

- Well Margaret thank you very much for this interview. Could you please say your full name?

- It's Margaret Jean Thomas.

- Good. Excellent. How do you spell Jean?

- J-E-A-N.

- Okay, thank you. And are you lay or clergy?

- I am Presbyterian clergy. Ordained in 1971.

- Okay, great. And Margaret, when and where were you born?

- I was born in Grosse Pointe Woods, Michigan in 1943, December.

- Okay, thank you. Where did you go to graduate or divinity school?

- Several places. (both laughing)

- Interesting, good.

- Yeah I went to graduate school at Michigan State University. Pursued Master of Arts at that time. (laughs) Stewed on that. Did not get that degree. Presbyterian Church in the south actually called me to be a staff person before I finished it. So I went to join the Board of Christian Education with the Southern Presbyterian Church in summer of '65. That was the last year of the civil war centennial.

- Oh Right!

- Which affected a lot of what we're gonna talk about today. Because they were in the midst of fighting all the segregation and feminist issues. I was 21 at the time, so a Yankee in the South was an interesting dynamic. I went to Union Seminary in Virginia. In Richmond, Virginia. It's now Union Presbyterian Seminary. It's changed its name three times since I graduated.

- Oh really?
(both laughing)

- I graduated in '71 from there. And then I got a Doctor of Ministry in the San Francisco Theological Seminary in '91.

- Oh, okay. Great. And so what work or ministry were you doing at the time of re-imagining? That was '93.

- I was executive director of the Minnesota Council of Churches.

- Good. Could you say a little bit more about what that job means? What you were doing then?

- Well the state council of churches was the conciliar ecumenical agency in Minnesota. It related to the communions, not to particular congregations. So we were the ones that were in relationship with the senates, the dioceses, the conferences. And sought to do what was cooperative at that level in the state of Minnesota. We were actually at the time, I think, four major city councils as well in the state. Two of whom were in the metro area; The Saint Paul area Council of Churches has a new name now. And the Greater Minneapolis Council of Churches, which I think has a new name now. (both laughing)

- Everything keeps changing names.

- Everything changes. Well you have different relationships. And there's one in Rochester, one in Duluth, a nominal one up in northwestern Minnesota somewhere. Those were basically consortiums of congregations in those regions. And did the mission work cooperatively among congregations. So what a particular congregation couldn't do, the various councils did. And what the denominations couldn't do alone, we did.

- Okay.

- Our funding at the Minnesota Council was almost exclusively from the communions, with the exception of refugee resettlement where we got best major funding. The city councils of Saint Paul and Minneapolis, a primary was congregations. So greater Minneapolis increasingly went to government grants for a lot of their things. And obviously the whole conciliar structure of ecumenism confuses every parishioner in the world. And a lot of clergy who don't quite know how this works. So Minnesota was kind of in the lead, and still is in cooperative work among the entities. So the Joint Religious Legislative Coalition, for instance, came out of the denominational affiliations. Primarily really just Catholic conference and Jewish community. Minnesota Fuchair came out of the greater Minneapolis Council of Churches. Paint-a-thon came out of the greater Minneapolis Council of Churches. Saint Paul Council focused very heavily on Indian ministry. As did Greater Minneapolis later. We did too, but ours was statewide. So the number of programs were pretty much anything that would work better if we were doing it together. The three councils, the three that have presence in the metropolitan area formed an entity. It was deliberately focused on program and events. And that was the Tri-council. Twin Cities Metropolitan Church Commission at the time, later became Tri-Council. Twin Cities Metropolitan Church Commission. And Sally Hill is the staff person for that. So she actually was an employee of the three councils and whenever we thought there was something worth doing, as an event, she was kind of the staff person for it. And she's a very, very creative person, very connected in the community. Her whole life she'd been connected in the community. Primarily through McCallister and her connections there. And she did just great stuff. We would have Christian Educator events, she did a celebration of scripture that got 900 people showing up at St. Marks Cathedral.

- Wow!

- Yeah precisely. And so when the World Council of Churches decided in the late '80s to focus on women in the church for a decade of the '90s, and asked all the communions around the world to do the same. Well and the United States, The National Council of Churches. Which I was on the board and eventually became its treasurer. Might even have been at that time. Anyway, we said we were more than happy in this country, to encourage our communions, as well as the National Council of Churches, to plan events, educational materials, anything we could do. I think there were a few videos created on this decade of women. And of course, we then said, well we got this Tri-Council coordinating (laughs) committee. And Sally Hill(?) who loves to do these things, so let's do something locally. So Sally was turned loose to form a planning committee to plan the event. One of her close friends and fellow parishioners at Saint Luke Presbyterian, was Mary Ann Lundy. So Sally being the kind of person she was, she went to the people she knew and said, hey we need some funding for this. And of course Mary Ann Lundy was more than willing to help fund. Because the Presbyterians said yes, We're gonna celebrate this decade of women. So she became not only a member of the planning committee, but also a funder of it. I don't remember all the other places that money came from and that kind of thing, but we did set up, as we did for every event, a planning committee. And that's many of the people you've interviewed and many of them became speakers. (laughs) Now the dynamic of it was that because it was a three council entity, the person who supervised Sally, rotated every year.

- Oh!

- So she wasn't supervised by the three executives, but she was our staff person. In that particular year, in '93, for Re-imagining, Tom Duke, of the Saint Paul Area Council of Churches, was her supervisor. So anything that related to the work of the planning committee or when any issue arose, He would be the front person. And of course we had meetings, regular monthly meetings of The Council. And Twin Cities went into commission. The commission and a few issues arose during the planning, but not very many.

- What kind of issues arose, that you recall?

- Well the big one was, I'm gonna speak only what rose for me.

- Yes. That's fair. And what I spoke about it and tried to intervene on, unsuccessfully, I might add.

- Oh. Was one, I tried to put it in the broader context of what was going on in the communions. And raised the awareness that they were going to be attacked. That the far right are coming to institute a religion democracy in the lay committee and others. There's a parallel group in the Methodist church here now. And a kind of small presence in the Lutheran church at the time. It wasn't very powerful at that time. Never did become powerful in the Lutheran church. But inside the Presbyterian system, it went back all the way to 1965, these people who were attacking. So they were very used to, and they were well-funded from the Pew Foundation, who had funded the lay committee to start with. And were sad at the fact that they had to keep

giving them money every year. Because it was part of the bequest they had received from their founder,

- Really?

- Yeah, so there was a lot of money and a lot of history of knowing how to attack. It was post reunion

- Post reunion of the

Both: Presbyterian church, which was '83.

- Okay. And one of the political dynamics of that reunion was both churches had experienced schism prior to this. The Southern Presbyterian Church, which was contiguous with the old confederacy. It was still the boundary of the old confederacy. They had lost 5% of churches' in their membership in one schism. We had lost, in the United Presbyterian Church, which was the one I was connected with, which was nationwide, maybe 25, 30 thousand people. It was nothing. But it did form another schism and another dynamic. Well the lay committee had its origins in the so called northern, (laughs) had to put the parentheses around it. because I was a member of the Presbyterian Church, and we didn't consider ourselves Northern. (both laughing)

- Oh interesting.

- But that's how the Southerners described it was the Northerners. It was still the civil war. It was still the North and South, Well excuse me, we were a national denomination and a regional denomination. But the United Presbyterian Church, the so called Northern, had the lay committee and the money. The Southern Presbyterian Church in the culture wars had the vitriol and the go for the gut kind of methodology. And unfortunately in '83, they found each other. So we got a lay committee who was effective and criticizing and did good investigative reporting in some instances. But it got, then merged, with people who were, the only end goal we want is the destruction of the national structures. And if you wanna put it into today's context. Okay, who wants big government. and who doesn't want big government. Who wants a national presence and who doesn't? And the kind of language we're hearing and the kind of products in this debates these time. This is kind of mild compared to what we were experiencing inside the church. So 10 years after reunion we have all this stuff going on. Those people in what was then Louisville heard, they're evil, unchristian, we gotta get rid of them mentalities. The primary focus was always biblical authority, you don't believe the Bible, you don't think the only way to salvation is Jesus, you support abortion, and it's these terrible women who are leading all this. (laughs) That kind of mentality. And I had come from New York to Minnesota in '85. I knew all that history, I knew all the actors. And I saw what the Re-imagining planning committee was doing, and I said, they're gonna come after you. You need to be prepared to answer what's going to be an all out assault. And they did not believe me.

- First of all, could you identify what you saw in the planning that you knew they were gonna go after.

- (laughs) Well one, they were gonna be ecumenical. And our conservatives, I think the conservatives in most

churches don't understand ecumenical. They don't understand that when you have an ecumenical gathering there are certain things you can't do, or you have to be cautious of. So we couldn't have communion. If you can't have the Lord's Supper or the Eucharist, what kind of rituals can you have? And when I started talking about the milk, what became the milk and honey, made eminent sense to me from a biblical perspective and from an ecumenical perspective, is way of symbolizing our unity without offending or violating the religious principles of our participants. Made eminent sense to me, but I said that's gonna be a big flashpoint. Being with the National Council of Churches, all the orthodox communions, heads of communions were close friends. And I understood Sophia. I understood that. I understood and I knew the theology of Sophia, that wisdom was present at creation and was identified. And if Jesus was the word of God, with the logos being present from the beginning, that that had to be wisdom cause that's the only biblical thing it could be. And that the word was Sophia. And by the way if that wasn't true, there would be no Trinity. Because Jesus couldn't be the son of God and coequal in the Godhead, if Sophia wasn't a name for Jesus, I knew that because it was such an important part of the orthodox traditions. And it was present in the Catholic traditions, but not huge. Mary was huger (laughs) obviously. But the feminine side has always been more prevalent in the orthodox of the Godhead. And I said, you know you're gonna have to explain this. You can't just say Sophia's wisdom in God, and then have a milk and honey ritual that can be confused. Well they weren't into theology, and they weren't into ecumenical sensitivities. So they just did it, (laughs) they just did it. And it made eminent sense in the planning committee, it made eminent sense ecumenically, and didn't offend very many people present. (laughs) just a few. But it became key points for proving these were heretics. Heretical women heretics trying to destroy the Gospel, destroy Jesus, substituting another God. Just tossing out the history of the church. In fact, we were reclaiming the history of the church. But I think, and you can check this out, if you go back to the material that was produced for the conference, I don't think you're gonna find any explanation.

- The only thing there was, had a newsletter that was produced at the conference. It did talk about Sophia, but yeah, so there was a little bit.

- Yeah, but not much. And in the publicity had never said anything. It's being advertised nationally, and once you get these national invitations to this event, well there's all the fodder these folks who were trying to tear down the churches needed. So I knew they were treading on shaky ground in terms of the future. And what could be done with what they were doing. The other thing that I warned them about was security.

- Oh? Say some more about that.

- Because we had, matter of fact right over here about two blocks, a congregation of the Presbyterian Church in America. No the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, excuse me. The orthodox Presbyterian church was a 1930's schism, by Carol McIntyre, out of the old United Presbyterian Church. And it was one of these fundamentals schisms and their only purpose as a denomination was to picket the national meetings of the mainline denominations, particularly Presbyterian or the national council or anything, because of their heresies. So you'd have a meeting of a general assembly or something and these folks would always be out there with their picket signs. You think the anti-abortion guy out of Missouri or whatever, Nebraska I guess is it. You think those things are, but these were in that ilk.

- Right.

- So I knew that if I got through it, There's a church right here. They're gonna show up. And the folks at the convention center better know that they're going to be there. This is not just a church meeting. It's a politically charged church meeting. And I said you gotta be prepared, you gotta be talking with the police of Minneapolis in terms of the potential here. And you better be hiring some security guards.

- And did they? What was the response to that?

- The response was, well nothing's gonna happen. But of course they were there.

- They were there.

- They were there, and they had a scrabble with the Minneapolis police department.

- Really?

- To get them out on to the side of the convention center where they could not come in, but be outside in a public space. But I remember days when the participants were leaving the convention center and had to wade through them. And that's because of my national experience.

- I'd seen these things in operation and all. But you tell them and I wasn't their supervisor so. (laughs) And the general response was, these aren't going to be problems? Was that was it?

- This is the irony of the whole thing. The fact that you're even sitting here doing this interview. If those reactionary forces had not been present, it would've been an event. And it would've ended.

- You're right.

- And it would've been wonderful. They made an issue of it, and they went after people, and they won in several instances. And the community goes on. And the agenda goes on. So I kind of laugh at them, but I was kind of hoping that would happen anyway. They never did win. The demise of mainline churches might be a result of some of this. But it's the same as the demise of the republican party. (laughs) It's the same, you keep spewing hatred and for some reason people don't want to part of you. (both laughing) So that's kind of what I brought in to it. And I don't believe I ever saw any of the planning materials Or anything specific that I could've responded to. But it was that broader climate that I was aware of. And the other dynamic at the time. Just one more and then we can--

- Well this is very helpful. Keep it up, yes.

- The other dynamic was I think the conference was, What day was the conference over? Was it a Sunday?

- It was the beginning of November.

- Was it a Saturday or something like that that where had ended?

- I think that's right. I think it was.

- And the following Tuesday was a presbytery meeting.

- Oh?

- I was moderator. of the presbytery at the time.

- I'm sorry, clarify. Presbytery of the

- Twin Cities area.

- Twin Cities. Okay got it.

- And our meeting was down in Rochester, which is, you don't wanna be going late in a meeting down in Rochester when most of your people are up here. But at the very end of that meeting, the commissioner from one of our conservative churches, got up and introduced a resolution to condemn the Re-imagining meeting. And the Presbyterian participation in it, and calling for the resignation of Mary Ann Lundy. The resolution, which did not pass, cause there were too many people sitting in the room who attend the conference knew better. (laughs) But it was a verbatim of the charges that were filed publicly by the lay committee and the others. So it was written before the conference occurred and it was presented the following Tuesday night. So they were on attack by Tuesday night.

- Wow!

- And it literally was the same language used in all the stuff that you've probably seen.

- Yes. That soon, wow.

- Yeah, so it was identified as a way of perpetuating the warfare. And initiated immediately after the conference.

- Now you anticipated this backlash. Were you surprised at the form that it took?

- Not really because I had seen it before. I wasn't prepared for it at the presbytery meeting. I didn't think it'd come that quick. I thought it would hit the national level first, but it hit the presbytery level. And it was a motion to condemn our participation and apologize for it. And then, then ask for resignations and firings of

key people. Okay. I'm a Presbyterian leader, right?

- Yes.

- Okay. I've held the second highest position in the denomination.

- Which is called what? Remind me.

- I was the chief operating officer of the deputy executive director of the mission council, which oversaw the mission of the church on all six continents.

- Wow

- And I'd come from New York to Minnesota several years before this, '85. But I continued to hold leadership positions at the national level. I was on our national judicial commission, I was on our committee that interpreted the constitution. I became the Presbyterian representative and then treasurer of the National Council of Churches. So I was very, very, very visible. And I'm sitting here watching this backlash develop in the communions. And the assaults on the lay committee's publications. And overtures around the church going to the general assembly. And I don't know if you've seen those.

- I have and the report too. I wanna ask you about that, but go ahead.

- So I'm sitting here, okay, three councils sponsored this event. One of them is a high profile Presbyterian clergy. I think the three councils in their totality got maybe nine letters.

- Really?

- Nobody in Minnesota was after us. Nobody in this national assault was after us.

- How do you account for that Margaret? That's amazing.

- Because they wanted to destroy the denomination. They didn't care about that.

- I see.

- Now I had one other dynamic which Mary Ann didn't have. I do not remember the name that, it was Presbyterian's Renewal at one time. And it might've been still that at that point. But during this period, an executive again was submerging the two denominations. A woman named Betty Moore, who was from South Carolina, was the executive of the group that was going with the lay committee on these assaults. And Betty Moore, and I also had worked for the Southern Presbyterian Church before going to the United Presbyterian Church. And Betty Moore had learned to trust me. I was head of the research departments in the Southern Church, and I was one of the few national staff people who told the truth. You do survey

research, I'll give you one illustration to tell you.

- So from her perspective you were the--

- From her perspective I was reliable and I was a good person. And I have a suspicion that she protected me.

- Oh interesting.

- I don't know that to be a fact, but I do know during this entire period she had speed dialed a lot. And she'd get a speed dial call to me and we'd have a nice long conversation. (laughs) She didn't intend to call me, but we'd have a nice conversation.

- Oh really!

- Yeah and so I think some of that southern family stuff that might've protected me. And I wasn't at the national level so she could convince them no, we don't need to worry about them folks. But the same thing happened to the other two councils. There were a few people in Minnesota who were upset, but like I said, it was less than 10 or 12 letters total.

- Amazing. Wow. After what happened at the national level that's incredible.

- Yeah during that entire period. And at the beginning you think you might have a few comments and then when it boils over you think you're gonna have, okay and all this stop the funding for the councils. Why should our church be supporting these heretical people who did that horrible conference. None of it. None of it. And that was a pretty good clue that it was part of the bigger culture war. It didn't have anything to do with the conference. It was just fodder. (laughs) It was fodder for them. And the more you could distort it, the more you could misinterpret it and spread hate and vehemence against people you wanted to get rid of, Mary Ann Lundy wasn't the only one that was fired. Jim Brown was as well. Did she mention him?

- Briefly.

- Yeah, now I don't think they got along to well cause he didn't defend her, at all. But they got him too.

- Yeah did they get him like the following year or something?

- Yeah cause he had a term that was up and he was not re-elected. Which was unheard of.

- And that was because of Re-imagining?

- Oh absolutely yeah.

- Even though he fired Mary Ann Lundy?

- Yeah, you know, you do damage control and you think you can get rid of the people that are the lightning rod, when in fact you're the lightning rod too. (laughs) You were running this organization and you didn't keep her in line. And besides you wanted gays included. The other thing to say of course, is this was just the beginning of the gay rights movements in the churches. So if you don't get these feminists and radicals into line, next thing you know we're gonna have gays in the church. (laughs) we gotta get them out of there. So they worked to do that.

- I was wondering, were you at the '94 general assembly?

- Yes.

- Okay. I would love to hear your perception of what happened there. The report on Re-imagining, whatever you recall about that and what happened.

- You know I really don't have a lot of recollection of it. More of my recollection is Jim Brown's not being re-elected.

- Say about that.

- Cause he was nice and a good friend. But see I had been at the national level. These were all people that, he was my director, he was my elected chairperson for finance at the national level before he became in that position. So I knew him. He was a pastor. He had a kind heart. He understood the church, but he wasn't a fighter. He just didn't know how to deal with those political dynamics. It wasn't in his soul to do that. The election we knew that was gonna happen.

- I'm sorry the elect, what was gonna happen? The election for him?

- Yeah. We knew the election was gonna happen and we knew he was in trouble because there were people running against him. And it was such a stunning loss that when the vote was announced, I did go over to him and talk to him for a few minutes and then he disappeared. He just walked out.

- And who was elected instead? What did they belong to a certain group or?

- No, it was, I won't pull back his name. Pretty mainstream person. But see the assembly didn't buy the Re-imagining junk.

- Say some more about that.

- Well I don't remember them approving anything in reaction. They didn't censure it. Mary Ann had already been fired. I don't recall any, I recall heated debate on the floor. But most of the debate occurs in committees and I wasn't in those committees. I was actually assigned to another one. I was on the advisory

committee of the constitution at the time and I had to resource a holiday committee, But even then, we there'd be a significant conservative vote. But that triggered, again the conservatives lose everything. They don't win, they just make life terrible in the church and drag people away and make folks think we're a nasty denomination.

- They don't win because they're a minority, is that right?

- They're a minority! They're on the fringes of both theology and evangelism and everything. And they give us this song and dance about how great they are and proclaiming the Gospel. Their churches don't grow any faster than anybody else's. (laughs) you know?

- You mentioned all the overtures that went into general assembly.

- Yeah. There were a lot of them. But I'd have to go back to the record to see how they were disposed of. I think there was some kind of general statement, but I don't think-- John Buchanan was moderator and he chaired a committee and they came up with a general statement. But it's interesting that it's not really memorable. (laughs)

- It's not memorable and it didn't affect the national church. Certainly didn't get rid of the women's voice at the level. I mean part of the dynamic is that, I don't know if the advisory committee on women in the church still exists. I don't think it does. But I think there is an all women's presence still that would be equivalent to Mary Ann Lundy's old job. And there's Presbyterian women, and it's the most radical group in the world. And everybody thought that was dying. They really did. There's been this downwards membership spiral. And presbyterian women used to meet at the time of the '90s. They'd meet at Purdue and they'd have several thousand people there from around the country. And there try any else seminary three years. And I think maybe six years ago, they were down to maybe 600 showing up. And so they started moving it into hotels rather than college campuses. Well the last triennial was last summer and it was here in Minneapolis and they scheduled themselves into the Hyatt and 1400 people showed up. They couldn't get into the room.

- Really?

- Yeah. People just kept coming. And there were bets in Louisville, that they wouldn't have 600. And people just kept piling. I think the women are getting angry again. (laughs)

- And getting angry about?

- The course in America right now. I think there's pretty strong anti-women movement. Women obviously have no moral authority over their own bodies (laughs) for example. Voter suppression is usually expressed as a racial issue. It's as much a women's issue. I think you get the language that you get in some of the debates going on. I think Hillary has a great little response to that. (laughs) I think people, some of those folks who say they're not feminists, that have benefited from feminism are maybe beginning to catch on that as they move up the ladder in their careers, maybe that ceiling and that bias is still there. And that wage

disparity doesn't go away (laughs).

- So do you feel like in the end, I don't wanna put words in your mouth, but in the end, what do you think did the backlash accomplish? It accomplished in forming the community.

- Well it did do that, but I think it helped place in the atmosphere inside the church.

- Say some more about that.

- Well it's you can't have constant attacks on the integrity of the people who run the church. And not have a negative effect. I mean if you just look at the religious statistics right now, I sympathize with the nuns. I mean, who wants to be a part of a church that's got a lot of pedophiles in it, or can't control its priests? Or where there's fiscal mismanagement. Or they're fighting over whether women have any moral sensibilities at all or gays or lesbians. They don't care about those things. If that's the image of the church, why join? I think the whole culture wars has been a terrible thing in terms of the presence of religion in America. And unfortunately there are congregations and denominations that just kind of plug along and they're not going away. (laughs) they're just not going anywhere. Been around for couple thousand years it's not gonna go away. It will be transformed.

- How would you evaluate the presence of the right wing and the Presbyterian church USA today?

- Well we've had several schisms and we keep getting rid of them. Our assemblies, general assemblies are pretty moderate, enjoyable. We get these resolutions on abortion every year. I think it gets dismissed with 95% against them. It's just not an issue. The issue of ordination of gays and lesbians with marriage equity it's not an issue. You can print all the resolutions you want, it's not going anywhere. So they're a little more copacetic. We're being able to know in our presbytery meeting we're actually doing educational events. We're having a lot of fellowship. We're doing mission like crazy. The whole mood has changed with these people out of our midst. And you hate to see the body of Christ separated that way. But, boy it sure makes it nicer for those of us who are left. (laughs) And churches that are, I think in the moderate to progressive and inclusive, who don't shut out the people with differing opinions are thriving. I think maybe as recently as seven or eight years ago, Presbytery of the Twin Cities area, maybe 72, 78 congregations at the time maybe had four that grew. The rest were either stable or declining. And now it's 2/3 of them are growing. Not significantly, but they're growing. Get rid of the people who hate and suddenly churches have some meaning again. So I think a great deal of harm was done. It parallels what we see in our political parties.

- Today?

- Today. Having worked in the south, I am absolutely convinced we have not dealt with the civil war yet. We have not dealt with slavery yet. And all of these battles are continuing those arguments. And the reality of controlling women, controlling minorities, it's just part of this mentality that they're not quite fully human. And that's the civil war. The founding of the nation for that matter. But slavery was there. But slavery, race is a new concept which I didn't know. I did not know that the concept of race did not appear until the 1800s.

People were people. You had slaves, but it wasn't a racial thing. And we don't talk about that.

- I'm curious. So in the end, what do you think the significance of Re-imagining finally was?

- Well I think, I don't think it had much influence beyond the conference itself. I think the ongoing community might be local, but I think the battles that we were addressing are not an issue inside Minnesota. They may be an issue for people who aren't part of churches.

- Which battles are you thinking of?

- Well the inclusion of women. The broader theological language. The reinterpretation of scripture with some of the more feminists perspectives. That's routine now. You got an awful lot of (laughs) female clergy now.

- So you're thinking the Presbyterian church overall that that inclusive language and feminists theology are part of the congregations?

- Yeah. Every now and then you have to deal with it but it's usually with one of our conservative churches. But people just they're over that stuff. At least here. So as far as the Re-imagining community, I don't think so. It did empower a number of feminists theologians who were the speakers who continue to write and continue to be a presence. But I think they would've done that anyway. I don't think the Re-imagining community particularly did anything for them. I mean academically they would have to go that way.

- So just to make sure I understand. So you think there's more feminist theology inclusive language, but the Re-imagining community is not responsible for that.

- No. I don't think it nurtures it in any way because I don't think it's needed.

- Do you think it led to it at all? Or helped it happen? Or not?

- Well it certainly surfaced the issues. As soon as something that was, like I said, it wasn't an issue in Minnesota to start with. And for our denominational colleagues here. It just, it might've reinforced it a little. But the forces were in those communions to start with. Some of the ironies of it was we learned how to deal with some of the differences a little better. Take orthodox communions and homosexuality. When we, the Minnesota Council of Churches tried and the communions, most of the communions tried to get sexual orientation into our protective classes. The orthodox vetoed JRLC inclusion. And when pressed, it wasn't that they wanted to discriminate against gays and lesbians, it was that there was no such thing. Because God created male and female so there could not be a different sexual orientation. So the word sexual orientation was theologically impossible. So we challenged them. We said, you know the gays and lesbians are getting beat up, they're getting denied jobs. And they said, yeah we know that. I said, well come up with a different phrase that describes them. And then of course, they couldn't. But I think the Re-imagining, there's a different way of interpretation here. You gotta start thinking about it. And they could be challenged

on that, where before I don't think they could've been challenged at all. So that was one thing. I think the inclusive language questions. One of the strangest conversations I ever had was with the episcopal bishop at the time. Who actually I was doing a workshop at the Basilica and a lot of people questioned me about my ordination and what's it like to be an ordained woman and all that kind of stuff. And I was debriefing with the episcopal bishop on it afterwards and he said, well you know they can't ordain you, you being ordained just doesn't make any sense to them because they can't ordain women. So of course they're curious about that. He says, but the real problem for me is inclusive language. And I said why? He said, cause I've got this prayer book that I have to follow and it's not inclusive. (laughs) I can ordain you, but I can't give you inclusive language. I think those conversations got facilitated a little bit by Re-imagining, but they were off on the side and they were in individual congregations or denominations. And of course the United Methodist still can't ordain gays so (laughs) despite the fact they do.

- Yes. So how would you say the church needs to be re-imagined today? By that, I don't mean just the re-imagining movement, but what needs to happen in the church today, do you think?

- Well I think we're going through a major transformation and then the best is gonna be over at House of Hope this weekend. Or starting Friday night, we'll talk a lot about that. I think one of the major things is the question of belonging. Everything we've been told is the current generations don't wanna belong, they wanna participate. But not belong. And that's true of all kinds of institutions. So if churches can't find a more inclusive way of involving people without the why don't you come to our membership class being the first question out of your mouth. We're not gonna go into the future. The image of the congregations is having set beliefs needs to be acknowledged as it's never been true.

- Say some more about that.

- Well we have basic Christian principles that get reinterpreted all the time. That's what Re-imagining was about. How do you re-look at this language for today? The whole area of cosmology is changing the way we look at the universe and the possibility of creation and all that. Well people come now out of schools, even high school let alone college, with a different understanding of how the universe works and how life is. And how people are related. So the churches better be a place where those things can be talked about and explored and connected with the tradition. So the translation role from the old to the new is pretty critical. Back when I was doing research for both, I headed a research function for both denominations before I moved into the other position. You'd have these certainties of response, and I used to joke about that there were only two differences between the northern and the southern church other than the civil war. (laughs) but one was the professional makeup of the two churches. The southern church was basically educators, business owners. The northern church was managers and entrepreneurs they were the big people with industry.

- Are you talking about the participants?

- The membership.

- The membership. Okay, yeah.

- The second that was, and this is more or less going where I was going, if I ask somebody, what do you think about the death penalty? A southern respondent would right down Leviticus flump, flump, flump. That's all they'd say, Leviticus, flump flump. I ask a United Presbyterian that question and they say, well in the Bible, there's this phrase of an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, but then Jesus said we should forgive seven times 70 and (laughs) they give you a long discourse on the complexity of it. I figured that was the only reason for reunion. The southerners could tell us where it was and we could tell them what it meant. (both laughing) We need more of that, what it means, rather than what it says. You open for an illustration from Westminster, Minneapolis?

- Sure.

- Cause this is a thriving liberal church he's growing.

- Yes.

- And expanding. We launched groundbreaking for a 34 million dollar extension of the church Sunday.

- Wow.

- And a lot of important people were there. Like the governor, (laughs) and the vice president, and the mayor, not the mayor but the head of the council, and the councilperson and folks like that. And the architect is James Daden. James Daden is the great great grandson of the original founder of the church, George whatever his middle name was. Draper Daden, who originally founded the church and was responsible for the church being on Nicolette and 12th, moved it from Nicolette and 7th to Nicolette and 12th. He thought the 7th would be a better place for a store than a church. And 12th would be better for the church. Anyway that's our history. Our history is the Dadens, and the Cargills, and those folks.

- Oh wow.

- And James Daden who's the architect is describing this addition that's going on and he says, you got this staid Romanesque church, with magnificent stained-glass windows, and a proud tradition and outstanding worship, and my challenge was to put next door, something for the next 150 years that would be open and glass, and you could see in, and it welcomes the community, and it has space that can be modified for concerts or receptions or funerals or jazz bands or whatever were going on. And space where we can welcome mission groups from other churches to spend the night. And where we're partnering with communities and endeavors. And we're probably will have two community entities in there. And it will be welcome and open and said this and you don't want to lose that Romanesque tradition. But you want to be able to do these other things. And you can't do it in the Romanesque church. So the expansion is one of the future. And that's Re-imagining church. That's saying the very successful way we've been is not what we should be for the next 150 years. We've gotta be different. But we can't throw away that old history. And

Mark Daden, who is a member, he was one of those speakers, and he, there was the sermon which kind of gave them vision and then there's this video that showed the thing and all that. And he got up to speak and he says that I am so glad to see that shift in there. And the maintenance of the old, cause he says 24 years ago I was in a rough spot in my life. And he was. And I think that was when he was divorcing and his career was collapsing, the whole thing. And he confessed that he every Monday morning, early morning, he came into the sanctuary at Westminster and the sunlight was coming in from the south windows, stained-glass windows, and just simply bathing him in that sunlight. And he did that for weeks to get through that rough spot and he said, that's what we need to give as a grounding and then move into the future. I think churches, Westminster isn't the only one building downtown. I think there's 10 or 12 entities downtown in the downtown coalition of Minneapolis. Saint Paul doesn't have one. But Minneapolis does. I think eight of them are in renovation or construction processes because people are coming back cause the churches are open and they're allowing those places of safety you can ask questions. So Re-imagining was part of that movement. I don't think it started it. I don't think it sustains it. But it certainly was a part of it. And it was a very significant one because it got raised to the national and international levels in a way that said to all these folks who kind of took it for granted that we're going in this direction. Well wait a minute, we gotta fight for this. It's not a given. Well that's a pretty good heritage.

- Wow. That's great. I love that illustration. Actually you summed it up really well, but I'll ask if there's anything else you wanna add. (laughs) cause that was great.

- Yeah I do. One thing I do wanna see in the future is the effective Re-imagining, I think Re-imagining and the whole feminist movement in the church, really did open the way for women in ministry. There was a pretty big glass ceiling. A lot of associate pastors, not very many pastors in '93. Some of both the Methodists that I know, some of the Lutherans, not as many. A lot of the Presbyterian mega-churches are headed by women now. It did open doors for folks. And a lot of folks paid their dues. I'm sitting here watching Westminster and I've only been with it 17 years. And we're going through pastoral changes right now. Elderly pastors are retiring. And I'm watching it in the Presbytery as we ordain new people and take new people under care for ordination. I am so impressed with the people who seek ministry now. And I think having dealt with the culture wars, these people know all about those culture wars. They grew up with them. And they're over, these people wanna be part of the mainline churches that have survived and thrived the progressive agenda. And I'm looking at our associates. One of my friends said, when I look at seminary graduates or cohorts of seminarians, or these, I look at it from the perspective, would I want them to be my parent's pastor? Would I want that person to be a pastor to my parents. I don't see very many that would not fit that right now. They are incredible people. And they're not frozen in the past. They're looking to the future. You know, we got an associate pastor for our youth and families, he can't wait til the new meeting hall is opened up cause he's got so many ideas of how he's gonna use it. (laughs) and you just sit there and say, Yes! And I think we had to work our way through that. And for once, maybe the church is ahead of the politics. Usually we're years behind politics, our business. You know business tries something it fails, and then we adopt it. (both laughing) that's the norm. I think maybe this time we're ahead of it. The mainline churches who are surviving. Diminished, but still there. We're all looking to the future now. We're not having to fight those battles anymore. Now we will fight them in Mississippi and (laughs) South Carolina. But they're political battles now and they're gonna lose. I mean when you had the latest Supreme Court decision with the split it

got was eight-nothing? (laughs) I mean certainly there are values in this country now. And you can't go to the extreme. So I'm very optimistic actually.

- I think that's a very encouraging way to end. That's great. Thank you so much.

- Yeah.