Woman: Thank you so much for meeting me, Randy. If you could say your name.

Randy: Randy Nelson.

- And are you lay or clergy?

- I am clergy. I am an ordained member of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

Woman: Thank you very much. When and where were you born, Randy?

Randy: I was born in South Dakota, a small community, Watertown, South Dakota, in October of 1941.

Woman: Okay, great. Where did you go to school? Graduate, Divinity school?

Randy: Went to grade school, high school in my small community of Strandburg, South Dakota. Went to college in Gustavus Adolphus in St Peter, Minnesota. Went to seminary first in Rock Island, Illinois, and then graduated from the Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago. I had moved there, and then did a master's and a doctorate at the University of Chicago Divinity School.

Woman: Okay.

Randy: Did some graduate work, or some sabbatical work in Cambridge, England, at Cambridge University, and that's the academic part.

Woman: Yes. That sounds wonderful, actually. What work or ministry were you doing at the time of Re-imagining?

Randy: I was on the faculty at Luther seminary in Saint Paul, Minnesota. I was the director of contextual education, which was the seminary's program for placing students who are preparing for ministry in congregations all around the country and in some overseas sites, so, I supervised their placements. It was a one year... They were in a, basically, in apprenticeship I don't know, for a year, and I and my colleagues, at one point there were three of us, at another point there were four of us, another point there were two of us. We ended up supervising them in that year of internship.

Woman: Yeah, and how long did you do that, Randy?

- Thirty-two years.

- Wow.

Randy: And for most of those 32 years, I would say for, maybe, 28 or 29, it was our practice to visit our interns in their places, each year. And so I would make, one year I made 60 site visits throughout the country and then other years, it was mostly between 30 and 40.

Woman: Wow, that's a lot.

Randy: I was, basically, every other week I would be gone from end of November through end of March.

Woman: And this was all over the country?

Randy: Yes, and then about, all over the country and in about seven or eight foreign countries over the time, as well.

- Really? So you visited there, too, the foreign countries, wow.

Randy: We did, up until the last two or three years, when we did not do visits anymore.

Woman: Yeah, yeah, yeah. And you're retired?

Randy: I am retired. I retired in June of of 2007.

Woman: Yes.

Randy: My wife, who was a school social worker, retired the same year. So, we've been in retirement now for, this is our ninth year.

Woman: Wonderful, great. How and when did you first become aware of feminist theology?

Randy: Well, I suspect, well, yeah, when I was at the University of Chicago, at the divinity school, for a couple of years, I also served part-time on the faculty of the Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago, and a couple of those years, I was in internship, a couple years I was teaching in church and society, and a couple years I was active dean of students.

Woman: Oh, wow.

Randy: And so, in those years, we had not very many, but we did have some women students that were coming. So that was one of the impetus for my interest. Another was a colleague of mine at the University of Chicago. Her name was Mary Pellauer. She was a part of the feminist movement, and so she and I were classmates, although class is a little different when you talk about graduate school. So, that would've been the early, the early interests, and then basically coming here and being at Luther Seminary. I ended up having a strong interest in feminist theology, and I seem to be able to relate, to women students fairly well.

This is not quite what you asked, but it's related, I also became very interested, at that point, in LGBT community.

Woman: Yes.

Randy: Especially some of the women students who were lesbian, but could not be out.

Woman: Right.

Randy: Would come and, we'd talk about, well, what are your options and that kind of thing.

Woman: Wow, no, that's definitely related, yeah. So it's interesting, so it was largely your, the women and students who were, that's what sparked your interest?

- Right.

- Yeah. Being supportive of them.

Randy: Yes, yes, and then I would start to read some of the feminist theology. So, it was primarily, though, experiential, is what triggered it. And, I mean, that's not surprising since my whole ministry was basically working with experiential learning.

Woman: Right. The doctorate was pretty much academic theology, but most of my ministry was more, okay, how do you put this into practice?

- Makes sense.

- Yeah.

- Absolutely.

- It does, for me, at least.

Woman: If we could talk about the Re-Imagining Community. Could you talk about your relationship that you're in, in Re-imagining community, what kind of role you play?

Randy: Sure, sure. My first involvement was with the Decade for Women. It started in, what, '88, '88.

Woman: Yeah.

Randy: And I was asked by a senate staff person if I would, in some sense, represent the Lutheran church as a part of that planning committee, or I'm not sure what we called it at that point. But anyway, Sally Hill was

the one who kind of, both invited me to be on this, and also, then, encouraged me, so. From '88 I was a part of that planning committee, and it wasn't a planning committee yet. By about '95, it became clear that not much was happening in terms of what's going on here in the cities, or really anyplace, and so that group said, we need to put on a conference.

Woman: Okay. Can I interrupt for one minute? Is this, the church councils, the Minneapolis?

Randy: Yeah.

Woman: Yeah, yeah, okay, sorry to interrupt. Okay, go ahead.

Randy: Yeah, and I don't know exactly who started the thing because Sally was with the Council of Churches. So I became a part of that, planning for the first major conference. And we played a kind of minor role in that, but was involved from the beginning with that. So, participated in that conference, and then, when that one was over, we basically thought we're done. This is it, we're done. Well, the response was so major and so much of it was negative, that it became clear that we couldn't just fade away because there were some people that needed that help, support, and we thought we could offer that. And so, instead of a one and done, we continued to work, and then we decided, well, we needed to do some more of these. And I'm not exactly sure why I was invited, but Pam Jorn and Jerry Smith and I were asked if we would be chairs for the '98 conference. I think all three of us said, well, we won't do it alone. So if we can't do it together, we won't do it. So we agreed to do it. And so we did it in '98, and then, when that one was over, we said that they were still not done. So the three of us became tri chairs again for the 2000 conference. And, I think after that, the three of us said, okay, if there's gonna be more of these, that's great, but we're not gonna be the instigators or organizers, or whatever it was called. And so, we did those two conf-- chaired those two conferences, and then stayed somewhat involved. It became, really, a bonding conference for Jerry and Pam and I, as we had continued to meet regularly, almost on a once-a-month basis, since then, so I suppose you could say, we started in '98, then we were meeting more than once a month, of course, for the planning. So it's been almost, it's been close to 20 years in which we've met regularly, over breakfast, once a month. That's been a, that's been just a great, fun experience.

Woman: I love that.

Randy: One other thing just went through my mind and I've now lost it. Oh, my other involvement with the Re-Imagining Community was we put out a newsletter, or a monthly. And Nancy Burnekin was the one who was the first editor. No--

- Pam Jorn was.

- Pam Jorn.

Woman: Yes, and then Nancy, you got it.

Randy: And then Nancy Burnekin, and I served on the editorial council for both of these. And I would occasionally write an article, or whatever. But, again, that group would meet pretty much on a monthly basis. We did editorial work for them. So, my main involvement was with the two conferences, but then also the ongoing work with the Re-Imagining newsletter, or the, it was more than a newsletter, it was a magazine, 20 to 30 pages long. That was fun. In a former life, or in a different life, I would've been an editor.

Woman: Really?

Randy: If I can't proof something and find a mistake, then there's something wrong with me. (laughing) It was all in good fun, and it was great to work with both Pam and Nancy in that context, also.

Woman: Oh, yes. Randy, I want to hear more details, 'cause you were involved in so many important ways. This is great. First of all, when you think back to the planning, when you were on the Ecumenical Decade, the church council, all of that, could you tell me a little bit more about how this all evolved into the conference that it became? Do you remember that?

Randy: Well, my main memory is that we, it was an Ecumenical Decade, but we had gone three or four years, and nothing much seemed to be happening.

Woman: Across the country?

Randy: Across the country. And Sally, I think, said, something's gotta happen or we're gonna have 10 years and, what? And so, it was Sally that really was the prime mover of this, but I think it was good, good participation and awareness. Again, we needed to do something, because nobody else seemed to be doing anything. So, we decided, well, let's do this conference. And I'm not sure how we settled on the notion of re-imagining God, all the theology, quote, topics. But it became clear early on that what we wanted to do was a conference, and basically, the staff staffed by female theologians. And, again, it was Sally with her kind of content, who said, well we don't need to just stay local. We can go national, in fact we can go international. And so, we had presenters at that conference from all over the world, Africa, Asia, Europe, and the United States. I think we were all surprised at the response. I'm not sure how many we thought we were gonna have, but when we ended up with 2,200, that was kinda like oh, there is something on here that needs to be tapped. And it turned out to be, I don't have the exact figures, but about 2,100 women and about 100 men attended that. And then, it had its own momentum. And, of course, by describing it as re-imagining, and some of the presenters were really quite bold in re-imagining very traditional and in some sense, untouchable topics that they dared to touch. And then, of course, that because there was some ecumenical money involved from the various denominations, some of those denominations, or parts of those denominations, became very critical, and they said they took off some of the presenters and some of the organizers. One of the unfortunate things is that several persons lost jobs, were emotionally abused, not physically, as far as I know, but emotionally and psychologically targeted for heresy, I mean, there was no it wasn't quite that formal, but that was the implication. That these feminist theologians were out of bounds and were targeting the faith, destroying the faith for the churches and that kind of thing. And the leverage they had was that there was some ecumenical money involved. So, it was kinda like, well how come our

money is being sent being spent for such and such a thing? So, then, as I say, then it kind of had its own momentum after that. And it was kinda like, well, we got a tiger going here. We can't just drop it. We could've, I think, if the response had been either neutral or maybe more positive. Then I think we could've said, well, we did our thing.

Woman: Right.

Randy: But it was clear, if we didn't continue, some people were really gonna be hurt, and they were anyway, but at least we could provide a support for them, which I think we did pretty well.

Woman: Yeah, yeah.

Randy: I, at least, from my perspective, went into this fairly innocently, so I mean, I don't recall all the ins and outs of this until after the fact, and then, oh, were we aware of that? Should we have been aware of that? Should we have expected this? Well no, I don't think any of us did.

Woman: And why didn't you expect it?

Randy: 'Cause I think most of us thought, this is what theology's about. It's about group creativity and it's about thinking outside the box, and that's not that's not something that ought to be stifled, I guess. Now, obviously, when you think about it, most of us were like-minded. There was no what I would call conservative fundamentalists in that group. So there was nobody there who was saying, well, you can't do that because the bible says this. No, so I think we were, we were naive, I would say we were naive in that sense. That we thought the whole theological arena was more open than it turned out to be. And, I think we were not aware of how okay, academic theory is one thing, but then you have the whole lay community of the churches, and they were less interested, I shouldn't say less interested. They were more afraid of what this meant because, okay, if you can challenge that part of my faith, then I'm not sure what I've got left, kinda thing. We were, I think, both like-minded in what we were hoping for, but also then, naive in the dimensions of the church community, especially, that were not prepared for that kind of outside of the norm kind of thinking.

Woman: Yeah, and you mentioned earlier about untouchable topics, or topics, what would you say were the issues that really--

Randy: Well, one of them was atonement, and there was a thought about, well, maybe Jesus, that the normal understanding of Jesus as dying for one's sins, maybe we need to rethink what that means. Another was the image of of milk and honey, which was seen by some to be a reflection on critiquing the eucharist, or somehow that, that was not a good thing to be doing. Another was the Adam and Eve, the apples with the Korean woman who kind of--

Woman: Chung Hyun Kyung?

Randy: Yeah, instead of saying biting of the apple is a problem, she said, well, we're gonna bite the apple, (laughing) and, of course, without any explanation of that. That seemed to be saying, (mumbles) at least, or how sin comes about, so atonement was one. The creation story was another. I would say, the whole notion of sin, worship, music, ritual, all of that was, at least on the edge.

Woman: Yes, yeah.

Randy: And while it was we thought it was the thing to be doing, was to kind of open this up.

Woman: Right.

Randy: Many people in the church, at least the vocal ones in the church said, you can't do that.

Woman: Right, right, yeah. What was your experience like at the '93 conference? Do you remember?

Randy: Yeah, it was, well, I was doing a lot of behind-the-scenes stuff, so I didn't get to hear everything. And, that's okay. My most vivid memory of that was the closing conference when, at that event, we started singing We're Marching in the Light of God, and the whole auditorium was, basically, marching. I was partly awestruck by the fact that I had been invited to participate in the event which was clearly feminist, and I'm not a woman. So, there was a part of me that was saying, I can't believe that I have been invited to be part of this. And then to be able to do that kind of celebrative dance at the end, was just great. I was also aware of, during the conference, the sense in which LGBTQ, it wasn't Q then, I guess it was just LGBT persons became very visible and were basically saying, we're not gonna apologize for who we are anymore. I guess three things, one being the closing celebration, the kind of coming out of the LGBT candidates, and the behind-the-scenes work of, okay, which speaker has to be where at what time, and that kind of thing. And I did some transporting of people, which I ended up doing all three of them and then I did find out (machine whirring over speech) I would make a note in my journal of, this time I brought Rebecca Walker to the airport or something like that. Another time, I think (mumbles). So I was one of those who had a vehicle and I had time and I could do that. And I thought it was more important for me to do something about organizing than to be making sure I heard everything and preventing some other one from hearing when I could be doing behind-the-scenes stuff. As I say, that I did with all three of the major ones. There were several of the minor ones, in between, that I did not have much involvement with.

- Did you attend those?

- Yes, yeah. And that was fine, too. I'm in a different role.

Woman: Yes. You mentioned being, I think the phrase that was often used was, one of the few good men that were involved. I'm just curious, how would you describe what it was like being a man and involved in this organization that was primarily women?

Randy: Yeah, it was. Well, I think having been a part of the Ecumenical Decade committee, from the

beginning. It wasn't like I have to find my place. And there was such a great group of women. They welcomed me. As I said, I did feel like, kinda when I would stand up and think, how did I get into this position? And not in a sense of, as a bad place to be, but how did I, how did I get to be in this situation? And it was because so many of the planning women simply welcomed me in. And it wasn't a question, well you gotta, you gotta prove to us why you belong here. Not that at all. It was, welcome, let's do the work. But, I mean, there are still parts of me that think, and still times when I wonder, how was I both able to do this and why was I so lucky that I was able to be a part of this? Because I really do find it, I think of it as one of the major, major events in my life, in terms of welcoming and being just accepted and having a place and a spot in which to give to bring my gifts.

- Wow.

- Yeah. I should say a little bit about my background, because I grew up in rural South Dakota, very traditional, normal kind of place. You know, rural values, I would say. My family, my parents were normal kind of Republican persons. And so, there was a part of me that thinks, how did a little country boy from South Dakota get into this kind of a international milieu? I still think about that on occasion. I don't know how it happened. I'm sure that it did. But I don't know how, because nothing, in some sense, prepared me for that. Well, I shouldn't say that. After college, it's one of those things where I had not planned out what I wanted to do. It just kinda comes. So, when I was a senior in college, my philosophy prof said, well, you're applying, aren't you, for a Fulbright scholarship? And I said, no. Well, yeah you are. So he, basically, had given encouragement. I applied for a Fulbright scholarship. Well, I think, okay I'll apply. Surprisingly, I received a full (mumbles).

Woman: Wow. State government fellowship, so I spent, between college and seminary, a year in Germany studying at University of (mumbles). Well, that was another pivotal point in my life, because it started to break me out of a rural, midwestern mindset, and say hey, there's another world out there.

Woman: Yes, what were you studying there, Randy?

Randy: Well, it was social ethics. I couldn't tell you why my interest in social ethics started but I carried that forward, then, into seminary, but especially into graduate school.

Woman: Yes. I'm just curious, this is fascinating. What led you to divinity school, to becoming a pastor?

Randy: Well, I was one of the, we had our small church in South Dakota basically had pastors who were nearing the end of their retirement, or, I'm sorry, nearing the end of their ministry and heading for retirement.

Woman: Yes.

Randy: When I was in high school, we had a seminary graduate, right out of the seminary. And his goal was to have a youth group here. Well, there were enough of us kids around, so he did that. And at that point, I

became one of the leaders in that, and I ended up doing some supply preaching as a junior in high school in rural churches in South Dakota.

Woman: Wow.

Randy: And, it was the kind of thing where, okay you showed some aptitude for it, the ministry's a great profession, sure. You ought to do it. (laughing) Then, as I say, I mean okay, I can do that. So I did. So, it wasn't a it was not a conversion experience or anything, I mean, it was not a blinding light. You've got the gifts, so that's what I did.

Woman: Wonderful. That's great, I love it. This is great, we've talked about, did the backlash affect you at all directly? You were talking some about that.

Randy: Well, I was identified in several conservative Lutheran papers as one who had been a part of that. The bishop that at that time was Herb Jolstrom, and so, some of the inquiries came to him. And he said, well, why don't you be in touch with Randy Nelson, he's a part of it. And I remember one of them, it was in a paper called the Lutheran Commentator and the editor said, well, getting in touch with Nelson is like getting in touch with the fox after the chickens have been eaten. It was the image, it wasn't the right language. So there was that, but it was just very minor, two or three instances like that where I was referred to as one of those that was a part of it, and but there was no repercussions at the seminary. There were some people at the seminary who clearly didn't think I should've been doing that, but they were not, they were not mean or, they didn't come after me. And I could weather that fairly easily because by then I had been with the seminary for almost, well, I started in seminary in '75, so I was one of the main persons there. And there was nothing really in the church, itself, and Lutherans were not picked out because we had not, maybe a little bit of sabbatical money but there was no major money source that could be said, well, why are you spending Lutheran money?

Woman: Right, right.

Randy: So, it was, it was minor.

Woman: Yes, yeah, that's good, good. Talking about Re-Imagining, the community itself, how would you define Re-Imagining?

Randy: Well, it was a community that gathered around first, supporting a feminist theology, and then it became a community that continued, in order to support those who had been a part of that effort and were now being challenged. It became, basically, a support community, and the support was very strong locally. It continued, then, to be what I think of primarily as a support community. It was in a position to provide some educational experiences and support for persons not from around here. I can remember one Lutheran woman who was a pastor in North Dakota, and for her, the conferences were kind of life-saving because in her community, she had really no support (mumbles) to be a feminist. She would use these events as kind of restocking or rebuilding her resources kind of thing.

Woman: Were there other ways that the community provided support, other than the gatherings?

Randy: Well, we tried to help groups in other places develop into small groups so they didn't have to rely only on Minneapolis, St. Paul, but they could gather their own. And then, I would say the newsletter did that also, because it became a really valuable resource for, I think, people, who, and especially for those who couldn't attend the conference. They could still get a sense of what was going on, and have a sense of participating in it. Now, I'm sure, those, I mean, there are ways that others in the community probably provide additional kinds of support, but that's what I'm aware of.

Woman: Do you have any idea how successful the small groups were? How many were formed, or any of that?

Randy: I don't think there were a lot of them, and I don't know how long they continued. So no, I really don't know how on that.

Woman: I wanted to ask a little bit more about the quarterly publication that you were involved in. I've been looking through them, and it is amazing how much is in them, and how integrated it is with art and poetry. Could you just say a little bit more about what you recall of what you were trying to achieve there, what it was like being involved in that?

Randy: Well, one of the things we tried to do is to keep the theological conversation going by having, usually there was a lead in which there was a conversation first with Pam and then with Nancy, with two or three persons around a common, around a theme. So that was a priority way of saying, let's keep the conversation going theologically. It was also intended to give an outlet for some people who wanted to express themselves and were able to do that. (machine whirring)

Woman: Go ahead.

Randy: And, it was also intended to be an outlet for providing information about what's going on in various parts of the movement. So, if a group was meeting out, say, in California, they could announce that in there. And it was a chance to express true art, so many mentions of this whole movement, as well. Basically, I think it was intended to be a way of keeping people in touch with each other in between gatherings and it did that. I don't have any idea how many actual subscriptions or how many actual copies were made, so I, but, it did, I think it did what it was intended to do, which was to kind of serve as a glue or a thread for the whole community.

Woman: Yes. Exactly, yeah. How would you say feminist theology affected the structure and functioning of the community?

Randy: Well, one of the ways it affected it was in terms of language. There was no hesitancy about talking about God the mother, and so feminist imaging was there for the theological themes. I think feminist

theology was also prominent in a kind of egalitarian or equality kind of notion. It says it's not hierarchical. It's what the gifts you have that you can bring. And I think that was modeled pretty well. So many of the leaders were lay leaders, I mean, they were not ordained. There were several, I mean like Sally, ordained, there were several. But many of them were lay leaders. And as far as I can tell, they did not feel they felt welcome for the gifts they had. They weren't intimidated by not being clergy. So, this maybe is redundant, but there's a sense in which the theology, itself, that's very clearly feminist that was not it did not worry about well, does the tradition say this? I mean, it wasn't disrespectful of the tradition, but it didn't feel that it needed to be simply (mumbles) The tradition could be respected, but we're in a different era. There's new learning going on in biblical theological area. We need to deal with that, incorporate that if we can. So, it was partly a sense of, let's be creative and that's, if it develops into something good, that's fine. If it doesn't, that's okay. We can, okay that was a good attempt, but it didn't work. So, we can go back and, if not start over, but at least take a different tack. It was also, I think one of the other things it did was, it was very committed to diversity. And that was diversity in terms of the nationalities, races, and it was not individuals may have had all kinds of trouble with maleness. But as a community, it was not disrespectful of males, either. In other words, the egalitarianess also extended to, well, if you want to be a part of this, you can be a part of it, even if you're not a woman. And that's partly why I think I continued to be a part of it was because I didn't have a sense that I didn't belong. So I'm not, there's probably some other ways also, but I think--

Woman: Those are very helpful.

Randy: I think that's what I, you need immediately.

Woman: Yeah, those are very important. When you think about the kind of challenges, you know, during its 10 years of existence, what challenges did the community face? And how did they address them?

Randy: Well, I suppose, the most vocal challenges (machine whirs) the most vocal challenges came from concerned lay people in various denominations. And, the way we dealt with it was, partly to support those who were being attacked, but it was also not to back off from, okay, we understand you don't like this, but we think this is something we need to be thinking about. So that was one of the challenges. There were some, I would say the pushback or the challenge from professional theologians was more muted and probably more subtle. I mean, there wasn't direct out and out, although there would be comments about, that doesn't seem to be what we ought to be doing as theologians, and that kind of stuff. But I would say the biggest challenge was, was from the church and its denominational manifestations.

Woman: When you talk about the professional theologians, was this in print or was this more comments?

Randy: I think it was more comments. I mean, there were, every now and then you'd see a comment in print from a theologian who was questioning what was going on, but that was, I'd say, much more muted. And I'm not sure, I think I think part of that was because they said, this isn't a serious movement.

Woman: Oh, yeah.

Randy: I mean, they didn't think it was, and I think they thought, you know, we don't need to address this. Well, they probably didn't. But when the lay people got upset, then in some sense, it became a serious movement.

Woman: Yes, yeah. I wanted to go back to that issue of diversity because I would say that the community did very well at getting racially and ethnically diverse speakers.

Randy: Right.

Woman: The general population of the community tended to be very white and middle class.

Randy: Right.

Woman: Would you agree with that?

Randy: Absolutely.

Woman: So do you have any thoughts on that? Why that was? Were there attempts to address that? Just any reflections on that?

Randy: Well, one of the attempts to address it was by the diversity of the speakers. And we did, we did try to incorporate into the kind of planning groups women of color, especially African-American. I think it's, because it started out pretty much as a middle-class group, I think it had some of the same problems that every middle-class church group has, and that's, how do you accommodate persons who don't have for one thing, don't have time, and they cannot give that kind of volunteer time that most of us could.

Woman: Yes.

Randy: Because we were secure in our positions. And I think in some sense, the worship and the ritual was going to the other direction. In other words, it was not going towards the spiritual African-American style. It was heading the other way, in terms of much more, much more adventuresome stuff. And I think, I think especially people of color, their tradition of that kind of of worship is so strong.

Woman: Yeah.

Randy: But they're not gonna really be attracted to something that seems to be, well, not only are we not moving our way, you're moving another way. Now, I mean, I'm not sure that makes sense, because I'm just kind of thinking it through at this time.

Woman: Could you say a little bit more, yeah, what details would make it move the other direction? You said adventuresome.

Randy: Well, milk and honey, for some. I mean, I don't think most African-American communities would say, that doesn't fit with our tradition at all. And, it didn't fit with mainline, either, but the mainline was more, because middle class, okay, we can try this. So, I haven't thought this through much.

Woman: Sure.

Randy: That seems to be, but as I say, I think the main issue is what every church-based, traditional organization the problem it has in trying to bridge both ethnic differences and in some sense, class differences and we were clearly middle class. And that's who, basically, attended. What we found, though, was that the middle class, white, spiritual people, they had no outlet for their stuff, either. And they had no way to find support, especially if they were serving congregations in smaller communities. So for them, it became a lifeline. And once that kinda got developed, it seems to me, that's the direction it continued to go. So, I mean, Church Women United was a part of that, the impetus for this, and that's primarily a white group, a middle-class group. So, that's the way it stayed.

Woman: Yeah, that makes a lot of sense, yeah. You may have already answered this question. I'll give you a minute to have your drink there. But, what aspects of Re-Imagining were most significant to you, and why?

Randy: Well, I, the theology, itself, was. Much of my academic work, and that experiential work was in liberation theology. I would take students to Mexico. I did that about 16 times.

Woman: Wow.

Randy: And part of that was, they'd get a sense of what's going on in the liberation community, particularly, I mean not only Roman Catholic, but, so I read a lot of liberation theology, so Re-Imagining seemed to be a liberation movement. And so, that resonated with what I was doing in my own academic work. So, for example, my sabbatical, I had a sabbatical in Cuernavaca, Mexico in what year was that? '89, '90.

- Huh.

- Yeah. And, what I did there was write a manual on liberation theology. You know, so it fit very much into that.

Woman: Yes, yes.

Randy: So that was one of the things that very clearly resonated with me. I think the sense of creativity was important for me. But the main attraction was the theology, itself, which seemed to be another version of what I was very interested in.

Woman: Yeah. Very good. How, or did your involvement in Re-Imagining change your perspective on feminist theology and/or the church?

Randy: I don't know that I would say it changed my perspective on theology. It probably deepened it. I have not, for example, done much with womenist theology, which, as I think about it, that would be kind of a further elaboration of this, and I just haven't done much of that. It kind of reinforced, confirmed, kind of, my own sense of things. But the truth, itself, I think it was both I wouldn't say disappointed, but I was I would have preferred that the church not be quite so quick to say no, no, no, we can't do this. But much more willing to explore. But that's why all of us were naive. I mean we thought, okay, we're offering here a gift, and why don't you take it? Well, it's too threatening.

Woman: Why is it threatening?

Randy: Well, because I think it does say you can look at the bible in different ways. There's not just one way to talk about major theological issues. There's an openness here and that would suggest there's maybe not one right answer, either. And if you need to have something solid and secure, we're not it, 'cause all we want to do is open things up. We don't want to close things down. So, I mean, I think that was, and that's, I think what really threatened lay people was this sense of, you mean, all I believed all these years, maybe isn't quite what I believe? Well, what does that mean? And how do I deal with that? And I think there's still some issues with the liturgies of the church because they claim to be still very traditional. Even some of these nominations are very active in social justice and ethics and that kind of thing. The liturgies, no, (mumbles) God the father and Lord have mercy. I mean, I understand why that is, because when you've got a congregation you've got the whole gamut and you cannot be so far ahead that those who are more traditional in their faith can't find a place. But, I think, that's why in some sense, it was a re-imagining movement. We'll offer this. If you can work with it, do it. If not, we're gonna still do it.

Woman: Yeah, yeah. Did you think that, why don't you take a sip. Did you think that the churches would be further along in inclusive language in 2016? Or, are you not surprised?

- You mean today?

- Today, yeah.

Randy: Well, I think we're there, when you talk about academic stuff. We're not there when you talk about liturgical stuff. Some are. But it's more individual congregations. It's not whole denominations. And in some sense, some of the liturgy has gone out of that. It's kind of like, oh that's, we've got other things to deal with, rather than that. Which, in some sense, that's true. I mean, you've got lot of the justice issues now. I'm not gonna fight over God the mother or daughter or father. It seems, okay, yeah, that's okay, but that's not really what the issues are. But, on the other hand, you could make a case that if we could get that straight the rest of it might actually get easier. But, it's hard to make that case.

Woman: I want to pick up on one other word. You said Re-Imagining movement, you emphasized movement. Why movement? What do you see?

Randy: Well, because I think this was not just individuals. I mean, there are individual theologians but

together they represented and still represent a kind of larger reality. I mean, that's what it became for at least 10 years and then as with other movements, when it has done its work, then it needs to quit. And I think we have done our work. It would have been, we could have continued, but I think that some of the energy had gone out of it. And, we were not saying, okay, if we quit, we failed. It's time to quit.

Woman: Yeah, yeah.

Randy: So, for me the movement, then, simply, it's more than just one or two theologians. There is a sense of, this is something that's happening in the church. But actually it's happening outside the church as much. (machine whirring) So, in some ways, it was a way of bridging the church and world. Which, as I said, when my background is ethics and society, and so for me it was a way to confirm professionally what I actually studied and trained to do.

Woman: Could you say just a, give an example of how you saw it or examples of how you saw it bridging the church and the world? How is it doing that?

Randy: Well, I think some of those who attended, for example, the conferences had pretty much given up on the church. And yet, here's something that is at least under some auspices of the church, and they're willing to do this and so maybe we don't have to quite quit yet. So, I don't know how many that was the case, but I know there were some for whom, okay, we'll give it a try again. And whether they've stayed with it, I don't know what's happened since. But I do think that was one of the goals, well, I don't know if it was one of the goals. It became one of the results was that the appeal was not just to tried and true church members, it was to those who wanted (mumbles) the church. We gave them a place to say, well maybe there is something down there. So, that's basically what I mean is that sense of trying to help those who were having trouble with the church. Say, well it's not a lost cause totally.

Woman: Right, yeah, yeah. In the time we have left, and I so appreciate this, we want to look a little bit toward the future. And so, what do you think is the greatest legacy of the Re-Imagining Community?

Randy: Well, I suspect the legacy is in those individuals who participated in it, and whether there's much for them either in their faith life or their ministry life. There are a couple of written documents, so there is some of that. But I think probably they focus more in terms of what needs to happen in the lives of individuals and then, to some extent, what happened to parts of the church.

Woman: What do you think happened to parts of the church?

Randy: Well, some, I think, were some did become more open. Some allowed it did give greater space to some, especially women, who I think might not have continued in the church if they had not had a sense of, okay, now I can try some stuff and still be accepted, or, I can be true to my own sense of who I am and still be in the church. I suppose, and I don't know the extent to which this is the case, but part of the legacy is a sense of what what can happen when committed people decide it's time to do something. It doesn't mean it's gonna change the world. It doesn't mean it's gonna go on forever. But it's like kind of a, okay, grassroots

movements still have their place and can still can still create a bit of excitement and if individuals can connect to that, great. But, we didn't go into it saying, we want this to be our legacy. We went into it saying, this is what we need to do and then, let it happen.

Woman: Yeah, yeah. Couple more quick questions. What does re-imagining mean today?

Randy: Well, for me it means, every now and then I see someone say, well we need to re-imagine this, and they don't have a clue that they're picking up on that movement because as far as they (mumbles) But I see it as a way of saying, yeah, there is always a need for a re-imagining what we're about, what we believe, what we think, and how do we do that? It has that kind of personal sense. And I do think that, for those who are able and willing to kinda take a look it does refer to this really quite extraordinary event in which, primarily, women got together and said, we're not comfortable with how the tradition has always described things, and we think we can, there can be other ways of doing it. So, in some sense what you're doing, probably, (mumbles) there's something here, let's take a look at it. And it may not, I mean, it's not current right now, but you can look at it and say, okay, what did they do that was able to get some stuff moving? But for me, the re-imagining will always trigger, whenever that word is used, whether it's in relation to theology or anything else, it'll always trigger, ah-ha, there was a movement once that was really quite exciting and did some good stuff.

Woman: Yeah, yeah. And my last question, which is very specific. The community is creating a Re-Imagining website, and I wonder if you had any thoughts about what would be helpful to include in it, who would benefit from it, how we could get the word out, any of those issues, any ideas on it?

Randy: Well, to be very honest, I have been skeptical about trying to resurrect that.

Woman: Mm-hmm, say some more about that, yes.

Randy: Well, my own sense is that we did our thing, we did what we wanted to do, that particular dimension is done, let's let it rest.

Woman: Yeah.

Randy: I don't have a good sense of what could be done because I, especially if it's, those who are part of the original Re-Imagining movement, most of them aren't gonna be around much longer. And so, unless the attempt is to appeal to the younger generation, I don't have a sense of what, why that would be a good thing to do.

Woman: Yeah, fair enough.

Randy: But that's a personal opinion.

Woman: No, well that's good, and it's good to hear that. I think that's very good. We need to hear all those

voices, that's good. Last thing is, is there anything that we haven't talked about that you would want to say? Something we've left out of the conversation?

Randy: I think, not really. I suppose, personally, for me, what was a benefit was the fact that I was out of a Lutheran context, meaning the ecumenical context. So, for example, Sally Martin who, a musician I would never have come in contact with her except through this, and some of the other women who represented other denominations and I think that was one of the geniuses of it was that it could span denominational lines, not just Protestant, but especially Roman Catholic, Protestant lines. So, I mean, that was a diversity also that was a positive diversity, especially for me. But it did bring together the Catholic nuns, sisters, Protestant theologians, Protestant pastors, lay people from all over, so, that ability to appeal was a good thing. But no, I mean, when Jerry and Pam and I get together, we don't talk about Re-Imagining so much anymore because now we all go, what's going on in your life?

Woman: I love it.

Randy: I went to Joe Engenberg's funeral, so when those things come along, there is still a tie that says, okay, let's get back into that and, or not get back into it, but let's remember that, affirm what happened.

Woman: Yes. Yeah. Thank you very much, Randy. I really appreciate it.