

- Thank you so much, Ofelia, for being interviewed, and I have some background questions for you. If you could first say your name.
- Yes, my name is Ofelia Ortega, yes.
- Thank you, and are you lay or clergy?
- I am a clergy. I was the first woman to be ordained in Cuba, in 1967, long time ago.
- Yes, and that was in the Presbyterian church?
- Presbyterian church, yes. I have been Presbyterian since I was four years old.
- Really?
- I have been in the Presbyterian Church all of my life, and then in 1967, I was ordained. It was the same year that the Presbyterian church in Cuba become autonomous from the Synod of New Jersey.
- Of New Jersey?
- Until 1967, we belonged to the Synod of New Jersey, then we become autonomous. And then, it was a very incredible service there, to become autonomous, by ourself now, after 1967, and be ordained at that time.
- Oh, amazing, and I am so interested in this. How did you decide to become ordained? What led you to that?
- I want to tell you that when I finish in our seminary in Cuba, my first degree in Christian education, it was a time that the missionaries left. I finished my first degree in 1959, the same year of the revolution in Cuba. Then many of the missionaries left in the '60s. Then in 1960, then I began to teach already, at the seminary there in Cuba, and then I worked for eight years in the Presbyterian church since 1959, more or less, until 1967, as what they call a commissioner for Christian education. Then when I was ordained it was more or less already eight years of work in Christian education. In the first decade of the revolution in Cuba, the '60s, that was the most hard time of that moment. And then I never struggle for ordination, it was the general secretary of the church, because after that, I took then my degree in theology. And then, the general secretary of the church said you are one of our best theologians, he asked me, Ofelia, I think it's time for you to be ordained now. And then I told him, what, then I need to pass exams, one evening. No, no, buy a nice dress for the ordination. You need to buy a nice dress for the ordination. I was the only Cuban that never pass exams of ordination.

- Is that right?

- But I have already eight years of work, you see? They realize that, that I don't need to be proved that I was good, because I had been working for eight years in Christian education, doing workshops, doing a lot of things in the Presbyterian church, and then he says I only need to go and buy a nice dress for the ordination.

- That's a great story. So you hadn't thought about being ordained, he was the one who thought that?

- It was the general secretary who asked me, I think we could ordain you now, because now you have the second degree in theology. I was the first woman to have this degree, of theology in our theological seminary in Matanzas, because I realized I cannot be a good Christian educator, a professor, without a good degree in theology. Then I passed the degree in theology and then the general secretary of the Presbyterian Church asked me to be ordained. It was more or less a mandate.

- And that was the same place you returned later to be rector, is that the same seminary?

- Yes, yes, yes, but I work in different churches, especially in the rural areas. When I was ordained I was assigned to at least four different churches, during more or less some years, more than 15 years, and then I returned to be the principal of our theological seminary. Really, when I finished my task in the World Council of Churches. I was called to work in the World Council of Churches in 1985. I never applied to work in the World Council of Churches, they called me to work there in 1985.

- Really?

- Then I worked in the World Council of Churches from 1985 until 1997. Then I returned to Cuba to be the principal of the seminary in Matanzas, the place that I was teaching for some years. Yes, it has been good time in life. Teaching, and my time at the World Council of Churches was wonderful, especially working with women and struggling for the rights of women all over, inside the building and outside the building.

- Now that's what you were doing during Re-Imagining, correct?

- Exactly, in '93, because I was in the World Council of Churches in '93. I arrived 1985, then in 1993 I was in the Council of Churches, because I returned from Geneva, in Switzerland in 1997 to Cuba. I remember the first of April, that it was a foolish day!

- That's right.

- Then some people were thinking, are you going back to Cuba, in the foolish day, yes. Many were very interested, and they noticed that we returned in the foolish day, to Cuba.

- What brought you back to Cuba? The position at the seminary?

- The call of the church, yes, yes, yes. I went to Geneva with the support of my church. They told me okay, now is the moment that maybe you will be good that you go to the work of other churches to work, to respond to this call. And then I returned when the church called me back to work in Cuba, and I was happy.

- I was happy to return to Cuba, to work at the seminary there.

- And what was your title at the World Council of Churches?

- I was, the first three years, I work as professor, in the Ecumenical Institute of Bossey, for three years. And after three years, they moved me to the program of theological education for Latin America and the Caribbean. Then I was more or less the executive secretary in the program of theological education of the World Council of Churches, but especially for my region, Latin America and Caribbean. And I want to tell you that it was a wonderful time.

- Was it?

- Because it was a time that could really raise a lot of funds to support women to get their degree in theology, in Latin America and the Caribbean. Many women that today are working, it was during that time that they received really a lot of support from the World Council of Churches, on this theological educational program, to help. I remember that my boss was John Kwofie, an African, wonderful man, that he is now actually a bishop in Ghana. He was my boss, he was excellent. And then, John Kwofie decided one woman in our program, that we need to support women 100%. This means there are men good in different part of the world.

- And this African, he's a bishop now in Ghana. I hope that he will see the web and say, oh, Ofelia's mentioning me. John Kwofie, wonderful man, and 1% of our funds were given to women. And then there was the time, that it was organized by our support, of this circle of women in Africa, with Mercy Amba Oduyoye as the boss of this circle. It was the time that we said, now women in Africa need to be organized very well, to be writers. And then Mercy Amba Oduyoye said, yes. And the Institute is still working there in Africa.

- Is it?

- It is still working under the leader of Mercy Amba Oduyoye, my dear friend and sister. And we did a lot, for example, during that time, it was Elsa Tamez, we really find the funds, to bring Elsa Tamez to Geneva, to Switzerland, to Lucerne, to have her degree. And she has been one of the best biblical scholar in the whole Latin America. Then the funds were provide by the workers of our church, for her and for some men too in the area, but we support women all over to see that they will get a degree in theological education during that time.

- That is exciting. You mentioned, how else did you support women? Both in that role, that sounds so important.

- How what?

- Oh, how else did you support women, you mentioned other ways?

- Well, yes, during the decade of this church is in solidarity with women, we have what we call the living letters. We were visiting the churches in Latin America. I remember that I visit Peru and Chile with a French man, a lovely French man, and that he died already. We worked together visiting, we called the living letter. People go in there to visit, to see what happened to churches. We have all kind of stories. For example, I remember, we went to one church. One of the women said, my pastor said that I cannot even go to the pulpit or read The Bible or whatever if I have menstruation. This man's Leviticus. Taking Leviticus, The Bible in a way that you cannot imagine that. And another woman said, my pastor said that I cannot go to read The Bible, or whatever, if I have a sexual relationship with my husband the night before. All kind of stories we heard. This is incredible stories that we said, how this could be? How this could happen in this century? That we are taking The Bible in such a way that limited the expression of women, and even limited the, I would say, the sexuality of women. Women's menstruation is a gift from God. Then you say you cannot read The Bible if you are menstruating, you don't know God at all. And we found that during this visit in Peru and Chile, and there is a booklet. Maybe you could look to that. There is a booklet of these times. The WCC published in Spanish, English, German, and some other language. Try to to look at that.

- Do you know that the title of it is?

- It must be in the World Council of Churches.

- Yes, I will do that.

- Some of the stories are there. The living letters of the visitors of the work comes from our church. All kind of a stories. Then we realized that how people could take The Bible like that.

- Yes, that's fascinating.

- It's not God desire it. To limit the life of people, it's not God desires.

- And Ofelia, how did you first become aware of feminist theology?

- Oh my goodness, this is a good question. You see, you know that theology of liberation was going in Latin America in the '70s.

- Oh yes.

- But the theologians of liberation, the men, men theologians, you know the names, they really were more or less focused in economic. And they forgot women culture, the indigenous people, black women too,

black people, not only women but black people, indigenous people, these things, and it was only in 1979 that we met. And it was a group of religious sisters from the Catholic Church, that still they are in Mexico. We met in Mexico. It's a group of religious sisters, Catholics, that they call Women for Dialogue. Women for Dialogue. They call us to meet.

- Who's us, I'm sorry, who met with them?

- Well, we met for the first time, I met there in 1979, in St. Thomas, I met there Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz. She had been working here in the States with Hispanic women. She left Cuba when she was 18 years old. And many other people from Latin America, there were people too from different countries. We have a kind of interdisciplinary meeting, because we have women doing, we have anthropologists, economic people, but we have also then had people from the popular movement, people that were cleaning ladies, trade union cleaning ladies. Then Women for Dialogue, these religious sisters met us there. It was the first meeting of women theologians in Latin America. 1979, first time that we met. First time. It was a very particular meeting that, first time, that we met for the first time. Oh, you are, I'm part of a tribe from Colombia. Oh, you are Elsa Tamez from Costa Rica. Oh, you are Ada Maria from the United States. Oh my goodness, what good combination. And at the end of the meeting, I was the only woman ordained in the whole group, because I was ordained in 1967, and it was at 1979. The religious sisters said we want to have an eucharistic service, Ofelia. I said, well, I do not have a proper dress. They went out and they bought, I remember, a kind of Mexican dress. I was yellow, a lovely yellow. It was a yellow dress. And then I have this gown, yellow gown. And then they said, we want that you have the communion with a Catholic priest. And it was a Catholic priest in Mexico that said, yes, I will do the communion with you. And it was the same day that the Pope said in New York women never will be ordained. Same day! The same day, the Pope say in New York women will not be ordained. And then this same day we have a Catholic priest together with a Protestant woman from Cuba doing eucharistic service in the meeting there. We met in Tepeyac that it was a very special place because it was the place of the Virgin, Guadalupe there. It was very special there. And then we had the eucharistic service, a Catholic priest together with a Protestant woman.

- Amazing.

- No woman ordination in New York! In Mexico, woman ordained, presenting eucharistic service. This is the light, and I like to do it. Breaking barriers, all the things that could really stop the participation of women in everything, even in eucharistic services, yes, the sacrament.

- That is wonderful.

- It was 1979. Since then, of course, we continue working. We have several meetings in Buenos Aires and different places. Then we went together now, after 1979. And then we began to write. I don't know if you know the booklet that we published in Latin America, Ribla, R-I-B-L-A. This is going to the Web. I asked people, look for the magazine Ribla, R-I-B-L-A, Ribla. There you have more than, yes, probably more than 500 writers, women writers there, writing, doing Exodus of The Bible. They have a lot of publications, and now it's in the Web now. Ribla is in Web.

- Wonderful.

- Go there and read that, what the women are writing in Ribla, in Latin America, yes.

- Did that come out of the meeting of the women theologians.

- No, no, no, no, no, this was really two men that decided to organize that in Latin America together with women. Especially we have Carlos Mesters from the Catholic Church, Roman Catholic Church, and Milton Schwantes. Milton Schwantes die already. Milton Schwantes, Lutheran. One of the best biblical scholar in the whole Latin America. Carlos Mesters and Milton Schwantes began at the beginning the whole process of the base communities and then they decided to organize all these meetings of people doing research and writing as biblical scholars in the whole Latin America. And the magazine is Ribla. Today, we are going to have in Cuba in July, July this year, will be a meeting of some of the biblical scholars, women and men, that will come to have a meeting to continue the work of Ribla. This is wonderful, might I say. And the person that is leader now of Ribla is Nestor Miguez, that he's from Argentina, one of our best biblical scholars in Latin America. But we will have many women there to participate in there. Yes, the movement is going on.

- Yes, that is wonderful.

- For sure.

- Oh, that's wonderful. So, to move to Re-Imagining, you were one of the presenters at the Re-Imagining, the 1993 gathering, and you didn't participate in other ones, but do you remember anything about the invitation and how you were invited, or what that process was?

- I received an invitation maybe because I was working and the work concerns churches and the problem of theological education for Latin America and the Caribbean. And they assigned me to do Re-Imagining worship. And I enjoyed to do that. Because being a pastor, I say liturgy is one of the ways that we can work for the transformation of people, liturgy. Then I say, okay, then I like that. But surprisingly, it was what happened after Re-Imagining. You see, I said, I need to read on my papers again, I said. What do I say? Let me look at the paper to see what do I say. Is this against the theology that we need to propose? No, it's alright, what I was telling you was alright. And then what happened? And then it was very interesting for me to see the happiness after the Re-Imagining committee, because it was such a good time. Especially, we enjoyed the liturgy.

- Yes, say some more about that. What do you remember about it?

- I remember the liturgy. For the first time, I began to hear about wisdom in The Bible. Never before I have so many insights of what wisdom means in The Bible. And I said, okay, wisdom, my goodness, sophia. And then we had the whole celebration, call in Sofia to bless us. And they said it was good. We enjoyed, we laughed, we danced. It was wonderful to see the inspiration, to see, well, now we are relating with this wisdom, with

sophia. And then I think this was a problem, one of the problems, that the people, they didn't understand that. But it was the first time that The Bible was opened to us, to tell us, look, wisdom was there. Old Testament and New Testament, wisdom was there. And then to look at all the biblical passages that speak our wisdom in the Old Testament, New Testament, to say, my goodness, this is wonderful. And at the same time to appreciate how Jesus Christ take wisdom even with him in his ministry. I think we have that in Re-Imagining. Jesus taking this in his spirit. You see, and afterwards, I was looking at the ministry of Jesus in a different way. For example, I said, afterwards I said, oh my goodness, Jesus even could change words. And I'm looking at the passage when a woman give unction.

- Yes, yes, yes, yes, oil, anoint.

- Oil, and then the Pharisees said, you don't look at this woman in the proper way. And then they used the word, in Greek, (Greek word). And then Jesus changed the word, and said, well, you didn't see her in the proper way, and he used the word, (foreign word). How Jesus could change words. And I think, this is what I want to do. To have wisdom inside in a way that I could even change words of the people, and said, you cannot tell this women that she cannot inspirational. This means to be present in Re-Imagining really orientate my life very much into biblical exegesis* that will be really good for our people, especially our poor people. That sometimes we are so heretical that they can't understand what The Bible says. But telling these stories of wisdom to them, they say, oh my goodness, this is wonderful. We support by that. Then Re-Imagining gave to me orientation for the future.

- Say some more about that.

- Orientation for the future to read The Bible in a different way, to enjoy liturgy in a way that we enjoy worship and liturgy, and to know that we could work for transformation and changes, and this is what maybe the people didn't accept at that time. Some of the people that contested Re-Imagining, they don't understand that to work as Christians we always need to work for transformation and changes. We cannot be paralyzed in the past, or in tradition, or in codex, whatever, that all below. I see we need really to be supported by grace, by the grace of God, and by changing. After Re-Imagining, I discovered one biblical passage that it was for me the motor of my life. Second of Corinthians eight and nine. It was the passage that for the first time, Paul speaks about economy. I think people need to read these two passages, because, you see, the Church of Macedonia, a very poor church, is put an example by Paul to the whole people in Corinthians. And I said, oh my goodness, this is exactly what we are doing in Cuba. Being a poor country, like we are, we are sharing what we have with all the people all over the world. Our medical service, to help people to read, to write, and to read, this, we have been very poor country, like the church of Macedonia, but when we are moving to share what we have with other countries all over the world. And it was shown how, by the prize that our medical doctor received from the United Nations, because they went to Africa with the Ebola epidemic. We were the first doctors that were there with the Ebola epidemic. I said, well, this is what Paul is saying in second of Corinthians eight and nine. And I seen people in the consume society needs to read these two biblical passages, because there Paul said that those that has many, don't have too much, and those that have less, don't have too less. Those that have many don't have too much, and those who have less don't have too less. Them opened The Bible to me, and I seen this was part of the Re-

Imagining understanding.

- Did you hear it, was that interpreted at Re-Imagining?

- No, I discovered this afterwards.

- You did, yes.

- But it was because of the tools that I received in Re-Imagining. Because Re-Imagining was giving us tools, tools to understand better the worship, tools to understand better The Bible, tools to understand better the relationship with people. Very much indeed. I feel I was inspired by reading that I received there, for Letty Russell, readings from her, speaking of the theology of relationships. And since Re-Imagining, my theology is theology of relationships. No more than that. Connecting and having relationships with all over.

- How would you describe the tools that you received?

- The tools, I describe the tools from The Bible studies I would receive there, the worship that it was wonderful, that I received there, conversations, people that encouraged us to continue working. It was a kind of momentum in life. Re-Imagining was a particular momentum in life. Then I'm glad that they speak today about continuing of Re-Imagining, because you would could continue Re-Imagining now, at the different levels, north, south, east, west. Then if we could have networks of Re-Imagining all over, we could do a lot of transformation and changes in our churches. That our churches need these changes, and in our societies too. This means some of the tools were received by biblical scholars there, excellent biblical scholars, by the people that organized the program and lead the worship, and always I have been grateful, very grateful, to Anna Maria Lundy, because she was really a powerful source of sustaining us, not even during Re-Imagining, and after Re-Imagining, I feel, she continued working a lot through the workings of our churches to support women all over. Then I see this as being, yes, a particular moment in life, that really encouraged us that we could do more. You could do more, I could do more.

- I wonder if you could say a little bit more about, the worship was amazing, do you remember what about the worship you found particularly inspiring?

- The joy.

- Joy, yes.

- Joy! Well, you see, some of our worships in our churches our the funerals. You go in there thinking, oh, I'm going to die. Oh, I'm going to die. But then the worship in Re-Imagining was joyful. Even we dance, that now we know that in African churches they dance. But it's so difficult for the north to dance and worship. But we were dancing.

- We were.

- Round dancing, dancing, oh, it was wonderful. Laughing, dancing, joyful worship. And I think the joy was the best. The joy of finding a smiling God.

- I like that.

- Finding a smiling God. And not only a God in the cross suffering, but a resurrected God, like the women find the resurrection at the end, all the women that find him, we found a resurrected God, that could laugh, dance, and do a lot of things together, and not this God that sometimes is so sad that we cannot even imagine him. Then imagining God with this joyful expression gave some kind of tranquility. I feel so nice inside. After Re-Imagining, I said to myself, okay, I could really be in front of any problem that I know that I could resolve that.

- It gave you strength and courage.

- Strength and courage, exactly, exactly. And still I want to confess to you I am a little troublemaker, doesn't matter Doesn't matter because being a troublemaker you could do a lot of things. And I am. I would confess to you, I am. I am because I was encouraged in Re-Imagining to say, don't be paralyzed, don't stop yourself. You march, you go, you do. And then this was Re-Imagining, the Re-Imagining conference. I hope that all the women feel like that during that. But I like the continuity, we could continue.

- Absolutely, yes. Do you wanna talk some about the backlash?

- Yes, yes.

- Did it affect you directly, first of all?

- No.

- Okay.

- No, no, because, in the workings at our churches, of course, I was with the women task force, and I was the moderator of the women task force. We were very strong. And the women task force, we include not only executive. We have secretaries, we have people that are not at the upper level, but are at the middle or lower level, and always we do this with our theology. To be with people not only at the upper level, and then to have to have to sit together, and then at the same time to have people from different religions, too. One of the things that really encouraged me was to meet, and it was the impetus to maintain, Orthodox women, or Roman Catholic women, or Jewish women, women from different religions, Muslims, Hindus, women that, you sit down with them and then you could talk with them about what is in your faith that encourages you to go on. And they will say, oh, this and this and this. And there are many common things that united us.

- What were some of those things, would you say?

- Well, prayer. Prayer united us. Caring for others united us. I like very much in Africa ubuntu, because ubuntu said, you are because I am, and I am because you are. This means community developed, community.

- Relationships.

- Relationships. Theology of relationship that I learned from Letty Russell. Theology of relationships. And, yes, I think that in Re-Imagining, at the same time, I bought many books. This was another thing. I could buy books. It was a good library display, and it was when I found Phyllis Trible with the books that she has, texts of terrors in the Old Testament. And now I could teach my students in Matanzas. Look, there are texts of terrors in the Old Testament, Phyllis Trible is telling us. And I bought books too. At the same time I could return to the WCC and then afterwards to Cuba with all these books that I could buy in Re-Imagining conference because there was a good exposition of good books there. And it was not only the literature but books, libraries, books that women wrote, and it has been an inspiration for us. There have been many things together, and with Re-Imagining, it was a kind of, we always said that it was like different, we are telling in Latin America, different, how do you say, when you do one of these things like that, that have many, many patches?

- Pieces.

- Pieces, many pieces. Then I said Re-Imagining broke towards many pieces. And then you could have a big tablecloth or a big mat or a big piece of material with all these little pieces that women brought to this meeting.

- Like a quilt?

- Like a quilt, exactly. Re-Imagining was like a quilt. (crosstalk) With little pieces put together. And I think this is the image that I have of Re-Imagining, but at the same time, pieces of color.

- Yes, exactly!

- A lot of color pieces! Black, white, yellow, red, whatever, all kind of pieces. Because we have black people there, we have yellow people there, we have white people there, we have people from different countries to there, yes it was a kind of quilt full of colors, colors of women from different part of the world too, yes.

- Given how wonderful it was, and it was, how did you react to the backlash against it? Did it surprise you? What did you think of that?

- Well, I will say at the beginning, it surprised me. I said, what happened to these men? what happened to them, that they react so strongly to that? And finally I said, well, I even didn't remember the name of the

institution. It was Lay, Layman something.

- Presbyterian Layman.

- Presbyterian Layman, there is, yes and it was a question why Mary Ann Lundy lost her job. Presbyterian Layman, and then I said, what happened to them? Do they literally diminish of Jesus in a good way or not, what happened to them? And then at the same time, what do attack a group of women so violent there, was some arguments that really were not the right arguments. Because at the same time, I believe in dialogue. You could have dialogue, you could talk. We could explain to them, we could have a meeting of the minds and to explain to them what is the meaning of wisdom, what is the meaning of not to, when we attack, when we try to destroy all the lives, we are not doing what Jesus wants us to do. We could sit down and talk. And at the same time, I learn in life that we cannot think the same, we are different. We could have different opinions, different feelings about things. Some people like the funeral worship, I don't like them, but maybe they like it. I need to respect them. Then it was in some way, I seemed, we need to go more and more in dialogue. And then they said, pity that they didn't want to have a dialogue, to sit down with the organizers of Re-Imagining and talk. Let us see what you feel about wisdom, it was not heretic, as they said, it was really a different way of seeing wisdom in The Bible and sophia and all this. I mean, we could talk, and then it's not that we could change them, but at least they could feel that in life there are people that think differently like you. And when we said that, we cannot sit down in the church, because in the church we are totally different, all of us, and thank God for that, that we are not similar, we are different, but all of us, we have God's image. When we have reminded him, we have God image in us, and we have the holy spirit, too, in us. Because it was clear the holy spirit was working there, Re-Imagining things for the future. I think that we believe in a subversive holy spirit, subversive holy spirit. A holy spirit that is working when you not imagine even that it was working. For example, when I've been in Cuba, I said, we never could think that the churches in Cuba could grow so much, being in a Socialist country, being with the Communist party, but the churches are growing. We have 3,000 to 5,000 house churches now, it's thanks to all the missionary work, and this is the subversive work of the holy spirit. You don't believe that, you don't believe in the holy spirit. And I like when you mostly, I like Paul, because Paul is using, I am professor of ethics, and Paul is using ethical views in his ethics that for me they are very valuable. He use the indicative and the imperative, the indicative is that you have the holy spirit, but the imperative said, but you need to live the holy spirit. It's not only to have the holy spirit, you need to live the holy spirit. And then we have all the fruits of the holy spirit, and we have the fruits. And I think that it's a pity that we couldn't have at that time a dialogue with them to convince them that we were not heretic, that we were doing the will of God during the Re-Imagining conference, that's it. Simple like that. But it was hard for me to hear the Baptists side, oh my goodness. But you see today, we're not out of that either in the world. The backlash is going to women again. For example, many of these women that we prepare very well in Latin America, now many churches they don't like the theology that they are teaching. They said, nuh uh, we don't like very much, but it's a good theology, you say, what of the theology?

- What don't they like about the theology?

- It's feminist theology. Of course it's feminist theology. They are looking at The Bible with women eyes, it's

feminist theology, yes. We are not, we always said in Latin America, we are feminist theologians of liberation, feminist theologians of liberation. Everything that free women is good. Everything that really enslave people, women, or men, or children, is bad. It means we want to see in The Bible that liberation is stronger there, all over from God, from the beginning to the end. I think we need to look at that.

- What do you think is causing that backlash against Re-Imagining, even today?

- We are becoming more conservative and traditional in many of the world churches now, more conservative, more traditional. I don't know if they want to respond to the people that have power, that sometimes the people that have power and rich, they are more conservative than people that are more poor and have less. They are more conservative, they want to keep the tradition. They low, and they are not for the grace of God. I think the people in United States need to read the book of Elsa Tamez, it's in English, The Amnesty of God. That it's trying to insist there is no condemnation of God. In the Spanish, no hay condenacion, the amnesty of God. And this was her dissertation, and it was on the book of Romans, too. The Amnesty of God. Then I think people, we today believe that many people are living what we call in English greed, greed, avaricia, greed.

- Yes, greed, avarice, yes.

- Avarice, to have more, and more, and more. It's not to be, but is to have. And then we need to, I think what Re-Imagining wants to tell us is to be less, to be, and not just to have. And then today greed is growing fast, very fast, to have more, and more, and more, and more. And then if you want to have more, you need to be more conservative, then you have to have less, then you would be more open to the things, you need to lose things, you need to lose things, and then people don't want to lose, they want to only go up, and up, and up, and this is the problem. This is a problem. That is the reason why I say today there is a movement, and maybe we could contact Re-Imagining with this movement. The movement is called oikostri, oikostri. Oikos means the house of God, and tri means three, then the whole question of theology of creation. Because we emphasize very much theology of redemption, and not theology of creation. And I think in Re-Imagining, we emphasize theology of creation. Theology of creation, not theology of redemption. Not only to save souls, but to save lives. And one of the best documents that we have today, we have two wonderful documents today, one is the mission document of the workings of the churches. That is called together for life, juntas por la vida, together for life, if you are not for life, you are anti-life and this is the question. Together for life, how we could be together for life. And I think this was Re-Imagining, together for life, to have life for women, for the people, theology of creation, for the environment, this was Re-Imagining, theology for life, not for redemption, not only to save souls. And you go to the minister magicians, it was not only to save souls, it was really theology of creation to save humanity. And creation, and life for everybody. Anyway, I think that this was Re-Imagining, and I hope that we could have it continue to remind, and I don't know how we are going to do that.

- And let's work on it, yes, yes.

- And no, I want to tell you about this movement, oikostri, and this women, oikostri have three elements

that are fundamental. Ubuntu, that I mentioned to you in Africa. But in Asia, it's (foreign term), another movement very strong now in Asia. Very similar to ubuntu. And in Latin America, it's (foreign term) (foreign term) means exactly that, life for everybody. And then (foreign term) is coming from the Quechua Indian language. But the good thing is that the three elements, one for Africa, one over in Asia, and one for Latin America are feeling the same. This means God is acting, God is acting. That is the reason why I tell the people when they are concerned about governments and so on, I say, God is acting in history, don't be down, always God is acting in history.

- That subversive holy spirit.

- The subversive holy spirit, and we believe that. We the women, we believe that. If we don't believe that, it's difficult. That is the reason that next year, 2018, will be a wonderful year for the celebration of the 20 years that we have dedicated the churches in solidarity with women. But we have how many years of Re-Imagining?

- It's the 25th anniversary of Re-Imagining

- 25th anniversary of Re-Imagining, then let us be together.

- Absolutely.

- To celebrate in Mexico, first week of October, 20 years of the church in solidarity with women, and 23 years of Re-Imagining.

- That is wonderful, yes.

- And we have Mary Ann Lundy there, who will take her free like that to be there. So many people that participate in Re-Imagining need to be there.

- You brought up Mary Ann Lundy, could you, I want to hear more about how the World Council of Churches, the women of the World Council of Churches supported her after she was fired.

- We supported her very much.

- Tell me about that.

- Well we really supported her, and I would say not only women, but men, too, because the general secretary said no, she couldn't come. Then we were happy that she could be named, and she could name deputy and she could return, and she could have a place of work. And she was wonderful, working with women there, and working in the programs of the World Council of Churches. Yes, I think we pushed the matter. This means that we could do many things together when we want. I remember so many things that we did in the World Council of Churches in the women task force that it was wonderful, the women together,

and we have men supporting us, too, there. From the very beginning, in the early process it's not only women, it's to form the community of women and men together. This is the idea in our churches, together. Not women in this side, and men on the other side, women and men together, and maybe this is what the Laymen, they did was through the door. Women and men together, working for a community, for theology for life, and so on. Yeah, we support Mary Ann Lundy, and she did wonderful work. And you need to have some support to go through the work, 'cause if you're choosing to work after you have this black--

- Abso-, yes. How would you evaluate the ecumenical decade of churches in solidarity with women?

- It was good, but at the end of the decade, we notice that there's a backlash, and there's still--

- Against the whole work?

- It still is not really what we would like to have. It still we have a lot of, yes, a lot of things that we need to still get done for mind change, even now.

- I want to hear that. What still needs to be re-imagined, what needs to be transformed now?

- The Re-Imagining needs to be that the churches will accept the theology that women agree. Simple as that. They are wonderful women theologians all over in United States, in Canada, in Germany, in Africa, in Cuba, in Latin American and the Caribbean, that the church will say, look, this is a gift from God. God has given us all these wonderful biblical scholars, women, but they are look in The Bible in a different way. You see, reading about that, I realized, and this will be my sermon, next sermon that I'm going to preach over there, you see, you go to Exodus one and two. At the beginning of Exodus one, you have 12 men there, named there, 12. But look how wonderful is God, you look to the rest of Exodus one and two, there are 12 women. Look at God, what God is doing. Put 12 men in Exodus one first, and put 12 women there. And the 12 women were the women that liberate Moses. It means the culture could not be liberated if these 12 women were not there.

- The midwives.

- Shiphrah and Puah, the midwives, then the three that were near Moses, the daughter of Pharaoh, the mother, the daughter, the sister of Moses. Three, we are five. And then seven at the end in Exodus two, when Moses killed the Egyptian, and then he found the seven women around the well, and then he helped them, and then they took him to his father there, seven women taking him to save his life over there. And then he married Zipporah there, one of the seven sisters. 12 women.

- I never realized it was 12.

- 12, how God could do that, only because women are reading The Bible in this way, and said, okay, 12 men there, they are nice people, good people, they did a good job, but who saved the life of Moses? 12 women. Then women mostly want a liberator of the country of the whole people. Then what happened is these 12

women would be not there, but God knew, and put the 12 men at the beginning of Exodus one, they didn't do too much to liberate Moses, and they put the 12 women, one after the other, one after the, until the end. This is the reading that women, of The Bible, that women are doing today. This is a threshold, it's a threshold, not only to see what happened so many years ago, but how to read The Bible in a way that we understand. And then of course, we are very grateful to Rosemary Radford Fuether, to Phillis Trible, to Fiorenza, Elisabeth Fiorenza, so many here, and there is De Sola in Germany, and many others all over, and many Latin American women like Elsa Tamez, Ada Maria, to Padilla, the Tanimarez, Maria Pilar Aquino from Mexico, there's been many women reading The Bible in a different way Then why not accept that as a gift from God? Why should they just say no? No, we need to read The Bible with our own eyes. Not only that, why not to change liturgy? You see in Chile, there is a group of women that they are the liberals of the group called Conspirando, Conspiracy, Conspiracy. And they renew the liturgy totally. There is a house there, the liturgy that they are doing is so beautiful, it's like a beautiful Re-Imagining. Then you have a group in Brazil that is Mandragora. Oh my, the liturgies in this group of Mandragora in Brazil. Women are doing a lot of efforts in liturgy, bible reading, preaching. Preaching, too, liturgy, preaching, that is incredible. Then we need to look at all this.

- Oh, that is wonderful. (background talking off mic) In the end, what would you say is the greatest legacy of Re-Imagining, the greatest legacy?

- The greatest legacy I think that, that we continue, that we have dreams of continuing. And I think this is a great legacy. Dreams to continue. If you don't have dreams to continue, the transformation and change, you are lost. Those are the great legacies that we need to continue. Then the best thing that we receive now from Re-Imagining is what is the continuation. This on me is a blessing. And I think this is the legacy. This is the great legacy, that they say, we did something, that it was good, and now we will continue doing, and assume that all these women that participate in Re-Imagining, they continue going good things. Because I did, I did, I did, I did. I was a principal of the seminary in Matanzas. I changed to the model of leadership in Matanzas when I arrived there in 1997, after Re-Imagining, all this. And then, it was a different model of liturgy.-

- How did you change it?

- Non-hierarchical, not all in Italian. A liturgy for consensus of being together with the workers, with the professor. The model of liturgy was changed totally. And then at the same time, I bring to the seminary ecological concerns.

- You did.

- We reforested the seminary with many trees. We organized an organic vegetable garden that is serving the seminary, is serving the whole, some hospitals and health care centers, too. And we changed to the, not only, well, tried to change the ecological concern, but we would relate the theological education with the civil society. To put really theological education in the middle of the civil society, that was the reason that we built the seminary when I was the owner, the chief of the process. Then we built a theater, a cultural

theater one block from the seminary that is called Abraham Lincoln Theater and we gave this to the community. And we have more than 200 children now doing worship, no worship, what do you say?

- Plays?

- Plays, choir, all this kind of things there, and we gave to the community. It related theological education with the civil society.

- This has been wonderful, is there anything else you would like to add before we end?

- No, because what I want to tell is if you have any more questions, we could communicate, I will give you my card.

- Thank you.

- And then maybe I could add more to your presentation. I don't know how much I could add, but anyway.

- This was absolutely wonderful. Thank you so much.

- You need to tell that I am 81 years old.

- Are you really?

- Yes, I will be 82 next year.

- That is hard to imagine.

- This means age is not a boundary not to do anything. I have 81 years old, I organize in 2004 a christening to do for gender studies.

- Did you?

- In Cuba. And this a part of Re-Imagining. Christening to do gender studies, then we are doing worships all over the island. In worship, ask people how to preach, how to do Bible studies. At the same time to work with women and men, because we're working with men now how to change masculinity concerns.

- And where exactly is the Institute?

- The Institute is in Matanzas, where I am. But we have an office in Havana in the Council of Churches, and we do worships along the island.

- That is wonderful.

- And we have a lot of job people facilitators, speaking about power and leadership, self esteem, liturgy, how to change liturgy in the best way, liturgy, Bible studies, how to read The Bible with our own eyes. It's what we call popular reading of The Bible that we learn from Pablo Fredi, a long time ago, when he developed the popular reading of The Bible. And all this, we are doing that to the Christening to do those gender studies. I'm still teaching in the seminary, ethics and theology and gender. And of course, I had the chance when I was a principal of the seminary to include theology and gender in the curriculum. It's obliged in the curriculum, it's not something that is option, it's obliged, everybody needs to take theology and gender. You would say this is a project of Re-Imagining, things that I'm doing. And I suppose that all the women that participated in Re-Imagining, they are doing things like that. That is, you have 65 interviews, you got 65 lives telling you, why I'm doing that, and I will continue doing that.

- That is right.

- Thank you.

- Thank you.

- But you could--