

The Reverend Rob Spach Oral History Interview Two

Interview Conducted by
Severine Stier
Dahlia Krutkovich
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Title: Rob Spach oral history interview two, 2019 April 1

Description: College Chaplain Rob Spach speaks about important events that shaped Jewish life at Davidson. He discusses the history of Davidson College Hillel and how the student-run organization made Jewish life on campus more visible between the years of 2011 and 2018. He describes how the college started accommodating non-Christian religious groups, his reaction to the discovery of neo-Nazi students on campus, and how other religiously motivated incidents affected Davidson's culture and Jewish population.

Biography: Rob Spach graduated from Davidson in 1984 and returned as College Chaplain in 1993. He is an ordained minister in the Presbyterian Church (USA).

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Interview History:

Interviewer: Severine Stier; Dahlia Krutkovich

Transcriber: Olivia Harper

Editors: Olivia Harper and Rob Spach

Reviewed by Rob Spach

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Setting Description: Interview with Rob Spach, Severine Stier, and Dahlia Krutkovich in Davidson College, Davidson, North Carolina

Transcript Notes: The following transcript has been edited for brevity and clarity.
RS: Rob Spach
SS: Severine Stier
DK: Dahlia Krutkovich

DK: So, we just talked about Ari and his time in Hawaii.

RS: Right.

DK: Um, one of the most important things to happen to Jewish life at Davidson.

RS: Yeah.

DK: Yeah, do you mind telling us a little about Hillel after that and, kind-of, how it seems like since 2011, there's been this flourishing essentially, or at least a relative flourishing of Jewish life on campus.

RS: I think so, um, so in the fall of 2011, it was the tenth anniversary of 9/11. And so, we had a tenth anniversary commemoration in the atrium downstairs. And a variety of different student organizations were asked to be represented, and so Hillel was among those. And students from various different religious traditions spoke and read texts from their particular traditions at that event. So, I think that was an important event that was campus-wide, in which there was high visibility for Hillel as well as a number of other religious organizations.

DK: Was that one of the first times Hillel was kind-of in this public facing position?

RS: On 9/11 itself? Um... Dr. Lerner well, well not Hillel itself, but Dr. Lerner helped play an important part into figuring out responses to the events of 9/11. And then, yeah, I would say that, if I'm remembering correctly, I would say that's one of the important moments when Hillel itself as a student organization is represented in a large public event. Um... The next year, or I guess it was actually two years later, the 2013-14 year, there were several events that Hillel worked on that I thought were of particular importance. One of those is that Arielle Korman worked with Sana Alimohamed, who was one of the leaders in the MSA, and the two organizations, Hillel and the MSA, co-sponsored what they called a Salaam Shabbat. So it was an opportunity for twenty students, Jewish and Muslim specifically, together for a shared meal and conversation. And I thought that, personally, I thought that was a really creative and interesting way to bring those two organizations and the members of them together.

And that was also, if I recall correctly, the first year that we had the reading of the names of the fallen, all day long on Yom HaShoah. And that was a joint effort between Hannah Sachs and professor Thomas Pegelow Kaplan. And I recall that being for me personally a very meaningful and powerful experience to go and sit in that room as the names were read. And we've had that every year since then, with the names being read all day. And many, many members of the community take part in that every year, and it's always been something that president Quillen has made a point of being a part of, as well as many other faculty and administration in the whole range of students from many, many different traditions. So I think that's another way in which Hillel, in a very public setting, has brought together a really wide variety of members of the community to focus on something that is not uniquely Jewish, but primarily Jewish in terms of who was killed in the Holocaust, but in a way that also connects to our broader sense of humanity, of what is right, what is just, what is outrageous towards humankind.

And then I remember the other very powerful event that year that Hillel sponsored was in early May. Hillel and the Chaplain's Office and the history department brought to campus the woman named Eva Kor. And she was one of a pair of twins upon whom experiments were done by Mengele. And her talk was entitled, "The Triumph of the Human Spirit: From Auschwitz to Forgiveness." And there were, I think, about 400 people there, and it was a very riveting experience hearing her talk about what had been done to her and her twin sister when they were little girls.

The next year which was 2014-15, Ann Marie Costa in the theatre department organized a production of Fiddler on the Roof. And right from the beginning, she conceived of it not only as a production of that show, but also as an opportunity for us as a community to explore various dimensions of Jewish history. And so, I remember a bunch of us met over in the theater building—faculty, myself, some students—and we brainstormed about ways that we could have events that went alongside the theatre production itself that would address several different dimensions of Jewish identity and Jewish history. And I also recall that for a number of Jewish students, being able to perform in Fiddler on the Roof was a really meaningful experience.

It was that same year in the spring that Rabbi Shields conceived and put together a "Jewish Life Summit." And that summit included a couple of members of the faculty and alums—as I mentioned I think to you guys before, Jess Heilweil and Kelly Kopeikin came here for that—and students. Ava Pomerantz was there for that, and some administrators, the member of the, I don't know the exact name, I think it's like the Jewish Federation of Charlotte, and a member of the statewide Hillel organization was invited. And President Quillen opened up the day by offering some remarks about dimensions, in which she saw the importance of Judaism at Davidson. Then we spent a good portion of the day talking about what was already here and what we might envision for developing and nurturing Jewish life in the future.

DK: What specifically came out of that?

RS: In terms of ideas? So, um, let me get my little note here about that. Some of the things are things that we've already seen, and others are just ideas that have yet to come to fruition. One was that Hillel itself create recognizable things, like stickers and t-shirts and memorabilia like that, and of course you see those around campus now.

SS: Yamacat!

RS: Yes, exactly.

DK: The best stickers on campus.

SS: And shirts.

RS: Yes, exactly, and there's still a bunch of the shirts left actually. I think incoming students might really appreciate getting copies of—I mean getting shirts. We talked about having a Jewish alumni network, and so I'm glad that that seems like it's come to fruition, and I think it just has to get come up and flowing at this point. There was discussion about having Jewish

focused alternative break trips, so the fact that we now have this trip that's been going to Poland and to London is an example of that coming to fruition. There were students at the time we really wanted a kosher kitchen or something, if not an actual full kosher kitchen, at least a space where they could cook their own meals that would be kosher, and there was a desire for kosher grocery items to be more easily available right around here. I think they were hoping for example that in the Union Station there might even kosher items, that kind of thing. A desire for some kind of a mentoring program for Jewish students perhaps to connect with either Jewish staff or Jewish faculty when they first got onto campus. The idea of having mezuzahs around campus, at the doors of various offices where Jewish students might be going. And we I remember we even floated the idea of having mezuzahs available for any incoming Jewish student who might want one for their room. And the idea of having host families in the area who are Jewish to host individual students on an ongoing basis, you know, so that once a month or something they can have a home-cooked meal with a Jewish family, that kind of thing. So those are some of the things that that came out of that and some of them obviously we made some progress on than others there hasn't been a lot that's happened. I think woven into all that was a sense of more courses centered in Judaism as well, so all the efforts that y'all have made in having some kind of a Jewish Studies program would really be meeting that need that was identified. It wasn't talked about quite in that way, but I think that was a general sense of what people wanted. So that was, that was in the spring, and it planted seeds of things that then have developed, and then others that I think just have lain fallow but continue to be needs.

DK: And where did the energy go after that Summit? What, well first of all, what precipitated that Summit? Did Rabbi Shields just say this is something we need, or did students come to you or him, or was there a catalyzing moment or?

RS: I think it was primarily his recognizing that we are at a place in Jewish life where there was a lot in place but another step was needed in terms of the visibility of Jewish students on campus—the visibility of Hillel as a contributing organization not just for Jewish students, but really for the campus as a whole. And were there ways that we could help Davidson continue to fulfill what it had been saying it wanted to do and have taken baby steps along the way towards, in terms of making Davidson more inclusive not only for Jewish students, but also for students of a variety of traditions. And, you know, I think if you were to ask me, one of the things I think that is important about the presence of Jewish students at Davidson over the years is that Jewish students have helped Davidson embody more of what it has wanted to be on paper. And Jewish students have done this by simply asking for what is right and appropriate and just and inclusive for themselves, but not only for themselves. I think that because they have spoken up, it has led to a recognition, broadly, that these are things we need for all students and all students of all different religious and spiritual traditions. Probably it even goes beyond that, just to all students. But with regard to religion and spirituality, I would say that because the number of Jewish students...that's been the largest of the underrepresented religious populations on campus, they've had the most forceful voice because of sheer numbers, in part. And I think that's been really healthy for the college to do what it wants to do and sort of be prodded in specific ways to do that. So, I would say that, like, that would be then, one of those boundary lines that I was saying between eras, because I think another era then begins the following year in 2015-16.

DK: Would this be the third or the fourth era?

RS: This is the fourth that I see.

DK: Okay yeah good to hear.

RS: Ok and I think this is when I feel like Hillel becomes a known presence broadly on campus, you know. One of the things that happened that year in the fall, is that Hillel worked with the Chaplain's Office... Rabbi Shields did the bulk of the work on this, and with Temple Kol Tikvah, to host on campus the whole Jewish community from the Lake Norman region for the High Holy Days. And I think that was an important step in developing the connection between the college and the broader Jewish community. So, you know, you had hundreds of people here for the High Holy Days that year. And that was also, like, going off of some of the ideas that had emerged in the Summit but in the spring, that fall Hillel developed the t-shirts, and the stickers and all those things which I think immediately raised visibility as well. And I think it gave... I think... I don't know, maybe I'm ... I'm not right on this, but I would imagine that against some of the Jewish students a sense of like identity and connection, to have their own Davidson image, you know, of the wildcat wearing a yarmulke, you know, I mean that feels very Davidson, and it feels very Jewish, you know.

DK: Shalom y'all!

RS: Yes, Shalom y'all, exactly. So, you know, I think that was an important moment in sort of a sense of, like, Jewishness and Davidsonness are like they're like this, you know. [Note: RS interweaves the fingers of both hands to signal an integration.]

DK: Creating and claiming space. A visual space by wearing a t-shirt.

RS: Exactly. And Dining Services... we've been working with Dining Services for a number of years and they have been just so helpful and positive. But one way in which they really began to really take initiative was to create meals that represented different religious traditions. And so, highlighting meals on Rosh Hashanah, on Hanukkah, and on Passover that year were things that were done through Dining Services that then every student who would go to Commons would participate, enjoy, see the posters and all that, you know. So, it just became part of the, kind of, you know, swimming in the ocean of Davidson, that's part of it was. It wasn't a special Hillel meal, you know, that you had to go to. It was just, this is the college's meal for this ... you know, so I think that was important. And that was also the year that the Chaplain's Office and the Development Office worked together to secure just a really generous gift from the Shapiro family that has generated ongoing funds that will provide both for Hillel and more broadly for Jewish life initiatives in perpetuity. So that was an important step in terms of making sure that there were some funds that weren't contingent on, sort of, ATC or availability from one year to the next, but that were designated specifically for Jewish life.

SS: We received those funds in 2016?

RS: So, I think the funds were received in 2016, and of course we couldn't use any of them for a year, and so it was the following year that they became available. And then, I don't—I can't remember if I mentioned the year...I don't think I did...when, I don't remember off the top of my

head exactly...that Arielle Korman was a ministry fellow, so she had a placement in New York City at a synagogue there, and she had a really terrific experience as a ministry fellow leader... she did that.

DK: Do you know which synagogue?

RS: I would have to look it back up... oh yeah, Romemu.

DK: Oh really?

RS: Yeah.

DK: That's really cute.

RS: Yeah, yep so she had a really good experience doing that and...have y'all talked to Arielle?

DK: She's coming this week.

RS: She is?

DK: I don't know if you know, well, I can talk to you after the interview.

RS: Anyway, you may want to ask her about where she is now and what her ministry fellow experience had to do with that.

DK: Big time.

RS: So then in 2017- 2018, Ava Pomerantz was the third ministry fellow in the Jewish tradition, and amazingly enough, she got to intern with the Rabbi who had been our adjunct Rabbi for one year, Micah Streiffer. Yeah, the one who played the guitar for the family weekend Shabbat service. Well I thought to myself, I think Ava and Micah would get along really well, and sure enough. So, she spent her summer in Toronto interning with him, and they got along really well and that has continued to be an important community for her. And so, while she was there, she and Rabbi Micah worked on creating a Davidson Haggadah. And she did the bulk of the work, and he kind of oversaw and supervised her on doing that, but I think that was an important moment as well that Ava envisioned that and created that, and it was able to be used by Hillel for our Seder last year. I think that was great.

And it was also when an anonymous donor provided significant funding so that we could have the Exploring Our Jewish Identity spring break trip, which of course, as you know, went last year for the first time to Poland and England, and then again, this year and... My hope, we'll see, but my hope is that that continues to give for some of our Jewish students a real opportunity to reflect in ways they may not have before about their identity as a Jewish person and what it means to live that out in contemporary U.S.A.

DK: Have you already seen the upshot of that trip in the students who went last year and the students who went this year in your conversations with them in the way they are involved in Hillel, or even in the way they kind of just, like, live out... you tell me.

RS: Well, I kind of want to turn it back to you and ask you, what did it mean to you?

DK: I'll be giving my own oral history, and I'll definitely be talking about it, but I'd say it was an important part of my being Jewish at Davidson and having an identity that was particular to being here.

RS: This year, I would say that I've spoken to two students that went on this year's trip, and both of them have made it clear to me that it was very important and very formative for them. And at least one of them—who knows how this will play out over the long run—but at least in the short run for this student, it changed their sense of some trajectory in their professional life, that they really want their life work to focus on the Jewish community.

DK: I'd say it ties into some things happening on campus, which kind of brings me to my next question.

RS: Okay.

DK: So as far as... so we've kind-of built this arc of Hillel is now, or at least let's say at the beginning of last semester, so in the fall of 2017-2018, more of community, a more robust kind of cultural apparatus on campus. So, understanding the events of last semester, how did you see your role as Chaplain, and did Jewish students come to you? What exactly...I don't know if I have a really focused question, but from the perspective of the Chaplain's Office, like what, what did you see? And how did different individuals react to a manifestation of a neo-Nazi sentiment on campus?

RS: I have a question for y'all. Should I use people's names or should I leave it more general?

DK: The students who came to you? I think whatever you're comfortable with, I think maybe leave it on the general side.

RS: Well...When the murders took place in Pittsburgh, I was in touch with the leaders of Hillel who, very appropriately, wanted to have a vigil. And I wanted to be as helpful in that process as I could be. And I mean, just in general, I think that's the way that I have often approached these kinds of situations, where I want the students to feel empowered to do what they feel is the right thing to do in response to any kind of tragedy, but I want them to know that they have my support, and I can help them with organizing things, and envisioning things, whatever they want...right. But I really want, you know, I want to, in a sense, take a back seat, because I feel like it's really up to them and what their vision is and their leadership. And so that's how I tried to approach it. And I also offered to speak, which you'll remember that I did speak, and I was really grateful for the opportunity to say something as the Chaplain for the whole college in that setting. And also as a person who comes from the Christian tradition, I wanted to be able to say something out of the Christian tradition that I hope was appropriate within that context, that

those two things make sense. So, one was really as a Chaplain for the college, the other was just as a Christian.

Then, like immediately, we have things written on the board, "Hitler did nothing wrong." And so, two students came to my office, one of whom had been in the classroom where they saw that and... So, we gathered to sort of reflect on, how do they want to respond to this, and what do they hope from the broader college community as well. Because, obviously, this is a violation of our community norms, and it's just a heinous thing to be written. And so, in meeting with those students, I encouraged them to draft something that could be sent out to the broader college community on behalf of Hillel. And I also encouraged the student to whom it had all personally happened, if he wanted to speak with President Quillen, that we could see if she was available. So, I called over to her office, and she was in fact available, and so he went over to speak with her. And between his conversation with her and then the letter drafted by the other student, who was one of the presidents of Hillel, President Quillen then sent out an email to the whole college community articulating how much this violated our norms as a community, and also gave space at the bottom of her email for the statement by Hillel.

Then, of course, a little bit later we have the whole doxxing event and... My immediate response to that was one of just heartbreak and pastoral concern for the Jewish students with whom I'm personally closest. So, I think my first thought was of individual people that I know, and I care about. And so, I contacted those students to let them know that I was thinking of them and that I was thinking of our whole Jewish community here. And then, I was working, and I can't take any credit for this, this is not me, this is Dean McRae, but Dean McRae called together a group of us, myself included, and we strategized ways that we could create spaces for students of the many identities that were upset by the tweets to be able to gather in their respective communities, in order to sort of grieve and feel anger and process what they were going through. And so, my own part of that was to be available for Jewish students and more broadly, to students for whom religious questions mattered as religious questions in this way. And so, I held a couple of different opportunities here in the Oasis for students, and two Jewish students came to the one that was specifically for Jewish students. That was before the one that was kind of broadly open for any students. And so, I spent some time talking to those students individually. And in the meantime, interacted with other individual Jewish students and tried to indicate my support for Hillel. But I didn't seek to take sort of a, like, an in the front primary role, in part because I wasn't sure it was really my place in the context.

DK: That's fair. I mean using that, using the tweets as a jumping-off point, at least thinking about different moments in which Jewish identity is a challenge here, there have been difficulties for the college as a place that prides itself in the particularity of its tradition to ecumenically welcome people in. Can you speak a little bit to... I think we'll talk about the Linden Affair and some of the discourse around that a little later, but specifically some of the things that you've seen in your time here... so everything from, as I mentioned before the homecoming fiasco, to the crosses, to anything else you may have seen.

RS: Yeah, so let me let me just pull up, so I get the order of things right... So, there are two years in which what I'm about to narrate happened, and I can't pick apart in my mind, because it was over 20 years ago, all the details, but in 1994-95 and in 1995-96, students erected crosses on

campus during Holy Week leading up to Easter. And the students that erected those crosses, from my conversations with them, at the time...they wanted to remind their fellow Christian students about the significance of Holy Week within the Christian tradition. This week, in which we as Christians remember Jesus moving through the week towards his death on the cross, and what a somber event that is. And it's the end of a season of Lent, which calls us to a time of repentance and reflection, and then, you know, culminates with the joy of the resurrection of Jesus on Easter. So that's what they understood they were doing, and they did it in a very public place, which was between the residence halls and Chambers. Other students, not only Jewish students, but Jewish students included, but there are other students as well, didn't experience the crosses in that way. It felt very exclusionary, it didn't feel inclusive. I think because of the horrible Christian rhetoric that has been directed towards Jewish people through the ages. It was also experienced in a way that was painful. And I can understand that, and I sympathize with that. And so...negotiating how to move through that was challenging, because on the one hand, I understood the motivation of the students who erected the crosses, and I understood the pain of the Jewish students, and I understood from students who were secular, their sense in which this felt like a very, kind of oppressive, kind of Christian symbol being put in a space that they just didn't expect it, you know, and so it felt offensive.

The second—I'm pretty sure it was the second year that this happened, the other phenomenon was that a group of students, the next day, had overnight erected another cross that was wrapped in flyers from department stores, all about like Easter candy, and they had put little Easter bunnies and Easter eggs, and were making a commentary about the commercialism of Easter. And it was a very striking contrast to see this wooden cross and then to see this kind of frivolous cross beside it. And I think some of the students who had erected the original cross, felt like something very deep and important to them was being trivialized by this, whereas the students who put that up were sort of saying, this is our space too and for a lot of us, you know, Easter is about the Easter bunny and the Easter eggs, and it's not all this religious stuff that you guys assent to.

So, we had a forum later that spring around religion at Davidson and the experiences of people. Yeah it was hard. And I sympathized with the Jewish students, who experienced that whole thing as very difficult. And from all of that, I came away with a sense that there were many students from many different perspectives, who felt like their own motives were misunderstood. And you all gave me some information that I hadn't heard before about how this one student Sarah had had someone tape passages from the New Testament to her locker. I find that really offensive. I don't know who did that. I don't know if it was the students who put up the crosses. But part of me thinks it might not have been because of other things that I have experienced where students who are Christian do certain things to represent their tradition, and then there's response that's not positive, and then other students, not the students who did the original thing, respond in ways that are really inappropriate, but it looks like it's the students who did the original thing. And I've seen it happen more than once, and the dynamics are just...they create these strange dynamics. Human beings are very complex in the way they respond to things...can sometimes be so defensive. And they can use things that are holy and precious in ways that are unholy, you know, and I've seen it happen more than once. And it's not always the same people who started things, who do that.

DK: What was the college's response beyond holding a Summit or a dialogue session?

RS: Part of the reaction was to ask whether this was appropriate or not, you know. And if I'm not mistaken, one of the things that grew out of it was a college policy that students couldn't just erect things anytime they wanted anywhere they wanted. And there had to be permission in order to erect things in public spaces around campus. Ah, this is making me vaguely remember something else. Alright, I'm gonna say this, but I don't know I don't have a clear memory, so you'd have to go back in actually check the facts, but I remember there being... I forget what they were called at that point, but what is today Q&A... at the time they weren't called that it was years ago.

DK: It was like friends of...

RS: I don't remember the name at that point. Anyway, they had erected a display of some kind around LGBTQ issues, and I think one of the responses was, "why can they erect things, but then when students want to erect something religious, they're not allowed to," you know. And so, I think all of that together led to this sense that like there needs to be a process by which people erect public things on campus, you know, and that someone has thought through the implications to the rest of the community and not to say you can't do it, but it's question of where you put it, you know, what does it mean, what does it symbolize, ask more questions as opposed to students just sort of erect things, because they want to erect something.

DK: Can you speak a little to like scheduling at the college and different events, as I kind of mentioned over the Homecoming situation, or even other issues that Jewish students kind of raised for Davidson.

RS: Yeah, I mean there were two years in a row in which there were issues around scheduling the major college events on significant Jewish holy days. One was in 2003-2004. There was a major Patterson Court event that was scheduled during Rosh Hashanah and that same year, there was a major public lecture that was scheduled on Yom Kippur. There was a lot of pain within the Jewish community about both of those. And, you know, one was a social event, one was a lecturer, a kind of more formal event. And one way that the college responded that year was that the Council on Campus and Religious Life, the CCRL, convened to talk about creating a Holy Days calendar that would list on it the major Holy Days of every religious and spiritual tradition represented within the college community. So, it can't represent every holiday of every tradition, that would just be way too many, but... So part of what we ended up having to work out, to figure out, was like, how to identify those dates, those occasions that should be on this, and then how do we help members of the college community pay attention to that when they're scheduling things?

DK: Something that a faculty member raised with us was you can't have Rosh Hashanah and Tisha B'Av on the same calendar and not explain the difference between them; one is a minor a relatively minor holiday, one is perhaps one of the most major holidays in the Jewish tradition, so how did you go about also making that...did you go about making that an educational tool as well?

RS: So, I worked, yeah, I worked with others, initially creating it. And...and you can go on now online and see it. The way we've structured it is that I worked with students and some faculty from a variety of different traditions, and together we identified what would count as the "major" Holy Days. And we also had to explain for people things like, you know, a Jewish day begins at sunset, right. A Muslim day begins at sunset. And so, like, that looks different than...in terms of how they count things... so we had to explain all that. So, we had to figure out how to put all of that in a tidy fashion, in an accessible fashion, right. And we had to distinguish between those holy days when people in that tradition would ordinarily not go to school or work, and holy days in that tradition when they would continue. So, Hanukkah, for example. Americans [in general] think Hanukkah is this big deal in Judaism, and it's not. But we wanted it on the calendar, in part, because there probably would be some kind of celebration on Hanukkah, and if it wasn't there people would wonder why didn't they include Hanukkah...So we had to make something that would also distinguish between those days that people would actually take off, because they are so holy, and those days that matter, but that are not like of supreme importance like that. So, we try to do all of that and consistently we always say if there's a holiday that's not here that you think it should be, let Rob Spach know so that it can be added. And so, like even this year, I've had a student contact me saying I definitely want this added, because in my like...their sub tradition of their tradition... it's, like, a very holy day. So, it's gonna be added for the calendar, you know, we produce next year.

So, the calendar thing took a couple of years for us to kind of figure out, and work out, but we've done it now and we have it so that every year, it's three years out, so that people can plan ahead. And I get emails not infrequently from various offices around campus saying, now I see this falls during Ramadan, is there problem for me to hold this? I'm like, well you know, Ramadan is a month, so like you're not expected to avoid the whole month, but you should certainly avoid these days at the end of Ramadan, you know, ... you don't think through that kind of thing. So, the college community, at least the staff, are much more attuned to the importance of paying attention to the calendar and avoiding important Holy Days in different traditions and so yeah. And that's clear to me by the emails I get.

The other thing that happened was the next year, the next year, right after we'd had all this conversation, Homecoming was scheduled on Yom Kippur. And that, I think in part because it was a second year in a row, I felt like it caused even more upset. People were really angry. It felt like a slap in the face. The first one felt like they just overlooked it, but it's not nice, but like okay. But this was the very next year. I remember having one conversation with a student, a Jewish student, who just, she said, "I'm leaving Davidson, you know, this just shows me how little this school takes regard for my tradition." So among other things that year—we have a Religious Life Council that is composed of student leaders of all the religious student organizations—and that year the council as a whole, which included, you know, I mean you had everything from, like, very conservative evangelical Christian students, to Muslim students, Jewish students, mainline [Protestant] students. We all agreed on the letter to the President saying, we have got to be better as an institution about not scheduling major events on the holy days of any religious tradition...And I do think things have improved considerably since then. They're not perfect, but they're a lot better. People are much more conscious that this is something to pay attention to.

DK: Kind of like institutional regard for other traditions right, so we talk calendar all that good stuff and what it means to respect a tradition, I mean as far as just like college policy goes, we saw you at the panel that Dr. Linden did earlier this year, and there's been perhaps a little more conversation because of his presence on campus about the school's affiliation, if you will, with the Presbyterian Church and even the mandate that the President be a member of DCPC.

RS: Affiliate.

DK: Affiliated, sorry.

RS: Not be a member, it's very important.

DK: Affiliated...I think you've spoken and written on the college's church relatedness over the years. You wrote an Op-Ed while you were a student about it... has your thinking changed as far as the College bylaws go? How do you conceptualize the bylaws?

RS: I really regret that I can't answer that in two minutes. It's a long, very measured answer that I'd want to give.

SS: Definitely, we can also just ask what it was like to have Linden back on campus.

RS: Yeah, and I'm happy to give an answer from my own personal perspective, but I'm not sure that this is that helpful, that answer, in that for many years, I knew nothing of the Linden Affair when I first came here. It was something I learned about sort-of later on. So, it was not sort-of something talked about widely when I came as Chaplain. And I never heard about it when I was a student. So, I appreciated his being back on campus, and I appreciated the, sort of, thoughtfulness with which he made his own remarks. I knew Sam Spencer, and Sam Spencer was a stand-up person. He had to deal with many very difficult situations over the course of his years as President of Davidson, and he did it with a great deal of dignity. And he himself, his own inner compass was geared towards inclusiveness. He also had responsibilities to the bylaws of the institution that he was obligated to uphold. And the whole situation with Dr. Linden was a situation that I think prodded this institution to take a look at bylaws that had developed over the years and question whether they fit the institution at the time. And one of the things, I think I said it to you, Dahlia, when we spoke earlier... I think...this is my personal opinion... I think all the bylaws are, if you look historically, they're all put in place at some point for political reasons. And at the time they're put into place, they work as a political resolution to things. But as time passes, circumstances change, and they become problematic, and they need to be revisited. And the reasons they were put there in the first place are not altogether bad, because political solutions are not altogether bad, they're attempts to reach compromises about things that then we can keep moving. But when they get outdated, they can become very problematic, and they need to be revisited. And I think that's the way traditions in general are. I mean that's part of what it means to be in a tradition, you know, and so I think it was an important thing that the community of Davidson responded to what happened around the...what was called The Linden Affair at the time, because it led to changes that brought us towards what we wanted to be as a community and as an institution that we hadn't been. And then you can see things later on, call for further change, right, and it's this ongoing evolution.