

- Annie, thank you so much for agreeing to be interviewed. If we could start with some background information, first could you say your full name?

- Yes, Annie Wu, W-U, King, K-I-N-G.

- Thank you very much and Annie, are you lay or clergy?

- I'm an elder.

- Okay, in the Presbyterian Church USA, right?

- Correct.

- Good, and could you say a little bit about when and where you were born?

- I was born in 1933 in Nanchang, Jiangxi Province, China.

- Oh my goodness, that is really interesting. Where did you go to school, graduate or divinity school, college, any of those?

- I never completed high school because I was in the Shanghai American School that closed during the change in government, but I was accepted at the University of Pennsylvania and I majored in what was called Oriental Studies. I took it as a B.A. but that was actually a Master's course. Then in the University of Louisville, in Kentucky, I got my Master's in social work and went on to become a licensed clinical social worker.

- Oh, fascinating, thank you so much. Could you talk about what work or ministry you were doing at the time of Re-Imagining, that was 1993.

- I had been invited by Mary Ann Lundy to apply when she was the director of what was called the Women's Ministry Unit. I was asked to apply for the associate director so I was holding that job, I was associate director from 1989, and that meant coordinating staff and the senates around the country and also managing the budget, which had to do with Re-Imagining, as you can imagine. Then when Mary Ann Lundy left in July of 1993, to take a different position in the building, I became the interim. The whole organization was changing names and changing structure, so I was called the Interim Associate Director, which was still the head of the women's ministries.

- Okay, that is very helpful. You were also coordinator of staff and senate, is that correct?

- That's correct. When I began, we had 14, 15, 16 staff all around the country because we believed in getting the woman in the pew involved in women's ministries so we wanted staff close to them.

- Okay, well that's interesting, great. And what work or ministry did you do after Re-Imagining, Annie?

- I continued, we did hire another associate director, but I continued as coordinator of staff and left there, and I left the building, I was quote "downsized" in 2002, when they had a shortfall of (mumbles) and money. Lots of people were let go at that time.

- Okay, and Annie, how and when did you first become aware of feminist theology?

- Ha ha, that's a funny question, I'm sorry, it's not funny. After I finished my University of Pennsylvania work, my husband, Doug King and I went to Indonesia to teach in the university. While we were there, a good friend of mine, Polly Johnson, was sending me some books on feminist theology. I have to admit that I was so busy that I didn't read much of them and at the time, my efforts were in teaching at the university. But that's when I first became aware of it.

- Oh, interesting. How did your interest in it grow then eventually?

- When I came back to the states to work and I was working in Louisville, Kentucky, I was working with an assisted living place which is a program for people with disabilities. We worked with people who had disabilities and were trying to become more independent and live on their own. I was working there but had no pension, I was past 50 years old, the salary at that time was about \$16,000. One day, Mary Ann Lundy called me and said, "Do you know that I have a position open for an associate director?" And I thought, what does that require? She said, "You have to coordinate the staff and the senate and you have to do the budget." And I said, "Budget, I don't know anything about a budget." I never had any money. (interviewer laughing) She said, "Oh, that's the easy part." So that's when I did apply and I did get the position and was working at Presbyterian headquarters from 1998 on until 2002. Gradually Mary Ann, of course, was very much involved in Re-Imagining and would talk with me about it, but before that, our own women's ministry committees, which was made up of people from around the country, it was like a board. They as well as some of the staff, we were talking about having a conference of women from around the country and maybe the world but we didn't have any money for that sort of thing. When the Interfaith group in Minneapolis started talking about Re-Imagining, that was really exciting to us. Of course Mary Ann was one of the prime movers of that.

- So how did you know Mary Ann Lundy?

- I had met her earlier, before I got the job, in Justice for Women, that was a women's ministry, but at a Justice for Women social gathering. I had talked with her and met her just as a friend, so she knew about me and that's the way I got to know her.

- Oh, nice, okay. So you were involved in women's ministry at the time that Re-Imagining was being

planned. Do you have any memories about how that evolved, the planning involved and the idea?

- I don't have any memories of the ins and outs of all that, but because Mary Ann would go to planning meetings in Minneapolis and so on, she'd come back and she would talk to me about what they were hoping to do. What especially interested me was that they were planning to have women theologians from around the world. To me, that just struck home because my father was Chinese, my mother was an American from Philadelphia, she had gone in as a nurse, so the international part of it was very exciting to me. The other thing was that Mary Ann and I had discussed did we have any money to contribute to a Re-Imagining budget. Of course, that's the issue that became such a hot issue at Re-Imagining but Mary Ann was very knowledgeable about her budget and, of course I had to be too, so she said, "Well, such and such a fund," and I said, "Oh yeah, that's good," 'cause that was for education and so on, so that's where we got our, I think around \$66,000.

- Exactly, yes, that's right. Annie, did you have a chance to attend the Re-Imagining conference?

- Oh yeah, in fact, of course Mary Ann left the position in women's ministries like I said, in July of 1993. She and I were always in touch though because she was still in the building and she was doing another job. At that time, the Presbyterian church was sort of restructuring and that was part of her job under Jim Brown, and the top office, so we had to discuss about how we were going to deal with the staff and the senates and how could we still serve the women in the pew but change job positions and so on. We talked a lot about that and Re-Imagining. My question to Mary Ann at that time, just to get her advice, was, I said, "I believe this is the first time "our staff can get to hear so many women "from around the world, women theologians, "and around the country in fact." I said, "I would like to have all of our staff "and all the associates and so on, "go to the conference." She said, "Of course." We did decide that I would ask all the staff to go, they could use their travel budget, they didn't have to pay for the travel there because this would be an educational thing and helpful to the women in the church when they went back to their own homes. So that's how we started working on that. I did tell all the staff, all of the exempt staff, that they could go and they all went.

- They all went and Annie, just to clarify, was this staff in the women's division that went?

- Yeah, I'm talking about the staff in the women's unit as the women's program area, yes. I meant nothing to do with the rest of the staff.

- Sure and, Annie I know it's been a long time, but what are your memories of the Re-Imagining Conference?

- Oh, you don't want to get in ... Well, actually, I have many memories. I don't know how much you want, but the thing that I personally exhibit or felt, when I went into the first session, went into the big room where we had the (mumbles), I was overwhelmed. Partly because I had not experienced a lot of big conferences. Coming back from China, not after the Cultural Revolution, but coming from China to Hong Kong, I was a refuge in Hong Kong and then from Hong Kong to the states, I didn't have a lot of opportunity like some women did, to go to this conference and that conference. I was a little bit hesitant and apprehensive that I

wouldn't know what to do or how to relate to all these women so I was overwhelmed. It was so different, when I walked into that first room, here there were tables that we were assigned to and I didn't know anybody. I wasn't sitting with any of my friends and I didn't even know the stage was. The stage was, of course, in the center of what's a circle and so, it was just a little bit overwhelming. I wasn't sure ... Are you there?

- Oh yes, I am, listening.

- Okay, I wasn't sure whether I would be able to participate correctly in other words. That was something that came to me at the beginning. Then, when I heard the different speakers, that was something that was important, the stage, which was in the center of the circle, the speakers would move around. There were different presenters, different song leaders and no one seemed to be the big shot. Everybody had a role and everybody in that plenary room was equal. That began to make a difference to me. I'm getting off a little bit but part of what happened to me, personally, when I was rather apprehensive and things that I hadn't heard before from different theologians. Some things, I thought oh that's crazy, I can't be that, and then I started questioning myself. The thing that helped me, there were a couple of things and very briefly, experiences. One was when I went back to China to my family after the Cultural Revolution. My father died and I went back for the Easter service, one of the first Easter services after the churches were reopened and the church was packed. I admitted that the churches had been closed, so I asked a former pastor of mine, "Where did all these people come from? "They don't know anything about Christianity. "It's not like you had church members." No, we weren't preaching, we weren't allowed to preach but we had Christians and they learned and then they were working in the factories and everywhere, and this pastor said to me, "Other people, "non-Christians, saw these people, and there "in this Cultural Revolution especially, when people "were afraid to do anything or say anything, "these Christians would show concern about their "colleagues, their coworkers. "They had a different way of relating to others, "a caring, a loving way so people would wonder, "what is this, what's different with these people "called Christians." When the churches were opened, they started to go with the Christians to the church to see what it was all about. To me, it was okay, Annie, you don't know in your rigid, traditional way of seeing God, you don't know how God works. God works in all sorts of ways. So when I was at Re-Imagining, I felt it all so some of these theologies that I wasn't comfortable with, I said, "I can't write them off, nor can I "write myself off. "I can listen, and learn, and take what I can." So that experience in China, then the second experience was in Indonesia when we were serving there. We were there during the 1965 coup d'etat and many thousands of people were killed. Many people were accused of being communists. Actually some were, some weren't, but they were put in prison so there were thousands of people in prison. Then I heard that some of the churches, the little churches in the villages felt sorry for the people in prison because nobody was really taking care of them, so they would walk miles and miles and take food and clothing to the prisoners at their own expense and at the possibility that they would be accused of being communists. I thought, here, again, was a community where God was working and I didn't understand it. These things helped me to feel more at ease with the different theologies and, especially when the women would talk about the conditions in their own countries and in their villages, the poverty, the situations. That just rang a bell and I felt so good about it. Sorry, I keep babbling on.

- No, Annie, you have had an amazing life and those were really important experiences that related to Re-

Imagining. Thank you for sharing that. I was wondering if you have memories of what particularly bothered you at the presentations? Let's start with that, do you remember anything in particular?

- Well, partly, I'm not a theologian, that wasn't my field. I did take some theology courses at the University of Pennsylvania but that really wasn't my strong point. I just remember some of the statements of, I think it was Delores Williams talking about we don't need someone hanging on a cross leading sort of thing. I thought, well what does that mean? I was brought up believing that Christ was crucified and it was just uncomfortable, I should say. Some of the paintings, her drawings were just things that I was not used to. But, again, I gradually was able to say, "Okay, I do not have to accept everything that I hear. They weren't the same anyway, people were not on the same page, which of course made that a beautiful situation because they all learned different things. I also did not have to just throw out all that I had believed before because when I was a teenager in China, this was after the government changed to the People's Republic, I had wanted to become a pastor. I walked with my Chinese pastor there, and I said, "I want to study theology." Of course, my Chinese really wasn't good enough to do it in China and he suggested I go to Trinity College or Seminary in Singapore I think it was, or (mumbles) in New York. I later found out he was a communist but he was very knowledgeable with me and he was a good pastor. There were things that I had really believed in strongly, and some of these were being challenged. Some of them I've let go. I can't really remember just exactly how to tell you about that.

- Annie, what made you not become a minister?

- A couple of things, one is that I didn't have any money. My father was a top tuberculosis doctor in China but he was on a regular salary so we had very little money. I couldn't get out, I was a Chinese citizen and leaving was difficult so I just never did. Then when I finally did come out, I was a refugee, I had no passport and I had to wait until the U.S. government gave me a special passport because I had friends who were trying to solicit their senators to let me come into the states because my mother was an American citizen. You see, at that time, when I was born in 1933, if the mother was an American citizen and living and the child was born in a different country, that child could not have dual citizenship. If the father was American, then I could have had dual citizenship. When my brother was born two years later, and, again, this is the woman thing, women don't count. When my brother was born two years later, he could have had dual citizenship because the law had changed in the states. So coming out was not easy, coming out of China. Then by the time I got my refugee and came to the states, things had changed and I just didn't get it. I didn't go forward with that.

- Oh Annie, that's amazing. Before you move on to the backlash, I did want to ask if you had anything, you mentioned that you really appreciated the women from other countries talking about the situation of women there. Is there anything else that you recall about the conference that you found inspiring or helpful?

- Yeah, I think that maybe for the first time, I really can't say, but I felt affirmed. I felt, I am all right as a woman. I am all right as a disabled woman. I had polio when I was eight months old. Because there were people there, men and women, who were disabled and that was affirmed. It wasn't horrible, it wasn't a

handicap. As for my sexual orientation, I felt I was married, I had been married for 23 years and then we were divorced but we were still good friends. So all of that was affirmed there at the conference. For the first time, I felt safe and accepted as a woman and who I was, which sort of ties into the background, and maybe I shouldn't get into that, you know the backlash afterwards?

- Oh yes, I did want to hear about that. Please, tell me.

- When I was at the conference, we went to the Presbyterian church, those of us who were Presbyterian, went to the Presbyterian Church first for something or other, and I had put my backpack with all my cash and everything under a coat hanging in the lobby or someplace. It was stolen, so I had no cash, no credit cards, no identity, no tickets, nothin'.

- Oh Annie.

- Of course, I had friends who helped me out. When I got back to Louisville and started getting, I had to field some of the calls. The calls were really not very personal against me, except I was in the top person in women's ministries, and women's ministries was attacked and I was the person who told the staff to go to the conference and I was the person who was the budget person who gave the money. But I knew that they were really after Mary Ann Lundy. I felt so demeaned and so put down and the loss of what I had gained at the conference, so I was just comparing this in a piece that I had given in July of 1994, Presbyterian women had a gathering every year or every few years and I was asked to do a forum on the Imagining, so I had written a paper which I happened to find, and some of what I've been telling you reminded me of some of the things that I had written there. The loss of my money, the loss of my credit card, the loss of everything else was nothing compared to the attack that I felt upon women, and especially women's ministries and part of it personally. I had lost money, that didn't matter. But losing what I had been feeling at the conference and being demeaned because I believed and enjoyed and appreciated the conference was a much greater loss.

- Oh, Annie. Before I forget, if you do find a copy of that, if you would be willing to send it to me, I would really appreciate it.

- Sure, okay, I can do that.

- Yeah, it sounds very powerful. When you said it demeaned, I don't know how much you want to go into detail, but what was sort of the tenor of the attacks against the women's division? How would you describe it?

- It wasn't always from the laymen and if you are familiar with it, it is the organization, the laymen, and of course they attacked us. And especially later on, attacked our young women.

- You mean in the college group, the network of Presbyterian women, college women?

- The Presbyterian college women, not so much the (mumbles) women, the older ... We had different parts of the women and women's ministries. We had one program with Presbyterian women, that's the traditional women's group. We had women employed by the church, those were the clergy, women in the states and the secretaries and anybody else. We had women of color and that program, of course, was for women of color especially and then we had the advocacy program. So we've got the four programs, but then we also help support a young woman in the U.N. office, and we also had a growing college women network of amazing young women, some of who have gone on to do great things. Of course in the later years, when I was still there, they attacked the young women especially, and the young women's network was put under, I can't remember how they said it, but they were going to inspect or supervise and see what was going on with them. Of course, later on that was thrown out, there was nothing there. Of course, for women's ministries, the staff there was, what was so demeaning was that they discounted anything that we had heard or learned or felt at the conference. The detractors were never there themselves, they never experience it. But I think many of them, they were not all men. Part of it is, maybe a threat to the male dominance in the church all these years. I think that's a part of it, but the other part was, there were women too, and it's scary when your own traditions or your own beliefs are challenged. Re-Imagining challenged some of those beliefs just as I challenged them myself. Of course, the other issue which was personal for me, was women's ministry gave \$60-some thousand dollars to this terrible conference. It was one of the biggest gifts and what sort of undermining of the church were they doing by giving this money? Although that was not my decision alone, that was Mary Ann and I. That also hurt because time and time again, even the people in our own building would say, "Oh, now we're losing our church members. "Now we are losing our giving because the giving "goes to such horrible conferences as Re-Imagining." For all the things that were happening in the Presbyterian church, it seemed to be all caused by one of the (mumbles). We're so powerful, you know. (interviewer laughing)

- Annie, earlier you mentioned they were really going after Mary Ann Lundy, why was that? Why were they going after her?

- Partly, she and Sally Hill were good friends and they were probably the strongest initiator of the conference. Mary Ann had always been very outspoken about things and the church, but she worked well in trying to help the Presbyterian church but I don't know whether there were other reasons why. But, because Mary Ann was one of the leaders in the Re-Imagining conference, so they would go after her. I mean, I was really a nobody, but I was an accomplice. (ladies laughing) It wasn't that they were going after Annie Wu or anything like that, it was more just what the women's ministry sat down and and I participated. And, of course, I was the one. When they made phone calls, I would have to take the phone calls until we had a new director, associate director. The phone calls, I would have to listen to their, "How could you do this, how can you use people to be "the witch hunt and this sort of witch stuff." It was just degrading and when they asked why did I send the staff there, I said, "Because for the first time, "we could all hear women from around the world." When can you have that opportunity? To me that was the biggest thing, not that we all agreed with all the theology, but we could learn and we could hear about women, how they've suffered in some other countries and what the church should do and what Christians should do.

- Annie, you obviously stayed. Did you ever feel as if your position was threatened, that you were in danger

of being fired or losing your position?

- Not for Re-Imagining.

- Good, good, good. Did your involvement in Re-Imagining change your perspective on feminist theology and/or the church?

- Oh yeah, sure, and in some of the local things, like at the Louisville Seminary, we had a women's group. They have a women's center but we had a women's group made of other people more from the feminist perspective and I was involved in that, just helping to plan and so on.

- I'm sorry, was that before or after Re-Imagining?

- Oh, after. After.

- Did your experience at Re-Imagining lead you to do that? Was it related to Re-Imagining?

- Yeah, I think my whole perspective of women in the church changed. Women as women, what does it mean, created in the image of God? What does all that mean and what does that mean as a person? I think I grew up in a traditional but not conservative church. When I lived in China, because I was born there, didn't last because the Japanese were coming closer and closer to where my father and mother were working. When I was four in 1937, I was brought back to the states for surgery and during the war, I was separated from my father for seven years 'cause he stayed to help the hospitals move inland. Then he came to the states and had a couple of fellowships and was working in the states. As soon as the war was over in '46, we went back to a devastated Shanghai, it was pretty bad. I think the church there was an ecumenical church that I attended and at first it was in English. It was community church in Shanghai and I was very active as a leader there. Then it changed of course, after the revolution in 1949, the church changed to a Chinese church in Chinese language, but it was a very, what should I say, traditional church. That's the way I grew up. And then when I was back in the states, that meant I had to find a church at that time at the University of Pennsylvania. I belonged to a Methodist church which my grandfather helped build as per a Methodist church in Philadelphia. My mother was from Philadelphia. In fact, I helped the pastor there. Again, it wasn't really conservative, but it was rather traditional and so going to Re-Imagining later on, and this was after being in Indonesia and all that, things just sort of clicked for me as to what these women, these feminist women theologians were talking about. It resonated with some of my experiences in the People's Republic of China, in Hong Kong and the refuge situation and in Indonesia, living in central Java and during the coup d'etat so all of these things resonated with me, which made me come to believe differently about the church, and what the church was about, and what the church should be doing and, also, what my place in the church would be. Some of that hasn't changed.

- Annie, this is fascinating. Could you just tell me briefly what resonated with you and how did it change your view of the church? This is really interesting.

- I changed the whole concept of what the church should be about. Not just preaching, but the actions of the church, and how the church should be serving the poor. How the church should be accepting those who were excluded before. When I was at the University of Pennsylvania, no, no, this was still in Shanghai. A young man that I knew, because I was a leader of the college people, the youth. A young man came to my home, he was visiting me, and I said, "Robert, you haven't been coming recently." He said, "I can't." I said, "Why can't you?" He said, "I don't have good clothes." That hurt, the fact that he thought he couldn't come because he didn't have the right clothes.

- Yes, yeah.

- These things that the women talked about, that people who are marginalized belong to the church. We were preached about this, but to actually see them doing things, again, the actions, the living of the Word is more powerful. That's what I saw in communist China after the Cultural Revolution, that's what I saw in Indonesia after the coup d'etat and what I heard from these women theologians.

- Oh Annie, that's really powerful. I just have a couple more questions. This has been wonderful. When you look back on it, Annie, what do you think is the greatest legacy of Re-Imagining?

- What was what?

- Oh, the greatest legacy, yes.

- Hopefully, just what it meant to me, hopefully it's true for a lot of women. However, I must say like with the Presbyterian church, we have lost that. I stayed until 2002, when I was downsized. I knew I was going to be downsized because actually I was older, I could get a pension, I had a higher salary because I'd been there longer in various positions. I saw the change starting and then, when I heard from my friends they eliminated the staff in the synods, they did this, they did that and the people in charge were not speaking with the love and the compassion and the concern for women, "Oh, we've been through that, that's nothing, "we don't need to worry about that." That just hurts. I have, quite honestly, disconnected from a lot of that. I do not know what's going on except for a few things in the Presbyterian church. My friends that I knew have disconnected, and I think the legacy is in the hearts of some of the people who continue. I did not go to any of the other conferences afterwards, partly because I didn't have the money or the time, and traveling was more difficult for me because of my disability. So I never did go, but we're (mumbles) now and maybe in some communities, maybe in Minneapolis, there are still groups of people who hold on to that. Hopefully, in the hearts of many of the participants, it did make a difference, hopefully.

- Annie, I just want to make sure I understand. Would you say you've disconnected from the church, would it be largely because of a lack of attention to women and women's issues, is that a fair statement or is that not correct?

- Yeah, I think that's pretty fair, for me anyway. You know, there's a Presbyterian women, but they're a separate group now, they, themselves are not under the church structure. I mean, they're related, but

they're not part of what we used to have as the unit. There's no real women's ministry unit, partly it's because of financial things and partly it's because of the leadership in the last 10 years. I don't think women's issues have gone away. (laughter) I still think in our society, although women have different positions in many situations, we still have problems and the church, the theology of the church and some of what I've heard or what I heard before, it's just not quite sitting well with me always. Social justice issues, we were working really hard on such things. I was helping, I was staffing the church on Violence Against Women seminars and preaching. How do you preach about violence against women? I don't hear that now. I may just be so far out that it doesn't, you know. It's not that I've lost my faith, it's, I don't know. The institution has really disappointed me.

- Yes, yeah, so where do you think Re-Imagining, and I mean that in the broadest sense, Re-Imagining is happening? Do you think that kind of thing is happening? If it's not happening in the institutional church, do you think it's happening anywhere else or not?

- I don't have any facts but I suspect it has. Since it's here in southern California, we have what we call the feminists network, Feminists Agenda Network. This was a small group, leaders, I mean leaders and many planners, for women in this area. We have programs every year or so about the conditions of women, the trafficking and other such things. For instance that group was inspired by feminist theology. We have finally given up having programs. Since the last two years, we didn't have but I was very active in helping support that and arrange that and so on. It turned out that most of the women that came, and they would probably be about 40, 50, maybe 60 at the best, it turned out that these women were coming together because they were coming together with their sisters, if you know what I mean. They needed that nourishment. They were already knowledgeable about the programs. We had one on sexuality, we had one on trafficking, we had, I can't remember them all, but we needed to get together. I think that's where you see probably the Re-Imagining communities around the country. Probably, you look up a place, there are other such groups.

- Yes, yeah. I have one last very specific question that you may or may not be able to answer. As you know, Re-Imagining has reincorporated and we're developing a website. I'm wondering if you had ideas about what would be helpful to have on the website, or who might be interested in it.

- Is the website up?

- No, it's not up, it'll be up probably, we're aiming for the end of the summer. We're working on developing it.

- Well, I don't know, speaking for myself, in fact, when there was something mentioned about a website so I went into my computer to look at the Re-Imagining things, and just reading something from a layman that we do still have resources about Re-Imagining, also some things even in Wikipedia, who was there, or what, I just felt renewed again looking at that. I think what would be helpful to somebody like me is to know about what's going on around the country, what's happening and what does this mean to women. I don't know but whether people have any faith in the institutional churches. I know that some churches are very supportive and good. I'm not talking about the individual congregations, but the institution. Maybe there

are things like that, that could be helpful.

- That sounds really good, great. Annie, is there anything else that you'd want to add that we haven't discussed? (ladies laugh)

- I think I'd better just shut up.

- Annie, this was wonderful, really, really helpful and interesting. You've had an amazing life and your reflections were really, really interesting.

- Well, thank you, okay.

- Good, I'm going to turn off the recording now, so if you'll just give me one second to do that.