

- Ann, thank you so much for doing this interview. If you could just say your full name.

- I'll give you my full, full name. Jessica Ann Craig.

- Great.

- I go by Ann.

- You go by Ann, great. And are you lay or clergy?

- Well, I have been a lay person for most of my life and in the last year, about a little less than a year ago, I was ordained in Metropolitan Community Churches as well as the Fellowship of Affirming Ministries under the leadership of Yvette Flunder. So it was a very ecumenical ordination.

- Wonderful, thank you. So, those would be your denominational affiliations now?

- No.

- No, okay. (laughing)

- Yes and no. I am affiliated with both groups and I have not given up my United Methodist membership. Call me ambivalent or call me visionary, either one would work.

- Okay. (laughing) That is great.

- And, when and where were you born?

- Oklahoma City, Oklahoma in 1952.

- Wonderful. And where did you go to school? Graduate, divinity school, college, anything?

- I went to Nebraska Wesleyan University and then to, several schools, but I went to Yale Divinity School. But in the past as I also did a summer quarter at Grailville and got credit through the United, what is it? The United Theological School out in Ohio. Which is a United Methodist affiliated institution. Met some of the key players in that summer quarter at Grailville. And, many, I don't know if many, but several of them were present at Re-Imagining and certainly all were impacted. So, and I've done graduate work, although I didn't get a PhD, I did some PhD work, finished all the classwork at Drew Theological School.

- Wonderful, interesting. That's great. What work or ministry were doing at the time of Re-Imagining in 1993?

- I spent about 17 years in the general board of ministries, specifically in United Methodist women, what was then called the Women's Division, now called the United Methodist Women's National Office. So that's what I was doing there. And my role was the Executive Director for Spiritual and Theological Development.

- Could you say a little bit about what that work was? Sounds interesting.

- Sure, I was, let's see (mumbles). I provided the oversight for an annual spiritual growth study that dealt with social issues from a spiritual, theological and biblical perspective.

- I'm sorry, that was social issues you said? It broke up just a little bit.

- Yes.

- Got it, good. Sorry.

- No problem. And always feel free to clarify because I know it's Skype. (laughing) So, and I ran workshops and developed curriculum for leadership development for our, basically state level groups, our conference, United Methodist Women's leadership. And every year we would have a school Christian mission and we would implement some of that leadership training there and, along with the spiritual growth studies in that locale. And, one of the other things that I did was I ran what was called Christian Disciplines Workshops, which provided a much more in depth weekend experience for conference level women's leadership. (audio cuts out) And for the district level as well that were attended to provide, how do you do theology? How do you do biblical research? You know, study, in a United Methodist approach and in order to deal with the issues that you have back at school, we're committed to dealing with.

- Very interesting. How long were you in that position, Ann?

- 17 years.

- 17 years, okay, yeah, you said that. What work or ministry did you do after Re-Imagining?

- I kept my job so I continued to do that work.

- Good.

- Yeah, so I know some people lost their jobs. I was instrumental. I organized the entire group that attended from the United Methodist Women.

- Oh.

- Yeah and that was, you know, we learn about the event and then I ran through our usual procedures and got permission to fund, I think we had about, I would say 15 people there and that could be verified at my fingertips, but about that 'cause we had a handful of directors from our board of directors. And they are all elected from the conferences and the jurisdictions and then we had about 10 representatives from two groups. One was this spiritual growth coordinators at the conference level and the other group was vice presidents who were in charge of programming at the conference level. So we had about, I would say about 15 people total, roughly.

- Yeah, actually I was looking because I have, I had a fact sheet from Joyce Sohl, the director, and she kind of listed that out. So, those numbers are there but that's fine. As you said, I can check that out. I'm really interested in what made you decide to organize that, to go to Re-Imagining. Why that conference? What did you know about it or hear about it?

- Well, I had already read, and I'm trying to think of the name of book, Hal Taussig's book on--

- Wisdom's Feast? Yes.

- He co-wrote that, right?

- Right.

- Who did he write that with?

- Susan Cady, became Susan Cady Cole. And Marian, she was from Grailville, a sister from Grailville. And right now--

- Marian Ronan.

- That's it, that's it. Yes.

- Marian Ronan was my adviser when I was at Grailville.

- Oh, okay.

- One of two advisors at Grailville. And the other was Joan Mark.

- Oh. Presbyterian? Or no? Yeah.

- Yes.

- Oh really? Okay, yes. I interviewed her earlier too. That's amazing. So you knew about Sophia obviously.

- I did. I actually was not expecting, I'm not sure what I expected, all I knew was that this was an ecumenical event and the known people in leadership, Jeanne Audrey Powers was among the leaders so that was institutional connections. And, so we said let's get a delegation going. You know? And so off we went. I'd seen the list of speakers, as I recall, and I said, oh yeah, we need to be here. But I was not necessarily expecting Sophia.

- Okay. Oh, yes, I see. But you saw the speakers, yeah.

- I did, yeah. And so I remember the moment vividly when, I mean, it may have been the blessing, the blessed Sophia, grand provision within whatever, it may have been then or the end of the first night when I realized, oh my goodness, this is gonna be so controversial. It became crystal clear.

- Really?

- Yes. And I remember I had to have a little person to person talk with myself and I said, alright, now what am I gonna do? Am I going to panic or am I going to enjoy myself? And then deal with whatever fall out that happens later. And I decided, in that moment, to enjoy myself and participate and what comes, will come. Yeah. But I knew, it was so like oh my gosh, I did not quite realize. 'Cause I knew the controversy had already started around the Sophia Wisdom Theology and in the right wing of the United Methodist Church. It was almost, it wasn't full blown but it was very intense already. And so, like, oh, now we're in it. So, there was that moment.

- Wow.

- I knew there was gonna (mumbles) and I said, oh, here we go. And I was right.

- You were right. Boy, were you right. I want to get back to that. Before we do, I just wanted to follow up, what kind of work or ministry are you doing now, Ann?

- Well, let me give you just a brief overview.

- Please.

- I segued off of the United Methodist Women's work to early retirement and had a year to kind of contemplate where I wanted to go, did some entrepreneurial kind of exploration and began as a free lancer. No, sorry. For four years, I was at the Gay Lesbian Alliance against defamation as their first Director of Religion.

- Really?

- Yeah, religion, faith, and values to be precise and so I worked for them for five years. So I went from the church, looking over my shoulder for being lesbian, and to the LGBT world, having to explain myself as

religious. (laughing) But it was great. People actually were very kind. It took us all a little while to get over the shock of having a religion person in a major LGBT organization. And, but a lot of people came to me and sort of confessed their wayward ways. So, it's okay, you know? (laughing) And then so the ongoing hunger for a safe space to be spiritual that was really deeply expressed. So, I did four years of that and in that I worked with, that was an incredible experience of working with probably 25 different LGBT denominationally based faith groups. One denomination might have four different faith groups and I worked with all of them. And, four LGBT faith groups. And then helping them with journalism, with getting press releases, how to get journalists to show up to their events, message, do talking points, do interviews, all that. And I learned all of that from GLAD. I have (audio cuts out). But they didn't really know what they wanted their religion person to do so once they told me, I got it clear that they really didn't know what they wanted me to do, they had a good idea but they knew I was supposed to do something but they weren't really sure what. I said, okay, good. I know what I need to do and that's when I just networked with all of the (mumbles). So that's four years and now I--

- Can I just interrupt for one second because I'm dying to know, what motivated them to decide they wanted someone to do religion, faith, and values?

- Well, it's, it really boiled down to a couple, there are about five major funders that get the key people who got foundations connected to them, who get, mostly white gay men, who get together every year at a sort of retreat to talk about where they want to go next and, you know, and they finally came to the conclusion that maybe we should do something about religion. Duh, you know? And, kind of one of those moments. And, they began to fund the LGBT faith groups directly and they funded the national secular groups to have an angle on religion. And so that's how those positions got established. So it was a very historic moment and in our humble opinion marriage equality was won because of the faith leaders and in particular, particularly, the black faith leaders who stepped up in Maryland, Washington D.C., to begin the watershed moment when marriage equality came across. So, it's very historic and it was thrilling to be a part of it, honestly. Really thrilling. And so now, I spun myself off of GLAD and, 'cause, oh my gosh, that was an intense organization. (laughing) I love GLAD, I speak very highly of it, but it can make people crazy because I decided (laughing) like one year at GLAD is a little bit like dog years. You know? It's like (laughing). Isn't that a funny idea? I got in trouble for saying that once. (laughing) But it's a very intense organization but does incredible work and it was a fantastic platform to do the work I wanted to do. Fantastic. So then off I went, a little bit in survival mode, and became a consultant in taking the knowledge that I gained at GLAD and all the programmatic ideas and knowledge that I experienced through the United Methodist Women and have been a consultant ever since. Now, right now, let's see, over the years, because I've worked with Presbyterians since then as they gained, they dropped their prohibition and welcomed marriage. (speaker garbling) But afterwards, Presbyterians and a major part of our work has been following community churches. I've been a primary consultant for them of communications. And, but I'm beginning to work with kinship, which (speaker garbling).

- A Seventh Day Adventist Group you said? Yes.

- Yeah, LGBT group, yes. Go figure. And, so I've been working with them on a little bit of programming

development. You know, fundraising and communications. But my main, one of my main pieces of work that I'm doing right now is Joseph Tolton and I have been working for five years on the Fellowship Global, which is an organization aimed at identifying and expanding progressive faith voices in Africa.

- Really?

- Yes. So east and west Africa. If you've gone to Kenya, Rwanda, Democratic Republic of Congo, and a little bit of Cote d'Ivoire in West Africa. So yeah, it's like, I guess I've never shied away from a challenge. (laughing)

- No. That is fascinating, wow. Well, I'd love to talk about all of this. It's so interesting. I'd better move back to Re-imagining. But this is fascinating. And we'll get back to it when we talk about the future, I think, where you see, where Re-imagining needs to happen. So we'll get back to it but one last question, background question. How and when did you become aware of feminist theology?

- Well, perhaps in college in 1973, 74. I remember I was in a colloquium with one of my religion professors and he gave us, like, oh, you should be sure to read as an extra credit, Rosemary Ruether. Well none of us did. (laughing) In true student fashion, you know, it was like, oh yeah, by the way, read Rosemary Ruether. And at the end he's like, well, did anybody read that? I was like, no, we were too busy. 'Cause it wasn't for curriculum.

- Right.

- But that was the first time I really had heard of her. Feminism was not really on my radar, per say, in college. There were some feminists women but, oh my gosh, were they harassed in college. I didn't know what it meant, honestly. By the time, I did a two year volunteer program right out of college and was kind of immersed a little bit in, well okay, I wasn't because, it was like a six week program and about three weeks into the program of the training, a woman showed up who was at Saint Paul's School of Theology in Kansas City.

- Oh yes.

- And she asked the question, have you already begun talking about women's feminism and women's issues? And all the leaders kind of shrank down. It was kind of like that moment when they asked about Rosemary Ruether. It was like, no. (laughing) It was mostly women in the room and she goes, how could you? And so, that was my introduction and it blossomed from there. I was more intensely dealing with being gay in college and trying to figure that out and creating my own personal escape program. Like, making deals with God and all that stuff. Survive myself and all that. And through that same church base, the United Methodist base program, was introduced in the training to openly gay people and lesbian people so the irony of church, right? Yeah. So that was sort of my introduction to feminism and to LGBT stuff.

- Wow, fascinating. You started talking about your initial introduction at Re-Imagining, going to the '93

conference which is the one you went to, and you talked about that Blessed Sophia. Could you talk about other moments that struck you during that time, that you particularly remember?

- Sure. Predictably, the moment when all the lesbians were invited on the stage and--

- Can I ask, did you join them? Did you feel like you could join--

- No, I did not.

- Yeah, understandable. Yep.

- And they, and I remember them saying that were many women in the room who are not free to join us on the stage for the risk of their jobs and their families and many other things. So, and I got back and Joyce Sohl, in her enumerable way, although I will imitate it. (laughing) Alright, did anybody go up on the stage? And everybody said, no, nobody went up. And, so she says, well good. (laughing) (mumbles) She was very supportive, as much as she could be, but did not feel like she could defend people if it became a blow out situation. So that was one moment. You know--

- Wait, can I just interrupt for a minute? How did it feel to see that? I'm sorry. But how did that feel to see those women go up there and the response that they got?

- Oh, it was both devastating and wonderful all at the same time, not being able to go up. Because when I was in seminary, I was totally out. I was out, I was highly political. I lived in Virginia for five years. I was the sort of go-to person for panels of out lesbians and my partner at the time and I were in the local newspaper. And I was doing campus ministry at the time as a two year volunteer, it was stipended. So, I was very much organizing, enrichment of lesbian feminists in the network of a group called Gay Awareness and Perspectives so I was extremely political. I was on the Catholic, I helped found the dignity and the integrity chapters and the Methodist affirmation chapters in Richmond during that time. And then was on the study commission from the diocese of Richmond for the Catholics and the diocese of, I guess it's probably, I don't remember, the Episcopal diocese of Richmond. Maybe that's what it was called. I was on their study commission for human sexuality as well. So I was very ecumenical then as well as now. And, I was involved in the United Methodist human sexuality workshop. It was not the same. It was more of a curriculum that they had developed at the national level and implemented at the conference level and then they identified leaders from that training to do district level training and church level training for the United Methodists. And I proceeded to announce that I was considering having a child but I wasn't sure I was gonna get married. (speaker garbling) (laughing) So I was not invited to be one of those leaders. So those are some of the pieces, that background, and, so I don't know how we got back to that. But I was, you know, strong background and a big political icon (speaker garbling). So--

- I'm sorry. I'm losing you a little bit. Can we just wait a second? I'm sorry.

- Yeah, I was muttering.

- Well, it was getting, the connection's not so great. But, you were saying, so you had a strong background in being political so that moment was both devastating and wonderful. And I interrupted you there. You were talking about other moments but I wanted to hear about that.

- Right, right. So, so being in the closet was like challenging and it takes a toll. So that was a moment at Re-Imagining that was difficult. And, you know, I was like, alright fine. I'm just not gonna be able to go up and I won't but I wanted to.

- Oh sure.

- So other moments, you know, the apple. Rita Nakashima Brock always knocked my socks off. She's a really, has done some amazing work. And she did some amazing background work around the right wing, all denominations that was really very watershed. Some of that was a little later. So the theological work that they did, Trinitarian theological work is not a moment but it's the motif and research that they did was amazing. Now, one of the things that happened to me is when I got home, and we can go back to other moments as I, it's been a long a time.

- Yes, it has.

- But one of the things that it forced me to do was really to do some research for myself about early church theology, Trinitarian, wisdom literature, and how it is in a world with scripture and I became the resident expert on wisdom literature and all that. And I actually went back to graduate school in early church theology as part of my self-education on that. Worked with Virginia Burrus in all the early church stuff. I've done all the coursework. And I think I got what I needed out of that. It would've been nice to have a PhD but 9/11 hit and the economic realities bottomed out for United Methodist Women, which meant I didn't have as much support staff and all of that or permission and so the PhD thing went on a back burner and has not ever gotten to the front burner. But, the class, the coursework was a result of me already learning about the Trinitarian theology and how less than gendered it was than what it has become. Or at least complicated in its gender identities. So I was like these women did their homework.

- Yes.

- They knew what they were talking about completely. And this was not casual. And for it to get the kind of blow back it did was, you know, a sad statement about the total church, about our lack of knowledge and how easily we're manipulated. But it was a sad statement about the blatant disregard for facts and for the actual realities in the old church that the right wing chose to follow.

- Yes, yes. Very good. Well, should we move to the backlash or did you want to talk about other moments? What makes sense to you at this point?

- Well. Let me talk about another moment. I think it was after the first night but I'm not sure. It may have



been the first morning. But when the whole room realized how controversial. I need to remember this. I'm trying to decide if this was after, I don't think it was after the lesbian coming to the stage. I think it was when, it was when it was clear to everybody that we were talking about feminine imagery of God in full Trinitarian outline. God of the mother, Sophia, and the holy spirit Roha, and that some of the controversy had already surfaced and (garbling) and the people that had been invited, the program and the spiritual development people. We convened a meeting because people were very concerned. We did. And I had to talk them down. (laughing) And I'm trying to remember exactly what the conversation was. It was very difficult to remember. But I had to lay it out for them an understanding in metaphor and gender notions of divinity and all of that. It's not like it wasn't, I don't think I told them anything new but I said, let's not panic here. This is (mumbles). I kind of put them through my moment. It's like, so what are you gonna do? How do you wanna handle this? And, it was, I downplayed it but and I tried to explain it. And, it seemed to be adequate for the moment. And the blow back later did not come from the directors particularly. Nor from the members from the conference level. I don't think we had hardly any critique from them. So that was another moment. Who were the speakers? Would you remind me the names of some of the speakers?

- Chung Hyun Kyung, Barbara Lundblad, Mary Bednarowski, Lois Wilson, Virginia Ramey Mollenkott, there were lots more. Those are the ones that are just coming to the top of my head. Joan Martin.

- Okay, yeah. Chung Hyun Kyung is always the dramatist and she did a great job during that time of the, I think she used the burning imagery, right? Magic burning paper. So, she was always a show person. But with solid theology behind it. And Barbara Lundblad, I don't remember her sermon that night but she's an all-time favorite of mine. She and I are friends and I went to her church when she was at the Lutheran church in upper Manhattan occasionally. I should've gone more often. Like, the best preaching I've ever heard in my life and I can't get up early in the morning. You kind of know after the fact that like you should've gotten up everyday but be that as it may, she was always a show stopper preacher. Yeah, so it was quite a cast of characters and I think that was one of the obvious draw. Some of my friends like Joan Martin. Alright, so now I'll--

- Can I just make sure I understand something? When you said you had to talk them down, what did that mean? Were thinking of leaving? Were they, I mean, what was the--

- No, they were just upset. This is kind of like what are we gonna tell people when we go home?

- Yeah. Were they upset because they, was it their reaction? I mean, was it their reaction, they didn't like it or they were worried about what the repercussions would be or a combination?

- A little combination. Sort of like, what is this? How are we supposed to be reacting to this? Is this wrong kind of question. And, what are we gonna say to people when we go home? I don't know that, none of us knew exactly what kind of bad press we were gonna get. We didn't know at that moment. We didn't know if we were gonna get it or what kind it would be but they knew that this was content that was pretty unfamiliar and kind of over the top for them. And so, I had to just console them a little bit and say, you know, this is theology. And, I don't think, it's kind of a blur so I had read the Taussig book about it and I had

already done some writing on it, sort of reacting to it as I recall. So I had some knowledge of that. It's like, what is Sophia? And I could explain a little bit to them. But it was really after I had gotten back that I became immersed in it and so I don't know how detailed of information, and probably I gave them plenty, just around the female metaphor for God. So, that's probably what, and the Sophia thing, and it's like, whatever. So it was, I think, more about the gender of God than anything as I recall.

- Yes, yes. So you came back and what happened then? First of all, what happened to you personally when you got back in terms of the back lash?

- Yeah. Well, it didn't take long for the good news people to put out some really bad press and the, what's the Presbyterian--

- Presbyterian layman?

- Yes, yeah. And, I think it was both of them that, and I describe it nowadays when I tell people about it, it's like they took women's theology and made pornography out of it. And, they put, you know, I described a tryptic that was being painted and the tryptic was very important and very, that's whole 'nother moment, very captivating. The entire time of it being created and for them to take a picture of the rear end of Eve and put it on their cover, that's what I mean by creating pornography out of women's theology. And then the whole, oh good grief, the milk and honey thing was ridiculous because it's like I'm the honey pot. I had never even heard of that derogatory kind of understanding of sexuality for women and it's like, well, what about the land of milk and honey? Hello, you know. It's like totally familiar biblical references. So yeah, that started really making the circles and the good news, people created their own version of that and letters and all that. We used to get a massive letters that had been kind of mass produced from local women and some conference level women. So, Joyce Sohl was DGS, Deputy General Secretary, when I was in the middle of this and I have to tip my hat, I even have one on, but tip my hat to her that I did not get fired because I was the point person for getting people there. And she could have fired me easily if she had chosen to. But she took a lot of heat herself and did her share of defending what had happened. Now, one of the things that I probably, now, this is confessional time, I offered to respond to many of the letters and I'm a very good letter writer and I make it very personal and really compassionate. I don't turn people off. I consider it a mystery. But there were so many and I did not have a boiler plate letter and they sat there, they sat there, and they sat there and a lot of them did not ever get an answer. So that's a little confessional. They should've gotten an answer but they didn't. So, Joyce answered some but on the other hand, I don't know that they wanted an answer because it was more of just like, we've heard this and you shouldn't have done that. We heard this, you shouldn't have done that. And boom. And so they had already made up their minds. (mumbles) And it gets played out in the public arena as well. So the arguments that would laid out in a written letter are the arguments that were laid out in the public arena. But, I have to say, that the whole event I would describe as theological terrorism.

- Say some more about this. Why theological terrorism?

- Because it was a warning signal to all women that you will not go here and if you do, you will pay dearly.

And, from that point on, if you said the word Sophia or even wisdom among United Methodist Women's leadership, especially at the highest level, they broke out into fearful gibbles. Like, why would say that? Don't say that, don't say that. I mean, literally. And I would always just say why would you act that way around theology that's core to the bible? It's like oh, you know, you know, you know. I was like, no, I don't know. And I would really press people because it's a very unhelpful response and people who should know better. Oh, no don't talk about that. Don't say that. We'll get into trouble. It's like no, I'm not gonna go for that. So that's why I call it theological terrorism because people were afraid for their jobs, their livelihoods and permanently damaged in terms of women's imagery and leadership. So that's why I would call it that.

- You said you got support from Joyce. Did you get support from other ways from people in the church or?

- Not particularly. I mean, there were plenty of people who attended and who heard about it later, wished they'd been there, kind of folks that you would kind of predict that would be supportive and that was good. I ended up going not that long afterwards to western North Carolina conference, United Methodist women. Oh my goodness, that was quite an experience.

- What happened?

- They were armed for bear as we say in the Midwest. They were not happy and there were two or three women, I think it was one of the spiritual disciplines workshops that I described.

- Yes.

- And we really had to kind of set aside the primary curriculum in order to discuss and come to some kind of prayerful agreement to disagree and to, you know, because they just, they had bought hook, line, and sinker, the whole pagan, goddess worshiping, sex crazed conclave. They had bought into that hook, line, and sinker. You know, including sort of devil worshiping, demon possession almost. That kind of level of who are you, why are you here, and aren't you Satan kind of almost. And, there were a couple women who were just in a frenzy, in a frenzy, and so they were dominating the entire conversation. And so, I had the group holding hands and praying. (garbling) Not like we don't do that normally but it's like a little bit of emergency prayer. It's like, can we see the humanity in each other. And, trying to lay out the Trinitarian theology that was at work and that this was not any kind of heresy at all. But, the minute you, I had not had my GLAD media training so I didn't necessarily know that you shouldn't repeat the word heresy. (laughing) But at the same time, helped them work through some of their frightening concerns.

- How did they react, Ann?

- Well, I think there were those you were just watching this punching fight, theological knock down, drag out, and others who wanted to have sincere questions, and then there were the frenzied people. So, I don't know if I did a decent job or not. I know we stayed together, nobody left, and that's probably significant. So I don't know. It was what it was. But it was intense (laughing).

- I bet it was. And I just have to ask, how was your relationship with the other women from the division who had gone to the conference?

- Fine. Nothing of great note. People were, besides what I described to you, the ongoing kind of fall out, most people just didn't want to have anything to do with it at that point. And so, they, I couldn't even tell you which staff were there. Oh, Sammy Ruby was there. Do you know Sammy Ruby?

- I don't, no.

- She would be a great person.

- Okay, good.

- She's in Ohio.

- Okay, great.

- She might remember a whole other side of it.

- Sure.

- And I could try to, hold on for a second. Do you know what town Sandy Ruby lives in. (speaking softly) Oh, in Indiana. Okay. Because she was at Re-Imagining. We're talking about Re-Imagining Women's (mumbles). She's doing an archive for (mumbles). Do you remember who else was at Re-Imagining? Who else from, anybody from your conference? (woman speaking softly) Was she there? Ah, great. (woman speaking softly) I'll have to pick their brains if I could remember, yeah.

- Maybe an email later? Would that work? Would that work?

- Yeah, Deanna Rodriguez is another person, yeah, we'll try to remember a couple of those people.

- Good, I can follow up with an email. That would be great. How do you account for this back lash?

- It was in the works.

- Say some more.

- It was in the works. The Institute for Religion and Democracy, as far as I understand, was a mainstreaming of a religion office under Reagan. And, they spun themselves off and they established three targets and there was a grant proposal that Joyce Sohl knows about. Oh you should, a little more background that you might want to take a look at--

- Absolutely.

- Is a book called, United Methodism at Risk.

- I have that, yes.

- Okay.

- Thank you.

- In the back of that is a grant proposal, an appendix, a grant proposal from the Institute for Religion and Democracy. It'll give you the year and all of that. That targeted the Episcopal church, the United Methodist church, and the Presbyterian church, U.S.A. And so, we have had been, it all started really with the Iraq contra reality and once, as well as apartheid South Africa. The churches were having a major influence and Reagan would have none of that, obviously from the history that got lived out. He was against breaking down apartheid. Et cetera. So he set up this religion office in order to manage, try to undermine the progressive voice of our Protestants and the irony was birthed. It became funded on its own. And Mark Tully of the United Methodist Good News because the point person in terms of United Methodist. And when he was outed as a CIA agent or employee of the CIA, his excuse was well, CIA people have to go to church too. But his specialty was (audio cuts out).

- His specialty was? I missed that.

- West Africa.

- West Africa, okay.

- And so some of the fall out of all of this, decades, 40 years or whatever, between then and now, is that now West Africa that we're gonna have, this next general conference we're gonna have close to 40% African delegates and they are not always in tune with Wesleyan theology and history. Let's put it that way. Now, there's change happening and part of what we're doing in Africa is raising up the voices. We're working directly with United Methodist Africans and there is not a monolithic world view which is very important to remember. But the trajectory from the beginning of the right wing movement and with a watershed moment of (garbling) was roughly to today and how that has continued to, they've continued to try to restructure the church and if you can't, with all of the denominations, and many of them, you know, had major fall out from Re-Imagining. If you cannot take, there were a couple different goals. One is to divide up the inner church center and break it open and get denominations to move away from each so you no longer have this coordinating hub of the inner church center. So, divide up the churches. Attack them on any issue whatsoever. They don't care about gay people, they don't care about abortion, they don't care about women. But whatever issue is handy, attack the church, undermine the church, break it up. And, if possible, take it over. And one of the strategies was also to create parallel structures so that if the church was ever so wobbly that there's this parallel structure that could just step in. And so all mission sending society for the

United Methodist parallel, the seminaries, and of course, each of those had its own life and was able to drain resources away from progressive parts of the United Methodist church. So, all of that is not unrelated to the Re-Imagining moment. It was a particular moment where they, for the first time honestly, they were able to attack the United Methodist women and get real traction. They had been attacking around abortion and around feminism and all that and they have not really even gotten traction on abortion. Among some people, yes, but mostly people who were just naysayers anyway. But, this was it. And this one shocked. The whole sexualization of theology and the accusation of goddess worshiping. That shocked the average human Methodist woman. And so that was the moment when there were able to get some traction. And, permanent damage to the unity of the denomination and respect for United Methodist women.

- So you said it was permanent damage? Could you say a little bit more about how that was?

- Well, kind of the internalized oppression of like, oh don't say Sophia. That kind of piece. And, the inability to, really up until then, United Methodist women felt free to be on the cutting edge of theology and issues. After that, you will not see that. (mumbles) There were issues that continued to be raised but in terms of willingness to advocate around abortion, it was pretty much gone. Really gone. They were not willing to have any more major blow back. You cannot find (garbling) substantive actions besides a patch approach to the cope of discipline. That's it. So I would say, yeah, that's permanent damage that has not been recovered.

- And you think it was because the charges of, they could make the charge of goddess worship and the sexual issues and that was?

- They were able to get enough traction and enough controversy that United Methodist women and the leadership did not want to deal with that ever again. And, we also had some leadership transitions that went for better, for worse. After Joyce Sohl then we had Jan Love and she only stayed two years. She just took the job, I won't say anything because it's on tape, but she did not enjoy her time with United Methodist women. And, she became the dean of the school in, what's it called, in Atlanta.

- The school, I'm sorry, I missed that.

- In Atlanta. What's the name of that?

- Emory?

- Yeah, Em.

- Emory?

- Yeah.

- Candler.

- Candler, thank you. Which was a nice match for her because she really wanted to be in the academic world and I think it was a little bit shocking to be in the lay women's world. Wait, this is not what I pictured it as. Because United Methodist women had had this reputation for being on the cutting edge but the organization is everyday women. You know? But they are not your highly informed everyday woman but everyday women none the less. And I think it was, she was not used to being in an all women's environment and I think it was a bit of a culture shock. And so, two years later, she was gone. And then, so those kinds of transitions blend themselves to the need for stability. And so you combine everything with that and you get a less and less willingness to take risks and the financial reality were dire over that time period for United Methodist women and so there you get, I think you can argue that the financial realities were as important as Re-Imagining for the decreasing willingness to (garbling) high risk moments.

- And I don't know if you can answer this question. If you can't, that's fine, but I know that Maryanne Lundy in the Presbyterian church lost her position in the women's division, it was attacked but no one lost their position. Do you have ideas on why that was in terms of the way they were structured or anything?

- I do.

- Good, good, please, tell me.

- My theory is, at least in part, is that the hierarchy, the hierarchical nature of United Methodists actually worked for us.

- Say some more about that, interesting.

- Well, with the Presbyterian structure you have (garbling) of bishops and I'm trying to recall, it seems to me like we garnered some support from bishops and I can't remember who.

- Yes.

- I think it's a good question to ask other people.

- Sure.

- Joyce would remember better than I would.

- Bishop Susan Morrison was a major person.

- She was there too.

- Yes, yes.

- Yeah, so she would remember the bishops who were helpful. But in any case, and I don't know if this makes any sense at all but I felt like our structure was helpful in protecting me. I was not hung out to dry. And so, I'm sorry I can't be more precise than that at this point but I remember thinking vividly that if I'd been in the Presbyterian structure, I'd be gone.

- Yes, yes. And related to that, there was, and I don't know if you recall this and that's fine, but the bishops, United Methodist bishops finally wrote a report on Sophia. I don't know if you recall that?

- That's right. That's, and that's exactly what helped because there was playing for time a little bit. So they took the time to take the complaint seriously and write the report and so we have the formal report. So yeah, that was a moment of the hierarchy helping us move through this.

- Yes, yes. Yes. And how about a time of hope, a time of threat? Do you recall that at all?

- Yes. Refresh my memory.

- Sure, it was statement by a group of nine United Methodist women, Jeanne Audrey Powers, for example, you mentioned her earlier. Bishop Morrison and they spoke out, had a press conference on the International Women's Day.

- All coming back to me.

- Yeah.

- Yeah, that was really strong statement as well. I was trying to remember if I, I think I signed that after the fact, you know. I don't know if there's a collection of signatures.

- There is, yeah. And I can look. There was a total, it started out with 800 and went well beyond that, so very possible, yes. I can look.

- I'm sure I was in there.

- Yeah, yeah.

- Had a J in front of my name, J. Ann Craig.

- Right, yes. Well, shall we move to, in the end, how would you define Re-Imagining? What was Re-Imagining in the end?

- Re-Imagining was traditional theology interpreted, Trinitarian theology, interpreted by women who were misinterpreted in the after the fact by people who only wanted to undermine all of the denominations that's represented. And the women who were there. And a short.



- Yeah, that's good. In the end, when you look at the significance, in the end, what aspects of this Re-Imagining were most significant to you and why?

- The seriousness of the theological work and the biblical work that the women did. So that's amazing and that was my take away and the end, I took it seriously as well.

- I'm impressed. You went and did doctoral work because of this.

- I did.

- That is amazing, Ann. (laughing) You took it really seriously. (laughing)

- I did and I was like, it was kind of a question of like, what is this about? Why are we so vicious with each other and, you know, the one take away from my PhD work is well, respect the way we do theology. You know? It's like out of our conflicts, come our theologies. And, it's just, it's like, oh, okay. Now I know I'm doing theology. (laughing) And at the heart of it, really in the thick of it. And, you can say there was not literal blood on the floor during this time and half in those periods when there have been literal blood on the floor. You know, people lost their lives over these theological arguments. So progress, maybe. It's still vicious.

- Yes, yeah, yeah. There were charges of heresy but no burning at the stake, literally. (laughing)

- Not literally.

- Yeah. Judging from your face, it felt like it came pretty close?

- Probably when you lose your livelihood for folks. And, you experience permanent harm and damage to the psyche of women. Yeah, and it's not harmless.

- Exactly, you're right. Yes, yeah. How did your involvement in Re-Imagining change your perspective on feminist theology and, or on the church?

- Well, I think one of the things I came away with, that's a good question because it was one of those moments where I said, oh, this is why women should have PhDs. That was a real like aha moment because I was like why would anybody want to do that and why should we be messing with all of that? And I was like, that's why. It's because there's scholarship that needs to be done and women bring a completely different perspective on it. And, they will read stuff that men will skip over. Or downplay or misrepresent or whatever. And, who reads it, who does the scholarship makes all the difference.

- Yes.

- So that's big, that was big.

- Yeah. And then what would you say? What specific contributions did Re-Imagining make to Christian theology and, or liturgy?

- Yeah, oh wow. Thank you for that. (laughing) A whole liturgical piece that (mumbles) element. Oh my goodness. You know, the unveiling of the very first sacramental, of the cups of the milk and the honey and the wine. The milk and honey, the water, and the wine cups. Huge revelation. You know?

- Revelation in what way? Of like, first of all, the communion hasn't been done the same way for ever and ever and the obvious, despite, well, you cannot have milk without an inherent feminine element. You just can't. You know, so and then the whole connection to the Hebrew text which is inherent and in the water and in the wine. It's profound, deeply profound. So they'll trip that as a liturgical moment was earth shaking and life changing, theology changing. So, yeah. So say that question again for me.

- Sure, what specific contributions did Re-Imagining make to Christian theology and, or liturgy?

- So, the liturgy, certainly. The communion right was changed forever in my eyes. And I think in the church's eyes. But I don't think we will I don't think it's played out in these generations. It may play out in the future but not yet. If the church survives, if it wants to survive. So, that remains to be seen. But it certainly changed a lot of individuals. And the theology, I think, you can't unsay some things. You cannot unread some things. Despite the sort of theological terrorism that I described can silence many women. Your work in doing this and all of the women who have recorded their perspectives right from the beginning that the book that they put together which, what was the name of that? Did they call it just Re-Imagining?

- Remembering and Re-Imagining.

- Yeah. That was tremendous. And, the solid, academic work that they did to get to that event was just monumental and historic. It was like a, for me it was a bit like a Vatican conclave of women, you know?

- Yeah, yeah. And, this may be a little redundant but I'll ask it, you're coming up with great answers here. What do you think is the greatest legacy of Re-Imagining?

- You know, all of the things that I've been talking about but just that it happened. And, I think Nell Morton would've been very happy hearing women into speech and that this was a moment when we heard each other to speech and it wasn't just, it wasn't just saying about my feelings. It was, I have read this. I have researched this and it was a platform for revealing what we have learned, what we have connived our way into the stacks of libraries and the archives of place and that place and even the Vatican and people, women who have made their way into places where they were not supposed to be and came out with research and, you know, laid it at the feet of other women. So, it was historic, it was watershed, it was frightening and a terrible wind moved through the house and made a lot of noise. (laughing)

- That's great. I have a question. Part of Re-Imagining was to bring, an important part of it was to bring expansive or inclusive language and feminist theology to the churches. How would you evaluate where that is today?

- Well. What a terrible question. Stop asking that question. (laughing) I don't know, you know it's interesting because I see women being included. I see women being respected. I see the changes we want to be implemented in a very substantive way. I do not see the language changing and that's interesting to me. It has changed some. Nobody reacts, like in my congregation, nobody reacts when God is called mother. But, that's not the norm and we have a woman, feminist pastor, you know. And I don't find myself using inclusive language in the same way I might have in the 80's and 90's. So, I think it's a conversation that needs to be had.

- And, I'm asking another awful question. Do you have any idea, here it comes. Do you have any idea why that is? I'd really like to know the answer to that. (laughing)

- I'm not gonna tell you. (laughing)

- Good. (laughing)

- I think people are tired, women are tired. And I think that in some ways, maybe we haven't implemented it on some levels because people don't react negatively to the feminine imagery that we do incorporate. People have gotten to the point where God, as a mother, is part of what we talk about. But, if you do it all the time or exclusively like male language is regularly used then people do react. So, I think if Re-Imagining hadn't happened and it happened now, there would still be a strong reaction. So, I think it's just habit, ingrained world views that are very difficult to change. I think, you know, it is changing, people's ideas of gender are changing. The kind of fluidity of gender identity is becoming more and more apparent. So that is a different way of changing our imagery and our identity and our own anxieties, hopefully reducing anxieties, eventually, about gender identity. And that, I think, will project onto God as opposed to using language to change as I think our own shifting identities are gonna change our perspective of God. So I think it's a long haul and that may just be the reality and people get tired. Like, I'm not gonna do that for a long time. And then someone else will have to pick up the torch and do a new generation. I just think it's deep. So the answer in my book is a deep, culturalization of gender. And war weary. (laughing) I think that's probably it, in short,

- Well, I have one other big question for you.

- Okay.

- And I'm gonna be interested in your answer, especially given what you're doing about progressive movements in Africa. But, what does Re-Imagining mean today? And by that, I don't mean necessarily the community or that conference. I mean what needs to be re-imagined today or what is being re-imagined today?

- Well, I think church itself is being re-imagined. And, not fast enough because I think it's kind of dissipating before our very eyes. And that's been, honestly that has been, at least in part, the result of the constant harangue of the right wing. And, intentional, strategic goals to undermine progressive Protestant groups in the United States and that has had fall out around the world. And, some of the strategies have been to intentionally foment hatred around LGBT issues in places like Africa among the Anglicans there as well as a whole plethora of folks, political and religious alike. And, (audio cuts out) have completely politicized.

- How do you see church being re-imagined? That's a more--

- Well, I think people are going outside of churches to find their spiritual nurture. Churches, some churches are smaller and more welcoming. I think churches are a little more humble, all in all. It's like, well, where we gonna make it? And, it's like, how do we serve people a little more? And of course there's still the, but even mega churches and the big people who are, evangelicals who are making lots of money, they're trying to re-position themselves because they see the handwriting on the wall that they're version of narrow mindedness, in many of those cases, is not gonna survive. So, I think there's change all across the spectrum. And, it's only natural but I think it has the potential of some realignments. You've got a whole swath across the denominations of progressives and you have a whole swath of more and more intransigent, entrenched right wing, hard line, rigid people and they've been reinforced by talk radio and right wing talk radio. So you've got that swath that's, can be mobilized as we have found by Trump and that's unnerving. But I think the folks across here are trying to make contributions to society and their respective congregations and bring some humility as well as some generosity and some sense of the universal journey toward God that runs across denominations and religions that there's, that's the changing church. But this is the changing church too. The rigid. People were not as rigid as they are today. At least not as many and not as mobilized and not as politicized as they used to be. They tended to be on the outs and they tended to be a little more humble and that came after the scopes trials and the whole monkey and evolution but they have regained their irrationality. (laughing) And their commitment to it. So, what do you do? So yeah, so there's a lot of change. I would say it's happening at different levels. It'd be fantastic if the Catholic church ever really embodied compassion that the Pope is kind of tip toeing toward. Even an anti-violence message toward gender, sexual minorities would be earth changing. So, the Catholic church is changing and for him to go to a mosque and do all that is big. So the world is changing.

- Yes, yes. Well, I have one last specific question for you. We are working on a Re-Imagining website and I would love any suggestions you have about what would be helpful to include in it, who would benefit from it. We're just looking for ideas and suggestions.

- Well. I think, you know, all of this runs the risk, and did run the risk of leaving a lot of women behind. So, like, how do you do with some literature in the bible and wisdom theology in a way that is accessible and to make sure that the hard core research that's so critical to the validation of the Re-Imagining experience of research, that that doesn't become the dominant theme in a website. It needs to be there but I think the real goal and the way to move the findings of the experience of that into more mainstream church women would be to make it accessible and to have some process involved in it of helping women read the bible with

different eyes and read the bible through the eyes of wisdom literature because it's all there throughout it. So those would be some of the things that I would look for.

- Yes. Very helpful. Is there anything else that you would like to add that we haven't discussed, Ann? (woman sighs)

- It would be fun to do a few conference calls, recorded conference calls to jar people's memories.

- Oh yes.

- Some group conference calls.

- Great idea.

- Yeah, and to record those with some of the, say have a group of about six women and have them chose each other.

- Oh!

- Uh-huh. And, what do you remember? Even getting some United Methodist women who were there together. What do you remember? What happened to you afterwards? And then just, 'cause I realize that it's all here but it takes a little digging.

- Yes.

- In the memory file cabinets to, like the paper and now I remember it. And then I don't want to conjure up some memories, just like, well, I kind of remember that but I think it happened this, you know. It needs to have some checks and balances so other people who were there can do that for us. And it's like that moment when I got the United Methodist women together, I don't know, I remember the feeling. I remember what I kind of did but I don't remember the content as well as I want to. But I think other people would who were there.

- Yes, yes.

- They were listening to me. I was talking, they were listening, you know. (laughing)

- Yes, yes, that is a very creative, interesting idea. If it turns out I can work this out, I'll be emailing you, okay?

- Yeah, and would love to get a group of Presbyterian women together, talk to each other, and some of the (laughing). It might even be interesting to get Mark Tully and some of them. Are you interviewing anybody on the right wing?

- Not really.

- They had their chance. I kind of agree with that. Although, I wonder what they would say, you know?

- Yes, I do. Well, I'm still thinking about that.

- Yeah, don't spend a lot of time worrying about it. (laughing) You've got plenty to do with this. I'm so happy you're doing this.

- Oh, thank you. Me too. Me too. Shall I stop the recording now?

- Sounds good.

- Is this a good place to stop? Good, let me just turn that off.