

- Thank you so much for agreeing to do this, Elizabeth, if you could say your name.
- Elizabeth Jarrett Andrew.
- Thank you so much, and are you lay or clergy?
- I am lay.
- Yes, and what denomination?
- United Methodist.
- Great. When and where were you born, Elizabeth?
- I was born in Brooklyn, New York in 1969.
- Really, interesting, I didn't know that. Where did you go school, graduate, divinity school, any of those?
- I did undergrad at Carleton, and I did a graduate MFA in creative non-fiction from Hamlin.
- Very cool. What work or ministry were you doing at the time of Re-Imagining? (laughing)
- I was, I was, um, newly out of retreat ministry, where I had been working for three years, and moving into self-employment as a writer. So at that point, I was doing a lot of freelance jobs, including gardening and data entry for Re-Imagining.
- Wow. Do you remember how many hours that was or what that was like?
- I think it was really small, I think it was 15 hours a week, yeah.
- And you said it was data entry. What were you, what was it exactly?
- It was mostly maintaining the database, doing mailings.
- Yeah, okay, good, good. And what did you do after Re-Imagining, what kind of work, ministry?
- Well, um, after I left Re-Imagining, I think that, I think I was there for two or three years. And I think that that was my last real employment, actually. (laughing) So I went into freelance teaching and writing from

there.

- Why don't you say that, your books that you've written. They're wonderful.

- So, um, I'll give you kind of the big picture 'cause the books really are just a small source of my income. So, the first book that came out in 2000 was *Swinging on the Garden Gate*, which was a spiritual memoir that was reconciling my sexual identity, my bisexuality with my Christian upbringing. And the second book that came out was called *On the Threshold*, which was a collection of personal essays about home and making a house into a home, and home is a metaphor for, homemaking is a metaphor for the spiritual life. Also in 2005 I published a book called *Writing the Sacred Journey*, that's about writing spiritual memoir. And then most recently, in 2014, I published a book called *Hannah, Delivered*, which was my first novel. So that's what's been going on in my writing life. I left Re-Imagining and started teaching, actually, I was probably teaching at the Loft while I was at Re-Imagining, but then I really amped up my Loft teaching, so I taught creative writing at the Loft for, well, I'm still there, so for more than 20 years now. I did a lot of freelance teaching around the community, so, at churches through the Re-Imagining small groups, or faith labs, I guess they're called, at UTS, at Hamlin, and now I'm doing more retreat leadership, so I lead writing retreats through the Christine Center in central Wisconsin and through the Madeline Island School of the Arts, and a lot of my work these days is at Wisdom Ways, where I really am beginning to frame the writing/teaching as a ministry, finally, and setting up a spiritual memoir program where, where, new and serious writers are fostered in developing their writing practice as a spiritual practice, so. So, yeah, it's all kind of a, a big piece, I still do a lot of work one on one doing writing coaching privately and, and most of that coaching is some, it's either working with writers who have some pretty spiritual content in their work, or working with writers for whom writing is a journey of discovery, and so there's always, like, a personal growth element to, to the work, that it's not just developing a literary craft, it's also about deepening the, deepening the life, so, so, yeah, my work is very much at the intersection between spirit and creativity.

- How wonderful, you've done such exciting things, it's great, oh, that's wonderful. Do you know, or how or when, you first became aware of feminist theology?

- I do, in fact, I was just writing about that the other day. I took a course my junior year in college from a woman named Jeannie Wirpsa, who was a visiting, no, I don't know if she was visiting, I don't know, but she was down at Carlton, and it was a liberation theology class, and we did a whole unit on feminist theology as part of that class and that's when I was first introduced to a lot of, you know, Mary Daly, and Rosemary Ruether, and a lot of the classics, and it was that class that really instigated my feminist awakening, so, I, you know, I can even pinpoint the moment. (laughing)

- Really!

- When the film was peeled back from my eyes!

- Oh, what was the moment?

- Oh, well, it was, um, we were put into small groups to talk through some of the material, and, and my small group always met at the student union, and, I, you know, I love the liberation theology stuff, but when we came to the feminist theology I actually took a lot of issue with it, and I think it was more actually because I grew up in a liberal United Methodist church that was very small and very loving, and had a whole parade of inept white male pastors, but for the most part, it was like this really loving experience, and to come into these texts that were very angry and critical of Christianity was incredibly painful, and I, in the small group, threw a fit about it, and I just really reacted, it was like, you know, my experience in the church was loving and nurturing, and I was a leader in my church, and how dare these people criticize my church, and then there was this senior in the group who said something to the effect of, you know, Elizabeth, love, in particular, doesn't negate the fact of systemic oppression. (laughing) You know, I and I was, like, pissed off! (laughing) But afterwards, it was so clear that she was right, and so I just remember leaving the student union that night and standing on the steps, and, like, the campus was dark, and thinking, everything's different. (laughing)

- Wow. Oh, I'm so glad you told, that's a powerful story!

- It was, it was a powerful moment. I've been writing about it because I've been thinking about kind of the evolution of consciousness, and those moments of awakening, and how, um, how, you know, that was a moment of coming into critical thinking, really, but I think even something deeper than that, that it was a moment of kind of detaching my, my ego and my personal experience from from, my delay to see it, the bigger reality. So, um, so yeah, that was the start.

- Wow. That's great, oh, that's so good. Well, let's talk about the Re-Imagining community, and could say some about your relationship, you talked about doing data entry, you mentioned faith labs, could you say a little bit more about that, what you did?

- Well, I'm trying to remember, so what year was the first conference?

- '93.

- '93, so I would've been 24.

- Okay.

- And, um, so my first experience at the conference was that, I was living in uptown, and my aunt, who's a United Methodist pastor in upstate New York, came out to Minnesota for the conference with a group of friends, and they all slept on my floor. (laughing)

- This is the '93 conference.

- Yes.

- Yes. Sure.

- That would, yeah, so it would have been, that would have been, it would have been, that's sort of the right timing. So, I didn't actually go to that conference, but I got to experience it all secondhand as my aunt and her friends just came home and, yak, yak, yak, yak, yak. And then one time I picked them up at the conference, and I just kind of snuck in and walked around the, you know, the display area. And, so that was, like, it was exciting, and there's all this energy around it, and I, because my, I have two aunts who are United Methodist pastors, and my mother is seminary educated, so, I grew up with lots of theological conversation around dinner time, and, so, it just felt like, the next step of that, that, my aunt and her friends would be having these kind of conversations and all excited about this conference. So then, I think that, I think I only went to one or two of the conferences. And so most of my, most of my experience with Re-Imagining was as an employee. (laughing)

- Interesting. Well, this is a good perspective, yeah!

- And, um, and then I, you probably remember more about the faith labs than I do, 'cause I do so much freelance teaching, I don't really remember how many faith labs I did, or what I did, I don't know.

- I've gone several times, and I'm trying to remember what it was. I think it was about the idea of spiritual memoir writing, as spiritual, that's what I recall.

- Journaling.

- Journaling, yeah. That kind of thing, yeah. So, what do you remember, what was it like being an employee? (laughing)

- Well, um, wretched? (laughing)

- Wow.

- I mean, no, that's, data entry stinks!

- Oh, of course.

- You know.

- Yes.

- And we're in the basement of the church center, and it was a horrible office, you know, there was never enough money, our computers were outdated, the, the, um, database was outdated, you know, when we did mailings we were still putting stickers on envelopes, and I mean, it was horrible. (laughing)

- Oh, yes, yeah.

- And, you know, like, of course it's great to be around all these fabulous women, and that's really exciting, and I really believed in what we were doing, which makes a job like that bearable. I do think I was there for two or three years, which, that's kind of amazing. But, um, but at the same time, if you've ever worked for a small nonprofit that's run by women, it can be really challenging. Because there's all sorts of dynamics around, consensus, and, and it's also been my experience, having worked for a number of small Christian organizations, that, like, there's all sorts of ironies, like, you know, underpaid employees, and it's hard to be an underpaid employee in an organization when you feel, you're like, there's kind of this attitude, well, you're doing this for a good cause, so of course we're gonna pay you poorly. (laughing)

- Right, yes!

- So I remember, I can't remember the name of the woman that I worked with, I took her place, Lisa? She was a redhead, um. But she was also miserable there and. (laughing) So. It was just a job.

- Yes.

- It was a job with cool people.

- Right, right. But I can see why all of that would be so hard, really. (laughing) Exactly.

- And also, you know, like, I had a whole other career that I was launching, that was really where my heart was, and it was really just to pay some bills.

- Exactly, yeah, yeah. Well, it is good to have your perspective on things. Well, one of my questions is, and I hope you give an honest answer, how did feminist theology affect the structure and function of the community? Do you think it did?

- Oh, that's an interesting question.

- Yeah!

- Yeah, 'cause I really was not involved in the, you know, I was not involved in the structure and functioning.

- Right, right.

- I was not involved in any decision making or any of that. But, um, that's, that's funny, you know, I was so young, too, so I don't really like, trust my perspective. Well, I mean, it was like having 12 bosses. (laughing)

- Oh, gosh, wow.

- Yes.

- Yes, yes!

- It kinda sucks!

- Yes! (laughing)

- I've since worked for so many other women and feminist organizations where, like, I really have come to appreciate the healthy balance between strong leadership and consensus making, and, um, and I don't really, I don't know what was happening at the governance level of Re-Imagining, I just know that it was very hard to work for those people.

- Yeah, yeah! Well, you mentioned the term consensus, in what way was it that you weren't getting clear direct, you know, say a little bit more.

- Well, I mean, I think the, so, it was an organization made up of volunteers.

- Right.

- And I think that, I think that we were the only employees.

- I think you were, yeah, you were!

- Right, so, so, there was, who is the boss, who is the person that I'm really accountable to, you've got all these volunteers coming in, asking for this or asking for that, there's no, no sense of leadership around administration, right? (laughing)

- Yes, yes.

- And so, so, you know, even if there was great, who knows, if there some great consensus or some great leadership around planning the conferences, it sure didn't show up in the office, and so, so, yeah, it just.

- So, I'm trying to picture this, I'm picturing like one person would come in and ask you, can you do this, another person would come in, is that the kind of thing?

- Yeah, it's the different, different requests from all over, and, and, I really don't remember, I think most of what we were doing was just mailings.

- Yeah.

- You know, like, taking in new members and putting them into our, into the computer, and.

- Were you responsible for getting out the quarterly newsletter, the quarterly publication, was that part of?

- Well, we worked with Nancy, yeah, I worked closely with Nancy, and that, she was wonderful, I really have, really good, strong memories of her, because she was very clear. (laughing) Professional.

- Yes.

- She had done, she had worked in publication, she'd worked as a writer, but she had published things before, too, so she just, she had a schedule, and expectations, but yeah, we did all the printing and the mailing of that, and, but I think she did all the layout.

- Okay, yeah.

- That's my memory.

- And you would have had to send in all the stuff for conferences, sent out to, for conferences, registrations, that kind of thing, memberships.

- Yep.

- Yeah, yeah. Yep, interesting.

- So, yeah, it was interesting, it was, I was, I was kind of a gopher.

- Yeah, yes. With 12 bosses, boy. (laughing) Well, probably it didn't, but I'll ask it anyway, did your involvement at Re-Imagining change your perspective on feminist theology or the church?

- Hmm, well, you know, change my perspective on feminist theology, well, yeah, I guess it did. It, like, um, in a couple ways. Like, I've always been a theological thinker, and so, it was really stimulating to be part of a community of, where, you know, where that was happening.

- Yes.

- It was also really interesting to watch that, watch the community fade.

- Yes.

- Because I had also just come out of three years of living in Christian community, and I was very interested in community. And so, even though I never really felt like I was part of the Re-Imagining community, to see how, just how communities function and how there's a lot of idealism around community building, and how the reality is very difficult to sustain. So, so, there's, you know, there's just this, there's always this

interesting dichotomy between theological conversation and what I experienced as I lived spiritual life, and, I think that, I think by experiencing Re-Imagining, in some ways, clarified where my place is, as much as I love theological dialogue and, and I'm very informed by theological ideas, and feminist ideas, my real passion and what really brings me life has more to do with a lived, grounded, incarnate experience of the spirit, as opposed to inhabiting the realm of ideas, and I think that, that, my work at Re-Imagining helped me clarify that, oh, there's all these great ideas, but, when the rubber hits the road, what does it really look like to manifest a feminine divinity in this life and this body, and this, in my relationships in my home. That, like, to me, that was a much more rich terrain, and so, so that's where, that's the direction I went.

- And, and, just to make sure I'm understanding you, did you feel like Re-Imagining was a lot about the theological ideas and not so much the lived spirituality?

- Well, yeah, I mean, I felt like it was very much about ideas, it was also very much about the church.

- Yes.

- And, um. And, you know, I am a churchgoer through and through and, for me, being church is part of my Christian calling, so I, I definitely am an insider in that sense, and at the same time... I think it comes out of being a lay person and, and, having, so the church that I belonged to then, and I still belong to is Prospect Park United Methodist, it's a small church, pretty feminist from its beginnings, well, not from its beginnings, but, you know, like, really has had pretty good theology all along and, and, so, there wasn't a lot to push against, and, and so, while, while I think, you know, reading feminist theology in college and afterwards, and then learning what I did at Re-Imagining, while it clarified a lot of stuff for me, it wasn't revolutionary at that point. And it also was not, it was very much in keeping with what I was experiencing at church. So, so, in that sense, it wasn't lighting any new fires for me.

- Yes, yes.

- And, um, I think that there's just part of me that, that needed to, that went from, and if I'm thinking about the timing right, I think I was a lay leader about the same time that I was working for Re-Imagining, and, um, and, that whole real work of really being community. (laughing)

- Yes.

- You know, like, what does a, over decades, like, these are the people that are gonna be at my memorial service, like, that real, you know, again, like, feet on the ground, manifesting Christ's body in this group of people. Like, what does, like, that, that was actually more the space of my, the venue for my faith.

- That makes sense.

- So.

- Elizabeth, I'd like to dig into that more, because given your knowledge about community, your experience of community, both at the retreat center and at church, what would your reflections be on the Re-Imagining community, and how it functioned, and how it sort of, how it's kind of died, I mean, yeah, what did you, what did you notice about that?

- Yeah. You know, the community's a big mystery to me, and, um, and it's, you know, it's like one of the perennial questions in my life is how, how do we be community for each other? And, um, and, you know, in some ways Re-Imagining, in hindsight, seems like a flash in the pan. You know? It was the, it was, kind of this flash of great radical ideas, it was this, you know, flash of great women coming together, and finding commonality, and, like, really using their voice in a new way. But I don't think it ever really figured out how to be community.

- Yes.

- And. You know, like, I was part of a little third wave group that Rachel started up.

- Oh, you were, okay.

- Yeah, I had forgotten about that. (laughing)

- Oh, okay, yeah.

- It had so little impact, but, um. But, you know, it was, it almost felt like we were trying too hard, like, um. I don't know, I don't know what it is that, that really, really bonds people together.

- Yeah.

- You know, I think, I think, um. You hear about consciousness raising groups among women in the '60s, and how, how important that was, and how, how the deep bonds that happened in those groups as people kind of came into themselves in community over great periods of time and, I don't know that there was ever, like, real space enough to, for, for the people who were involved in Re-Imagining to really bring themselves as, into relationships that deeply, or, you know, a lot of it was the exchange of ideas and how much of it was really sharing the lived faith, I'm not sure, I don't know if that would have made a difference, or like the faith labs that I did, those felt, you know, pretty much the same as any other sort of educational programming I've done, which, you know, you build the little community in the class, and it endures for the length of the class, and then it's over.

- Right.

- Which, it doesn't say that that's not a valuable community, it really is, but, um. Yeah, I mean, what exactly is community, I don't know, I don't really know.

- When you get it all figured out, let me know, okay? (laughing)

- It is all, the whole phenomenon of that fading off is really interesting to me because, because it's true that feminine images of God are much more integrated in our culture now, and, you know, yeah, there's always gonna be conservative pockets of the world where talking about God as she or even, like, gender-neutral terms about God are gonna be offensive, but, but, these days, I feel like if I'm reading a book about theology or spirituality that uses a, a masculine pronoun, that kind of stands out to me, like, oh, wow, haven't seen that for awhile. You know, so I kind of feel like it did, and who knows if it was the conference, you know, or just the evolution of our, you know, us as people, but I feel like, the work happened, which was a beautiful thing. And at the same time, it's like, so not happened, you know, and I don't even think that, what is it that, I actually think that the really profound feminist work of, um, changing the church is not gonna be theological, it's gonna be about, it's gonna be, it's gonna be institutional, it's gonna, like, be about kind of tearing down the institution as we now see it and reconfiguring it in a completely different way, and so I think, in part, there are some limits that the institution places on what's possible, that, that has restricted the depth of change that can happen as a consequence of that kind of theological movement, I feel like I'm not being very articulate about this, but, but I just.

- Well, say some more about what would need to happen, I'm intrigued by this. You know, it's sort of like the question, one of my questions was what would Re-Imagining look like, and I don't mean Re-Imagining the community, but what would, what does it look like today, what needs to be re-imagined?

- Yeah.

- What needs to happen?

- Yeah.

- What do you think?

- Church needs to be re-imagined. And that's where I'm so excited about working at Wisdom Ways right now, because I think it's happening there.

- Oh, say some more!

- I think it's like, I think that Barb Lund has her finger on the pulse of, of what's emerging.

- That's great, and what is that?

- Well, it's a, um, it's a, it's centered in body wisdom, it's very feminine, it's non-denominational interfaith, beyond faith, so, wildly inclusive. It's absolutely working outside of power structures. (laughing) It's you know, I wish I could remember what the charisma is of the Sisters of Saint Joseph, because it's really powerfully at work in Wisdom Ways, but, but it's something to the effect of meeting the spirit where it's

coming alive out in the world, and serving it, and so, so, what I see happening is that, at least, in Wisdom Ways ministry, is that they see the spirit coming alive through creativity, that that's really the place where people who are, for the most part, leaving the church, and still being seekers, or, you know, coming, they're seekers, having never been part of the church, and where do they connect with what's life-giving through creativity, and so, so then, so then, like a writing class, creativity becomes the means for deep listening, for growth, for connecting with what's sacred, and then connecting with each other through the art making, so, it's a really different, um, source for like, for participating in the sacred.

- Yes.

- And it's, you know, Barbara does such a great job of staying outside of all of the hierarchies that come with being clergy and, all the church hierarchies, she has like stepped outside of all that, and really creates an atmosphere where everyone's a seeker.

- Wow.

- So, at least, that's my perspective, you know, she'd be an interesting person to speak to that, but I think that there's this new, the hunger there for spiritual connection is stronger than ever, I think, in our culture, and more than ever, church isn't serving that, and so, a lot of the feminist theology is still kind of speaking to that structure that's dying. I mean, that's really not totally true, I mean, there's some amazing, amazing work happening now, but, but I think to, oh, another thing that I think is really shifting is with the environmental crisis, and, you know, this new, very women-centered reverence for the Earth, and the Earth is the body of God. (laughing) That, that, church, you know, that church is the natural world, and that that is our place of worship, and that it has to be in order for us to save our world, and so, that also is something that I see really, I see Wisdom Ways grappling with a lot, and, so, yeah. (laughing)

- That's wonderful, that's great!

- You give me the chance to ramble along.

- Oh, and I'm loving it, this is great! It's very interesting rambling, let's see, yeah. Well, I guess I will go back to, this is great. What would you say is the, the greatest legacy of the, of Re-Imagining?

- For me, or for?

- Both. What is most significant to you and in general, both, yeah.

- Well, you know, I think that, I think probably the most significant thing for me, that's interesting that this comes to me, because it really is about community, it's really, it's feeling not alone, I had this experiential participation in a bigger group of women, or people, just, you know, taking in the feminine God. I think that's a huge gift to have had that. So, so, you know, I can't imagine what it would be like to be asking questions about the nature of God, or, you know, about, even, even, reading feminist theology without

having had that lived conversation, that was a pretty amazing thing. And so, like, once you have that, it's like you know that that's possible, and so, then you just, you know, you have those conversations everywhere, or at least I do. (laughing)

- Yes.

- All the time.

- That's wonderful!

- Oh no, it's great, I'm really fortunate for that. So, I mean, I guess what I would hope the broader legacy is, is that that's happening for all those people who participated in that.

- Yes.

- You know, and I think about someone like my aunt, who was the pastor in upstate New York in a small town with conservative parishes and, and she felt isolated and lonely for her whole career, and, so to come to something like that was just amazing for her, and then, you know, she and I continued to have conversations, so, so, it is like this, it is groundbreaking in the sense that these conversations happen.

- Right, yeah, yeah. I have one other very specific question, and that is, we're working on a Re-Imagining website, do you have any ideas about what would be helpful to be included, how people would find out about it, who it would benefit?

- So, would it be mostly archival, or would it be, would it actually be active?

- Yeah, it's going to be both, probably, yes, yeah, yeah. So, it would be active, so what kind of things would be good to, to include?

- Yeah, it would totally depend on like, what your mission would be, really.

- Yeah.

- So, are you asking what mission? (laughing)

- Yeah, no, I think it would be, part of it, I think a lot of it would be, it is archival, so we have the, the gatherings on there, and a lot of the materials, but then I think what people are talking about, and it's still in process, would be things like, a lot of it would be networking, and pointing to other resources, and pointing to what's happening now. And so, people who are interested in that before, where could they go?

- Yeah. Yeah.

- I kind of sprung it on you, so if you don't have ideas now, that's okay. (laughing)

- It's really, um.

- Do you think that maybe it really doesn't have a role? Do you think there's other things that are out there?

- Well, I mean, I think it does have an archival role. In terms, you know, in terms of being, like, a, a hub, like a hub for information, or, you know, a connective place, I imagine that there's a purpose for that. Yeah. I'm not jazzed by it. (laughing)

- No, I can tell! And that's fine, that's fine! Yes!

- To me, the question is, it's like, is that enough, is that an organization then, or is it just a website, and, like, what are you creating here, what world are you creating, are you creating a world that's just, just, like, connected from things that happened in the past, or, or is there some way that you want to generate something new from this, and, um, yeah.

- Yeah. Those are all good questions. I mean, I think some of it would be, for example, there are plans in the next few years to do things, so kind of letting people know about that, and things, but, you know, those are, those are important questions that really need to be figured out, yeah. I think a lot of it, the initiative, was at archival, that we need to add that, yes.

- That's important, that's really important.

- Yeah. Is there anything we haven't discussed that you would wanna say?

- Well, you know, this one memory keeps coming back to me, so I'm gonna just, should I?

- Yes, please do!

- I was, I became quite good friends with Jeanne Audrey Powers, through these years, and I just have this lovely memory of her at one of the conferences, she always took it upon herself to sit down at the table with the reporters, and especially the conservative ones, and introduce herself, and get them coffee, or whatever. (laughing) And then have these really lively conversations, and I just, I so, I so love Jeanne Audrey, and really, it's something I never, ever would have done at that point, maybe not even today, and, yet, in some ways, she, she, I think she was kind of radical, even among the Re-Imagining group, in that she saw, she did relationship building. She always knew their names, she knew whether they had kids, you know, she actually had conversations with them, and I think that that's just, like, this amazing thing that happens so rarely in our world today, you know, it happens less frequently today than it did however many years ago, and, um, that sort of bridge building really stands out in my mind from that.

- That's a great memory. That's really important, yeah, yeah. Elizabeth, you had such an important

perspective, and some real good thoughts, thank you! (laughing) Thank you so much, I really appreciate it.

- Yeah, it was fun.