

- All right. We are now recording. Mary Ann, thank you so much for taking the time to talk to me. And if you could just start with your name.

- My name is Mary Ann Weese, W-E-E-S-E, Lundy, L-U-N-D-Y.

- Thank you very much. Are you lay or clergy?

- I'm lay, but I'm a graduate of Union Theological Seminary, with a Masters of Divinity, Union Seminary in New York City.

- Yes.

- And my degree was in 1957 when there were very few women there.

- Yes, that's amazing. I just have to ask, what led you to go to Union in that year?

- (laughs) What led me to go to seminary? A graduate of West Virginia University, and nobody in my family ever went to seminary. They were Presbyterians. My father was a Presbyterian elder and took that very seriously. But when I finished college, I said I had this, I had, during my junior year, decided I wanted to go to seminary and began to look at seminaries. Everybody thought I would go to Princeton, that's where everybody went, and McCormack offered me a scholarship. I got to know about Union. Some students came through from Union and convinced me that I ought to be going to Union, so I really, really had decided. I turned everything down by then, I wanted to go to Union. That was it.

- Wow!

- But then I wasn't sure I could get in, 'cause I had had one religion course in college. We didn't have a religion department, so it was a little iffy there for a while. And I always have had the feeling somebody, some other woman, there were five of us in our graduating class, 65 men and five women. Phyllis Tribble was my roommate, That gives you some idea.

- (gasps) Really?

- Vince Harrison was one of my good friends. And then other (mumbles). So we were a stalwart group, but still, we were very small.

- Wow, I just have to ask, Mary Ann, first of all, what led you to think about seminary? What were you going to seminary for?

- Well, this is very interesting. It wasn't the church so much as, I was a part of the student YWCA. The student YWCA in the 50's was on about 50 campuses. And they was the Women's Leadership body. I had joined it as a student. And then, the kind of social justice issues that we were dealing with, we're dealing with women's leadership roles, and had 400 members in our student Y on Wednesday evenings. I mean, it was really very, very effective, student YM was, too. So I was convinced I wanted to be a lay person in ministry, and in campus ministry. So that was why. And I wanted to do it ecumenically. I was already very much convinced about that. So that led me to Union. If I didn't get in Union, I wasn't going anywhere else.

- Really?

- Yeah, I was pretty crazy. And my parents were just very concerned. They thought any seminary was a very conservative place, and they were really concerned that I'd come home kind of wacky. (both laugh) They said to me, "If you come home on Christmas, "and you're really over the hill, "please can we say you won't go back?" And so I said, "Sure." (both laugh) They had no idea what the state of Union was.

- Wow. Oh Mary Ann, that is wonderful. (laughs)

- Little crazy.

- Yeah, yeah.

- I have to say I had a distant aunt who was a fundamentalist minister in Peoria, Illinois. That was on my father's side, so he had some reason to think, maybe, I might come home a little goofy. He was concerned about that.

- So just to clarify, when he was afraid of you being wacky or goofy, he was afraid of you becoming fundamentalist?

- Yeah, uh-huh, yeah.

- My goodness.

- She would come to visit us, and she'd sit on our front porch, and my bother and I would be coming back from school, we could hear her a block away. She talked about her love coach, and she drove a Chrysler Imperial and wore a big hat, and had a church, her own church. Aunt Arlena was some character. So I think my father thought, "Uh-oh, "she may end up being like Aunt Arlena." (both laugh)

- What was her name again?

- Weese, W-E-E-S-E.

- Okay. Oh, I love that, that's great.

- My father was a teacher. All my family were educators. Public school teachers, pre-Revolutionary War. They all were teachers.

- Wow. What--

- That was--

- Go ahead.

- That was thought to be okay, be a teacher.

- Right, not seminary. What was your experience at Union like, Mary Ann?

- Well, since Phyllis Tribble was my roommate, we had a great time. I mean, it was hard. It was extremely hard for me. But I was also, I just felt like it was the most exciting, interesting, incredible time that I could ever have thought it to be. Every day was just so exciting. Niebuhr was still there, so we studied ethics with Niebuhr. Doctor Meilenberg, so I was very, along with Phyllis, absolutely committed to biblical studies. They used to talk about, our classmates would say, Phyllis was the student and I was the people person. (mumbles) Beverly Harris theories. (both laugh) He'd say, "No, you can study, you're good with," anyway. It was fun. This is getting a little out of hand here, I think.

- Oh, it is. But it's really important, it's really good. What work or ministry were you doing at the time of Re-imagining?

- After I was in campus ministry in several places, then we were at the University of Idaho, the University of Illinois. Then I was with the national YWCA for five years. I was the Director of National Student YWCA, commuting to Minneapolis, where my family, my husband was a minister. Then the Presbyterian church was reorganizing, I guess is the way to say it. The South and the Northern streams had been separated at the Civil War. When they came back together, they hired new staff persons for the new structure. I had applied to be director of the women's ministry unit. I had done a lot of work in the church, chairing taskforces et cetera. This made, in a sense, I'd been on national committees, the Council on Women in the Church. So I applied. There were nine positions for the leadership of the church. I was hired for the women's position, the director of the women's unit. We had four groups, women employed by the church, women of color, justice for women, and Presbyterian women, which was the traditional group. This unit brought all of them together. That was what put me on a national stage in terms of women's issues and women in the church.

- Before we move on to Re-imagining with your role to that, which was absolutely crucial, could you talk about when and how you became aware of feminist theology?

- Oh, yeah, well, I think it was as much through the YWCA as it was through the church. You know, the Y doesn't get the credit for being an incredibly important religious lay body. So a lot of the reading I had done,

a lot of the work in terms of social justice, had been through the Y. The term "feminist theology," when we had been at the University of Idaho, I had led a group of women studying Betty Friedan and *The Feminist Mystique*. Those conversations, and then being on taskforces for women within the Presbyterian church, working on issues of ordination and placement for women, I was also of the General Assembly in 1956, when the Presbyterian church voted in General Assembly to ordain women the first time as clergy. They had ordained women as lay leadership from the '30s. Actually, that General Assembly was in Minneapolis, St. Paul, interestingly enough. Part of it, my commitment was very strong to the nature of social justice, and then moving that into racial justice and feminist theology and feminist studies. Yeah, by the time I took the job for the Presbyterian church, I'd been pretty much involved in regional and national taskforces on women in the church.

- Great, thank you. Well, that brings us to, you were absolutely crucial in the formation of the Re-imagining Conference. Could you say, talk about how that happened?

- Yeah, it happened when we got involved with the Ecumenical Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women, which had been set up by the World Council of Churches in 1988, trying to bring a realization to the churches of feminist theology, of the place of women, and to make that more crucial, really, with churches worldwide. That committee was set up, we as Presbyterian women knew that we needed to be an important part of that, particularly since the Presbyterian church had sort of been a theological backbone, the reform churches had been, of the World Council of Churches and the ecumenical movement. So we started to look at what could we do, what were we as women who were Presbyterian and reform, what could be our place? What could be our best contribution? Right away, we said, "Theology!" That's always-- (interviewer chuckles) So, what could we do that would be unique, that would be a gift to the church? We were just moving from the old structure as the United Presbyterian Church into the Presbyterian Church USA. The former staff were still there, Aurelia True-lay, (mumbles) Virginia's details and I met in an office. We were still in New York. We hadn't gone to Louisville yet. One afternoon, I called them together and said, "We need to decide, what could we do "that would really be wonderful for the ecum-?" And they knew about the Decade, but none of us had worked on it. This must have been 1988. Yeah. We came up with this idea of the theological colloquium. We wrote up a proposal. We were in the midst of a bicentennial campaign to raise capital funds for the church. We submitted that. I wrote the proposal, we went over and over it, I submitted it, and it was accepted. There were a number of, I think we sent seven proposals, actually. There were three of them, I think, were accepted right away. And this one was the one that we followed through with, which was a international theological colloquium that would have more women, as many women speakers from abroad as there were women from our own country. It was an effort to say, "We need to listen to women "in the rest of the world. "What is it that they're doing theologically "that (audio skips) to us?" And then, "How can we speak also," the real emphasis was that we were there to hear, to listen, become a part of the worldwide feminist movement in the churches. We were particularly aware of the women in Africa. We weren't sure about other areas, as in Eastern Europe. But that was why we wanted to get people who could come, women who could come and help us. It was to be an all-women's conference. Our proposal was that it would be a small group, maybe a couple of 100 people, and we would meet, we had some interesting ideas in the beginning that we would all meet in families, at round tables. That part, that was carried over in the final feminist theology, in the Re-imagining Conference. But we said that was absolutely necessarily.

Then we took the recent proposal to the Bicentennial Commission. It was accepted. Then we decided that if it was gonna be really effective, it needed to be given to a local Decade Committee. There were four that I approached, I visited. There was a Decade Committee in the Bay Area in San Francisco, there was one in Atlanta, there was one in Detroit, and there was one in Minneapolis. I met with some, you know, talking about what the possibilities were, what they were interested in doing. The one in Minneapolis was, it turn out to be the best organized. It was all ready and going. The one in Atlanta was, too. Detroit had already chosen what it was going to deal with. Sally Hill was a good friend of mine. Sally and I've worked together and known each other for a long time. She was the Council of Churches staff. So I called her and I said, "Sally, I have this proposal. "What are you doing with Decades Committee?" And we talked a long time. She said, well, they were more interested in doing something local, that they were going to send teams out through the Presbyterian, make some decisions about what the possibilities would be. I said, "Well, in the meantime, "let me send you this proposal, "because it seems to me this may be something, "knowing the Twin Cities and knowing how I'd lived there "and the general feeling and commitment, "maybe this would work for you." So I sent her the proposal. We talked several times on the phone. She said she had sounded out some other people and she thought they would be interested in it. I had said, then, that we would supply the seed money to start it, that the Presbyterians would. So that's how the whole thing got started. Then their committee was already organized, but not fully. They were still deciding what to do. They took it and ran. I would go when I could. I was based in Louisville. So when I either would go home to see my family, I have a son and a daughter in the Twin Cities, then we would make some more decisions. I would sit with the planning committee. They sent me, through Sally, all their written reports. I'm not sure the committee ever knew that, that I would receive their written report, their meeting reports. So I felt like I was a part of the planning of it. But I didn't see specifically things like the worship services. I would get snippets. Then I'd come, and I was at the meeting, the time that we decided to call it Re-imagining. We were meeting at the church center and Sally was writing on the board. I used to kid her, because I said, "Sally, you can't spell." She wrote re-imagining instead of reimaging, which, we were talking about using reimaging. Then we said, "Well, is that a word, re-imagining?" "Well, gosh, maybe that sounds good, doesn't it?" "Yeah, that'd be better, and that's more visionary." So that was how that happened.

- Oh, that is great. How did that, how did it evolve? I mean, it started out, was gonna be 200. How did it keep going to become what it did?

- We started talking about it, and we wrote, it really came more to the vision of the committee there, in Minneapolis. Part of it was also when we began to ask speakers and when we realized what we might wanna do. When we thought about worldwide speakers, actually, I sent Sally names and we talked with people in seminaries then in terms of the international people who want to be there. That's how the beginning of it. I would send her names and then they would vet them in some way and decide if that was the way they wanna work. Then we paid for 22 international participants. That is the Presbyterian church, the women's unit. Some of them couldn't come, of course. We did a lot of back and forth. But Sally was our main contact through that. She and I pretty much, I don't know from her, but the two of us would make the decisions on which people should come and speak. And then pretty much the format was sort of laid out in that original proposal. The committee tried to be careful, it being a colloquium, that is, a real sharing of information. Then the other thing that we, as Presbyterians, kept to was, we had said in the original proposal that all the

papers would be published, and that we felt that we really wanted them to be used in local communities, that that was the most important thing, was being able to, as widely as we could, send out the information study guides. Of course we had no idea how many people would come. And it just kept growing. Then it was to have been a couple of years earlier, and we weren't ready and the committee wasn't ready, the committees there weren't ready. So the date got changed. Then we began realizing it was gonna be huge, that there were a lot of people who wanted to come. Then it moved from the original proposal of having it really be printed papers to being a huge gathering. And that's worked. We, in the national office of the church, had some concern about that, because we really had thought it would be much easier to disseminate things more widely if they were a smaller group. But you know, I think, of course I think it turned out. It also turned out, I was chairing the US Committee of the Ecumenical Decade with a Bishop of the Methodist Church, male. We met, I guess maybe every three months or so. I preferred (audio warps) most of the denominations. It was the great concern, should they become one of the chief supporters? And we had some interesting conversations about that before there was a decision that they would become one of the main sponsors, as well.

- To clarify, who is "they"?

- US Committee of the Ecumenical Decade.

- I see.

- There were about 27 of us, I think, were members of that committee. Represented Latter-Day Saints, most of the major denominations were represented. Then in Minneapolis, I mean, the Roman Catholics had bought into it. So that was really important to us. Then, in the end, we had a large group of lay women of the Catholic church. I don't mean nuns, I mean lay women in the pews. They came to me at the end of the conference and said, "We wanna search you out. "We want you to understand, this is the first time "we feel we've been accepted in a major conference. "And this has just changed our lives." That was really powerful, the last morning of the conference. That's one of those things that happened and you didn't know it was gonna happen.

- Right, right.

- Part of that was the planning committee in the Twin Cities had included so many Roman Catholics in the planning. It just became incredibly important.

- As you were in that planning process, what were the hopes, or were there any concerns? What were people thinking about the conference as it was taking shape?

- Well, at first, it grew, too. At first we didn't think of it as being so large. I think the concerns, there were some concern about some of the worship material that was being developed. I wasn't as aware of that. It wasn't so much, it was Soo-side Martin who was chairing that group. It was just incredibly exciting. The rules of the conference, in a sense, came out of that planning. The local women could talk to you more about

that, I think, than I could, 'cause I wasn't involved in their meetings. Afterward, I wish I had been, because I think it would have helped dispel some of the concerns about the language of the worship, the sexuality, the images of sexuality that caused us more problems later. You know, I'd still affirm 'em. But I think that we would have been able to see, perhaps, that some of the images were pretty graphic for the religious communities to deal with.

- Do you think if you'd been involved, you would have wanted to kinda tone them down a little bit?

- I don't know. Yeah, I think I would have been able to see what some of the later ramifications would be in the national church lobbies and in presbyteries, for instance. Yeah, I think because I was living, we in the women's unit were living, in a male dominated structure. The church was trying, but still very, very male. And I think the Presbyterians in this would at that, (stutters) yeah, we just had some knowledge that that's gonna happen. I think that's one of the only things that I talked about later, and the consensus of being of concern, was one of the images.

- Like, for example, the milk and honey ritual, for example.

- The milk and honey ritual didn't bother us, because we knew the difficulties of worshiping ecumenically and celebrating anything like the Eucharist, you can't do it in ecumenical circles because Roman Catholics, for example, don't celebrate the Eucharist with other denominations. So we developed and had a ritual (audio warps). It really was misrepresented totally. And a picture of me was sent out by the Presbyterian, I should say, the Presbyterian Layman was the group that attacked us, attacked us from the beginning. And they had been trying, I was on their pages all the time, being this director of the women's unit because we were criticized for, we wrote a lot of materials on women and ordination, women and language we'd written, and language about God, language of people of God. And they were very, very, very critical of anything like that, anything that smacked of feminism for them. So I was already under attack by that group. That's just what they needed. They had their cameras there. They were all ready. That was the first thing that came out that was part of their attack plan, was a picture of me at a round table. What we were doing was saying goodbye to each other. They used this to say it was milk and honey and it was a substitute for communion, how pagan it was. That sort of became the head image of Mary Ann, her pagan group. (chuckles) And the (mumbles) language, yeah. I knew this was happening on the last day of the conference. I knew we were gonna be paying for it.

- How did you know?

- Well, for one thing, the woman who wrote all the articles and followed me all the time was in all our meetings that they could get in, in terms of the women's unit. Her name was Susan Fire, and she followed me. She was the one who was assigned to just tag me all the time. I had been in conversations with her. We had not, I wouldn't say we learned to respect each other, but we acknowledged each other in meetings and national gatherings. So she just followed me. She was following me even to the restroom at the Re-imagining Conference. So I knew immediately. And the people at my table at the conference said, "Who is this person that keeps "sticking his camera in our face?" I said, "Oh, that's a Presbyterian layperson." You

see, we had said we would not have cameras. We had made that decision not to have video or anything like that. So there they were, taking pictures. So I knew by the end of the conference I was in deep trouble. And I knew that they would certainly not report it as it was. Then I knew, also, that the gathering of the women in the conference around the lesbian issue and the whole issue of homosexuality, the leadership had called me from the table and said, "Come meet with us. "We have to decide what we're gonna do around the issue, "because a group of lesbians are here "and want to have some kind of acknowledgement "that they're here." So I went to that meeting with the leadership. I think, I don't know whether Mary Kay or Kathy was there. I think there was only one of us that was there. That had been a problem. It was a kind of hurried up "let's decide what to do." I had said yeah, we ought, there should be some kind of recognition. (audio skips) knew when I did that it was gonna cause big, big problems from Presbyterians. But that was okay. It was the right thing to do.

- I apologize, apparently I'm getting another call. Hopefully that will stop.

- Should we hang up and?

- No, no, I think it will stop if I don't answer it. So we should be okay. I really wanna know, what led you, 'cause that was quite a decision, what led you to affirm that decision, about the lesbians?

- Sorry, say that part again?

- I'm sorry, yes. What led you to say yes to affirming the lesbian presence at the conference, knowing that it was gonna cause so many problems?

- Well, we in the women's unit'd been dealing with the issue and all of the issues of inclusivity, on very many levels. I mean, I knew that the women's unit was, we were together on that issue. There was never any question about that. And that recognition of the presence in a sense was the same thing we as women had experienced in a male dominated church, in churches, which was to make us invisible and then we'd go away. So, you know, we were very much aware of being able to say, "These are our sisters. "They are with us, we are all one." That was important, just from what we were all doing in the women's ministry in the Presbyterian church. And the church was coming to that. But it was pretty slow.

- Mary Ann, you've written some about this, but I would really love to hear about some of you. That's an important memory from the '93 Conference. What were some of your other really strong memories of being there at that conference?

- Well, I was very much around a table, just being a part of a group. I was just thrilled from the minute I walked in. There were some funny things that happened. One of the funny things was that Sally, when I walked into the convention center the first night, Sally said, "Mary Ann." I said, "Sally, is there anything you need me to do?" 'Cause she just looked frantic. And she said, "Yeah, there is. "You could do something for me." She said, "I have a woman who are here from, "she's, I think, from the University of Michigan. "She says she will not sit at a table where there's a man. "And there is a man at her table. "She came to this

conference, she will not share her life. "You know, she's very threatened by that." So I said, "Okay, you want me to go talk?" She said, "Yeah, at the table, you'll see (mumbles). "Go see who it is, talk to him "and see if you can get someone else "to trade with this person "and put her at another table." So I walked into the table. The person at the table was Dick Lundy. (interviewer laughs) I said, "Dick, there's a woman here "who really can't be at a table with a man." I said, "Could I move you to a table?" I found Donna Blackstock, who wrote that paper that was so good, and I said, "Donna, you need to go to this table. "Will you exchange with Dick?" And she said, "Well, yeah." I said, "Well, that's fine. "Just do it as quietly as possible." So thank goodness. And then I stayed, Donna came to me and she said, "What was that all about?" They never figured that out. (both laugh) So we succeeded in making everybody happy. Anyway, it was so funny. I just couldn't believe it when I went in and that was Dick sitting there.

- I get it.

- Sally and I thought that was really the hand of God somehow.

- Yes, yes. (laughs)

- The conference itself, I was just so thrilled with it. I just couldn't get over it. Just so incredible. And Mary Bednarowski was the first speaker. Oh, I just thought she, I used a lot of her material in that first speech when I went to the World Council of Churches later and was asked to speak at various kinds of things. I just thought that was just a marvelous, marvelous beginning. If you never listened to her speech--

- Yes, I have.

- Yeah.

- Yes.

- So powerful about the women, the Jewish women who were together at the end of her, she talks about this. I use that a lot in Europe, where it's important. Worship was incredible. Sweet Honey in the Rock just blew me away. And I hadn't known some of those pieces. Then I knew Nancy Chinn, and I knew we tried to get her to do the art, but I didn't know quite how she was gonna do that. Then, it was just so powerful to have them doing the art at the same time when we're all eating. The whole opening was just, I thought it was a wonderful blend of, kind of, the usual women's hymns that were not that, Jane Parker Hueberger was a good friend who'd written a lot of hymns in the Presbyterian church, with the buoyant, and then the Native American, the drums, and the four corners, going back and forth, liturgy. It was so powerful. I just was walking on air. Yeah, it just was, we were all so excited. And there were 19 of us from the women's staff and the other staff at the national level Presbyterian church. We were all just walking on air. We were just so excited. The one thing that I guess I should, yeah. I had gone to the communication department of the Presbyterian church and said to the then-acting director, "We're having this major conference. "It's gonna be the major contribution (audio warps) "and we need two reporters later." And she said, "Oh, well, I've got two more meetings." And they were still organizing this department. She said, "We've got these general

assemblies." One was a General Assembly Council committee, another one. And she said, "We need to cover those. "I've already assigned you reporters "and I don't have any more." I said, "Look, this is really important. "You really need to get a reporter there." She said, "Oh, it's just a women's meeting, isn't it?" And I said, "It's our most important meeting of the decade. "It's not just a woman's meeting. "It's going to be "the most influential meeting of the decade." Anyway, she said, "I'll see what I can do," and she didn't. And that was one of the problems we had as a denomination, because the only communicators there was the Presbyterian Layman. Except that then Presbyterian (audio skips), who published a magazine and had very competent staff, realized that they were gonna have to take over the communication role about the second day in. So they did right. They were the best ears and eyes we had, to be there and to write.

- I think I missed the name of that, Mary Ann. Who was that again, who took it over?

- The person who was the editor was Barbara Roche. It was the Magazine of Presbyterian Women.

- Okay.

- I don't know, (mumbles). She's a good one to talk to, too.

- Okay, good.

- It's R-O-C-H-E.

- Got it.

- Think that's her name. I can't tell you where she is right now. She may still be in Louisville.

- Okay.

- But she did write a number of articles. And she became very out front there in terms of speaking back to the Layman about issues, even though that had not been her role, and speaking to the church.

- Was she at the conference?

- Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. I think there were at least two other reporters from the Christian women's magazine that were there, too. It was called Concern at that point. And then the Episcopal church had a reporter there that I really depended upon a lot for interpretation later, as well as the Lutherans. The ELCA was being formed about that time, too. The women's directors there and I met several times because we were, especially after Re-imagining.

- Mary Ann, now we're talking about the backlash here. I know you were definitely affected personally, and probably more than anyone. I know you've written some about this, but could you talk some about what happened to you and how it happened?

- Yeah. (chuckles) It's in and of itself a book. I knew right away, as I said to you. I went to have dinner with my family on the Sunday the conference ended. Both Dick and his wife Lucille, Lucille had been one of the dancers in the group. She said, "(mumbles), Mary Ann. "This is really gonna cause trouble, isn't it? "Aren't you gonna be in trouble?" I said, "Oh yeah, I think so." (laughs) And the whole family was at lunch and my kids were saying, "Well, what kind of trouble? "What do you mean? "What do you mean, Mom? "It was a woman's conference." And right away we said, "Well, there were a lot of things "that sort of, quote, 'broke the rules,' quote "for a conference. "And because I was so involved in forming the conference, "in the idea of it, yeah, there's gonna be backlash." And everyone was sitting there, thinking, "I can't eat any more of this lunch. "Where is she?" I just, it's, "They're right. "And if they recognize this is gonna happen, "it's gonna be really bad." So the (mumbles) realized that it was gonna be really, you know, very difficult. The group of us met right away, the 20 of us, or 19 of us who'd been at the conference. We tried to analyze what could be the biggest problems, how could we respond? And then everything began to come in from everywhere.

- Could you say a little bit more about what you thought at that time, what you thought the biggest problems would be and how you would respond?

- I thought the worship language would be biggest problems. I knew the gathering, the public recognition of the lesbian group, that kind of affirmation, really, homosexuality was given would be a problem. And the worship language, I was concerned about being able to defend as the liturgical language.

- Could I ask which--

- I had been in the group the afternoon that Dolores Williams had answered the question on the floor about the atonement that hit the fan. It was hard to hear her because she didn't realize she was mic'd. She thought she was talking to this person, just (audio warps) question and answer. And I knew the minute that came over the mic, the whole question about the atonement was gonna be a problem. But I knew also that Dolores could defend herself. (laughs) (mumbles) So I wasn't, I guessed that one didn't bother me quite so much. And the question of the atonement is always questionable anyway. And she was right in terms of, she'd been talking about the communities and churches, the black communities, the black churches and the fact that this code is there, is what she said, "You know, we don't need any more bloody Jesuses." And she talked about the fact that we didn't need to victimize and to lend credence to the idea that we were all victims in the Christian faith, Christology. I didn't think so much about it at the time. But I did think, "Oh-oh." But then I thought, "Well, that's now a part of her speech." It wasn't part of her presentation. But it ended up not mattering (mumbles). So those are some of the things.

- Mary Ann, I'm sorry to interrupt. Could you say a little bit more about, what about the worship language, specifically, had you concerned?

- Mostly, the references, the sexual images of women, the women's sexuality, and the part of what we were proclaiming within the rituals. Particularly the one about, "We greet the lover's body," I can't quote it exactly, "through the juices of our body. "We take a lover into our," that's, there's just one, really one image

there. I can find it if you need me to do that.

- No, I know where that is. Yeah, you're absolutely right, yup, yup.

- And that was, I remember thinking as we said that, "Wow, that's pretty graphic "and can be seen to be pornographic rather than liturgical. "But I still probably could defend it." On the other hand, I also knew that we were always, we'd had huge battles in the Presbyterian church. We'd always won in terms of a woman's right to choose, women's reproductive freedom. The women's unit had been right in the middle of a lot of that. But we always had always won on those issues. We'd always taken the very important, in fact, I'd been in several press conferences in Washington, at least twice, where the Methodists, head of the Methodists, the Jewish women had asked the Presbyterians. We had talked to those issues. And we were very much one voice. So I had the feeling that it was still an uphill battle. More of an uphill battle today, isn't it?

- Yeah, uh-huh.

- I think that that really jolted me, I think, the graphic images of woman's sexuality. I think that's the one, when I was asked nationally to make an apology for the conference, I refused, saying, "How can I do that? "It's the most important conference for women "as the Christian censorship in the last decade, "the most important religious event in this country." And I said, "How can I take that back? "That doesn't make any sense. "Why would I apologize? "That just makes no sense." But that was the area, I think, as the critics would say, "Well, if she just would apologize for some of those images, "if she'd just apologize." And I just said, "No, I refuse. "How can I do that? "That would be to deny the conference." Yeah. More graphic than that, let's see. Well, the Sophia language. But that was so justifiable I didn't worry about that. I just felt we were just right on target with the whole concept of wisdom and the feminine aspect of God. So I didn't worry about that. I felt we could justify that. It did turn out to be one of the major critical points later. I don't know, too, I was brought up on heresy charges. I don't know if you. That didn't come out anywhere.

- Oh. Say some more about that.

- I was charged with heresy. A local church can do that with a person, leadership in the church, particularly clergy. And they thought I was clergy. So I would have been brought up differently as an Elder of the church, an elected leader. But they threw it out finally. We have a whole court system in the Presbyterian church, with a permanent judicial commission that sits on cases of theological question. And one of the lawyers, you have to be a lawyer, who came to me and said, "Mary Ann, don't worry about this. "I think you'll be okay." And I said, "I'd be glad to talk about my theology. "I think it would turn out that I'm really quite, "quite common, not at all crazy." But it never came to that point. The charges were thrown out by the permanent judicial commission.

- Were they thrown out for technical reason, or what?

- Yeah, yeah. It was, it was thrown out because I was a lay person and because they had not been clear about what their charges were. They were trying to use the conference and they didn't tie it closely enough

to my theology and what they could have charged me, personally, with. So I got off the hook on that one.

- Are you allowed to say or remember which local church it was, or is that confidential?

- It was in Wichita.

- In Wichita? Um-hm.

- I think it's called Westminster Presbyterian Church in Wichita.

- Okay, yeah.

- Maybe it was First Presbyterian, anyway. And the (mumbles) was to meet there in Wichita, and the whole conference was going to be evacuated. So it all sort of worked together.

- When we left off, and I apologize for that 'cause I wanted you to clarify something, you were meeting with the 19 people who were there, the 19 women, and you were kind of addressing it?

- Yeah, (mumbles) the national staff, my colleagues on national staff in Louisville.

- Yeah.

- Yeah.

- And what happened from there?

- Well, they met. As things got hotter and hotter, they met Jim Brown, who was the Executive Director of this General Assembly Council. But I should say, by the time the conference came, that's the other thing. By the time, let's see, by the time, yeah, by the time the conference took place, I had been made the Associate Director of the General Assembly Council of the church, which meant I was the highest ranking woman in the church, in terms of governing, government. That's also why I think if I'd been identified only as director of the women's unit, it would have been bad enough. But by then, Jim had moved me up to Associate Director. I think, in fact I'm quite sure, that there still would have been lots of criticism, and lots of criticism of the women's unit, but not quite as much that that, not quite as much. It just hit the whole church because I was seen as the Associate Director.

- Okay, yeah.

- Yeah, that needs to be said. I keep forgetting that.

- That's important, yes, yes. Is this, just to get to how you account for the backlash, that seems to be part of it. What are your, when you look at it, what led to that backlash?

- Well, because of the \$66,000 essentially. I think had the church not given the amount of money from the Bicentennial Fund, then a lot of the opposition would have been much, much less. But the fact that that's our money going to that conference. I mean, it wasn't necessarily. There were lots of large gifts given by individuals as well as churches. But it was a major, major financial burst, from the (mumbles). I think that that really was the big controversy. And the other part, we ended up having a, uh, what's the word? When you do a financial. We had someone come.

- An audit?

- An audit of all the money. Sally and I figured that out. From the beginning, we said we had to keep the Christian money discrete in the census, that's being able to trace it. So we said, "Trace every penny of this \$66,000 "even to the point of saying which people "had been funded to come," which, many theologians had been funded. So that was helpful. We were never, ever accused of misusing any of the funds. I think in a way, that worked, by then, that hardly mattered. The other thing we did, we hired a woman, actually a minister, whose husband, I think, was a presbytery executive, offered to come and stay and go through all of the money that the churches were withholding, which was said to be \$4 million. Well, that turned out not be even a million dollars. She came and traced all the money, trying to find out which churches were already not giving their shares to the national offices. She was able to find out that it was about \$500,000. It was always questionable because a lot of the churches were withholding funds, anyway 'cause they were mad at the church. But this gave some of them a real reason to do that.

- Why were they mad at the church? What were the issues already there?

- Well, we had just joined Southern, Northern churches and the different politics that are involved in that. So there were lots of issues. There were different ways of doing things. When something had to be decided, when putting all this together, there were always people who were unhappy, at the presbytery level or at the, you know, in local churches, saying, "Oh, we don't have as much to say as we used to," or, "Why are we supporting this?" "What are we doing with that?" Presbyterians are very feisty when it comes to anything they disagree. (both laugh) We realized it just, in the putting together churches without any conference, any women's issues, it was a pretty tricky time, anyway. And we were not that far into that. That was part of the dissatisfaction generally.

- That's really important. That's an important context for it.

- Yeah, it was very important. And part of it was, we were still making decisions on how to put it all together. The Civil War still lives, right? In terms of the division between Northern attitudes and Southern attitudes.

- Right.

- That was part of that whole division and discontent, I'd say, with the national body that was being formed. It was still being tried.

- Yeah, yeah. To get back to your experience, could you say some more about then what happened to you?

- Yeah. I started getting awful, awful phone calls. Let me see what time it is. I don't know. Okay, quarter of eleven. I started right away getting phone calls from people who were upset. And I was trying to answer them first and then realized I couldn't. So I hired an extra secretary. I mean, it was just wonderful. She was an actress in Louisville, theater. (both laugh) She turned out to be perfect. She knew why she'd been hired, but she was willing to take these awful phone calls. And she was to deflect them so that I wouldn't have to take them. She got so good at it, she was so funny. And then every once in a while, she would come and say, I mean, we had 100 a day. (interviewer gasps) And she would come and say, "I think you should take this one. "This sounds like a good person." (interviewer laughs) She really sort of sifted all the phone calls so that I just didn't have to. But many people threatened me. There were church elders who called and said, "You know what I'd do with you if I ever saw you? "I'd take you down in the church basement "and give you what you need." I mean, really awful and vulgar stuff. So it was somewhat frightening in that sense. And she took down what they were concerned about. Jim had all the narrative. That was really helpful. And she was just so funny. I even forget her name, isn't that funny? Anyway, that helped a lot with my being one step removed. The other thing I should say was, all the time I was going through this, the national staff was so supportive. I would come in some mornings, I'm still getting (mumbles) about it, we'd come in and there'd be a rose on my desk, or a card or something like a hot cup of coffee. Most of the time I didn't even know who'd done it. So it was men, as well. In fact I got a lot of support from my male colleagues, as well. But my (mumbles), the thing I can remember back is, I'm taking a shower in the morning. I'd feel like had a black cloud over my head. If I could just stand there, wash long enough, the black cloud would be removed. And I'd come out every day and think, "Oh, it's still there." I know that seems so simple and so, you know, kind of naive, of course. But that was one way of dealing with what was so graphic. You know, awful to have to deal with all of that. But I must say, my colleagues on the national staff, I think all of them were supportive. Some left, didn't understand, still thought women were, you know, it was much too. I know a lot of them told me, some of them, I shouldn't say all of 'em, felt it was just over the hill, too far. And then I should say, the General Assembly Council did an evaluation of me, of my work as Associate Director. It was an effort to say, "Should we fire Mary Ann or not?" (chuckles) Well, the first thing was, "Should we do a major evaluation on Mary Ann Lundy?" It came out 33 to 32.

- Wow.

- (laughs) So they decided they couldn't do that, wouldn't be an evaluation. But then the General Assembly had a taskforce to evaluate the whole Re-imagining and my role. That came, I had already been fired right before that General Assembly. But I insisted on going. I said, "They're gonna have to face me."

- Wow.

- The Assembly was very positive. It said, this was an ecumenical conference. That was the other thing being just so frustrating, for Presbyterians to act like this was their conference and not an ecumenical conference. And we'd always supported ecumenical gatherings, very strongly. A part of the theology of being

Presbyterian. That was very frustrating, because people would write as though we owned the conference, it was our conference, Presbyterians. And we just had to keep saying over and over and over, and we wrote information sheets that we sent out to all the presbyteries, dealing with Sophia and the worship language. I have some. If you don't have any of those, you should see one of those, too, that we sent out.

- Thank you.

- Jim Brown is here in Santa Fe. We both live here now.

- Oh.

- He was the Executive Director. He was very supportive of me and tried hard to kind of keep it together in the national church, until he finally decided that it was too much of a division in the church. It was gonna split the church, my staying. So he came, and we issued a joint statement. Under personnel policies of the Presbyterian church, I couldn't say I'd been fired. We said, I forget what this, but it was related to, Mary Ann Lundy has found she can no longer be effective in her position as Associate Director. That was a very short statement that was issued. Then everybody wanted to know, was she fired or wasn't she? Did she just leave? So that became a whole conversation in the Presbyterian church. Did she leave, was she? (vocalizes growling) That was very hard for all of us, 'cause we just couldn't say.

- How did you feel at that point about that?

- Oh, awful. I was devastated. Because Jim had tried over and over again, and I think really earnestly, to say, "She's a good colleague, she's done her job." My job was church-wide partnerships between the presbyteries, the senates, the whole church, the structures of the church. That was my job, was working on partnerships of funding, programming, nationally. And I had meetings that I was responsible for, I think about four times a year. So he was really trying to say, and the 16 senate executives, who were all men, voted in support of me and said, "You cannot fire her. "This is not about the work she's done "or the work the church is doing. "This is the right-wing attacks." That came about three weeks before then, he came back from a presbytery meeting on the left coast, a very conservative presbytery, and said, "It's gonna be worse, it's gonna get worse. "You've got to go." So that was it, and I was just devastated. But, you know, in the long term, well, you know, I knew it was a possibility, of course. At the same time, I was doing all these things. I was being interviewed by ABC. They did a thing, I happened to be away in Florida for a weekend. So there's a film of that, on a beach in Florida with one of my oldest YWCA friends. It got a lot of more comment because the right wing said I was just trying to get sympathy, that I just looked bad because I was trying to get sympathy. (gasps) Rita Nakashima Brock did a good job on that one. She took up that cause. Then Ted Koppel did a thing, but that was, I think, with Rita. Oh, and Susan Fire, the one that had attacked me. Then I was, by PBS at General Assembly, which was really hard because there's so much stuff going on. And Richard, can't think of his name, he was the religion person. He was a Roman Catholic. I had a hard time helping him understand what the conference was about. Remember being very frustrated about it. So it came out to be a very short piece, because I hadn't done very well and I certainly hadn't helped him. I didn't think I'd helped him understand this at all. It was a really hard time. Anyway, then, let's see. Finally I was

gone. Had we gotten to that part? Yeah, we have.

- Earlier, you had said something, would you say something about that small Burgess paper that came out?

- Yes. That went to all the, it went to all the presbyteries. It didn't go to all the churches. I think it went to all the presbyteries. It made some statements. She said, you read Donna (audio skips) last paper that refuted it?

- Yes.

- I was just furious at them, because they didn't show it to me ahead of time. I didn't even know it had gone out until I learned about it from local churches, local presbyteries. It just was so unfair, 'cause it gave none of us a chance, none of us on the national staff, their colleagues, to say anything. And it was just wrong in some places. They really had done a, no. I still don't know what the motivation was.

- What was their role? I mean, they had a position?

- They were on the national staff in theology and worship. They said, "Don't (mumbles) this theologians "that knew better than the rest of us."

- When you said they got some of it wrong, do you recall what it was that they got wrong?

- If you read Donna's paper, I was reading that yesterday, about, well, it just, the nuances of the Sophia, I mean, they knew better than some of the things they said in their paper. I'm sorry, I'd have to have the paper in my hand. It was the theology. (sighs) No, I don't know any more. I'd have to go back and look.

- Sure. But you would say that Donna really gave a good response that you would agree with to their?

- Oh yeah, oh yeah. Donna's paper was sound theologically. She'd been at the conference. In several places, I think in three places, she said, "They didn't understand because they weren't even there. "They didn't even hear those words." She felt that it needed to be critiqued by somebody who was there. So that was a part of her. And then just taking things too far in some cases. I'm sorry, I'd really need to go back and--

- Sure, oh, understandable. Yes, yeah. You were saying, did you wanna pick up where you were leaving off there, about the firing?

- Yeah. Yeah, well, it was confidential. I couldn't talk about it. I was invited at the General Assembly to speak at the PHEWA, which is a, I guess it was (mumbles), yeah, Presbyterian Health Education Welfare, it's been one of the radical groups, social justice. I really thought, "This is a chance for me to say something, "but I can't" (audio skips) the personality, the personnel policy. I had signed a statement that I would not talk about it. So finally I thought of something. It was a whole set of things saying, "Do you believe," let's see, how can I say it? I said it was questions. Oh, oh, "Check your assumptions." I'd had a colleague, and she

(audio warps) saying, "Mary Ann, check your assumptions." Every time we'd get in an argument, "Check your assumptions." So I thought, "A-ha, check your assumption "that every person who stands up for gay persons "is gay themselves. "Check your assumption," and I just wrote down a whole line of things. It was, "Check your assumption "that Mary Ann Lundy was fired." And it just sort of, oh, (laughs) it turned out to be a good way to be able to say, "Okay, just question that."

- Because, would you, just to clarify. What would you say about that, that you were fired?

- I couldn't say anything.

- Yeah. But that was the truth, but you weren't allowed to say it.

- That's right.

- Yeah.

- Yeah. That little statement that said, "James Brown has issued a statement today "that Mary Ann Lundy is no longer able "to carry out the duties of her," I've got the statement somewhere. Is no longer able to carry out her ministry or her leadership in a way, (stutters) in a way that makes it effective, or that way. I remember the word "effective" on that, too. I can find the statement.

- Oh, I've seen the statement. I can go back and look at that, Mary Ann, thank you.

- It was a pretty neutral statement. We were both crying while the statement was issued. (both talk over each other) Pretty poignant, yeah.

- Wow. What did you think of the report that came out of the General Assembly about--

- I actually thought it was good. I thought they tried to be as neutral as possible. The person who chaired that committee is the editor of the Christian Sentry now. Shawn, this is so funny. He was just here and I've blocked his name. Anyway. I thought they did well. There were some things I wished they had stressed a bit more, I remember, at the time. But when the report came out and it said that we are ecumenical, this was an ecumenical event, was not a Presbyterian event. It talked about that they had found nothing in my leadership to be, I don't know what their term was, oh, that we should affirm the people who were there. It was trying to say there was nothing, the fact that it was an ecumenical event meant we didn't control it and that we should continue to be involved in ecumenical events and continue to sponsor them. The only question I think it raised about whether we could affirm (audio skips) that happened at the conference. Then, they did say, there was something also related to them. I remember being (audio skips) the door, talking to the Layman about what they had said that was incorrect, and their wanting to assassinate the people who'd been there. And I had hoped they'd be a little more. Later, they set up a fund for having conversations with the Presbyterian Layman. I think they had three conferences and then they gave up on it, because you just couldn't talk with 'em, was about the differences in the church and what they were critical

of. It was just a fiasco, really, because they would not agree to have open conversation, really. And (mumbles) Layman has folded now. It started in 1952, when Eugene Carson Blake was the stated clerk of our church. He was later the secretary of the World Council of Churches. He had integrated the park in Baltimore, and that's when the Layman started its great mission of taking down national staff. (huffs)

- Really? Oh. I didn't, go ahead.

- It started, it was a kind of spurious intent. And it was always aimed at national staff.

- There was a line in the report about not being in line with reform theology?

- Yeah, yeah, which I think was very unfortunate. In the report that came back.

- Right.

- Yeah. It said that everything in an ecumenical event, when they spoke to the report, everything in an ecumenical (mumbles) will not be in line with reform theology. But I can't remember, I think that was, yeah, that was the line that I never quite figured out what they were talking about. Yeah. Do you have that in front of you? Can you?

- I don't, but I could get that later.

- Yeah, and I can find it, too. I just don't have it now. And I just remember, I remember that somebody took a picture of some of us in the national staff hugging each other and crying when that report came in. The sad part of that whole thing was, after the report came in, and I learned this later, at a conference actually at Vanderbilt, there had been three commissioners with the General Assembly who wanted to thank, to issue a statement about gratitude for my leadership in the Presbyterian church, and they were told they could do that. Particularly one was a professor at a seminary. I met with him later and he was the one who told me that they had worked this out, and they were told this would be fine, that they could issue the statement just thanking me for my leadership and stating what my leadership had been. Every time they stood up, they were called out of order. So they never did, they were never able to get that overture or that statement of gratitude onto the floor. The conference I was in later with Ron Peters, he was furious, just furious, still, months after this because he's an African-American, (mumbles) professor in a Pittsburgh seminary. He felt like this was another case where women and people of color were counted out. It's kind of a private matter, 'cause people don't know very much about it. But I was really sad about that. Not for me, but for him.

- Mary Ann, I'm aware that we've been talking for a while now. You have generously offered to continue the conversation. Should we talk, I mean communicate, by email and set up another time? Because this is--

- Let's do that.

- So important and there's so much here. If you're willing to talk again, that would be such a gift.

- Sure, I'm willing to do that, sure.

- Good.

- In fact do you wanna try another Monday?

- Yes, that would work great, sure.

- Hang on, I think I can do it the 23rd, 'cause we'd said that I'd do two different, yeah. So I could do that the 23rd.

- Good.

- Let's try for 10 o'clock.

- 10 o'clock, which time?

- The trouble, that's noon (mumbles) you. You'll have to bring a sandwich.

- Okay, I'm fine with that. Actually, I'm only an hour ahead, so it'd probably be 11 my time, is that right?

- Pardon?

- I'm sorry.

- Yeah, we're just an hour difference.

- Yeah. So 11 o'clock my time, 10 o'clock your time.

- That would be great. I'm almost losing my voice here.

- Yes, it's been a lot.

- Funny, too, there's still so much emotion in this.

- Oh, yes.

- I'm always surprised at that.

- Yeah.

- It's been 20 years, 20-some years, my goodness.
- But it was huge, for you and for everyone. Yeah, especially for you.
- Yeah, yeah. Okay, good. The 23rd at 10 o'clock.
- Excellent. Thank you so much.
- I have your phone number if anything happens, so okay.
- Thank you so much, Mary Ann, I really appreciate it.
- I'm glad, thank you very much.
- Thank you. Bye-bye.
- Bye-bye.