchburg, Virginia. And I did it online. So I will say I had a little, little grace there, but I mean, those conversations, those, those discussion boards of, you know, and, and I'll say in my undergrad, it was more so women in ministry we're talking, I guess 2005 timeframe. It, the focus was women in ministry, should we allow women in ministry? By the time I went to go do my masters, I took a little time in between it's 2010 and I

15:33:34:03 went to go do my master's. They were talking hot and heavy. Almost every class had something to do with L-G-B-T-Q people in the church. And that's when I really experienced, and for my master's degree being in seminary, I had to go to Lynchburg physically every so often to be a part of like, maybe a two week process to go to school and be in the classrooms. And so I experienced it, I experienced the feelings of closeted and I experienced

15:34:04:07 the feelings of sitting amongst the, you know, feelings of, of, you know, rejection. I experienced all of that. Now, I certainly can't compare that to the real experience of living this from childhood on, but enough that I could feel what someone may be feeling in those instances.

15:34:31:01 [Tom Kohler]: Let me ask, do, does, does your congregation organize itself in a way that it does what might be thought of as mission work or might as a, a social action committee? Or how, how does the congregation relate to the larger physical community outside of it and then the general community of Savannah?

Candace Hardnett

- 15:34:52:01 [Candace Hardnett]: Yeah, you know, we used to be really big in the homeless community and helping the homeless pre, pre-COVID. A lot of things have changed post-COVID and, and mainly because we, we are, and I mean it's about a year has passed, but since we've been back in physical location, but we're still getting the gears running again. And so I'll be talking a lot pre- COVID here, but we were very big in the homeless pop... community and helping the tent cities to service them. And, you know, Michael Cheney's church also was, and does a lot of work within those
- 15:35:27:11 communities. So we almost kind of, you know, we take this, this, you know, pocket of people and this area and, and you take this pocket of folks and this area type of coordination and, and not so much where we wrote it down, you know, or anything like that, but we kind of had an understanding of, okay, if they're servicing that community there, then the need is less than over here where maybe they can't get to them. And so we'll, we'll be here now. A lot of those tent cities have since been
- 15:35:55:14 closed. And so beyond that, we also are very much activist minded. One of the first things that happened when we came here to Savannah was, I believe his name was Kieran Daly, if I'm not mistaken, I can't recall his name, but he was a gay man who was beaten severely by two Marines on Johnson Square. And one of the first things that happened that, that happened about maybe
- 15:36:26:02 six months after we got here, and we heard about it and we showed up and they asked me to speak there. And that was kind of my Savannah debut, you know, because I was a Marine and for two Marines to do this, you know, it's pretty intense and I've been active ever since, you know, so we've marched, we've, we've rallied for, at City Hall for domestic partnership benefits.
- 15:36:53:04 And we've, we've been at every march that we possibly could be at. We've gone all the way up to City Hall asking for marriage equality. We did a little sit in here in, in Savannah before marriage equality had passed and applied for marriage license and was denied because of our gender. And so all of these things are, are things that we were, have been a part of and, and continue to be a part of.
- 15:37:24:03 [Tom Kohler]: You kind of moved in a little bit. Do you think of yourself as political in any way?
- 15:37:29:18 [Candace Hardnett]: Yeah, I try to separate, even though our church, we're not a, a, we're not a 501 C3. And so we very well can be very political if we so choose. However, just like I don't believe in dictating to people how they should believe as far as I believe in giving folks the parameters, you know, like here's the parameters of what the scripture says, teaching 'em how to study for themselves and letting them have some thought in this process. Same thing politically, you know, I don't think it's a, if anyone were to go to my Facebook page, I don't think

Candace Hardnett

- 15:38:01:14 it's a secret of who and what, you know, where I support and where I personally vote and how I personally vote. But at the same time, I don't really endorse candidates publicly because I don't want anyone blindly just saying, well, because pastor is voting for this person, I'm gonna vote for them too. I would prefer people research candidates. And, you know, so politically in the sense of, I I, I will run a voter registration and tell people it's
- 15:38:32:14 election season, make sure your voter registration is, you know, is intact if you haven't registered, get out there, register. And when we were a larger congregation, we used to even run little, if you voted, bring your sticker, we put it in a hat, pull out and somebody wins a tablet, you know, that sort of thing. 'cause we want folks to vote. I don't care who you vote for, but you know, on a personal level, I certainly do. But you know, on a, on a, on a spiritual level, I don't care who you vote for as long as you
- 15:39:01:20 exercise that right.
- 15:39:04:22 [Tom Kohler]: Who's the, who's the poorest person in your congregation?
- 15:39:10:16 [Candace Hardnett]: The poorest person? Me? No, I'm just joking. I used to be, I promise you I used to be as, I didn't take a salary from the church. And so, yeah.
- 15:39:20:18 [Tom Kohler]: How long did you not take a salary?
- 15:39:21:22 [Candace Hardnett]: Years. I didn't take a salary for the first. I, I still don't take a salary. I take a stipend. But, and, and at the time when I say me, I had lost my job at one point, and it was by the grace of God that we were sustained, and especially during COVID and, and the bills kept coming. But, so, you know, I don't know if I can call anyone by name in particular right now, everyone is pretty much employed. You know, I, I,
- 15:39:57:22 I can't think of now we did recently have some folks that were experiencing homelessness. They're no longer, they moved away and no longer a part of congregation. So I would say that they would've been, at the time they were living in a car and, and kind of, we would try to help 'em get out the streets and into a, a, a hotel every now and then as much as we could to
- 15:40:21:01 get them kind of stabilized. So...
- 15:40:25:12 [Tom Kohler]: What about young people? Are they, are they finding you and finding sort of refuge in, in your congregation?
- 15:40:31:12 [Candace Hardnett]: Yes, absolutely. Yeah. I'm, I'm always so blessed to, you know, 'cause when I started I was, I was young, you know, like honestly, I was, I was about 30 when, when I, when I started ministry I was 24, you know, in San Diego. And by the time we came here, I was 30 when we opened the church. And so roundabout, so I was young. Time has passed me by and I don't know what

Candace Hardnett

happened, but, and I guess I was 28 when we started the church, but any case, now I'm realizing I'm old, but I'm still blessed that I still can relate to some of the younger people to feel

15:41:04:23 comfortable to come and, and listen to this middle aged girl preach.

15:41:10:23 [Tom Kohler]: And, and is everybody, is everybody who comes congregationally, would they identify themselves as a gay person?

15:41:20:09 [Candace Hardnett]: Not at all. Not at all. No. Yeah, we have a variety of people. We have some transgender people, some folks that are, you know, identify same gender loving, others who are straight, you know, full rainbow, full spectrum.

15:41:36:07 [Tom Kohler]: And then are there examples of the way that congregationally you reach out into the neighborhood or the community and offer, you know, support or are helpful outside of the church walls?

15:41:51:09 [Candace Hardnett]: You know, and, and pre-COVID? Absolutely. Like I was saying, especially via the, the homeless ministry outreach we would do now post-COVID, we are still getting ourselves back up and active. And you know, Agape in itself is an outreach in the sense that we offer service in many ways to the community, L-G-B-T-Q community especially to have a place of refuge that they might not find anywhere else. And the affirmation that they may not find anywhere else, just because of the way

15:42:25:16 some folks theology is set up.

15:42:29:03 [Tom Kohler]: Makes a lot of, yeah, let me ask these guys if they've got things they want to,

15:42:34:07 [Eric Darling]: Oh my gosh, it's so good. It was very far reaching. Yeah, I can't think of anything personally. Mickey?

15:42:41:23 [Tom Kohler]: Mickey, can you?

15:42:42:09 [Mickey Youmans]: No, I think we're good.

15:42:44:05 [Tom Kohler]: Yeah, it's good.

15:42:46:04 [Eric Darling]: I mean, the only thing that really comes to mind is maybe the question about the larger Savannah community and how you see your role now. When you first came, there wasn't a equivalent, you know, congregation and so you saw the need for yourselves. How do you see Savannah, has it changed as, has there been an effect that you think you've had and you know, what do you think the landscape, how now is it different today?

15:43:14:15 [Candace Hardnett]: Yeah. Should I look at.

Candace Hardnett

- 15:43:16:01 [Eric Darling]: Please.
- 15:43:16:12 [Candace Hardnett]: Tom as I'm saying this? All right. Absolutely. You know, one of the first things I said when we got here was one day, I don't want this church to even need to exist. I want us to either change our entire model and be a different church, or I want us to just phase out and not be existent. We are heading that direction, you know? And, and it doesn't make me sad. It's just a new, it's a new change of, of, of, of direction. I believe it's, it's very much in order, but I'm
- 15:43:47:00 seeing more congregations accept and affirm and bring in L-G-B-T-Q people in a very big way, in a very public way that we did not see 15, 16 years ago. Our city has done amazing things under the leadership of our mayor. He is most, in my opinion, and I love Mayor Jackson, I love Mayor Otis
- 15:44:17:08 Johnson, but Mayor Van Johnson has done, in my opinion, the most for the visibility and and acceptance of L-G-B-T-Q people. And I know they're, and, and someone may argue now under Mayor Jackson, we did pass many ordinances. So I don't wanna take away from that at all. Like I said, I love the work that all of those mayors have done for the LGBTQ community, but I see a stark difference in the way the, the landscape of the, the city has changed under this administration. And it may just be
- 15:44:51:11 because the world is changing, you know, and, and, and we had to build on something. So it's certainly not to take away from anyone else's the strides that they made, but we're seeing it come full circle now. It's actually happening. And, and there's not a need for some of the things, I mean, marriage equality has passed, so, so we don't have to go fighting the city for anything, you know, we, we have more things in the works
- 15:45:19:22 nationally than we did before.
- 15:45:23:04 [Candace Hardnett]: And so yeah, I see churches opening their doors that didn't open their doors before. I see people that would have had no other option other than Agape having options now. And I think that's a beautiful thing because I'm not the only pastor in Savannah and everybody can't hear my voice. Everybody won't listen to me, you know, or, or can, can, I'm a little bit different than some folks, you know, I, I don't, I don't preach the same. You're not gonna get a whole bunch of hooping and hollering outta me all the time, you know? And some people like that.
- 15:45:56:00 That's not the way I preach. And so I'm not everybody's flavor and that's okay. People should have a variety to, to choose from. And I'm seeing that happen.
- 15:46:06:23 [Tom Kohler]: That's a great ending. Thank you. Yeah, thank you. Absolutely.
- 15:46:10:09 [Candace Hardnett]: No problem.

Candace Hardnett

15:46:12:10 [Eric Darling]: Okay, I think that's a cut, unless there's something else you'd like to add.

15:46:15:21 [Candace Hardnett]: No, I'm fine.

15:46:16:17 [Tom Kohler]: That was great. I think it speaks well of the city.

15:46:19:12 [Candace Hardnett]: Yeah.

15:46:20:01 [Eric Darling]: Yeah. I mean, That makes me feel better.

15:46:22:19 [Tom Kohler]: Yeah, that's sure to hear it.

15:46:24:13 [Candace Hardnett]: Yeah. I, I see a change there. Well, I, I know occasionally I go to Christ Church now 'cause I'm.