



Contact: The Reverend Barry Stopfel
(570) 441-1779 blss@sunlink.net

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Holy Cross Faith Memorial Episcopal Church
(843) 237-3459

Priest at Center of Heresy Trial Reflects on Legacy of Controversy Fr. Barry's Stopfel's Multimedia Talk Looks Back and Ahead

[PAWLEYS ISLAND, SC July 5, 2024] The Episcopal priest whose ordination was the subject of a historic heresy trial will reflect on his 33 years of ministry in a live multimedia presentation at the Waccamaw Neck Library. "*An Evening With The God Who Dances (and Father Barry Stopfel)*" will be presented at 6:00pm on Thursday, August 22 in the Waccamaw Neck Library's DeBordieu Auditorium at 41 St. Paul's Place, Pawleys Island, SC 29585. The event is sponsored by Holy Cross Faith Memorial Episcopal Church in Pawleys Island, where the Reverend Barry Stopfel serves as Priest Emeritus. Admission is free. Seating is first-come-first-served.

The 1996 heresy trial of Bishop Walter Righter, who ordained Stopfel as a deacon prior to his subsequent ordination as a priest, received [widespread press coverage](#) and focused international attention on the question of whether non-celibate, unmarried people should be ordained. Stopfel was serving as a parish priest in NJ at the time of the trial and was in a committed monogamous relationship with his male partner. Same-sex marriages were not permitted in most of the United States until the Supreme Court's 2015 Obergefell v. Hodges decision.

The August 22 presentation will include materials from Stopfel's personal archives, including a 1996 interview with ABC TV's Nightline program in which he told host Ted Koppel, "Each of us should be fully who God formed us to be. God formed me to be a gay man." Stopfel says that while memories of the controversy his ordination stoked form the basis of the new multimedia presentation, he is looking forward. "Where is the Jesus path leading us right now, today?" he said. "Certainly on a path of fierce love for the other. The outsider. The one who is despised and rejected by our culture. Let's follow a path out of the safe places to the edges of faith and belief. Into the street so to speak. Jesus is not my personal savior. I don't own him. He owns me. What's more, I am a fan of heretics. They are always interesting and sometimes right. In the end the Church is judged not by who it lets in but by who it has kept out."

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