

- Alright, we should be going here. First of all, if you could say your name.

- My name is Kathy Deacon Weber.

- Thank you and are you lay or clergy?

- Lay.

- And your denominational affiliation, if you have any.

- Uh, my background is Roman Catholic.

- Good, great. When and where were you born, Kathy?

- I was born in Varina, Iowa in 1954.

- OK, nice. And where did you go to school, graduate or divinity school?

- I went to United Theological Seminary in New Brighton, Minnesota.

- Great. And how and when did you first become aware of feminist theology?

- Um. I think it started in the 80s and I attended a diocesan retreat that was held here in Shoreview at Home of the Good Shepherd. And it was by two nuns, Michelle and Kay and they gave a day of the feminist images of God in the Bible. And I was a young mom then, and I thought, oh my gosh, I had waited my whole life to hear this, you know. So they... talked about, well, I know they said that Ourea meant God of the mountains or God the breasted one and I thought, oh my goodness, I'm made in God's image. You know and--

- Is that the first time you really felt that?

- Yes.

- Wow.

- Mmhm, yeah, in a deeper way.

- Yeah.

- And I think I'd call myself a feminist before then. And then at the College of St. Catherine's they had a

theological insights program and every fall and every spring for four or five Friday mornings they would have a topic and they would invite a woman to come and share her story on the topic and then they'd have another woman come and do more of a theological reflection on the topic. And I would imagine there was at least probably 300 or more of us that would attend regularly and I went not knowing anyone and that's where I met kind of a core community that I still meet regularly with.

- Really?

- I decided then that feminist theology was women telling their stories. That's what I learned from that. So that kind of shaped my theology. And then I took a continuing ed class at St. Catherine's University by Florence McHugh, who studied and got her degree with the university that Matthew Fox had started in California. And it was called Awakening the Divine Feminine and that was very life changing and she introduced me to uh, oh, like the Goddess of Willendorf and some of the early goddess figures and um, some films about the goddess and anyway, that was quite an awakening. And she had two classes, one that met in the day and one that met at the night. And when that series ended, a woman from the other class contacted me and we formed a feminist spirituality book group that met for several years.

- Really?

- And um, our first book was Matthew Fox, Original Blessing and so that's kind of the book that, if anyone wanted to join the group, we'd say, well have you read that and does that resonate with you to see if they would uh, kind of fit into our group.

- How many people were in your group?

- I think um, maybe 10. Yeah. And then Florence McHugh offered another class at St. Joan of Arc called from Patriarchy to Partnership. And I took that and that was quite... Life changing too. And I think, I think there's a book of that title that I read along with that.

- You said life changing. Could you say more about what about these experiences were life changing?

- I thought it was interesting to learn a bigger history of um, women's role in the world, you know, in society. And of times way back and you know, when woman were honored and there were matriarchal societies and you know, um, a feminist reading of what some of the goddess figures represented, versus maybe what cultural patriarchy might say about them. It was empowering as a woman, yeah.

- Yeah.

- And um, and it was, there was also some anger there. You know, like we watched the film the Burning Times, you know, and how woman have been, women's wisdom has been downplayed and certainly those of us in those classes and in those circles felt we were involved in communities that limited the roles that we could be in the church or in society and didn't fully honor the gifts we brought.

- That is great, Kathy. How about talking about Re-Imagining? What was your relationship to the Re-Imagining community?

- Well, I began seminary in the fall of 1993 and I took a Re-Imagining class that Christie Neuger offered and so that's what introduced me to the Re-Imagining Conference. And I had not heard about it through my Catholic circles and found out, you know, it was sponsored by the World Council of Churches. It was um, amazing timing for me because I had just written a long letter to our local parish priest about my frustration with inclusive language and the limitation of women's voice in the liturgy. You know, like, we could do a reading or we could sing in the choir, but we could never, um, reflect on the gospel or give a sermon, you know. So and he accused me of having white, middle-class women's issues. That these were white, middle-class women's issues. So for me, going to Re-Imagining and having women from all around the world, from many ethnicities, raise up the same concerns was so empowering and I'm getting goosebumps as I talk about it. I felt like I waited my whole life for the ritual at that conference. It was so... amazing.

- Oh, I want to hear more about that. Talk some more about the ritual. What about the ritual moved you so much?

- Well, I had taken a class at St. Paul Seminary about ritual, feminist ritual. And I was critiquing the traditional, what at the time I called the Roman Catholic Liturgy, but you know, when I started at United Theological Seminary I was just surprised that a lot of times the liturgy there was the same that we had in the Catholic church, you know? I'm like, oh, you're the same creed, you have the same, you know, outline for your service. And many of the same prayers, I was kind of shocked at that because I hadn't been that exposed to, um, many protestant services.

- Yeah.

- Yeah. But I had done a critique of that and do you know, in our Catholic liturgy, God was referred to as male 80-some times. It's easy to refer to God in general neutral language. You can just say God. Lord was a very common phrase for God or Jesus was in the Catholic tradition. In our hymns, all of our hymns are, we're singing to the Lord, you know and our prayers. And God was referred to as father and the priests were referred to as father. So it was just refreshing. I recently reviewed some of the liturgy that we had at Re-Imagining and it was nothing that profound, I mean. (laughing) I mean, it was, but, I mean, it mainly just didn't, we didn't say God the father, maybe we just said that, kind of, you know, God is love or you know--

- Yeah.

- Loving creator, I don't know what terms were used, but they didn't seem that amazing. But they were, for that time.

- Right.

Both: Yeah.

- Do you think they would still be today?

- I feel like some of the work, like I have a friend in the United Methodist Church and I feel like even my own involvement in the Catholic church, I was a lay presider for a while, where I was uh, commissioned to lead communion services for the school children, there might be 800 children there, or in a nursing home or a Saturday morning at the local parish and um... I feel like that there was a little window where we experimented with more inclusive terms, that I feel like, some of it's turning back now. And I've heard that from my friend, who is a United Methodist retired minister too.

- Mm-hm, yeah.

- So--

- So mostly the ritual at that first Re-Imagining, it was the language, the different language for God that really was powerful for you?

- And the songs, you know, too. And just even saying there's many names for God, I mean, thank you. (laughing) I felt like, um, it was so nice to hear about one's spirituality or religion or theology from a woman's perspective and I felt like the metaphors and the language that the women presenters used felt so familiar. It felt, um... Maybe even somewhat ordinary to our everyday lives. You know, some of the symbols and the language and stories we could relate to.

- Yeah. You know one thing that attracted a great deal of criticism was the milk and honey ritual. Do you remember that? Do you have, do remember what your reaction to it was?

- Um... I remember that did get a lot of backlash. And um... I don't think the rit-, I loved the ritual but I don't think it shocked me in any way. And uh... I had been involved for years in the RCIA movement in the Catholic Church and I've been told that in the early church, the milk and honey ritual was part of that. I think it got misinterpreted.

- Yeah, yeah.

- Something else I want to pick up on that you mentioned, that was really interesting is that course you took related to Re-Imagining, could you say some about what that course was like and how it was connected to the conference?

- Yes, we um, we were asked to do several readings before the conference, so those readings kind of prepared us for some of the theology that some of the presenters would be talking about. We read an article on atonement that later was talked about in the conference and you know, and a variety of other things. And I was pretty new to, you know, it was my first semester at the seminary so, that was probably very

helpful for me as a participant.

- Right.

- Because there is a jargon in every field and there's a theological jargon that... You might not understand things as fully if you don't have a little background.

- Mm-hmm. So when you were actually at the conference and hearing the theology of the speakers, do you remember what your reaction was to it?

- I just remember being so excited. There was a... Woman from Korea, I believe, who talked about Adam and Eve and how Eve got in trouble for eating from the Tree of Knowledge and we all had an apple and took a bite out of it, kind of proclaiming that we have a right to that knowledge. (laughing) It can be ours too, it was, and I loved that, I loved using symbols and action. You know, taking the bite out of that apple. And there's many of us that, you know, we got, you know, like wooden apples with a bite out of them later. (laughing) That we used in rituals after or something and I remember um... The woman, perhaps from India, who had us put the red dot on our forehead, you know, so I just loved that, uh... We were including sacred symbols from women around the whole world. You know, we were greeted by the Native American drumming when we entered the space. And I thought the ritual was so full and so many layers, it was um, there was a lot of planning that went into it. A lot of planning and a lot of um, a lot of layers of meaning. And it was, for that big of a group, I think there was, you know, 24, 25,000 people there? For that big of space to have ritual and a flow to the weekend like it did was amazing planning.

- Mm-hmm.

- Because it flowed. It was not disorganized. There was so much thought put into everything.

- So you attended the first conference, but then you were involved after that. Could you say a little bit about what your involvement was after the first conference?

- Well, there was, I think every year for, was it up to 10 years that they had and I was, um, going to seminary at the time, so unfortunately, perhaps the first conference I thought I couldn't afford it. But I think Maryann Therese Winters was one of the prese-, and I really wanted to go to that. And I think by the time I finally gave myself permission to spend the money, it was full. But I remember um, attending some of the other conferences and I really can't even tell you how many. But there was one where we did movement and we did a lot of movement where we did like a karate chop, or you know, it was very empowering, it was so fun and then I woke up after that conference, I couldn't move my neck for a week. (laughing)

- You really got into it.

- But I think that was the very last conference that I was part of the planning committee and that was really rewarding and I met some women there that, um, I still am in contact with.

- What part of the planning were you involved in?

- Well, I remember introducing Mary Bednarowski, who was a professor at United Seminary.

- Yes.

- So I can't even really remember the details, but--

- Sure, yeah. It's been a while, hasn't it?

- Yeah. (laughing) But I remember being excited to be part of that.

- Yes. How about if we move to the backlash from the first conference? I assume you were aware of the backlash?

- Yes, I was.

- Did it affect you directly?

- Well, in a way it did. Because, you know, I, I um... I don't even know how to describe my religious affiliation today, but I, you know, I grew up in the Catholic Church and it certainly is a big part of my spirituality today, but I'm not involved, I'm kind of on the edges of the... Parish communities or just, you know. I'm involved in a lot of small groups and that's my church today. But... I knew a lot of Roman Catholic women at seminary who converted to another denomination so they could become ordained. And I think what Re-imagining taught me was that the misogyny that I experienced in the Roman Catholic church hierarchy was in all the denominations.

- Mm-hmm.

- And so it didn't appeal to me to change denominations to become ordained.

- Yeah.

- It kind of, like, opened my eyes. They might be further ahead in the struggle, but there's still a struggle.

- Right, yeah.

- It's women's issue.

- And how, as you think about it, at the time or now, how do you account for that backlash? Why did it happen?

- I think that even... One of the things I longed for at the time was a democratic church. And even, I think, what I saw then, I don't know how it is today but churches that even looked democratic had a patriarchy and women who were ordained were always not fully accepted. I mean, I know the system well enough to know that when you're a woman and you work within a patriarchal system and you reflect the values and the language of patriarchy, you're much better embraced and accepted than if you try to speak about your own personal spirituality, in your terms, you know. And so you're beloved as long as you're following the traditional... Rules and then if anything looks a little unorthodox then there's some questioning and um, moving you out to the outskirts, yeah.

- Mmhm, mmhm.

- So.

- Yeah.

- I guess I speak for my own experience of being a beloved person within my faith communities and also because of my ability to, or my, I guess I just couldn't help myself to ask some tough questions about inclusive language and the roles of women and many other things that... Even people who dearly love me could be challenged by some of my questioning.

- Mmhm.

- And wanting to move the community, open it up, you know, make it broader, you know. Yeah.

- When you say the community, would you say, are you thinking of the Roman Catholic Church or is that, or a different community?

- Basically the Roman Catholic Church is my experience. But I certainly was exposed to a lot more denominations in my four years at United Theological Seminary and I did see that so many of the struggles in my own denomination were the struggles in others.

- Yeah, yep, mmhm, mhmm.

- And I think with the backlash, I think that there was a window and I can't even tell you how many years. You know, maybe a decade, where there was a lot of experimentation and openness and a lot more freedom to try new things. And I think not only did some of the women who were part of the Re-imagining planning experience backlash, but a lot of the denominations too, because I feel like a lot of the progress that was made in the 80s and 90s is um, we're losing it.

- Mmhm, mhmm. Yeah. How would you define Re-imagining?

- At the time of the conference, I would say that what was so exciting for me was to explore new ways to speak about God that wasn't God the father.

- Mmhm.

- I found anytime that I attended a conference or a lecture given by women, or a sermon, I, as a woman, a lot of times the language or the um, the stories they shared resonated more personally with me because they were coming from a woman.

- Mmhm.

- Yeah.

- Yeah.

- Yeah. And I felt empowered. You know, in our Lectionary in the Catholic church, very few women stories are even in our Lectionary. And when they are, it might be a weekday. And so I felt empowered to be learning about all these women in the scriptures. And maybe a new exegesis of what, of how to interpret the story. You know, so that was exciting.

- And that was coming through Re-imagining?

- I think I witnessed some of that there, yes.

- Mmhm.

- And of course other places too. But that was there.

- Yeah.

- You know, there was talk on the atonement at Re-imagining and I thought that was so... It spoke to what I believed in my heart. You know, like I already had that in my heart but somebody was saying it out loud.

- And what specifically were they saying?

- That you know, the theology that Jesus died for our sins and we had to believe in Jesus to be saved or believe in Jesus, God the father through Jesus to be saved, that never made sense to me. Like I always thought Jesus was radical and he was, he's radical in that he spoke up for the oppressed and because he did, the people in power didn't like it and they killed him.

- Mmhm.



- So that's how I interpreted his life. Because the other theology, to me, creates an in group and an out group. And I could never, um, accept that. You know and my first time I ran into that was when I went to college. I went to Iowa State University. And there'd be, oh Campus Crusade for Christ or other groups that would, you know, stop you on your way to class or whatever and you know and, if they found out you were Catholic they'd say, "Oh, you're not saved," you know. And get into these theological discussions and so it was eye opening then to come, and I wanted to be a faithful person, so they did challenge my beliefs, you know, because I kinda listened to that. But I knew it wasn't true from my own experience.

- Yeah.

- Yeah.

- Yeah. Do you know anything about how and why the Re-imagining community was formed?

- What I heard was that um, the World Council of Churches was celebrating a decade of women.

- Yes.

- And that they wanted to do something.

- Right.

- And so toward the end of that decade, they had this conference.

- Yeah, yeah.

- And I love that it was woman from all over the world.

- Yeah, yeah. And then after the conference the community formed. The one that lasted for 10 years.

- Yes, uh-huh.

- Yeah, you probably weren't involved in that decision, right?

- No.

- OK, yeah, that makes sense, sure. Um, from your perspective, and you were involved with the planning and as an attendee a little bit so do you have a sense of how feminist theology affected the structure and functioning of the community from your involvement in it?

- I think that was the heart of it wasn't it?

- Yeah.

(laughing) Yes. Was there any difference when you think about, and I know it's been a while, so you might not remember it, when you think about like planning the conference, was it different because it was Re-imagining in the way that it was done?

- I think it was more collaborative. Yeah. I think uh... There wasn't a lot of top down decision making as far as I knew. And it just seemed so inclusive in that. I know that, particularly the first one, was so big that they had all the sub-groups, you know? So you wouldn't have to have like a group of 50 come together every time. But it just seemed like, um... For me, good ritual includes as many people as possible.

- Mmhm.

- And so I know the ritual of the Re-imagining had a lot of people's input and voices. And as far as the speakers, too, there was quite an effort, I could see, to have women from all over the world and from a variety of different experiences.

- Mmhm. Talking about this reminded me, you have a great story about your small group and the objects, could you say a little bit about that? About how people gave gifts to each other in your group. What your experience was at that table?

- Yeah, we were invited to um, bring a, an object... To share with other women at our table. We had a group of 10 women at the table. I received a beautiful clay, handmade plate that you could put under a candle from a woman from Saskatchewan. And I shared a, um, polished turquoise stone that I know one of the women at my table received and every time I see her she talks about that stone. And it's been all these many years since then and how special that still is to her.

- Mmhm. And when I came today, you were able to show me that plate and a pitcher that was used at all of the gatherings and a basket that was used at them. So you have those ritual objects still.

- Right, right. And I also remember that we were invited to bring um, I don't know if they said just a cloth, or I brought a scarf, you know, and we used those in some movement and um that became important to me too. Because out of this Re-imagining group, I had some friends who uh... Were active in the Catholic church, many at St. Paul's attending, you know, getting their degree at St. Paul's Seminary who wanted to do a ritual.

- Mmhm.

- And we gathered about 50 people and we um... Before the ritual, there was about 10 or 12 of us that met and we claimed our ordination through our baptism into the priesthood of all believers. And we used a prayer for deaconesses in the church to claim, you know, to commission ourselves to lead, to preside at this liturgy.

- An ancient prayer for deaconesses?

- Mmhm.

- Mmhm, yep.

- So we claimed our ordination through our baptism into the priesthood of all believers and we put our stoles on. And the um... The cloth that I had at Re-imagining was what I used for that ritual.

- Really?

- And then every time. And then this was supposed to be a one time ritual.

- Yeah.

- Well, we were so moved by it that we continued to meet monthly for six or more years. And every month we, um, people took turns planning creative rituals and we wore our stoles pretty regularly in the beginning years and I think as time went on, it became less important.

- And this developed right out of the Re-imagining conference?

- It did and we knew that Re-imagining had their own monthly rituals.

- Mmhm.

- But we had our own and the first one was held at the, is it the World Council of Churches building or Minnesota Council of Churches?

- Yep, Minnesota Council of Churches, yes.

- They provided space for us.

- Yeah.

- And then we met there for a while after that. But then um... There was gonna be a charge that was beyond our capability and we found another sympathetic protestant church that offered us space.

- I'd love to hear a little more about this, this is fascinating, so how many, you said there were 50 women at that first event?

- Mmhm.

- How many women would you say were involved over those six years?

- I would say that there was probably, we probably would have... 15 women there and there's probably a core group of about 10 that took some main leadership roles there, as far as, you know, like, there was a woman who was kind of like our liturgist. She would bring a round table to each of our liturgies that she had in the trunk of her car, because we wanted to gather around a round table.

- Oh. Was that, just one question, was that related to Re-imagining or not?

- Well, these core women had been to Re-imagining, yes.

- OK, yeah, OK.

- And so this was, this was kind of like, well, what can we do with this? You know, we felt like the ritual at Re-imagining was, like I said, I waited my whole life for it. So we wanted to continue that energy and I think a lot of us were kind of like lone voices in our local churches.

- Were you all Catholic?

- Yeah, uh, a few not, but majority yes. And many of us worked in the churches or were very active volunteers. So we had our liturgies on Saturday morning because a lot of people were involved in the Sunday morning services in their local parishes. But a lot of us found that we were kind of a lone voice in our parish, calling for inclusive language and greater roles for women and we almost felt like battered women. You know, it was hard to be a lone voice and for myself, I'll speak personally that I couldn't help myself, I mean, I had to bring up these issues. They were, it felt oppressive to not have an intelligent voice from women in our ritual. We could read a reading or we could sing in the choir, but we never heard from a woman, her reflection on the gospel. There was nothing like that. And we felt called to preside. So this gave us a safe place to develop our gifts as presiders of ritual and we also had a different vision. We never wanted anyone to be the leader. It was always a shared uh, leadership you know? There was never one person in charge. And even when we presided, it was a team or more. Never just one person.

- To make sure I understand, from what you said about the stoles, it sounds like you, you were doing this as lay women because of your priesthood as believers.

- Right.

- Is that right?

- We were claiming that. We were claiming our ordination and our right to wear a stole.

- Yeah, OK, yeah.

- And it was an important symbol at the beginning.

- Yes.

- And as the years went on, I think that, I had been a lay presider in our local parish and I presided over these word communion services and stuff. And I wore an alb. And that was important to me, but as the years went on, I saw that the stole or the alb became a symbol of separation between the presider and the community. And so I think we decided to shed those.

- Interesting.

- Because then it kinda... We didn't want anything that would separate, you know, somebody at the ritual from thinking that they weren't fully participating.

- Yeah, yeah. You mentioned the stoles, are there other key rituals that you remember from this group over those six years?

- Well, you know, we rose out of our Catholic traditions and so Eucharist was important to us and it was quite, it was exciting to claim that we could pray over the bread and wine and um, and then that became an issue as time went on. Some women, that was central, they wanted the bread and wine there every ritual. And others wanted more freedom to um, create ritual without those symbols. So there was some tension there as the years went on because some people it was really important to and some people felt it limited what we could do.

- Was it ever resolved in a certain way?

- I don't think so.

- Yeah.

- It just was, and it maybe was just with a few people.

- Yeah.

- Yeah.

- Yeah.

- There was actually one woman in this group who got her Masters of Divinity at United Theological Seminary and she was Catholic and she converted to another tradition so she would be ordained. And the Eucharist was pretty darn important to her. (laughing)

- But for those of you in the community, most of you, being Catholic was an important part of your identity, is that true would you say?

- For most of the women in that group. There was um, I remember right off hand, two women who were ordained in the protestant churches that were there.

- OK, OK.

- And another woman quite involved in another denomination through the music ministry, but the majority of us had a Catholic background.

- Yeah.

- Yeah. And even the woman who was involved in music from another denomination had, her degree from St. Paul Seminary.

- Oh OK, yes.

- So she had studied at St. Paul Seminary.

- Mmhm, mhmm, this is really, really interesting. What aspects, we've kinda talked about this, but maybe you can add something to it, what aspects of Re-imagining were most significant to you and why?

- I think it empowered us as women. I think that we were starving for that empowerment. And like I said, so many of us kind of felt like battered women, you know, so for me it was like my experiences, they validated what... It validated my yearning for inclusive language, for more active participation for women, for more inclusivity. And it validated my own call. You know, like, uh... So it was very empowering.

- How would you define your call?

- Well, I think a call to be a faithful person and I felt like there, I have felt for most of my adult life, a mystical, a relationship with a mystery, that seems real. At the time of Re-imagining, it was rooted in the Christian tradition and since Re-imagining, there's been an evolution of my spirituality that includes the wisdom from so many different religious traditions. And um, so Christianity's part of the story, but it's too small to contain what I experience now. And so therefore, I find it, there was about a decade in my life where I tried to go back to the traditional ritual and it just did not fit anymore. I know so many people like myself, who have no, um, church community because we don't fit.

- Yeah.

- You know? So my church today is small groups.

- Could you say more about that? You mentioned that earlier, that's intriguing, what kind of small groups?

- Well, some are all women, you know, maybe, I have a group that meets monthly at home of about nine women and we've met for um, almost 10 years monthly.

- Wow.

- When we first started meeting they wanted to meet twice a month, they were so excited. (laughing) And uh, we just, you know I, I call the group our soul sisters, you know, Oprah had an XM Sirius Radio show called Soul Series. And I loved all the people she interviewed and the books she talked about and so we kinda began reading and studying some of the books and authors that she had on her show.

- Can I just ask how these women got together? Were these people you know you kind of brought together?

- Yeah, these were all women I knew and they're kind of, mostly in the neighborhood.

- Yes?

- But many of them didn't know each other. And now they all do. And then there's another group. In 2004 to 2006, I went through a spiritual direction program.

- Yes?

- And we met every weekend, one weekend a month for two years. So by the time our program was over, we knew each other really well. And most of us were women, there was a couple men in the program. So I asked the, one of the women who um, facilitated that program if we could create a meeting, a monthly meeting where we could bring our spouses and significant others and so that started in 2006 and it continues today. And we lost our, our... Retreat center, our public space for that. The nuns who had that space sold it. But um, we now meet in homes.

- Oh.

- Yeah, we wanted to keep meeting. And it's so exciting to have a small group where my husband comes and we can talk about our spirituality. I mean, if it wasn't for, I've been at a couple groups with my husband, a small Christian community through St. Joan of Arc. And if it wasn't for those gatherings, there's so many things about our own spiritual journeys that we wouldn't share with each other.

- Right.

- And what I find in these small groups is, they're places where we can transform personally. You know, like, it causes personal transformation. So they're working groups in that we really work on how to become, you know, wake up to our best selves, you know? And you know, I just read an article on non-duality, you know

and I think that probably arises out of the Buddhist tradition, you know? But every time I think in black and white, I find that I'm stuck. And when I think in both and, a door opens, you know, so some of these concepts are just so freeing. They really have helped me grow as a person.

- I'm curious, if you don't mind my asking, the group of um, your spiritual direction with the spouses and significant others. I'm curious, do you have a structure to it, how do you have these conversations about spirituality?

- When we started we, like I said, we met at Women Well in St. Paul, which is no longer there. And we would go on one Friday a month and we start with a soup supper and it was so nice because we would sit in small tables of four or six and then have, you know, 45 minutes where we could get to know each other. And then we would gather in another room and we had a video for about a half an hour that we followed up with for an hour discussion. And one of the um, before Re-imagining, I was introduced to creation spirituality and I had taken some classes. And Brian Swimme has a series of videos on, he was influenced by Thomas Berry, you know and Brian Swimme is a physicist. And so he talks about the intersection of modern science with spirituality. My husband is a physicist.

- Oh.

- And I have a theology background.

- Wow.

- So we found his work fascinating.

- Yes.

- And so a lot of this, our journey in the early years in this couples group was studying the work of Brian Swimme and Thomas Berry and you know, other people who were looking at what does modern science have to say that informs our spirituality today?

- Fascinating, wow. To get back to Re-imagining, this was really interesting and related too, did your involvement in Re-imagining affect your perspective on feminist theology or the church? I think you've said some about that, but anything else to say about that?

- Well, you know, the work that the speakers, the emerging theologies that were mentioned in the main talks, it was exciting work and necessary work. And I know it probably continues today. Although, I'm disillusioned.

- Mm, say some more about that.

- I don't know... How um, it changed our local parishes in our local communities.



- Mmhm, yep.

- And I think a lot, I don't know, in my circles anyway, a lot of us who question and study and learn have left the parish communities because we don't fit there anymore.

- And I'm curious, have most gone to something like small groups? Have they moved to a different church or they've moved to small groups or they've just, I mean, where, where have they gone?

- I think, and I... A lot of the people I have contact with come out of the Catholic tradition.

- Yeah, yes.

- I think we tried sometime, maybe some of us went to the Unitarian Universalist Church for a while. And you know, personally, I loved the community, I thought the minister was phenomenal with her sermons, but there was a mystical connection that I have that I couldn't connect to there. It was more humanist. It was more in the head and maybe the mystery and the mystical feels more heart centered, you know? So I find I can bring that to the small groups. I think the call in these small groups that I'm involved in is to be authentic, you know, to be who you are, to bring your whole person, you don't have to hide a thing. And we love each other no matter what, you know? And we love each other into more wholeness. So we don't walk into those groups being anybody but who we are, you don't have to act like a professional, or-- (laughing) Like you're, you know it all.

- Right.

- You're a seeker.

- Yeah, yes, yes.

- We're in it together. It's all shared and, and leadership is all shared and rotated and of course there's certain people that, you know, rise to the occasion more than others to kinda create the structure or facilitate. You know, my opinion, I think it's shared among the group is that we're all there to learn from each other, we're mutual learners.

- Yeah.

- Mutual seekers.

- Yeah, mmhm. And as you look toward the future, you know, you've said it doesn't feel like that's really had much of an affect on the local church and do you see the future in these small groups. Or maybe another way to phrase it is where do you see Re-imagining happening, today or in the future?

- Well, when I was in Re-imagining, I think I kind of had a vision. And I shared it with a friend of mine who was Catholic married to a Jewish man. And she said it sounded very similar to what happens in their synagogue. And it's the idea that, um, and I did this with my children, we would have little home rituals, where I invited them to pick the reading and the symbols of the season. And we would gather, my son might invite the neighbor boy over and we had our own little rituals and they understood how to create... A ritual from the symbols of the season, having a reading, prayers for people important to our lives. And we even would have, share orange juice or crackers. (laughing) And they just loved being, um, involved in that, you know, in creating it.

- Yeah.

- And then uh, we were involved in these small groups where we'd meet in a retreat center or in each others homes with you know, a bigger group of people. And then we would go to our parish liturgy some Sundays or maybe special holidays or something. Well, this is my friend who was married to the Jewish man said that's, they had their Friday ritual at home, twice a month, they would meet with other families to have their Friday ritual and then for the, like maybe once a month or more, they would go to the temple. And so that's kind of the vision I had for a while.

- Yeah.

- But to be quite honest, today I don't have the connection to the larger community.

- Yeah.

- So I'm not quite sure. I know that the journey that the communities I'm involved in is part of a larger group. And actually Jean Houston, I read an article of hers about jump time.

- Mmhm.

- And it's this idea that, I think that jump time means there's big metamorphosis that kind of happen quick, you know, over time or, and that a lot of those are happening quickly now. But she said the work that we do in these small groups is transformative and it combines with the energy of all the other small groups around the world and it really makes a difference. And that empowered the work that I do when I read that. I thought, that's what I do!

- Yes.

- You know, it's personal transformation groups.

- Yeah.

- Around our inner spirituality and growth and wakening consciousness and--

- Would your hope or dream be that this would become larger, it would be a larger community, or do you think it's good to have it stay in the smaller groups?

- I don't know, I know in 1978, I was invited to be part of the Campus Ministry Team at Iowa State University. I graduated from Iowa State and I was invited to stay on staff and direct the student programs. And one of the women on staff, and this was a new thing then, this was kinda right after Vatican II and I mean, it was kind of unusual to invite lay people to be part of parish staffs. And one of the women who was on the staff with me said, "The future of the church is in small groups." I still remember that from like 1978. You know, just a conversation with her. But I don't know and I don't think a lot of us know. I think we're in the midst of a huge paradigm shift and I think we might not even see it in our lifetime. I don't understand, you know, like, there's a lot, you know, a lot of people are quite concerned about our youth, who aren't involved in churches today. I have um... Two children about 30 years old. And they do not, they are not involved in a church community. We sent them to Catholic school and uh... I'm not concerned about it. Because I think um, in my, in the terminology of the church I grew up in, we said the holy spirit was the evangelizer. And I believe there's a movement happening and I think it's gonna be better, because I think the transformation is not coming from an outside force, imposing it on a group of people, but I think the transformation is happening in the hearts and souls of people. And I would say that my children are spiritual, but not religious and they're very good people and loving and I don't know how it's gonna play, I have a granddaughter now, I have no idea how it's, but I'm not as worried as some people. Because I trust in that spirit.

- Yeah.

- I trust. Because, how did we come to faith, you know? Something bigger than us called us.

- Yeah.

- Yeah.

- Mmhm.

- And I found that even with my children, there had to be a lot of on learning, you know. Like, I remember my second grade daughter saying a prayer once, "Oh God, please change me." And I'm like why? You know, who told you you needed to be changed? You know, like--

- And what did she mean by that?

- Well, I think they're, we grew up somewhat with a theology that uh, we were sinners who needed salvation, you know? As a mother, I just, I found that sad, that somehow she had picked up on that too.

- Yeah.

- Yeah.

- Yeah.

- Yeah. But I empowered my children to question. I took a class at United Theological Seminary, a constructive theology class and our professor said the more questions you have, the higher your grade. (laughing) So as a mother, I encouraged my children to question. One of my proudest parental moments was, my son, in the eighth grade in the Catholic school, the religion teacher was telling him about the churches stance on homosexuality. And so this would have been, you know, several years ago now. And he raised his hand and he said, "If God's that prejudiced, "I'm not going to believe in that God." And I thought, what courage. He found his voice in junior high and what courage.

- Yeah.

- It wasn't a supported thing to say then.

- Mmhm.

- Like it is today.

- Mmhm.

- Yeah. That would have been in the late 90s probably. But anyway, I don't know what the future brings, I just, you know, there's a spirituality of being present to the moment.

- Yes. (laughing) Yes.

- It's frustrating though. You know, it's lonely.

- Yeah?

- I miss the larger gatherings, I miss the singing. Like, I feel like there's not even a lot of music today that speaks to the spirituality that I embrace. I'm old enough now to know that what I believe today could change 10 years from now and that's exciting. I really kind of like the new, you know? And yet there's things that are lost. And ritual is important to me, symbol is important to me. Um, I think there's, in some of our sacraments, there was some transformation that happened and so there is a loss when you don't have those. And yet, um, in the small circles I'm in, sometimes it gives us an opportunity to create some of those together in a new way. So we're continuing the Re-imagining work.

- Yes, you are. Well, what would you say is the greatest legacy of Re-imagining, for you?

- It was so exciting to have the questions and the... Experiences in my personal life being spoken about in a

public, global platform. You know, it made, I think a lot of us women who were there, you know, we were just like, we felt so affirmed and at home.

- Mmhm.

- And it felt, it felt... You felt it in your soul, you know? Like I said it felt like I'd waited my whole life, you know? (laughing) Yeah.

- Yeah, yeah.

- It was so affirming and um... The backlash was so disappointing.

- Mmhm.

- Yeah. So one of the freedoms I think someone like myself has, I used to work in the churches. That was my, you know, and I mourned that, I've mourned that I grew to be someone who didn't fit there anymore. Or I mourned that the church couldn't open and grow.

- Yeah.

- I felt a little betrayed by that. But on the other hand... There's no one telling me what I can believe or can't or what I can say or I can't. And that is, there's a freedom in that.

- Mmhm.

- It's hard to be called heretical.

- Yes. (laughing)

- Oh worry about being excommunicated.

- Right.

- Or moved to the, you know, you're not included in the group anymore. And so there's a freedom that comes and I've met so many wonderful, imaginative, creative, gifted people on the edges.

- Mmhm.

- So. And I guess I need to say that I feel like there's a community growing on the internet, you know? Maybe even on television. Like I said, I'm kind of a, I love Oprah, and the work she's doing on her OWN channel with the Soul Series and so many of her other programming. The World Wide Web and social media is a great tool for some of these, you know meditation and... We have access to whatever we want at the tip of a finger.

- Mmhm. And that actually brings me to kind of my final question is, what would you include, the community is working on a website, a Re-imagining website and do you have ideas about what you would want included? Who would benefit from it, how they would find out about it. You know, what are your thoughts about a Re-imagining website?

- I think that... If that website could connect us to some of the cutting edge theology today. Some of the current issues and maybe a broader vision of where people think things are headed or you know, or how many of us are in a certain movement. You know, I think that would be helpful. That's what I turn, like, I'd love like a TED Talk or something, you know? Where it's 20 minutes and you hear something that's somebody's, a new thing that somebody's given a lot of, maybe two decades of work to, you know, in a short.

- Yeah.

- And so it would be great to have access to some of the theologians today or, like I said, just a broader vision of church or spirituality, some connection to that.

- Mmhm. Good, Kathy, this has been wonderful. But let me ask, is there something we haven't discussed that you would like to talk about?

- Well, I just want to re-cap maybe.

- Good, do that.

- And emphasize what was so important to me.

- Please do.

- That the Re-imagining conference happened and it empowered, in my life, a small group of women to claim their, um... Gifts and to create space to develop them and I think we were just one small group of how many? You know. I feel like, you know, I have a whole file of our work and it was, it was, like the Re-imagining conference, we put a lot of work into our worship aids and our, you know, we created our rituals from scratch every time. And we used the Sophia blessing every time, I should say that.

- Did you, did you, OK.

- Yeah, that was our closing.

- Wow.

- But you know, I know of a, you know, probably four other ritual groups, maybe not sprung out of Re-

imagining. One particularly that was, but that were doing similar work so I think that, um... We don't know, really what women who walked out the door did with that, but it's probably been amazing. And it's exciting for me to talk to you so that I can share, you know, the work that we did for about a decade. You know, that was so important and yet... Hasn't really gone down in history, you know?

- Mmhm, mmhm, exactly.

- Like I said, probably the gift to us, who were Catholic women, forming these small groups, we weren't involved in, it would have been really exciting for me to be able to bring some of this to a local parish and do this work with people. And I tried, in some ways.

- Did you?

- Yeah. But you run into so much opposition.

- Yeah.

- And it's so discouraging.

- Was it mostly from priests? Was it from other members of the parish?

- Both.

- Both, mmhm.

- I don't think a lot of the people were there, you know?

- Mmhm, yes.

- And maybe still aren't, you know?

- Yeah.

- Yeah, as progressive as some parishes are, the minute I walk in the door and there's only a male presiding, a lot of people don't even recognize that that's limiting. They're so used to it. Yeah. So I appreciate how Re-imagining supported my theological exploration.

- Mmhm.

- And connected me with people, women around the globe asking such similar questions and having similar experiences. How exciting, in my lifetime, to be connected to that global community.

- Mmhm.

- Yeah. And that's maybe what can happen on the web.

- Yes, yes.

- We can continue it.

- Right. Thank you so much, Kathy. I really appreciate your reflections, thank you. We're done.