

- And we are now recording, Maryanne we are picking up the conversation, thank you so much for your time. And we, I thought it would be helpful to just finish up with looking toward the future. We've talked about the past but what, as you look to the future, what do you think is the greatest legacy of the Reimagining Community?

- Well in many ways, I think it wasn't so much what was said, even though, of course that's crucial and most important but I think, as one of my colleagues in of the time, Reimagining showed us a way of being church, not of doing church but of being. Relationships, attitudes, a way of looking at the past, a way of incorporating the past into the present and the future, a way of helping us be inclusive. It showed us how to be these things. It didn't talk about being church, it didn't talk about theology, it was a living, doing of theology. And that's why it was so threatening to the church in many ways because it was so living and it was changing. By implication, the structures, the worship, liberty and so it wasn't, it wasn't just something that you talk about intellectually and let it go. It was living the lives of those who are there. And they were committed to it and committed to bringing it back and living in our midst, in our communities wherever we were and in many ways that was why it was so, the impact was so great in local communities. I think the other thing that was so important was that it was international, it was so huge and so you couldn't say, oh, this is just a few women in a corner doing something. There were women there from all denominations, all parts of the Christian faith plus non-Christians, Jewish persons, some Muslim and people from all over the world so everybody could see it as going back into all corners of the world. And I think that was very threatening to the structures. In many ways, that is, has been what the legacy has been, it seems to me, it's what's remembered. The controversy's remembered but the controversy has stayed. I mean, we've had more theological discussion of wisdom, Sofia, what did that mean, what does that mean now. There's still books being written in terms of my own denomination that would never have happened without that. So in a sense, Reimagining's impulses, Reimagining's, I don't want to make it sound too academic. But the insights, didn't just live for women, they were really lived out and lived into the structures of churches so I think that's what's made the difference. And I think that because it became a living community, Reimagining, that also had a huge impact on the, it didn't die with end of the conference. It began to live then, so that the conference is an impetus for other insights and changes and controversies that happen.

- Oh that's great, what, as you look around today, what does Reimagining mean today, what needs to be reimagined, what is being reimagined?

- Well, I think in many ways, I guess I need to speak only for my own denomination but it's become much more, much less courageous than it ever was before. And I think Reimagining is the community which is starting again can become living and wide spread which it has the possibility of being, then I think we may yet be able to revive churches that are in so many ways dying. Mainline denominations that don't speak at all on the issues of culture and social justice, our voices are very much dimmed in terms of what they mean or whether they're listened to and I think that it's while it's history, in some ways. People say, oh yes, I know you, you were involved with Reimagining, nevertheless, there are still impulses of change and revision, I

guess revision, rethinking that I find in the local churches. But it's not fearful, it's not awful. If we really look or ask questions about some of these things, particularly as women do it. Now I think the other thing that I don't know and I am hoping that the Reimagining Community is revitalized again that we'll keep in touch with all those small communities of women that were the result of Reimagining. Women found each other and went back and formed small five or six maybe, women, who met, who read, who studied, who looked at their churches, their congregations and often the real center of their lives, religious lives were in these small communities of women. I'd love to know if they still exist. I'd love to know how many of those met together, knew each other in different ways, how much they shared across denominational lines. Because we knew from the quarterly publications that the Reimagining Community in Minneapolis kept doing for 10 years, we had some handle on where they were, where these little communities were. I think we didn't keep as probably as accurate a record as we should have of those communities. And it would be, I don't know how we'd find them now but we've got the names of all the people who went to the conference so if they're still alive, 20 some years later, it might be very interesting to find out.

- Just so you know, yeah, I actually am still part of a Reimagining small group and I know another woman who is but I think, those are the only two that we know of at the moment.

- Really?

- Yeah. There was an active one in Sante Fe I know, at one point but I don't think, most.

- Yeah, we've had, well, I came here. Sante Fe were one of the larger groups. I think there were 10 or 12 women who came from here and we studied for another 10 years probably.

- Wow, wow.

- We're not still going right now but yeah. But that group saw itself as extremely important to following up on Reimagining and staying alive and bringing to the church it's submissions. Because the church is very receptive to the Reimagining. Yeah, the learnings and that group, the women who read theology together is still doing theology in different configurations but it would be interesting to know where they, and I travel sometimes I'm in the church or in churches or local congregations, somebody will say oh yeah, I was at Reimagining and uh huh, we're still or groups of us. And the other significant thing I'd like to know is what's happened to the Roman Catholic Women who came in groups and they were parts of these local, small groups of women, I'd love to know if those were still happening, I think we still have a lot of follow up to do, I mean, we think we ended but. (laughing)

- I think you're right, ya know. Is there anything else that we haven't discussed that you would like to add, Maryanne?

- I, well, one of the other things I'd like to know is what happened in the seminaries afterward. Because I think the most impact that took place on women who were up for nomination in the various denominations and I don't know whether it was true in other denominations but in the Presbyterian Church, those women

were really given a hard time since they came up for their oral ordination exams. And they were harassed about it in some cases. They weren't sure that they were going to make it through. Just because in some cases, they were, the questioning went on for hours and hours.

- Wow.

- It really was just like an inquisition. And I think in most cases, they were finally ordained but they surely had to have stalwart backbone if they succeeded because they, men and others who would, had gone to Seminaries and graduated and who had followed a kind of regular tract were not given the same kind of inquisition or questioning or really critical. It was very, very unfair and I felt for those young women because in many cases, they didn't have a community as such. They were from Seminaries all over the country.

- Maryanne, do you know if the women were, how did they know they had been to Reimagining? Did that become a question?

- They asked them right away.

- They did.

- Every women who came up for ordination in the Presbyterian Church, the year following Reimagining was asked that.

- Wow.

- I have no doubts about that, I know that many of the Presbyterians grilled them about what they thought about the conference before they ever even began the ordination questions.

- Wow.

- And when you talk to Rebecca Todd Peters, she'll know about that because she was one of those people who was, who came up for ordination in I think, North Carolina. And she, because she keeps in touch with a lot of those young women, theologians, I think she'll know.

- Yes.

- But I felt one of the things we didn't do was follow up with the court for particularly the younger ones who were there at the conference that we as a Reimagining Community could've been better at so that's one of the areas that I and I have no, I don't know whether we can trace those women, we have the list of the women. Well, yeah, we do, we have the list. So we've never, I don't think we've ever done a mailing, a follow up mailing to all those people who were there.

- You mean like a, 'cause we did initially, you mean like in recent years?

- Yeah.

- Yeah, yeah. No, it's been.

- Did we initially?

- Yes, we did, I mean, I'm saying we. I was not actually part of it but I understood that they sent out a mailing afterwards to everyone who was there talking about what happened.

- Well, they must have because they got a lot of positive feedback on the conference itself and that must've been the way they did that.

- Yeah, yeah.

- Yeah. So I think, it would be interesting too. My feeling is so much because there was negative, immediate negative response that we didn't find many of the positives kinds of things that came out.

- Yes.

- We simply didn't follow up enough on that as individuals within our denominations.

- Yeah.

- I'm not, the Reimagining Community in Minneapolis may have done that, the other problem for me was of course, I left the country for four years, so.

- What was your title at the, it was the World Council of Churches, right?

- Yeah, the World Council of Churches. I was Deputy General Secretary.

- Okay, great.

- The General Secretary's the head and then there were two and I replaced a woman who was at Reimagining and down there, a theologian named Mercy Aduaway.

- Yes, oh, okay.

- Yeah, I replaced Mercy. She left and then she taught at Seminaries for a while and so and so I think part of it, my job at the World Council of Churches was not to follow up on the Reimagining Conference, that was not why I was hired. I was hired because of my positions in the Presbyterian Church, particularly I left as Associate Director. The General from the Council said that man that I was working in areas of coordination,

planning, staffing, staff issues, personnel issues. So those I was really hired to do that with the World Counsel of Churches. So I didn't feel, I did find, the one area follow up was I made, the World Counsel made ecumenical decade visits to all of the, how did they decide which countries, I guess they asked permission to come and they sent teams of four or five persons to spend four or five days and we had a set of questions that we met with the heads of the communions. Like I went to Estonia and Latvia. And what was the head of our delegation was a bishop, an African bishop from Tanzania. The head of the Welsh, the Church of Wales. Another woman and it all had to have a young woman. They were very versatile groups. That report, I have the book of the report to that. And then they came together at the end which would've been two years, I think two years after Reimagining had a conference and Todd Peters was there. She was one of the young women who planned that, Rebecca Todd Peters so she'll have and she's still on the Division of Faith and Order of the World Council of Churches.

- Oh okay so just to clarify, Maryanne, what was the point of the report? Was the report to find out what these different places had done for the ecumenical decade?

- Uh huh, it was to follow up, what difference had a decade for churches in solidarity with women, what had that meant?

- Wow, okay.

- Yeah so it's a follow up report in a book that I have. And if you can't find that, which you might not, it was published overseas. I'm pretty, I know I have it so I can get that to you.

- Good, I'll look and see if I can find it 'cause that would be very interesting, yeah.

- Yeah, yeah, yeah, because you know, that had been our intent in the beginning, this is a world conference. These women were coming from overseas to tell us. And that kind of got lost in some ways. In certainly did when the criticisms came, not only in my own denomination was this not seen sometimes as an ecumenical conference. It certainly was not seen as an international conference where we were receiving many cultural aspects of Christianity as well.

- Yes.

- So that made it a very different, that would have made it a very different critique and we could've learned instead of critiquing so much. So I think that's probably about where I am now. Let me look at one more. Yeah, I ended up with that about the international aspects of the conference and in those other countries, they did have a backlash about the conference.

- Really?

- Which is why I think, I don't know this for sure but I think I was hired by the World Council because the women, many women all over the world who'd been at this conference, when they found out I had lost my

job said then you must have her in the World Council of Churches. That conference was, so I think the impulse to hire me came from what had happened. And it was a, Conrad Riser who is the Executive, General Secretary, who's German, very, very competent theologian in his own right and so he was very much aware and up on top of it and courageous. No body could tell him who to hire, so. (laughing) Except the women. (laughing) Conrad's a very strong German theologian too. So Elizabeth would've told him but he didn't need to have anybody tell him, he was at the General Assembly when the report came in.

- Yes.

- He was the ecumenical representative, we always have one. And he happened to be that year, the ecumenical theologian when the report of the conference came, so.

- Maryanne, I'm just curious, do you have a theory as to why there was not a backlash against Reimagining other countries the way there was in the United States?

- Well, I think because there were fewer in each country, when we chose people to come and be speak throughs particularly, because we paid their way, that was the 66,000 from the Presbyterians covered that and we usually chose one, I think we had three from Africa. We had two from the East so they weren't, they didn't go back to a lot, clearly, they represented a whole country. African women theologians met all the time but they'd never been a threat in the African church in the same way. The African women theologians, very strong group, usually the churches begin to adopt or maybe not in recent years but they did in the '90's. So I don't know, that's another interesting question. And Mercy Aduaway, I think we spoke about that. I heard her once in Lu Abul after I had left and come back. And so there were several of them, Chung Chun, of course, spoke always in the theological communities. So they were already known but they also had very strong credentials, it wasn't like the person who sits next to me in the pew. It was somebody who knew more than I did. (laughing) A lot of people, a lot of heads of, well, I shouldn't say that, people high up in the structures realized that. So they had kind of competency already. But they were fearless too.

- Yes.

- So and the World Council's very supportive of that kind of theological investigation, so. That's another reason.

- Yes.

- Okay.

- Well, thank you. Maryanne, this has been so wonderful and so important. Thank you so much for your time.

- You're very welcome and I will look up some of these things that I think might, you might not necessarily have seen and maybe.

- And I'll turn off the.

- I had mentioned the Christian Century, I just found an article in which they talked, they did a piece on me. They never talked to me about it, I don't know who they talked to, but.

- Really?

- Yeah, so it's in, I have the date written down. I'll send you that.

- Great.

- I can't tell you, I don't see it right now in this stack of papers but yeah, I'll go through these things and just think and see things that you might be interested in 'cause I have your address.

- I appreciate this, I'm gonna turn off the recording now.

- Yes.

- And let me do that real fast, great and.

- Okay.