

7-22-2021

Interview with Dr. Kevin Neuhouser on July 22, 2021

Kevin Neuhouser

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Neuhouser Interview 7-22-2021

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spu, haven, students, campus, faculty, laughs, sexual orientation, church, issues, lgbtq, people, administration, meeting, club, growing, gender identity, homosexuality, bit, years, board

SPEAKERS

Isabel Bartosh, Neuhouser

I Isabel Bartosh 00:03

And we will begin the interview. Okay, so just for some background information, could you tell me a little bit about where you grew up. Like: the politics, was it urban or rural, family size, progressive, traditional, affirming or not?

N Neuhouser 00:19

Um, my family moved around some when I was growing up, but mostly, uh, Indiana, and in a small town. My religious background is Mennonite and so, um, traditionally, on-on gender, sexual orientation issues, Mennonites would have been conservative, but Mennonites, because of their positions on pacifism, non violence, justice issues, um-I was sort of raised I think, with some kind of conflicting messages that-around needing to-to love and respect and honor everyone. But at the same time, there was some-I grew up in a context in which the message was that homosexuality was a sin. So I think there was some, some dissonance there, but it wasn't really dissonance that I dealt with. Um, because growing up in a small town in which if anyone wasn't heterosexual, they-they stayed well-hidden. So it was-it was not an issue that was out in the open or really had to be dealt with growing up. I would say.

I Isabel Bartosh 01:50

So, what did you understand about sexuality and gender identities growing up?

N Neuhouser 01:57

My sort of, you know, in the-so I was born in 1957. So I was growing up in the 60s and 70s. And at that time in, in small town, Midwest, homosexuality wasn't really even an issue, really. I mean, it was not-I mean, Vietnam was an issue. Race was an issue, women's liberation was an issue. That's the way they talked about it then. But sort of the gay rights movement hadn't really come to any place that I had lived. And so there was sort of this background message

that hetero heterosexuality was the norm, heterosexuality was what God had ordained and that was right. And-but it wasn't something that was-the church talked about very much at that time, in my experience. I think that only came later. In which it became sort of, I mean, so it wasn't really seen as a central Christian issue. But just because it was so taken for granted that you didn't even really have to talk about it very much. I'd say, my own sort of exposure to it, I have-I have several cousins who I became aware of that were gay or lesbian. And that's for me sort of what sort of forced me to sort of begin to have to actually think about it in any real way. Because these were people that I had grown up with and knew well. And yet, all of a sudden, they didn't seem to, to be fitting into the sort of the story that I've been told that people were supposed to fit into. But yet, I was supposed to love them. So I think that's for me, that was sort of the beginning of having to think through what I believed in.

I Isabel Bartosh 04:06

And then you currently teach at SPU. Could you talk a little bit about what brought you to SPU?

N Neuhouser 04:14

Well, I just finished my 25th year at SPU so I started in 1996. I was teaching at the University of Washington and I did not get tenure and so I was looking for another position and the position at SPU opened up and so it worked out actually quite well for me. I've enjoyed working at SPU so that was how I came to SPU. Can you hear me okay because your screen has gone blank.

I Isabel Bartosh 05:03

Yes, I can hear you. Sorry about that. I was just testing something with my Wi-Fi.

N Neuhouser 05:08

Oh, that's okay.

I Isabel Bartosh 05:09

Okay.

N Neuhouser 05:10

Just wanted to make sure you were hearing me okay.

I Isabel Bartosh 05:12

Yep.

N

Neuhouser 05:13

So that's how I came to SPU.

I

Isabel Bartosh 05:16

Great. And what has your experience been like at SPU?

N

Neuhouser 05:32

I would say the SPU has been a good place for me, I have-the department that I teach in, Sociology, I feel very blessed that we are a department that gets along really well, that we enjoy being together and working together. And so it makes going to work sort of a pleasant-I think. I love-I love working with students, and...I love teaching, I can't, you know, people ask me about retiring, and I still haven't come up with something that I'd rather be doing in retirement. And so (laughs). So yeah, it's been a good place, I feel like being a much smaller school than, than the UW it's a place where I can get to know students in classes and in the major. And I feel like, it gives me the opportunity to have an actual influence on students in terms of helping them sort of as they're taking sociology classes and learning about the world to try to figure out what those new understandings of the world mean in terms of what they're going to do with their lives. And so it feels like I have a-can have a positive impact on the students I've worked with. And so I really enjoy that.

I

Isabel Bartosh 07:14

Yeah, I think a lot of people came to SPU for that same reason. So what-Okay. So how and why did you come to be involved in Haven, because-you're the faculty advisor for the LGBTQ student club on campus?

N

Neuhouser 07:40

Correct. Well, when I came to SPU, initially in 1996, sexual orientation as an issue was not an issue, because there was just sort of a perceived consensus that it was that homosexuality was wrong. As far as I knew, no students were out. It just was kind of a non-issue. And it's felt like it would be a very long time before SPU started to make any kind of move on that issue. But in the spring of 2006, an organization called-called Equality Ride, announced that they were going to come to campus. I don't know how much you've already been-learned about that beginning. But Equality Ride was a-was sponsored by gay Christians who were trying to sort of model what Freedom Riders had done in the civil rights movement by go-and they were going to go to different Christian campuses, and try to provoke a conversation about sexual orientation. At that point, it was primarily sexual orientation rather than gender identity, gender identities came later as an issue. And so they-they-they told SPU that they were coming and they told us when they were coming in April, it's April 16. And so SPU you kind of had to decide how they were going to respond. And at the time, uh, the administration decided that they would, they would sort of "host" Equality Ride, they would not try to block them from coming to campus,

which some Christian schools were doing, and even calling police to keep them off their property. But SPU decided that that was not a helpful response. And so on that day, there were a number of events in which the equality ride participants interacted with students on-and faculty and staff-on campus. And for the first time, really, there were open conversations about sexual orientation, about what the Bible taught about it, etc. And out of that a group of students decided that they wanted to create a-a um, a student club, that would be for gay students, and would try to help educate the campus on issues around homosexuality. And they announced that they were going to have an organizing meeting. And I didn't really know any of the students that were-that seemed to be leading at that moment. But as, as someone who was concerned about these issues at that time, and-I was concerned that there might be backlash against these students in this meeting that-and so I thought, well, maybe if a faculty member showed up, that would sort of diffuse any kind of conflict that might erupt between students, if there were, if students came, who were opposed to what was going on. It turned out there were there was no opposition in the meeting, and the students sort of discussed how they wanted to create a club, etc. And I just sat in the back and didn't participant just observed. And they scheduled a couple more meetings, planning meetings. And I showed up, and I think because I was the only faculty member who had come to those meetings, they asked me to be the faculty advisor as they applied for club status through ASSP. So really, that's kind of how it happened. It kind of happened-kind of by default, I think, just that, (laugh) that they didn't know any other faculty member that they knew, or they thought might be willing to do it. And so that happened in April/May of 2007. And so then I've been the faculty advisor ever since. So -and much of that time, I wasn't the official advisor, because they weren't officially recognized as a club. But I've always sort of served in that position.

I Isabel Bartosh 12:38

Could you talk a little bit more about your feelings and your motivations? Like what prompted you to go to those first meetings? You said you were hoping to diffuse any conflicts that would arise? Was there anything else?

N Neuhouser 12:54

Yeah, I'd say that. I had come to believe that... Well, that God's love was not based on sexual orientation. That God loved everyone, and that the church was doing a terrible job of communicating that to people who were not heterosexual. In fact, the church seemed to be determined to make it an either/or kind of choice, that either you could be in relationship with God, or you could be homosexual. And I saw that people who couldn't-that their sexual orientation is not something that they had a choice about, that they could choose not to be. And so that meant that they were giving up on the church, and they were giving up on God. And so it was important to me that they at least get from some people somewhere, the message that-that God loved them, and that there was still space for them as Christians. That was very important to me. And so I wanted SPU to be a place where they could get that message, where they could get a message that God loved them unconditionally no matter what. And so, that was probably one of my strongest motivations in terms of participation with Haven and why it was important to me.

I Isabel Bartosh 14:50

Yeah, that position seems like something very different from what you may have thought growing up in the Mennonite Church and in Indiana. Could you talk a little bit about kind of that evolution and what brought you to that-the current position that you have?

N Neuhouser 15:11

Okay. I think like for a lot of people, there's a difference in thinking about the issue of homosexuality and sexual orientation and gender identity when it's sort of in the abstract, disconnected from any one that you know, and care about. And so I think for me, I have a cousin, who I was always-she was older than me, and I always respected and admired her and looked up to her. And I-she is a lesbian, and has been in a long term relationship with her partner. And so I've known her for a long time. And as I watched her in her relationship with her partner, it became very clear to me that-that if-if that was, if that pairing was a man and a woman, that church would have held it up as a model of a positive, healthy marriage relationship, because they were good for each other, they were good to each other. There was love there and it-and it-and I just became convinced that-that that relationship could not exist in that way, if God was not present, that-that, um. That that was a kind of agape love that they were showing each other and living into it with each other. And so that if God could be in that relationship, then who was I to say that it was-that it was wrong? And I think it was kind of just through that relationship that sort of forced me to really think through, um... And it made me-I'm still Mennonite, and I believe that, you know, Mennonite teachings lead one, inevitably-to believing that everyone else, including LGBTQ identifying individuals, have a place in the church and have a place in God's heart and that, you know, equally with, with those who are straight. And so I think it was the relationship that forced me to rethink my theology, that was kind of the direction.

I Isabel Bartosh 17:54

Thank you. So going back a little bit, taking a little bit of a step back to Haven specifically. Could you talk a little bit more about like the chronology of Haven, first as an unofficial student gathering and then as a recognized student club?

N Neuhouser 18:13

Sure. And I actually have a have a written timeline, a historical timeline that I could be happy to send you that I, once this is over, if you'd like.

I Isabel Bartosh 18:26

Yeah, that would be great.

N Neuhouser 18:29

So basically, in spring of 2006, the students got organized and applied to ASSP to be a club, and ASSP approved their application. And-but the administration stepped in and rejected the

application. Basically, what they said was that before they could be approved as a club-well they were-they'd initially-the name for the club was, was "Gay Straight Alliance". And they were told specifically that the word "gay" could not be in (laughs) a club name, so they switched to "Haven". They were also told weird things like they couldn't use a rainbow as a symbol (laughs). Anyway, but that they, they had to affirm in their organizing documents, their application, that they supported the SPU statement on human sexuality, and that they would not do anything to try to undermine or change that. Okay, now this was a shock to everyone on campus because, uh, faculty were not aware that SPU had a statement on human sexuality. Faculty had never been asked to sign or agree to or affirm a statement on human sexuality. And so the fact that-that this one particular group of students was sort of being required to do that, when no one else was, seemed extraordinarily discriminatory. And so we weren't even sure where this statement had come from, or when it had been written. So there was a lot of controversy around that. It was very clear, from the students point of view that it was not a document that they could affirm. That-that to affirm it would be to deny their own identities. And so this lead to sort of Haven existing unofficially, and being sort of-not having rights to reserve meeting space on campus not having rights, you know, to do public publication, you know, I do announcements and things that clubs normally have. And so we're always having to try to figure out ways around those hurdles. The following year, they tried to apply again, and were denied again. So that was in spring of 2008. And at that point, there was a petition drive to try to change the administration's position, hundreds of students signed it. I was able to get 33 tenured faculty to sign the petition. We only asked tenured faculty, because we were concerned about the vulnerability of untenured faculty. But it didn't-it didn't change the administration's position. The following year, so this was 2009, the second year, Haven had been meeting weekly, just by unofficially sort of saying that they would meet in a certain space and showing up even though they couldn't reserve it. And they were planning to celebrate the National Day of Silence. And so they during the day, they-they did some-some activities publicly to commemorate the Day of Silence. And they wanted to to end the commemoration with communion. And they had invited a local pastor to come to campus to-to have communion. The administration found out about this, they contacted the pastor, and told him he was not welcome to come on campus and celebrate communion with the students. And so the pastor contacted us and said he was sorry, but he didn't want to provoke a confrontation with the administration. So instead of doing communion, we had a foot washing. But when other students found out about this, including ASSP leaders, they organized...two weeks later, they organized a communion service in Martin Square that was led by an ordained member of the School of Theology in which they specifically invited Haven to come to share communion as a kind of public rebuke of the university. So that was on May 1 of 2009. So the following year, we come back to campus and we're told by the administration that we're no longer allowed to meet on campus. And so for that fall quarter, we met off campus in a student apartment. But it didn't really work. It wasn't really it wasn't convenient for students, and it clearly was- was hurting their ability to to create a space for students to meet. So at the end of fall quarter 2009 we informed the administration that in January, we would meet on campus despite being told that we were not allowed to. And so we we made that a public announcement. We invited all students, all faculty, all staff to come join us in a meeting. And we met in-on January 10, in Weter Hall. And there were probably at least 100 people there, including faculty, staff, and-and students, to support Haven and to show that they were present on campus, they were students on campus, and they had a right to meet on campus, whatever-regardless of what the administration said. We weren't sure how the administration would respond. And it turned out that they didn't really have a plan B, and so they didn't respond (laughs). And so we continue to meet on campus. So I don't know if this is too much detail. But the following year in 2011, once again, I was called into a meeting with the Vice President of Academic Affairs, what's now called the Provost. Not-this is someone who's no longer at SPU. And I was told, in quotes,

"Haven no longer exists". And I just looked at the person and I said seriously, because there was no way that they could make it not exist. And up till that point, even though they weren't want us to meet on campus, they had always asked us for a schedule of our-what we were planning on doing, our meetings and events, and which we had always done so that they were aware of what was coming up. And I said to him, "so if Haven no longer exist, does that mean we no longer have to tell you what we're doing?" And they realized that they had, they had painted themselves into a corner that they couldn't get out of. So again, this erupted into a public confrontation with the administration. And this time, over 100 faculty signed a letter of support for Haven and paid for it to appear in the Falcon. There was also sort of it began to draw attention from local media, like the Stranger, and alumni began to put pressure on the university. And so within a month, the administration was forced to back off and gave Haven the right to meet on campus again. Basically, it went on like that until we got a new president, when Dan Martin became Pro-okay, so I'm not supposed to say names. But in this case, this was a public act. So you can decide whether or not to include that. But Dan Martin became, I think, convinced that this ongoing controversy was not good for SPU. And so he made the decision that Haven could be-that ASSP could approve Haven as a club. So that happened in the fall of 2013. And so since 2013, Haven has been an official ASSP club, and has operated under ASSP guidelines. I guess I would just say that the-Haven has always had, I think, sort of two primary purposes that they have articulated. How-and these two purposes, I-exist kind of in tension with each other to some extent. That one is that it be a space in which students can meet to support each other in the context of a campus that is not always welcoming. So it was kind of a private space. At the same time, Haven has wanted to have an impact on the campus as a whole by doing educational work, that would, that would educate the campus on issues initially around sexual orientation, but increasingly around gender identity issues more broadly. And those two purposes, while I think are mutually supportive, at the same time, there's a tension especially initially, when the public events of trying to educate the campus created controversy, which then made it hard for students to come to Haven if they weren't ready to be out to the campus as a whole. So it meant that only-only students who were ready to be publicly identified as LGBTQ, were actually members of Haven. And so that it actually was hard to be a safe space for students who weren't ready for that public exposure. Does that make sense? And then only later when Haven was-became more accepted, I think were those two purposes-uh, sort of fit together a little bit more easily. Because-because the-a significant amount of the, the fear of joining Haven, I think has has dissipated over the years. If you have any questions about any of that, please let me know. And I went through a lot.

I Isabel Bartosh 30:23

Yeah, no, thank you. That's a lot of detail and detail is fantastic. The more detail the better.

N Neuhouser 30:28

I can send you, I can send you the summary of that timeline.

I Isabel Bartosh 30:31

Yeah, that would be great. So were there any-you talked about Equality Riders. Would-were there any other events or protests held on campus in the early 2000s, around that time?

N

Neuhouse 30:57

I would say that the well every year, in the spring, Haven commemorated the National Day of Silence. And so that was sort of a public protest on campus in which students would, would spend the day with their mouths taped shut, and they would keep a continual presence in Martin Square, so that they-so that students would see what they were doing, as kind of a protest against the silencing of gay LGBTQ voices, and lives on campus. And so that was sort of an annual protest. At various moments, when, when there was-the university had tried to sort of shut down Haven, there were-there were public protests at various points there, where they would sort of meet Martin Square or in the Loop as a way of trying to draw attention to the concerns. So that-in those first years that happened probably at least once or twice a year. You probably could find I don't have all the dates for those, you might be able to find those in the search of the Falcons archives.

I

Isabel Bartosh 32:27

Yeah, we have an archival team working into-looking into those as well. This is just to get like your personal perspective and kind of fill out the dates.

N

Neuhouse 32:41

I would say this-the National Days of Silence were kind of a big thing early on, to try to make people aware of the issues. And I would always send out an email to all the faculty letting them know what was going to happen because students-there would be students in their classes who would refuse to speak. And I needed to explain to them what was going on, that it wasn't meant to be disrespectful or disruptive of the class, but they were trying to make public the silence that they had every day of the year. And that was always interesting, how faculty responded to that. Most supportive, but not always.

I

Isabel Bartosh 33:31

Could you talk a little bit more about how students and faculty would respond to either Haven or the actions that they would take on campus?

N

Neuhouse 33:48

I would say in general, the majority of students have been supportive or neutral. That is, from the very beginning, I think ASSP leadership has been supportive. I mean, the ASSP leadership, all the way back in 2007, they on their part approved Haven for club status, and were supportive at various points while Haven was still unofficial. I don't remember the year but-but at various points ASSP reached out to myself and to Haven and asked how they could be supportive, even as Haven was not official. And I think students in many ways led the push-in my understanding, the-the change at SPU started with students, that students changed their ideas, and then as they interacted with faculty and staff, faculty and staff started to change their understandings. And that sort of what remains to be changed is the board (laughs). I think

administration has finally changed, but it's a, significantly, but it's-it's the board. And-and so I think it's kind of moved from the students to those who have had the closest contact with students. And, and the board seems to be like the biggest opponent at this point.

I Isabel Bartosh 35:31

Yeah. So how have you seen the amount of conversations on campus around LGBTQ issues grow since your time there?

N Neuhouser 35:44

Could you repeat that first finding quite catch the first part of your question?

I Isabel Bartosh 35:48

Yeah. Could you talk a little bit about how you've seen, like people's willingness to have conversations around gender and sexuality has changed since 1996?

N Neuhouser 36:00

It's been, it's been dramatic. I mean, in 2007, no one was having conversations. And I think I mean, as I said, initially, we weren't even asking people to publicly support Haven who didn't have tenure. That's how concerned we were about the administration's potential to punish faculty who, who expressed a different opinion. You know, with the recent controversy around the SPU's hiring practice, and what the board has said, I mean, what you see is, I mean, untenured faculty being very vocal and feeling willing and able to speak out on these issues. And I think staff have always been even more vulnerable than-than faculty, because we do have the protections of tenure. And in some ways been more vulnerable than students because SPU needs student tuition. So, but staff, I think they don't have any sort of any real protection at all. And we're starting to see, you know, staff being much more vocal and public. And so I think it's just been a gradual. You know, I think at first, when people first started speaking, they didn't know if there was anyone who agreed with them (laughs). Right? The first time-because there's just been so much silence. And over time, I think people have come to realize that, "Oh, no, there's a lot of support. And there's a lot of effort". In-as the faculty has pushed back against the board's hiring policy, a survey was done of faculty and kind of realized the, you know, well over 70% of faculty are opposed to the current hiring policy. And so you kind of just sort of start to become more-more clear how strong the consensus is for change. And so that's made it much, much easier. You know, I think, you know, it's sort of gone in-it's evolved, as I said that, that homosexuality was the initial issue. And then so that was sort of the first, I think, issue that became easier to talk about issues of queerness, and gender identity, I think those took a little bit longer. Those were a little bit newer issues. I think people were less-they had less knowledge of those issues. And so that's taken a little bit longer. But I think it seems to be following the same progression.

I Isabel Bartosh 39:06

What are your hopes for the current and future student bodies?

N

Neuhausser 39:11

Well, my-my hope and-is that we keep moving, I think there is-You know, from my perspective of 25 years at SPU, the movement has-the change has been pretty dramatic. There has been a lot of change. And I know that for students who are here, usually four years, or two years if they transfer, that the change can be harder to perceive, because in two to four years that-the amount of change may not look like very much, but the reality is that SPU has changed a lot and that for a sort of historically evangelical school that belongs to the Coalition of Christian Colleges and Universities, we are probably at the most progressive end. Which (laughs) which may not feel like progressive enough, and it doesn't feel like progressive enough to me, but it's-it is evidence of all the hard work that's-that students and faculty and staff have done to get that movement and move momentum. And I think, you know, I think that what's happening right now with the, the, the hiring policy, it's just the next step. It's, it's it's like, Okay, this is-we've gone over several hurdles, and we've made it and now this is the next one. And it's not-just because there was an initial "No", doesn't mean that hope is lost? I think it-because we've been told no before and made it past the "No". So you know, I think, you know, I think truth. And, and I believe God is on the side of this change. And so I think if we, together students, faculty staff, keep working together that we will keep moving in may not be a smooth progression that maybe stops and starts. And I think, right now we're trying to figure out, how do-you how do we convince the board to see things differently? And that's complicated, but-but I'm, you know, I do believe that that truth and justice win out in the long run.

I

Isabel Bartosh 41:42

Okay. You've worked with many, many students over the years, would you like to share any personal anecdotes or recollections about SPU students if you feel comfortable doing that?

N

Neuhausser 41:56

Sure. During that early period, there was so much going on, and there was so much conflict and controversy with the administration that I met weekly with-with Haven leaders. And those-those meetings of Haven leaders, I came to admire their courage, and insight, and grace. I mean, they-they were dealt-they were treated badly in many cases. But they never gave up. And they never stopped caring about SPU and wanting SPU to be a better place. And I just remember so many times that we would just (laughs) that instead of crying, we would just laugh at the ridiculousness of what was what was going on. And we would find ways to, to take care of each other through that. And there was there was one leader, student leader, who-her one of her goals in life was was to be-open a vegan bakery. And so every week, she would try a new recipe for vegan cupcakes and bring them in, (laughs) and we would, we would give her feedback on sort of how successful that vegan recipe had been. And it was just, you know, it was just it was hard, but it was...But it was just a beautiful experience. And it was one in which I learned so much. I don't know how helpful I was to Haven but I know that they were helpful to me. And so-so for me a personal, this is a very personal thing, but um... A few years ago, my younger daughter came out to me as-as trans. And if I had not been educated by Haven leaders and Haven students for all those years where they had taught me what that meant, I

mean, as a straight man from Small Town, Indiana, I-I would not have known how to respond and how to-I would have, I'm sure I would have tried to love my daughter through that. But I wouldn't have known how to-what would be received as love. Does that make sense? Without having been a part of Haven and so I am eternally grateful to Haven that they prepared me for that moment where I could- I'm gonna start crying if I'm not careful. But-they prepared me where I could receive that conversation and express, in ways that could be heard, my acceptance and love of my daughter and the identity that she was was owning in that moment. And so for me that-that Haven has left a legacy in my own life and in my own family.

I

Isabel Bartosh 45:32

Thank you for sharing that. What would you say to the LGBTQ community on campus? Now that we're going through this particular chapter in our history?

N

Neuhouser 45:49

What would I say to them? (Pause) I guess I would want to encourage them that-that, that the board's announcement that they were not going to change their position on hiring was definitely a setback. And it was discouraging. But I would, I would hope that that's-that students know, and that that board decision does not reflect the campus community, that the campus community is made up of students and faculty and staff, the board doesn't live on campus with us. In a way they are kind of outsiders, and that the hiring policy makes things harder for us. It would be great to have LGBTQ faculty and staff that could model Christian faithfulness and model what it means to live for students who are LGBTQ I-that would be great. But it doesn't mean that they're-that that, that SPU can't be a good place for students, for LGBTQ students. I think the goal that Haven started with that would be that-was that, that, that SPU be a safe and welcoming place for everyone. And I think that's still the goal. And I think we've made progress on that goal, that it is-that it is easier today than it was 14 years ago, when haven started. Not-and it doesn't mean that there's still not hard things, and there's still not things that need to be changed. But that the goal-the goal is not, for me, is not to defeat people who I disagree with. Because if I defeat them, then-then SPU still is unsafe, because they're still opposed, they're still-they've been beaten back, but they're still there. My goal is that, that they convert that we, that we change their minds, and that we find ways to-not to beat them into submission or, or into silence because they have been defeated, but that we convinced them of the goodness of welcoming everybody. So I guess that's what I would, I would hope that I think for the most part that Haven has, has worked in that philosophy and that strategy of, of trying to do their best to, to dialogue and to talk with anyone and to try to show them a different way. So I'm hoping that the board is open to that. I mean, it's a little bit harder because the board is off campus. It's harder to get into those conversations with them, harder to build the relationships with them to sort of open their minds to new ways of thinking. But hopefully we can figure out how to do that.

I

Isabel Bartosh 49:45

Do you see broader trends in Christianity or theology changing beyond just at SPU?



N

Neuhouser 50:00

Oh, yeah, I mean, I think I mean, growing up the idea that there would be churches, with gay pastors, with openly gay pastors, it was just unbelievable. I mean, I couldn't have comprehended it. And so the church has moved and-but in that movement, there's been division, right, there's also been resistance. And so that's painful. But in some ways, I think it's a necessary part of the progress. And you know, that, you know, the idea that, that in the United States, there would be marriage equality. I mean, I could not have conceived of that 10 years ago, that that would be the law of the land, that anyone could get married. So I think that within the church, there are Christians who are becoming better and better able to make the theological and biblical case for why things like marriage equality and should be practiced in the church or why, you know, there should be no discrimination in the church based on sexual orientation or gender identity. I think. I think we're getting better at it. And, you know, I'm not so naive to think that, that the church will ever come to sort of unanimity on that. But I am hopeful that, as I-well, I guess I'm kind of torn. I mean, your generation, I think, is way more open and accepting than any previous generation in the US. And my hope is that enough of your generation stays in the church to change it. My fear is that the church will force your generation out. That-but not just by forcing out LGBTQ individuals, but by forcing out anyone who supports them. And I see, you know, as a sociologist, we see there's a massive exodus of this generation from, from the church. And I think that's kind of what we're-what concerns me, that if everyone leaves the church, then then only the ones left will be those who are anti-gay, anti-LGBTQ, and you know, I guess I hope that at SPU that enough-that students and faculty don't give up and, and don't leave, but stay so that we can transform the institution. So I guess it's not clear which direction that will go. But I'm committed to staying and fighting.

I

Isabel Bartosh 53:34

Is there anything that I haven't asked you about that you think is important for me to know?

N

Neuhouser 53:44

Um, you know, I think you've covered most things. I guess one thing that has been interesting to me over the years is that-as I said, initially, the issue was was sexual orientation. And that as-as that became sort of, more accepted than issues of gender identity, of queerness of transsexuality, those became issues and that those have led to sort of new issues on campus. Especially around you know, issues of dorms and roommates. You know, sort of who is if we're going to assign rooms based on maleness and femaleness, then who's male and female? And I think-and you know, who uses what restrooms, and I think it has created-it just, it has brought into focus new areas that we have to work on. And in some ways, when I look back, homosexuality seems simple. I mean, it seems less complicated than gender identity. It's a little bit more straightforward and how to handle it. And so, you know, as we've dealt with one thing is sort of like new. New issues have come to the fore. But that's, to me that's evidence of progress. It means that we've made progress on other issues. And now that just reveals the next step that we have to take.

I

Isabel Bartosh 55:25

Okay, thank you so much for answering my questions and talking with me. I really appreciate it.

I'm going to end the recording now. And we'll go over a few more things, but there won't be any more questions after I end the recording.