

- All right, if you could say your name.
- My name is Jerie Smith.
- Thank you, and are you lay or clergy?
- Both, sort of.
- Sort of, now explain that that's interesting.
- All the time that I was part of Reimagining, and up until about six months ago I was lay, or a certified lay professional in the ELCA. I am now ordained in the Universal Church at the pressure of several of my friends who wanted me to do their weddings.
- Could you say some more about certified lay professional?
- Well, it's a credential that the Lutheran Church offers to people who are not ordained, and go through certain processes of casting out both verbally, and focus on theological. Just the ability to do ministry. After you have a certain amount of experience in the church then you can apply for their process. Then the outcome is that you are called an associate in the ministry, so that's the title, but it's a certification.
- Okay, could you say a little bit about your career what kind of work you did?
- Well, it's always been with kids, youth, and young adults, and I started out in camping, and then was a pseudo kind of youth director, education person.
- At a camp for a church?
- For a church camping was about, I think, there were two summers. Then I got married to one of the people I met at camp, and we ran the camp for 2-1/2 years, and came back to the Cities, and then I was a youth education person in the congregation until we divorced. Then I worked for Ebenezer Society for 2-1/2 years as an administrator, their Ebenezer, and Luther Halls, which Luther doesn't even exist anymore. After that I went to Campus Ministry at the University of Minnesota where I was until almost eight years ago. Then I was offered a position at the University, and I've been there ever since.
- In what position?
- I am the Volunteer Coordinator for the Aurora Center, which is the Sexual Assault Center on campus.

- Part of that time you ran a retreat center?

- Yeah, John and I ran the Center for Spiritual Growth in Cambridge for about nine years. Yeah, I think, about nine years, and then sold it to two women who the community call the nuns, but they're a Lesbian couple who had foster children and worked. They were living in Pine City. They had a very large house, but not big enough because their focus was to keep siblings together when it was necessary, and at that time they had four kids.

- Wow.

- They wanted a place where they could do that. You saw the property they since have added a barn, and a couple horses, and chickens. They're kind of self-sustaining.

- Wonderful, it must feel good to know that's where the Retreat Center went.

- Yeah, because someone told me once that one of the words for retreat it has something to do with foster care or the care of children who are waiting for adoption, or something.

- Perfect.

- Yeah, it is. Something's happened there that was good.

- Yes, yeah. Well, thank you. Where did you go to school, graduate, or divinity school?

- I had some courses and classes at Luther, but the Campus Ministry process offered, again, courses that were necessary to contribute to the certification, so I have what's called the equivalency of an M.A.

- Okay. How and when did you first become aware of feminist theology?

- I don't know about feminist theology, but I was part of, and I'll figure out how to tie this in, but I was part of the committee, and the church in the Minnesota Synod that certified all of the people who were going through the ordination process. It was about 30, 35 people. I was the first woman ever to be on that committee. At the time of the meeting that I'm talking about another woman had been added, so there were two of us, and about 30 people around the table in a room. We were trying to solve a pretty difficult situation with a candidate just had a whole bunch of extenuating circumstances. I remember a lot of silence because he didn't know exactly where to move or what to do, and then voicing an opinion that I had, and the silence continued, and continued. Someone directly across from me said exactly the same thing I said who was a male, and the Chair said, "That's a great idea." Someone sitting right next to me who I'd known most of my life said, "Didn't Jerie just say that?" Then he just got red, you know, beet red because he knew that he kind of outed himself to the boys. I went to the bathroom, and in the bathroom tried to figure out am I gonna go back in there, or am I gonna leave? It was just that click. Some people have been telling me that this happens. You either experienced it before, or realized it before, but it was kind of a big screen in front of

me. I did choose to go back in.

- Did you, yes?

- Probably in part because my stuff was in there, you know, I had to go back, pick it up, and leave.

- Right.

- But I did go back in. Then I just started to pay more attention. Then about six or eight months later I started up a group for women who many of us had been saying to each other let's have lunch, and never did it. Barbara Lundblad was part of that group.

- Really? When would this have been roughly?

- Now I'm glad I never made this up. I was so afraid you were going to ask me dates, but it would have to have been in the 60's.

- In the '60's, okay, yeah. Just to get a general sense of when it was.

- I started in Campus Ministry in '71 at least I know that kind of that awareness that helps. It probably was '72, '73.

- Okay, yeah. What about this group of women that you formed? What was the purpose for it?

- I don't know if you know Strengths, or an app, but it's a thing that's used a lot in corporations, and the university has been using it where you get to know your top five strengths. One of mine is strategic, so that's how my head kind of works, but, okay, now I know this. Now what can I do, or what can I construct, or put together that might help to build on this, and, also, help to validate my own experience by the experience of others. I really was curious about the relationship with women with each other in the church.

- Excuse me for interrupting. Is this all Lutheran women in the church?

- Yeah.

- Okay, got it.

- That kind of silly thing about meeting people in other situations, and saying, you know, we really should talk, or we really should do something more, and neither person really continuing to initiate it intrigued me, especially, when I started paying more attention to what was going on in feminism. I should say that not theologically, but feminism was first brought up to me by Joanne Erickson, who I grew up with, we knew each other from third grade. We were at Gustavus together. She left Gustavus when she graduated, and went to New York, wrote me a letter. I was 21 years old when I opened that letter, and read it standing in the

kitchen of the house we were living in on 3rd Avenue. I had been married for probably less than three years. No, I wasn't 21, I was about 25. The letter told me that she was a Lesbian and a feminist. I wrote her back and said, I don't love you any less than before I read the letter, but you're gonna have to tell me about this feminism stuff. She sent me a whole bunch of things, and in her letter back she was kind of interested in the fact that I responded more to the feminism than I did to her being a Lesbian.

- Yeah.

- In fact, it totally didn't make any difference to me. I knew who she was. I don't know how I got into that.

- Well, I'm curious, what was your reaction then to feminism? Do you remember when you started? This was a vivid memory for you.

- We were talking about the group being formed. I think because of my personality, I think, I think somewhat analytically, strategically about what things are going on, but I learned through the human potential movement, and a lot of training, and another certification that I have in that to trust my gut, and to try to put both of those together, so I had some hunches about women just having a difficult time figuring out how to do this connecting thing with competition happening at the same time. The original group was nine people. Nine women three of whom were professionals like myself in the church. Three of whom were strong white women who were really involved in their congregations, and three pastor's wives. We were together for ... I know Barbara can probably remember more. Probably at least two years, and maybe longer, but within the first three to four months we made a commitment to meet, I think, at least once a month. Sometimes, we met more than that. The pastor's wives dropped out.

- Really, do you know why that was?

- Well, I think they were more than concerned about the fact that we were working with their husbands.

- Oh.

- To kind of know us more was more threatening to them than less.

- Really?

- Yeah

- That seems almost counterintuitive. Interesting.

- It was very unusual. We continued and then a couple of other people joined us.

- What came out of that group?

- Well, Barbara Lundblad went to Union Seminary. Susan (mumbles) went to Berkeley Seminary. One of the women had a pretty serious psychotic break. The rest of us actually supported her, paid her car payment, and a couple of other things to be helpful. and there's a lot of backstory in that. I'm trying to remember who the other. The other layperson where did she go? She went to Philadelphia to work for the LCA at the time, and married a professional golfer, got divorced, she's back here now.

- When you got together did you all have stories about how hard it was to be in the church? Was that a common theme or not?

- I wouldn't say hard, but some of the the kind of emerging challenges, you know, and one story was told then it was easier to identify a story that might contribute, but, I think, we weren't as focused on the church I don't think as we were on feminism, and kind of trying to figure out what's going on in human history that may have something to do with who we are as women. We read a lot of articles. We read Gloria Steinem. Everything was breaking at that time.

- And you were resonating with this.

- Yeah, or, you know, able to wonder. I don't know whether we looked at any of that with a very critical mind as much as kind of curiosity, and interest, and amazement because I think a lot of early feminism really spoke to women's experience, and you could resonate with, again, not maybe so much with your head as with your gut, you know, someone speaking my truth that I didn't expect to hear not here.

- Yes, this is really important, and kind of sets the stage. Was there a point at which you then discovered feminist theology in particular?

- There was so much that wasn't even published. When I started it probably would be more where that was when Barbara went to Union because, you know, everybody lives out there.

- Yeah, so it was through her that you started learning about it.

- Yeah, but I also at that time, or maybe a little bit later I started a similar group for women in Campus Ministry. There were some staff.

- To study feminism?

- More consciousness raising. When I first started in Campus Ministry we were at the place of it was the end of war, Campus Ministry at the University had been very much identified with protesting the war. Support for the ministries was really down, so we had to kind of struggle and figure out how we're gonna keep this boat afloat. Probably two years after I started we began a cooperative ministry with Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod which changed everything about the role of women.

- Could you say some more about that?

- We packed up our stuff, we sold our building, and we moved into the Missouri Synod Building not as co-owners, but as renters. That was really intentional because we knew that we might have to leave quick, and breaking a lease was a lot easier than dividing a building in half.

- How did it change the role of women?

- Well, Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod still does not recognize women. If I had even at that time started to think about being ordained it wouldn't have flown. I wouldn't have had a job. I do remember thinking some about it at that time, and then being discouraged from doing that because we had a really progressive Missouri Synod pastor. He did everything he could to put me in front of the community every time possible, and I did preach there, and I did lead worship, but never when there was any official from Missouri Synod Church. Roger and I would try to do some education for Missouri Synod pastors, which is always really interesting because we could do a presentation that I might even do the majority of it, and question and answer at the time they would ask questions of him. That was really ...

- Yeah.

- We once did a workshop for a conference Missouri Synod Conference. There was a list of workshops with names. I think my title of my presentation was probably kind of intriguing. A lot of people started to walk in the door they thought I was because of my name ...

- Jerie.

- Thought I was a man, turned around and walked out.

- Really, wow.

- I had a lot of experiences like that. Again, that was increasing my awareness both of that role in the church, and the role in the broader community. The women's group they formed there were a lot of stories. You know, I'm just sitting here remembering a lot of painful stories of Missouri Synod women just never feeling fully accepted. It probably stemmed a lot from the fact that the person who was the president of Missouri Synod in the state of Minnesota at that time his daughter was our secretary. She was part of the women's group. She would just tell about the things that were on her heart and mind, and could never have a conversation with her father about that. That just seemed so both sad, and, you know, angry strong feelings about not being able to do those things. Within that campus ministry setting we tried, we pushed a whole lot of boundaries, and did a whole of things that wouldn't have floated anybody else's boat in Missouri Synod, but, I think, it helped women feel better about their role, but never changed anything. Roger and I had ... He's the Missouri Synod pastor he's now dead, had several conversations about will the church ever change if there just is this under the table stuff that's going on. I mean how long can that go on before will it really make a difference, and he believed it would. I did not believe it would. I felt like we were doing a little bit of bait-and-switch, you know, trying to do this cool thing, and then people would graduate, or leave and

go back to another Missouri Synod Parish where everything wasn't okay and take 10 steps backwards. You know the Missouri Synod marriage ceremony still sets that much like the Roman Catholic, which they would screen if I said that that you have children. The first wedding that I was part of I remember looking at that reading it over. I had done lots of liturgical stuff but never looked at the wedding service seriously. I have two stories. One of the chairs of our Campus Ministry Committee was a really fun, funny man who would keep us in stitches at a meeting. I was living in an apartment building, and the people upstairs the grandma died, and I went to the funeral. Here was Fred presiding at the funeral. I was really surprised. I tell you hellfire, brimstone, stern, judgmental. I was just ...

- Yes.

- I think there's a lot of mixture of getting to know people as people, drinking beer with them, and then seeing them in the context of a liturgical setting, or a place where they were held more accountable somewhere else, and then seeing the duplicity just thinking what in the hell? What was this all about? Then I could question it because I was still part of, you know, a more progressive Lutheran church that allowed some protection. Then, eventually, the leadership in the Missouri Synod changed. We left that building and moved in with Episcopalians.

- Did you grow up LCA was that your?

- I grew up Augustana.

- Augustana, okay, yeah, got it. This is really interesting. To move to Reimagining, and this is great background for this what was your relationship to the Reimagining community?

- I registered for the first conference reluctantly.

- Why reluctantly?

- I didn't know what purpose it would serve.

- So why did you register?

- Probably someone told me that I should. There was a lot of buzz. I registered, and then the timeline was that I was at our National Campus Ministry Conference in Chicago. Gwen King who was a Campus pastor out East somewhere, I don't remember where, who I thought was so cool whose a woman of color told me that she was on the waiting list. During our conference she got called, and said there was a space for her, and she said that she wanted to come, but there was no hotel space. I said, well, you can come, and stay with me, so then I was committed to go. Frankly, I don't think when I got back from Chicago from that conference I don't think I would have gone. I think I would have opted out.

- Really?

- But because Gwen was there, and I knew Barbara was gonna be there.

- Yes, Barbara Lundblad.

- Uh-hmm.

- What was the experience then for you at the conference?

- It was certainly important. I think some of the most important things had to do with hearing people from other countries. It seems like it was such a long time ago, and like it was absolutely ages ago and just in terms of some of the change. I just remember when all the women who identified as other gendered got up together, and Barbara and I were sitting at the same table at the time, and the dilemma in her about whether she was gonna walk up there or not. We talked about it the night before.

- Did she decide to get up or not?

- She did not. I told her that if you go I'll go with you. I think a lot of the table conversations, just meeting people from lots of different places was important to me. I was really frustrated at how few Lutherans were there and involved. Two or three of the people from here from Minnesota were, I think, always kind of looking over their shoulder at who else was there who was seeing that they were there.

- Anxious about being seen?

- Yeah, it was disappointing to me. We had a hard time trying to figure out how to caucus.

- During the conference?

- During the conference, and then as well afterwards, you know, as Lutherans. It was kind of like that was a good experience but.

- Why was it hard?

- Here's another piece because in Campus Ministry at that time I had been doing a women's group that included seminary students, and women who were in congregations. That period of time I was the person who really knew every woman who was in ministry. I made it a point of getting to know, and many people would say if you're gonna go to Luther Seminary you need to talk to Jerie, so Campus Ministry and now we're with, or (mumbles) with Episcopalians kind of became the go-to place in a way for women who wanted to identify as feminists. We would talk a lot in that group about, you know, this is how it's gonna be when folks get out there, and then it would all fall apart.

- Once they got in the church.



- Several of those women were at the conference, and even kind of being reminded, I think, of what they felt committed to, and what was actually possible was great disparity, and hard to kind of be with each other, and own that.

- Right.

- I continued that group until women's ordination happened, and it was maybe five, or 10 years after that. We had a retreat. They asked me to do a retreat for them. The Synod actually asked me to do a retreat while he had the retreat center.

- Yes.

- 15, 18 women together in the living room the first night. I started with whatever we'd agreed upon that night, prepared and went to nowhere. One of the women who since has left, Perry Schienbien, long-term chaplain, hospital chaplain said, maybe it would help us if we all went around, and talked about what it is that we pretend, and people did. One major thing was I have to pretend that I understand what it is to be a rule-breaker, first person doing this, and that I know what it is to be a feminist. It was a real general understanding of needing to step out, and be on the edge of something that no one had really asked to be, or didn't really want to do just wanted to study theology, and be a pastor.

- Right, they were put into that role of rule-breaker.

- Yeah, and then some people talked about the lack of continuity, and what it is that they experienced in their hearts, and what they've been taught, and how it was that they came into a parish to be a pastor kind of in terms of what the church expected did not have continuity with what it is that they were feeling. Then that made them start to question both theology as well as scripture. That conversation went on into the night. As we finished one of the women got up went into the bathroom, threw up, put her coat on, picked up her suitcase, and would not talk to any of us.

- Wow.

- Within a year, year and a half she was no longer in the parish, but she was really, really angry at us for questioning the church, the bible.

- So with all of that work that you were doing when you went to that Reimagining Conference you heard the theology that was spoken, and you just (mumbles) the ritual did this feel new to you? How did you react to it?

- I don't think that it felt new to me as much as it felt more real. I remember the African women talking such ...

- Like the mercy of dooye.

- It could have been.

- Yeah, okay, whatever, okay, good.

- I remember her talking about how she wasn't always sure who her mother was, and that it takes a community to raise a child.

- Yes.

- I just remember mulling that over and over and over in my mind. I think in part my folks, you know, did the great American Dream. Built a little house with a white picket fence, and then you have to take care of yourselves, and you have to be your only resource, and you don't ever tell anybody else that you might wonder about something, or not know how to do everything. Just somehow, you know, thinking about what it would have been like to grow up where there were many different people to see what life was like instead of being forced and reinforced, you know, by, okay, you went to Cathy Butel's, and you ate peanut butter for the first time. Peanut butter is good. That's only one experience. I have some cough drops.

- Oh, thanks, I think I'm okay, but thank you. I'll let you know. I apologize for the coughing. Let's talk about the backlash for a minute. Were you affected by it at all personally?

- I would not say that I was affected by it personally because Campus Ministry was kind of the bastion of you can be weird. There was always this back and forth between Campus Ministry, and the real church. The real church kind of wanted us to be that bastion, so that they could kind of refer, and encourage people to have another alternative, but not too much. Then we had to kowtow to the church in some way and kind of show. I think that's why Campus Ministry has this town/gown kind of who are we supposed to be, and we justify our behavior. Kim's ministry justifies this behavior by being liturgical when I think it would be far more effective if it focused on what it means to be part of higher education in a university setting, and actually being part of the dialogue of what's going on in the world.

- Yes.

- Let the congregations do the liturgical stuff, but we had to do that in order to show that we were legitimate.

- Interesting, yeah. So kind of responsible with two different constituencies, yeah. How do you account for the backlash, and how did you respond to it?

- When I started to hear about folks losing their jobs, you know, it was sad because some of those folks had become people instead of just names. It was hard for me to understand that anything that happened in that conference was enough for someone to lose their job. I mean, this is not the big deal that it's a big deal, but

it's not a big deal it's like tangible real life stuff. Then I was really angry. When it's not your own denomination you don't have the same power, and nobody who I know was Lutheran, you know, lost their job, but I'm not sure that many of the women who were Lutheran maybe even told their congregation, or their Bishop, or anybody that they were there.

- Yes, yeah. So you said you were angry. Were you part of the forming of the community?

- No. How did I end up? It was Nadine.

- Nadine.

- It was Nadine who pulled me into. I really don't remember exactly how, but there was an opening in the Board, and they wanted a Lutheran. Nadine was in Campus Ministry at that time.

- Oh, right.

- Yeah, UBC. She said, would you consider doing this? I was sort of interested, but not really.

- So why did you do it?

- I went to one of the meetings, and Sarah was there, too. I knew Sarah from (mumbles)

- Sarah Evans, yeah.

- I think it was just getting to know people better who had been kind of distant, and people being really welcoming.

- Well, you ended up getting really involved.

- Yeah, well, Pam reunited us. We still have breakfast once a month.

- Oh, I love it, do you still?

- Uh-hmm.

- That's wonderful.

- Yeah, Pam and (mumbles) Perkins we were always the Perkins.

- You were tri-chairs for how many was it three?

- Three.

- Three of them, yeah, tell me about that process. What was that like?

- Well, again, I'm strategic, and I'm a connector. I kind of am input, gathering information. I kind of appeal to the things that I like to do. I frankly do not like to be on a board for the sake of just being there. I'm much more happy if I can actually make something happen.

- Yes.

- So doing the nuts and bolts of the conferences. I had done a lot of conferences before I'd been made the chair of the ... It's been so long (mumbles) Minnesota Synod Conventions both pre and post ELCA. There were 7,000 people when we were merged.

- Yes.

- I knew the dynamics of how we had to do that, and that's kind of the piece that I brought. Pam brought the artsy-fartsy background, and Randy brought the connections to some of the places that we needed. Then there were so many people were part of Reimagining at that time who kind of knew speakers, and were eager to work on the rituals and things. It was not hard. It was just not hard, and it seemed to me after one year, one round of doing it it was easier to do that then it was to sit on the board, or do any of the other tasks that were needed and necessary.

- Yes, now I'm curious. Did you know Pam and Randy before you became tri-chairs? How did that happen?

- Randy was a year ahead of me at Gustavus.

- Oh, I didn't know that.

- So we've known each other for a really long time, and we were part of whatever the Lutheran student thing was at Gustavus, I don't even remember. I had a big crush on him, but Joy won.

- Did she, yeah. I'm gonna be interviewing him later. Does he know this?

- Yes.

- Okay, good. Because it's now public anyway.

- Then he went off from Gustavus he went off to seminary, and then he was overseas for a while, and he came back to the Minnesota Synod. We were at a Synod convention a bunch of people. The skeptics and the cynics always stand in the back at church meetings, you know, I was standing back there. I kept looking at this guy, and trying to figure out who in the heck is that because in college he was just a string bean. I don't think he had an extra ounce on him. He never had a beard in college. Here is this man who had lost quite a

bit of hair, full beard, little bit of a pot, who is that? Finally I just walked over, and said, Hi. He said, do you remember who I am? I said, sort of. The Campus Ministry, and seminary faculty and staff who are at things that are often kind of crouched in the same stand in the back of the room. We reconnected then.

- Were you on a coordinating council together is that how you ended up as tri-chairs?

- Yeah, I think so. I think we were on. Either that or Randy had just gone off, and I came on.

- Okay, right.

- But wanted to. I think he really saw the importance of somebody from Luther Seminary, and was kind of also looking for a community of people to support some of his own thoughts, and feelings rather than the status quo that was happening at Luther.

- You had experience you mentioned planning conferences. Was planning these gatherings different? Was there a way that feminist theology affected the process, or the structure or anything?

- I think we would kind of start out with some kind of ways, in which, you know, a focus group, or let's bring some people together, and that would get down to the nitty gritty of, you know, there are deadlines, and heads in beds that stuff has to be in order. Some of the ritual planning, and those things kind of had a life of their own, and people who liked doing that, and wanted to make that happen. I think we were all good at finding ways to create, or connect that energy, and then letting go, but Dan didn't have to have supreme control over everything. Pam was a little more control oriented.

- So there were different groups that were planning like the rituals, and everything, and you just sort of orchestrated the whole process. Okay, that makes sense. What challenges were faced by the community during the 10 years that it was formed at least your involvement, and how were they addressed?

- The overall challenge was are we or are we not? Should we be an organization, an institution should we not?

- It's very existence, yeah.

- And by its very existence where we becoming an institution. That was voiced over and over and over again by the groups that came to use the center for spiritual growth. Folks often who were coming together because they wanted something different than they had come from, and they maybe would come, and use our space because it was a good space to think.

- Yes.

- Some of them over periods of time would do not just a one time event, but would maybe annually, or semi-annually come and struggle with who they wanted to be.

- What kind of groups were these other groups?

- People who would self-identify as a spirituality group, and maybe they were part of a congregation. You have some relationship to one of the congregations that used to come it seems to me I remember.

- There was a small group that I was part of. Is that what you mean, I'm sorry, no?

- No, it was a Methodist congregation.

- Yeah, my husband is a Methodist pastor.

- Yeah.

- Yeah, Silver Lake it might have been. I'm just trying to remember, yeah. I know I came individually.

- It's fuzzy.

- I know, me too.

- You know, you come, and you're in a different setting, and you start to think, well, you know, we want to break out of and do, but pretty soon it starts to look very similar.

- Okay.

- Because that's the structure that we've been taught.

- Yes.

- And we don't realize how well we've been taught it.

- Yes.

- It is really hard to figure out how to take responsibility for creating something new. I think Reimagining was always in a dilemma, you know, we start putting together all this structure then is it really Reimagining, but how do you do the work that might be necessary? Maybe that's one of the reasons, too, that during the conferences it seemed to me that the energy in some of the conferences in bringing people together who were doing interesting creative work was maybe at least for me one of the best parts of what Reimagining did, and then to fuss in the meantime about what to be, or how to organize less important. I don't know. I know twice we did a retreat with Lutheran women just for the purpose of talking about what it would be like to be another kind of spiritual community, and then create a ritual that we would end with, end the ritual was so amazing to me. I would just kind of stand back from that and say, all right there was an invocation,

there was, you know, the words. It was just exactly the structure. Where I did see some people who came from different backgrounds would come together where some different way of doing things might emerge.

- Where they from more liturgical backgrounds?

- Are you talking about the Lutheran women?

- The women from different backgrounds who did something different and didn't follow the same?

- No, they may not be from any.

- May not from any, okay, yeah.

- Or long since left, whatever, but, sometimes, that emphasis of trying to figure out how to be more creative than you've ever been before, you know, is not probably not as helpful as, and I'm not sure exactly what it is because I really have walked away from all of that.

- Say some more about it's not trying to be creative than you've ever been before is not as helpful what were you thinking?

- Where I think all the energy goes into what it really is that you're trying to create, you know, rather than some self-analysis about what's really going on, and what's really needed or necessary. When I was doing that sabbatical with students, I was also doing a piece for the National Church on singleness, and that was, you know, kind of dovetailed in a way, but I used to often talk with groups of young adults about, you know, two-thirds of the world is starving, and most of us are sitting on our fingers waiting for Prince or Princess Charming. Then we wonder why the world is still how it is. Sometimes, trying to continue to create can really be counterproductive, I think, to be change in the world.

- That's helpful. What aspects of Reimagining were most significant to you and why?

- Well, it's the same for me wherever I am it's the relationships. Building relationships with people. Learning from their experience. Having the freedom to share my own experience. There are people who will disagree with me because I will react and say I'm not an intellect, but I am not as excited about playing with issues in my head as much as I am trying to find, or figure out where does that come from, or why is that important to the person who is saying it? I think Reimagining in the conferences did a nice job of creating an atmosphere where people could be who they were. I don't think we were very stuffy. I remember Mary Branowski doing her doctoral thesis presentation. I don't know if you heard it or not, but the end was a whole list of I wonders, and just coming to the point of saying, you know, I was supposed to come to some kind of conclusion about this. That's what a doctoral thesis is supposed to be about, but I'm still curious and wondering. That's super helpful for me. That's one of the pieces of my life I've never forgotten.

- Why is that?

- Well, it's someone who has put all this work, all this time, all this energy, money into trying to prove to a group of people that you are good enough to have the title of Doctor who can stand in front of the same people, and say, you know, I didn't quite get there.

- Yeah.

- Just didn't quite get there. Didn't get all the questions answered, in fact, there are more now to be able to do that in the academic community.

- How or did your involvement in Reimagining change your perspective on feminist theology and/or the church?

- Yeppers, well, I've had enough of what was already Reimagining there. Someone a long time ago asked me about what I thought was the seminal experience in my life that projected me into social gospel, I think, was his point. He was talking about social gospel, and we were on a long car ride.

- This sounds like a conversation for a long car ride.

- This is Vince Hawkinson from Grace University Church. I'm a pretty extemporaneous thinker, or verbalizer and what popped into my head was a story I hadn't really even thought about forever I don't think. I was probably not quite four years old, or just four years old, got up one morning. Our house was on my great uncle's truck farm. There were cabbages in the back of us, and strawberries out here. I went to the window, and there were people picking strawberries, and the people picking strawberries had children and I ran to my mom, and said that I wanted to get dressed, and I wanted to get out and play, and she said over my dead body. I knew she was wrong. For a long time there was a motto on a bumper sticker Question Authority. One of the women's groups at Union Lu gave me that T-shirt, and I had a bumper sticker on my car for a long time. I think that's always been a core for me. so then I've also been accused of the fact that I have 30 pounds, and I probably do. I think, basically, there's a whole lot of stuff I've acted as though I believe, but I have never believed.

- Will you say some more about that?

- Well, I don't believe in God, and I don't think I ever have, but I acted as though I did. The question at the retreat about what do you pretend?

- Yes.

- What was her name? A lay woman in the Lutheran Church she was at Reimagining presented at Reimagining had an aneurysm has not functioned for a long time Elizabeth (mumbles)

- Oh yes, okay.



- Elizabeth said to a group of us gathered at that first Reimagining Lutheran standing in a room that many of us were doing what we were doing because there were no other options for us to do this kind of work. It was a period of time in human history. I look back at my own education, and if I had known that I could have been dean of students, or vice-provost for equity and diversity. There's so many things that exist now, but the church allowed me to do this programming, and hang out with kids, and do all this stuff that didn't seem to me would be very fun to do if I were teaching.

- Yes.

- That was the only other option.

- Do you think you were aware the whole time that you didn't believe in God, or did this realization come later? How did that?

- No, I think I've known it all. I think I have put myself through paces to try to put myself somewhere where something would happen so that it would become clear to me. Something tangible would happen, so that I could believe. I was raised in the Augustana Church, and we did things like every youth event there was a consecration service, and there was much more touchy-feely, but when all that emotional stuff was kind of programmed to make things happen it never happened to me. I was always the one sitting there going what is wrong with me? It was always more a realization of something that was important to me almost always happened in a conversation with somebody else, or a small group or something.

- Was this stressful? Was it difficult to maintain that, or were you able to pretty much navigate that?

- I think the last 10 years of Campus Ministry was the hardest. I'm figuring out that it wasn't so much about me it was about what am I as an image of the church how am I being perceived, and what is it that I'm perpetuating, and then it was something I don't believe in. The personal message that kept coming through to me over and over and over again is for some period of time in my life I want to be known as Jerie. I want people to talk to me wanting to know who Jerie is, or what Jerie's opinion is, not, oh, you are Jerie comma, Campus Minister. There just comes a time when you are part of that where people cannot get rid of that just cannot get rid of it, and you can't say anything right. Either you're too Left, or too Right.

- Given that how did it feel to be part of Reimagining, and plan these gatherings?

- That's an interesting question because I think Reimagining drew me into what I thought might be a new answer.

- Say some more about that.

- That somehow this would make more sense to me than anything else, and it would reframe the church, it would reframe theology, liturgy, and it would be believable.

- Yes.

- It's nice, it was really nice like there are a lot of things that I appreciated, but it's still outside of me. When I started to be able to be on campus more I mean, the focus of my ministry was much more on campus. My colleagues were much more disturbed, and Interfaith I was for the last 10 years I was pretty much the chair, and the driver of our Interfaith group, and my colleagues were really at Hello. They weren't my Lutheran colleagues, but I started to meet many people on campus and get to know them more, and get to know the fact that for them it's kind of institutional grounding, and something that they believed was either something they'd left a long time ago, or never had been part of their lives. My being campus minister being there doing things put me in a different light with them, and either people wanted to talk to me, or didn't want to talk to me. It's just been an interesting thing to come back to be included as a staff member at the university. Some people still remember me, the pastor want me to come to something because of my past, but it just feels so much more authentic to me.

- Yes, yes.

- Just so much more authentic.

- Yeah.

- I don't know if the Interfaith thing, or if there's a reframing where we could be different as a religious, or spiritual entity, but the older I get the more I doubt it. I've been part of a core group of people who helped to plan a course that's being offered now by the Center for Spirituality. It's the first course ever offered to undergrad students at the University of Minnesota. I've been racking my brains this morning to try to remember what the title of it is, and I can't. My part of the planning for this thing was to try to hold out for the fact that we would not use the word religion, we would not use the word spiritual unless someone, a student who uses that, or brings it up, but we would focus on talking about meaning and purpose, what motivates your life, where do you find meaning, where do you find purpose, so that the students who are taking this don't have to come from a point of view of justifying their own past or existence, but maybe can include as they're looking at this all the new things that they're seeing by being in a college campus that may, or may not be more diverse than where they came from. The state of Minnesota as well as the University of Minnesota is not doing a very good job of dealing with diversity, so I kind of feel that I have so much to gain from every single conversation I have with someone who doesn't look like me, who doesn't act like me, who doesn't have the same background. That's where I found that freedom to do that. The church for me, frankly, was continuing to be this kind of bastion of people who wanted to come together to be reinforced in like-mindedness, or whatever the focus is whether you want women's ordination, or whether you want gay and Lesbian people to be ordained, or whether you want them to be married. It still is a like-mindedness. I coined this a long time ago. I used to talk about blind to the Lutheran church of the butts, you know, we love everybody but.

- Oh, yes.

- You say that publicly anywhere, and people smile and say yes because they know it. I think we need to go on to the world of the what-ifs. There's a third way, or a fourth, or a fifth, or a sixth.

- Is that what you would say, well, I'll bring Reimagining into the conversation. Is that what Reimagining means to use that term? What is your vision for the future? What does the future look like? How do we go ahead?

- Well, I think, John and I created the Center for Spiritual Growth for that very purpose. It didn't go so well, and part of that was economics. Some writers have said that we're in the in between time, you know, where the past doesn't make sense anymore. The future in some ways offers so many opportunities that it's really hard to figure out how to move there. I guess if I were gonna preach about this now I think I would just tell people to relax. I wrote a paper once on community being something that would believe is about utopia, euphoria something that we're trying to make happen while we're not very willing to be in the present moment with what is happening. I think present moment is a really important thing in paying attention to what's going on now, and what do I have to learn from my neighbors over here who are Chinese. Just have no capacity to understand why I have a Buddha in my garden. You know what's that all about, and some kind of understanding of the fact that for many people there is nothing that makes any sense to them at all except the fact that last night they were sexually assaulted. Maybe my experience has been at the youth to be called in, in situations where a person in counseling in some agency on campuses wanted to talk about where is God in all this, but that's rare, and it's way afterthought. It has very little to do with the present moment. I don't know if I've been there nine years now of a hospital exam, a SARS exam that's happened, which, sometimes, can take hours where a chaplain at the hospital has ever walked in the room.

- Really? Why do you think that is?

- I don't know if they even think that that's important.

- Yeah.

- Sometimes, often erring on the critical, you know, the cup is half full rather than, but somebody has to do that.

- Well, and if you had to talk about the legacy of Reimagining what would you say the legacy is as we look back at those 10 years?

- Well, maybe it's just as simple as the fact that it happened, you know, there were forces in place, and women all over the world who, again, that was the amazing thing to me, you know. We so often just get this feeling that we're the only ones with people all over the world who are thinking on the same channels. It would be probably super interesting to bring all the very same people together, and see what they would say.

- Oh, interesting, yes.

- In this time what their story is, or where they maybe hear what they're doing.

- Do you mean the presenters, the people? Yeah, yeah, yeah. One last major question. Reimagining is working on a website. Do you have any ideas about what should be on it, who would benefit from it, any ideas?

- The only thing that comes to my head is the reason I read the minutes.

- And that is?

- See whose there, what are they doing now, whose alive.

- Yes.

- Because 10 years is 10 years.

- Yeah.

- You know, and it's always sad. I was at Cheryl's funeral for a memorial service. Even to see the few people who were there they all look a little older.

- But you still see Pam and Randy every month?

- Uh-hmm.

- That's impressive.

- Every month and they tolerate me.

- Why do you say that?

- I think for most people who are part of my past when I was part of the church the fact that I'm just not part of any of that anymore. One of my friends, Dorcas, used to say her new mantra was I don't know and I don't care about a lot of that stuff that's kind of my feeling because there's so much rich stuff going on and things that need attention I just don't have the patience anymore. If we start to talk theology, you know, I kind of just want to say could we talk about politics, or something else. They tolerate me, but most of the people who knew me well in the church are not in touch at all.

- Really, yeah, yeah.

- Not at all. There are some people that I may see somewhere, but I think there was probably word out there sometime about that the intern person who came into Campus Ministry we worked together for about a year before I left called me unfaithful.

- Really.

- So that the way in which I was doing ministry the fact that I was on campus as much I was didn't really justify it because I thought whether 5,000 Lutherans, but they're not in our worship on Sunday, only about 15, maybe I should be somewhere where the rest of them are, but he called me unfaithful, and so be it.

- Does that bother you that you're not in touch with those people anymore?

- I think there's a sadness in me that the very same people who preach unconditional love, you know, somehow I've stepped over a line, and then maybe I've heard this from a lot of people in retirement that you kind of feel like you drop into a big hole, and everybody is so busy in their lives, and it will probably happen when I leave the U, too. There will be a lot of people I won't be in connection with anymore, but sitting in a room at the university working with a team of people in a professional what's deemed a professional setting is very different than a church. I tell Katie my boss, this every once in a while if something went wrong with us as a team we'd close the doors go in a room, and say we're gonna hash this out until we figure out what's wrong, or what's not going well, no-holds-barred, well, in a university setting you don't work the same thing because people go to their supervisors when something is going on. You have to figure out through all the channels how that needs to happen that the environment I'm in now certainly isn't perfect, but the expectations of people with whom you had those relationships, and then suddenly it's not there anymore. I know part of it has to do with the fact that John and I have lived together for 20 or more years. If anybody had asked me directly I would never lied about it, or denied it, but I was never able to include him in anything nor did anyone ever engage me in conversation about the fact might there be some good reasons about why you're doing this.

- So just to clarify where you said where was the environment where you close the door, and you hash it all out?

- In the church.

- In the church, okay.

- Yeah, we're a team, and we're committed to this work with students now.

- Right.

- To figure out how to do this, though a hierarchy existed it was a pretty soft hierarchy.

- Jerie, this has been wonderful, and thought-provoking. Is there anything we haven't discussed that you

would like to say that you think is important?

- I don't, and I think part of moving away from wherever you've been no matter what it is I never mean who or what I am to be or sound as judgment of what other people may find important in their lives because very similar things were important to me at one time. Sometimes, especially, within the church it seems to me the word we're most afraid of is evolution. We kind of play around with more progressive churches saying, of course, we're okay with that, and those weird people over there, but I think we're really kind of afraid of moving on not straight movement, there is a spiral thing that talks about human development, but it's more of a rolling big stone that, you know, gets an impediment in it every once in a while, and maybe that's a thoughtful impediment where we can stop for a while, and think about what's happening, but things are changing, and what has worked in the past in every single institution we're willing to say, you know, we wouldn't be doing health care the same way we're doing it, but pretty much we kind of step out for a little bit, but it all reverts again to what it is that we know, and reading the Reimagining minutes, and seeing it recorded in there that people still think that language is a problem in the church just dumbfounds me, you know, even the news now pays attention to how it is that they talk about women and men together. It should not be tolerated, so that's where I would make a judgment, but most of the people who even will say to me at the U, you know, once I was a Lutheran, or went to church, or something, I never understood much of what was going on there but the community was important whether it was in my town or where, and maybe I'll do that again because I kind of would like to find that community. That's something about leaving the responsibility of creating that community to someone else where maybe all of us need to face how it is that where it is that we have the ability to either do that, or we've already have done it, we don't recognize it.

- What do you mean we've already done it, and we don't recognize it?

- I think a lot of people make fun of Christians who go to church on Easter and Christmas, but that's when they see their families, too, or know their neighbors. Catholics and talking about parishes is not such a dumb idea, but maybe the parish needs to be in your neighborhood rather than just the Catholic Center in (mumbles) I just think that taking responsibility for oneself is a big job.

- Yes.

- Most of the time we kind of look for the easy way out because life continues to be we continue to make life as complicated as we possibly can. Then my next birthday I'll be 72, and I look back and I think, and I listen to a lot of conversation about wellness and balance life balance, and I think, well, if I had 72 more years, I could go back I would just do everything I could, and not think about whether this was too much, or too little it just all goes so fast. It just goes so fast. Every opportunity is important.

- I just want to hear a little bit more about you wouldn't think about whether this was too much, or too little what did that mean? What do you mean by that?

- With the balance. I think the balance language drives me crazy. Boundaries language drives me crazy.

- Why is that?

- It seems to me, and I've done this myself you spend so much time thinking about controlling, and figuring out, you know, how much sleep am I gonna get, or what am I eating, and then in the long run it doesn't make any difference. We're all in this journey towards death, all of us, and people take really good care of their bodies, and drop dead the next day at 59. We just don't have control over that. I don't know. I wrote a poem. I think the catalyst was one of our last retreats at CSG, and then Roberta Gibbons who was the assistant director at Aurora when I started who now teaches at Metro State asked me one time they hadn't been part of any kind of organized institutional church as a family and her oldest was like 12 or 13, and she was saying should he be some place for confirmation? She was looking at the confirmation program at Unity because they do such a great job of sex education, and I think Nate did do that, but I don't know what there is a family, but she was just questioning me, so I pulled out this poem, and it was I believe in awe.

- Awe, do you remember what else? That sounds great.

- It's just a whole bunch of reflections about what has brought awe to my life. It's far broader than my Norwegian grandparents who taught me all the verses to Holy, Holy, Holy, probably before I could breathe, or my parents understanding of life. Some of the filters in my own life have been to say no that isn't, this is that dualism. I think it's just really important to have your breath taken away by either something that's so beautiful, or so horrible that it causes you not only to wonder, but to act.

- That sounds like a great place to stop. I believe in awe. Thank you so much, Jerie, thank you.