

Interviewer: Susan, thank you so much for agreeing to be interviewed and if you can just first say your name and actually spell it as well.

Susan Hames: Okay, my name is Susan Hames, S-u-s-a-n Capital-H-a-m-e-s, I'm a Sister at Saint Joseph.

Interviewer: Thank you.

Susan Hames: And happy to be a part of this project.

Interviewer: Thrilled to be interviewing, that's wonderful. So when and where were you born?

Susan Hames: December 1, 1944 in Oakland, California during the war.

- Really?

- My father was in the Coast Guard in Oakland-Alameda and my mother went out to be with him or to be close to him and was pregnant with me six months at the time. And then I was born in December and the war was over the following June. So we flew back over the summer.

Interviewer: Where was back?

Susan Hames: Oh, back to Minneapolis in Saint Paul where, actually, Minneapolis, both my folks were from Minneapolis and had decided to marry the day of Pearl Harbor.

Interviewer: Oh my goodness.

Susan Hames: My mother wasn't Catholic at the time but was in the process, when they married that April, was studying to be Catholic but very much later I learned how difficult it was for her that they were married in the sacristy because she wasn't baptized yet.

Interviewer: Oh really?

Susan Hames: That was hurtful to her for, I think, a long time.

Interviewer: Yes.

Susan Hames: But I didn't know that. People didn't talk about those things in those days.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Susan Hames: I found out much later. And we celebrated their 25th wedding anniversary in great style, it was as if they were married all over again, and all of us were the great witnesses so that was lovely.

Interviewer: How nice!

Susan Hames: My interest in ritual comes out of my family very organically.

Interviewer: Say some more about that.

Susan Hames: Well, family dinners were not to be missed and both of my folks loved entertaining. When I got to be working in campus ministry as the director, and much involved in the liturgy, and in hosting celebrations, I had the experience of experiencing my folks. I had a very visceral connection with my dad who was always the grand, loved to put together a party, putting it together, let's put something together. It was the supper, it was the dinner, it was the party or some kind of gathering and mother loved to do that, but it was the cooking and all the preparing and all of that, and then she loved the part where we cleaned up.

Interviewer: (laughs)

Susan Hames: We got to do the dishes and she was relieved. But, anyway, and we always sang, singing was a big thing in the family, music. My mother sang in the choir, her church choir, and she always sang in octave, her voice was very low, but my younger sister and I were very, and Phyl made church music for years and I assisted, she and a good friend of mine and I were backups to her. She had a voice kind of like Judy Collins in her heyday, and she played at the 4:30 Mass at Saint Olive for years and we were together, she and I, we were part of a contemporary group at basilica, at the 10:30 Mass. [Interviewer] Really?

Susan Hames: It would have been in the '70s, when I was, I think I was teaching at Holy Angels at the time, but that kind of became our parish. In fact, I made my final vows there, in '74, so Kathy and I backed Phyl up and Phyl was in our community for a while, my younger sister, and she had her BA in Theology from Saint Catherine's and she entered and stayed through the novitiate and kind of clarified her own sexuality in the process of that and when she came out as a lesbian she really didn't see herself continuing teaching and so we continued to back her up at coffee houses around the Twin Cities. [Interviewer] Is that right?

Susan Hames: Yeah, we had a lot of fun at women's coffee houses. We were down at Plymouth Congregational and, I forget, that's the place I remember the most. There were a number of other places, but it was fun.

Interviewer: You said her name was Phyl?

Susan Hames: Yeah, my mother's name was Phyllis, so we had Phyllis Eleanor and Phyllis Anne and, um...

Interviewer: That was your mother and sister?

Susan Hames: Hm-mm, Phyllis Anne was also, once she got into high school she became Phyl. P-H-Y-L.

Interviewer: Got it.

- Which is a little different from other Phils, but anyway, so, so my background is ritual, that's all kind of organic and in the community, I was just talking about this because I preached it at Carondelet Village on Saturday and Sunday, the Feast of Corpus Christi, which is my favorite feast so I got to tell them about that and why it's become my favorite feast, but anyway, I was remembering, part of it was remembering when I joined the community we spent the whole week getting ready for the Sunday liturgy. You know, we were learning the Latin chants. Our Sisters were trained at Solesmes, by the monks at Solesmes, so we learned the Gregorian chant and we practiced it so intensely that many of us got to know the chants and the readings, you meditated on the readings and we sang the chant so it stayed with me but I think for a lot of us we knew the chants by heart. [Interviewer] Yeah.

Susan Hames: It got inside of us, so the early training, it wasn't training, but the early formation in the liturgy was very profound for me. Really has stayed with me. I read the whole Bible in our novitiate years and I remember, we were taught to meditate, as a community we meditated for an hour a day, half an hour in the morning and half an hour in the evening, and it wasn't all serious. Some of it was trying to stay awake. [Interviewer] (laughs) [Susan Hames] Who had the banana peels and was peeling stuff. [Interviewer] (laughs) [Susan Hames] But aside from all the pranks and the play that it involved, there was a certain serious quality and something about learning to take time, to make time in my life for that kind of quiet, that I've held on to and has stayed with me. And I still value, so I learned a lot from the schedule even though it was quite rigid and uniform in ways that I could never support now. (laughs) And it was uneven, I mean, some people hate it. Not everyone would tell you that it took. [Interviewer] Yes! (laughs)

Susan Hames: Or ways it took, it was different for all of us, but it was on the whole a much more positive experience for me. And unintentionally, you know, we didn't have much else to talk about so we talked about what we were reading, the scripture we were reading or the spiritual reading that we were doing, so I learned, even though the structure didn't help us to learn to talk about those things, to articulate what things meant to us. We were learning it kind of under the radar, walking around the yard. You just had to be careful you didn't walk with the same person, which of course some of us did. [Interviewer] (laughs)

Susan Hames: Anyway, that's all kind of...

Interviewer: Well, that's fascinating, both your background and the whole...

Susan Hames: It's all connected.

Interviewer: It is.

Susan Hames: Yes, we say.

Interviewer: Yes, it is.

Susan Hames: Discovered so much more deeply.

Interviewer: Yes, yeah, I love it, I love that your love of ritual was rooted in celebration, it sounds like, at home, party, celebration, joy, which is wonderful. And I know we discussed this earlier but can you talk about where you went to school, graduate school? You have an interesting background. [Susan Hames] Yes, I, well, I completed a degree in Spanish and Secondary Education at St. Kate's. I got into Spanish, Jean Rooney, one of our Sisters, taught us all in Spanish because I entered in '62 which were the years Vatican II was just beginning, John XXIII is telling religious orders, 10 percent of your order should be going to the South American countries and we were preparing to do that. Our order got right into that so we were all studying Spanish for which I was grateful. I had four years of Latin in high school and you didn't talk it, it helped me, I'm sure, understand language but it made much more sense to me, and Jean Rooney, studying Spanish with her was like having a course in liberation theology. She was very, she eventually taught English and Literature over at the Minneapolis campus of St. Kate's but she was way ahead of her time in terms of how she understood Spanish and she taught conversational Spanish, she had a great facility, great accent, and she was, and helped me discover that I had some facility for language because it was easy for me and I think I got put into Spanish because we needed Spanish teachers and in high school I remember putting it down because I loved the language and I loved the class, but I also didn't want somebody assigning me to become an elementary teacher. I was scared to death of that.

Interviewer: (laughs)

Susan Hames: We were in the transition days from your mission or your ministry being assigned. So, anyway, I majored in Spanish and Secondary Education and I used it summers to work with migrants in the western part of the state, Hector and Bird Island and Mahnomen, but never lived anywhere where I was among Spanish people and using the language daily which would have helped me a lot. And I taught elementary and intermediate Spanish for about three years, four years in high school but I always really wanted to teach Religion and the deal was that we all had enough credits so we could all teach Religion and everybody did, but some of us really wanted to do it professionally, kind of, so I did, gradually I taught all Religion. I started at St. James' for a year at that high school and then that high school closed, nothing related to my being there.

Interviewer: (laughs)

- And then I taught at St. Margaret's. A couple of people that I really admired came and asked if I would come over to Holy Angels and I was thrilled. I saw myself as learning how to teach at that point and I thought, these are people who could really help me. So that was a very happy thing. I was there for five or six years and began to work in membership with the community. That was fine, I moved out of there gradually, but we team-taught, it was a wonderful way to learn teaching. Team-taught religion.

Interviewer: Sorry to interrupt, I was wondering if I could close the window?

Susan Hames: Yes, absolutely.

Interviewer: I don't want that to interrupt the...

Susan Hames: I thought Tuesday was the day, but I think we had so much rain, I hope that's not, that doesn't interfere. So I gradually taught more religion and then by '71 the community asked if I would like to go on for a Master's and I wanted to go, I had extensive, I finished my study at St. Kate's the year that they opened up a Master's for women in Theology and I had more than enough credits but not the right ones and I couldn't get all the right ones so I couldn't get a Master's. I'm sure I had a minor, but anyway...

Interviewer: This is the Master's at St. Kate's?

Susan Hames: Yes. I had a Master's, no, not a Master's, a major in Theology, you couldn't get a degree in Theology at St. Kate's until that time, really.

Interviewer: So you did get to a Master's?

Susan Hames: So, anyway, I didn't get a major in Theology because I didn't have the right credits, but I had more than enough credits to have earned a major, it's just there are certain ones that they required for the major, so, anyway, I went on, where I did go was six summers at Webster in St. Louis, which had an experimental Religious Studies program where it was a Master of Arts in teaching with a specialization in Religious Studies and it introduced me to world religions and to a lot of issues, liberation theology, social justice, it was really a combination, the emphasis was on opening up education and I would say it was helping me to begin to teach adult education and a lot of communication skill building process in education. Philip [Hiberian 15:21] and Elizabeth McAlister came, they would have people like that, came as specialists. We studied pedagogy and we addressed, as a significant, Thomas [Ellington 15:40] came for a summer, talked about authority in the church, very, really, again it opened up my thinking and it was, the theology had been, we'd been taught by Dominicans, we had to study Thomas Aquinas, we had philosophy of nature and metaphysics and, you know, I was looking for something that was more opening like that and it was a very good fit, so both process and content wise. So that was '71 to, really '71 to '74, it wasn't six summers, but anyway, so and I was teaching at Holy Angels and I moved into membership. And then we were reimagining the formation program for entering, where out of all this uniformity and we were creating a program where we had 30 or 40 women coming for weekends, three or four times a year, and what we did was we planned the weekends, introducing them to the community but also introducing them to spirituality and to religion and so the ritual was all very creative, I would say. The kind of thing that we would naturally do in RE-Imagining and bring to RE-Imagining. It was what we were learning to do in the community, what we were trying to do with students in school. You know on Ash Wednesdays we created a ritual where the students in homeroom could give each other ashes and then at the end of the day we came together for the liturgy of the Eucharist. The word was in their homerooms and in their homeroom groups and trying to

bring it close to them and help them get into it and discover it as their own, discover themselves and be able to claim it. So it was, it was always kind of, we had a couple of young assistants, Tim Hower and [Tommy Ryan 17:57], working with us and teaching with us and the principal was Bob Cassidy and it was already hard to get permission from him to do this or that for the liturgy. If it meant putting the spotlights on him during the consecration, he was good for that. He taught Drama, he understood drama. His understanding of ritual was a little different from the rest of ours and that was always kind of, but it was where we were at the time. So I moved into working full-time at formation, for the community it was the assistant novice director and social director for some years and that involved placing the young women in local communities, working with them in local communities, and a lot of that and ritual and community and working in community ritual continued to be a big part of my work, so I always from very early on I got into this working in reimagining the liturgy, particularly with younger women and particularly with women.

Interviewer: And eventually you went to GTU?

Susan Hames: Yes, I went to St. Kates first as director of campus ministry and the priest who had developed a very strong program in liturgy and went on to get his PhD in liturgy and teach liturgy at Notre Dame, began a very strong and wonderful program and the priest that we got to take his place when he left didn't see himself working in liturgy so I picked up the liturgy area and was happy to have the priest do some other things as long as they would support what we were doing. And that was fine at the beginning and then during the, I would say that the 10 years I was there, from '78 to '87, it got harder, progressively harder, harder to find priests who would work in that situation, work well in that situation. They were older, less identified with young women's experience, and less interested in really, they were closer to retirement age and more into retiring and working on their own terms than necessarily the college, what we in the college needed them to do. So after about 10 years of that, the students, I learned a lot from students, and I learned a lot with students and had a wonderful time with them actually and a wonderful time working in liturgy with them, but I was becoming feminist in those years and St. Kate's was struggling. It was the years when St. Thomas went co-ed and we heard all kinds of, restructuring every year. When I came in as the director, I loved doing the budgeting to make possible what we wanted to do and it got harder and harder to cut the budget every year, so after about 10 years I was ready for a change and it would be refreshing to study, and during that time I'd also gone off and gotten a Master's in liturgy summers studying at St. John's, six weeks in the summer. My job at St. Kate's was a 10 month job so I was free in the summers and I thought studying liturgy would give me more background for what I was doing with the students because we really did a ministry formation program trying to help them understand, to get underneath what was happening in the liturgy and relate it, I would say, it was about trying to help them develop a liturgical spirituality. And so, I loved studying at St. John's. I mean, our sisters had always studied with the monks, getting ready and were into the liturgical when they offered that so we studied, so I got a very thorough and wonderful education. Gayle Ramshaw was on my committee, really good committee, but Gayle was a breath of fresh air because she brought at least a Lutheran perspective. I mean, she also appreciated the tradition, but she had some different takes on things, and she was becoming more feminist in her thinking and that was clear and nice for me. And they were very supportive about me going on to study, I didn't talk about that immediately. Well, I finished in '86 and really I went away, I made the case to go away in '87, that was part of the energy for going was being encouraged by them and of course by then I'm getting closer to 50. When I went away to

study, I really didn't go to get a PhD, to become a college professor. I never saw myself doing that, but I did want to study women and ritual and I did want to do interdisciplinary study and I didn't even know exactly what that would lead to but I got to GTU and I put myself into the Christian spirituality area which was a very different place to put yourself if you're in liturgy like John Ball didn't understand that and Sandra didn't really understand it too well, she understands...

Interviewer: This is Sandra Schneider?

Susan Hames: Yes, she understands symbols when it comes to words and words as symbols, but, you know, feathers and stuff, she's just, she was very demeaning about what women were doing with ritual and playing seriously with other traditions respectfully, but really she did not...

Interviewer: Yes (laughs).

Susan Hames: I think she gets it now. But it was a struggle and other students knew, could see what a struggle it was. They could see how different we were and yet there's so much about Sandra that I loved. I mean, I knew her work and I read everything and we worked well together, really, within our limits.

Interviewer: (laughs)

Susan Hames: I was intimidated by her, her ability to present, I could not present like that. But, anyway, I did well and it was all, my dream, I had a dissertation topic but I came back to reimagine it, I came back in '93, but I came back because my mother had Alzheimer's. Not because, I came back to do the study, I finally got permission to study what one community was doing. All this time part of what's energizing me to go and do this study was what I can see happening which is reclaiming our own tradition on our own terms. And it's not a matter of, we were doing exactly what RE-Imagining is about foundationally and we were doing it from within and we were struggling with our own superiors to do it and it was a way of, we created in 1982 and 1988 and 1992 we had three province assemblies in which we invited all the Sisters to come back and live at St. Catherine's in the summer. And we did processes to help us know each other, which we had never done before, tell our stories, the stories of our religious life because we've lived together in these big convents but never developed the skills for talking to each other, for sharing our stories as we say now. And so we were trying to fill that in, create a space where we could and at the same time where we'd have morning and evening prayer and we could hear each other preach and we could do ritual the way, in a creative way, so that those who were slower to get into that or to appreciate a freer and more creative kind of ritual, to help us all along together and to fight it out where we needed, I mean, really, at one point we were so far from each other in our experiences of Eucharist we had to create a way to talk about how, why we couldn't go to Mass anymore or why, well, that's it. Why we can't have Mass for community celebrations, why we need to have something that's more flexible and inclusive for all of us. It was very threatening. And we had to have companions for the conversation. [Interviewer] What do you mean by companions? [Susan Hames] Well, we created a way where people, four or five people, talked kind of in a fishbowl setting but they had a companion with them so people raised questions to them and they were just, because the questions could be really unkind and not respectful because people were just so, I think some sisters who were at that time

so convinced of the traditional and of not moving ahead of the priests. In 1982, 75 percent of us said that women should be ordained. I had that in my research, from an evaluation tool that was done at the end of... That's a phenomenal number and we were in this province we were 800 or so sisters at that time, but we couldn't capitalize on that, we couldn't move forward. The leadership wasn't there, some of us were there, and we were the ones who were trying to create the assemblies and make it happen, but we never were in the leadership. Then the leadership would get what the assembly said, this is what we want to do for the future and then they didn't know what to do with it, so we would have in those three assemblies, it got better as the assemblies went on. We'd get better about using things and about moving together and that's the result of doing them. It really helped us as a community.

Interviewer: Doing the rituals?

Susan Hames: Yes, to negotiate the change and to have these assemblies where we really got to know each other in different ways. We lived together in a certain way. [Interviewer] How would you describe the change? What changed?

Susan Hames: We got better about living with ambiguity and with respecting the diversity among us. We got to know the diversity as diversity and not disbelief. We learned how to live with the differences among us and to not to feel like we had to convince each other that there's only one way to be or there's only one way to think or there's only one way to pray or there's only, whatever.

Interviewer: That's tricky when you're doing ritual.

Susan Hames: It is, it is, and so, but we weren't throwing out scripture and we weren't throwing out our tradition, so we could sing traditional songs but we could sing them with a more inclusive mind, which we could see a woman standing at the altar table with a priest and hold up the gifts. And eventually we got to where we sang the eucharistic prayer together, where we sang one of the table prayers, the eucharistic prayer, you know, these celebrations. We had women going off to study feminist, Joan was going off to study feminist scripture at Harvard and coming back.

Interviewer: Is this Joan Timmerman?

Susan Hames: No, it's Joan Mitchell.

Interviewer: Joan Mitchell, got it, okay, yeah.

Susan Hames: So she came back at one of those gatherings, talked about what she learned about women in scripture. And the whole ritual was more focused on women at the table and women sharing their stories. It just was profound, I have the video tape. What I proposed to do in my dissertation was to study us and make a case for our negotiating, really reimagining Catholic ritual in a way that includes all our relations. And I broke down in the process of it, I couldn't figure out how to include everything that I thought needed to be included, which you can't do. And I really wanted, I was so taken with our story, who we were becoming that



that was who I wanted to be faithful to, it became unimportant to write for who you have to write for, who you have to write a dissertation for, so I just lost energy. And then my mother was, that's when mother was having Alzheimer's and when I came back from studying all of us, Kathy, my good friend, her mother died and then Kay's mother died and I'm thinking this is a different time in my life. I had to pay attention to those things. I did not want to be absent from what was happening with mother, so I just made a decision to let go of the dissertation because I really wasn't... You know, St. Kay's, Joanne was leaving and they were, why don't you apply for this job? But there was nothing, there was no assurance, I had to have the dissertation in hand.

Interviewer: For what job, for a faculty position?

Susan Hames: Yeah, faculty position. So I knew I had to have it, so what they were saying was that and I didn't have it and I wasn't going to have it at the end of a year, so I just didn't apply, I just thought this is silly and if I do that all of my energy will go into that teaching and I'll never do the dissertation. And meanwhile, you know, RE-Imagining has begun, it's already begun. Sometime in there in '93 I reconnected. Before RE-Imagining, I reconnected with Sue.

Interviewer: Sue Seid-Martin?

- Seid-Martin, yeah. By that time, I think she, I don't know if she was still teaching at the seminary or what. Mostly I remember meeting with her at her home and just having this, really it was, we shared our stories where I'd been since I last talked with her and where she had been, and she was just, oh, you have to be involved in this because it's what we've been doing together, kind of. And I had been on the board, the founding board of Wisdom Ways so Mary Kay and I had been close, mutual admirers and appreciators for years.

Interviewer: Mary Kay Metzinger?

Susan Hames: Yes, and she was very involved in this and Donna Kassbaum.

Interviewer: Yes.

Susan Hames: Eventually we worked together at St. Kate's. So Sue got me into RE-Imagining and then meeting Sally Hill and Nancy Bernanke. Nancy and I, we did the same thing. We redid the hymns, we're forever reimagining the texts of hymns in ways that were more inclusive and were a theology that would be more inclusive for people, that we could all sing. So we could continue singing those beloved melodies but with new words. It's interesting because it's how the old words stay with you, you know, Holy God, we praise your name or Jesus Christ Has Risen. I have rewritten Jesus Christ Has Risen so many times. But the old words are so in us, that's what we know by heart. You can't, for our 2001 celebration I rewrote the words to Shall We Gather At The River and our Sisters have come to love those words so we keep using that, but still it's hard to sing because the words change and that's part of the beauty of it and doing it ritually in a celebration like that, we could tell the whole story of our coming and we could tell the story of our history

and we could be the river. But people have to have paper, they have to have the text in front of them to sing it, so...

Interviewer: So what was your role in planning? Was it working on the music? What exactly did you have plan? In the '93 RE-imagining?

Susan Hames: In '93 it was just being a part of a musical group. I didn't really, I don't think I helped plan anything. Sue told me about things that were happening and we had informal conversations about stuff but I wasn't involved in the planning at all.

Interviewer: So what did you do for the music? What was your role?

Susan Hames: I was a member of the choir, the singers. I was an alto and I will never forget the opening of the event. That opening, drumming, the gathering was just electric and it was, I think it was In Christ There Is No East. It was a very traditional, I'd say Lutheran hymn, very, very, very strong, just gorgeous and woven together, so it seemed to me there were about three opening chants. It was a huge and wonderful opening. It set before us what the feast might possibly be. And it was wonderful to be there because I kept discovering, I was freshly back from GTU and had been studying so I hadn't been doing any public ministry or something so I was relatively unconnected to people and as I went around the room I kept discovering people from every place in my past and meeting people I hadn't seen for ages, people that I worked on things with or I'd been very involved with archdiocesan work, pastoral planning, and head of the Sisters' Council. Lots of women religious were there and from different communities and different communities supported it in various ways and so it was just a feast of relations for me, a feast of reconnections, and then a feast of new connections in the sense of meeting all of these scholars from other traditions. It was a more scholarly conference than the assemblies that we had done. It was like the assemblies, so it was familiar from that point of view, but it was larger, 2,000, where we were gathering 500, you know. And it was serious talks, serious reimagining, talking about the rootedness of the tradition and all of that fit with my GTU study and the fact that I had to go to the edges of the GTU classes to get that kind of stuff and here it was, the feast was front and center. And the idea of it is that this needs to be front and center everywhere and I knew that from being at GTU, I knew that this has to permeate, not be one chapter in the book or one month of the curriculum, one unit of the curriculum, however you say that, or one book of feminist perspective. We need courses big time to reimagine the whole thing. So it was just such a feast on so many levels for me, and really I knew I was on the edges of what was happening with Sue about the milk and honey ritual. On the one hand, my experience of the ritual was just so, I would say (laughs), I would use the word orgasmic as much as any.

Interviewer: (laughs)

Susan Hames: As much as I could experience anything orgasmically. I think that it was visceral, the beauty of it and the longing for it, it was in everyone in that room. It was unbelievable (emotionally) and to experience it, overflowing abundance of our experience as women, it was so powerful.

Interviewer: You're tearing up even talking about it.

Susan Hames: Oh yeah. And to share it, the experience of that, the power of it, was very much a shared, we cried together, we wept together, and we sang together and danced together. It was very empowering and that it was a source of such controversy was just shocking. It was just unbelievable that... But, of course, if you weren't there and if you couldn't conceive of such a thing (laughs) yourself, then I suppose I could understand it. But in another way it was just so, so much an expression of what the problem is, where there needs to be communication, free communication flowing like milk and honey and there isn't.

Interviewer: Where does the free communication need to be happening?

Susan Hames: Well I think between men and women scholars and for sure between clergy and ordained Catholics and lay and ordained Catholics and lay and ordained Lutherans and every other denomination. In the other denominations they can ordain women, but it doesn't necessarily make for deeper communion and deeper communion is what it's all about. And deeper communion means that the boundaries are more porous and that we can think freely and differently and appreciatively together with each other and be influenced by each other. Because my thinking is feminist and I may speak from that perspective doesn't mean that I'm discarding a tradition or that I don't love this tradition and I don't value or honor it and claim it. In fact, I never claimed it more deeply or fully, the problem is that we're always only claiming it partially and we need each other and we need all of us and more to claim it fully.

Interviewer: I'm intrigued. How did feminism help you to claim the tradition more fully?

Susan Hames: Well, it made the women visible. You know, so I'm reading these texts and I'm not picking up, I have become absolutely, profoundly influenced by the woman who anointed Jesus and whose memory... The words of Jesus that are there affirming her and we never hear them, we never hear them. The readings that we read liturgically are so partial and so biased and even with a better preaching tradition, than we had for years when I was growing up, it still is so male dominated. And then all the work that has been done by feminist scholars on our language and imagery for God, I'm thinking of Elizabeth primarily and Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza and now so many others, they're legion, we are legion. We are so slow to welcome that. The clergy who still have the preaching authority and have taken it back from little advances that we've made, they don't continue studying, they don't continue learning and we all need to be continuing learning. If there's anything I learned from being feminist, there's always more! Once you start including, there's much more to include, so feminist isn't an end, feminist perspectives are one among many that are deeply enriching because of how limited our view of our own tradition has been and how much there is there to discover that we haven't. I mean, all the connections about who Wisdom is and who embodies wisdom and how did this woman figure, this Wisdom figure, how could she ever even appear in Proverbs? How could that become part of the Hebrew canon? Really, who is she? When I read Claudia Camp, part of my little studies out at GTU, her thing from studying Proverbs, that was her specialty, was that Israel socially and politically were so destroyed in the centuries immediately prior to the Common Era that it was the women through whom they survived. The women became so integral and gave such leadership in the people surviving that it became possible for the men to conceive that woman could be a female figure.

Interviewer: Wisdom could be a female figure.

Susan Hames: I'm sorry, Wisdom could be. So that's behind in the Book of Proverbs, this female figure in chapter eight, she's at play with the creator in the creation and the beloved companion of the human ones, of humanity.

Interviewer: This is great. Earlier you were starting to talk about the backlash and I'm wondering did it affect you directly at all, the backlash against RE-Imagining?

Susan Hames: No, no, because I was unconnected. But I was feeling it because in the community there was still controversy about, well, using feminine or feminist images of God, for instance, or language about God. We were still negotiating our way to doing that freely, which we can do more freely now, more or less freely. But still...

Interviewer: Did RE-Imagining influence that discussion in the community at all?

Susan Hames: It did very much for some of us. I would say indirectly, and there were other sources for RE-Imagining, like Roseanne, did you hear, was teaching a spiritual guidance workshop that was just beyond, I mean, she's into the whole universe and understanding what the universe is telling us long before. We were reading Brian Swim and Thomas Berry. I had begun reading Thomas Berry out in Berkeley and so she and I discovered we were on the same pages and she was always surprised because she would think of me as being much more, because here I am working in Catholic ritual and I'm always doing more traditional ministry than she would be. She would be much more at the edges, but we had a wonderful, at the end discovered this wonderful mutual admiration for each other and I think learning from each other that was quite wonderful and lovely.

Interviewer: So how do you account for the backlash against RE-Imagining? Why do you think that happened?

Susan Hames: Well, we should talk about what the backlash is first of all, because I'm not even sure I know when you say, what I'm talking about is and I don't even remember this so very well. My understanding was that Sue's position at the seminary was somehow threatened immediately. That was a source of huge pain for her, but in a way it was by that time she was so beyond it that it didn't matter and I was kind of amazed. That was a part of the whole, part of rediscovery and from my point of view, I didn't experience any backlash directly. I think what I'd say in retrospect is the backlash would be, you know, I can imagine priests in the dioceses reading the papers, reading about RE-Imagining in the papers and just concluding things that that's...

Interviewer: But people in the community here who were involved never experienced anything?

Susan Hames: Well, not that I know of, and I think that our leadership has been, well, since 1991 we've had

team leadership, and while individuals may have questioned things and we've had a team or two that I would say was less than feminist in their thinking, for the most part, they're understanding, they would not be making judgments about that just off the top. Their approach would be to talk to people involved and gain understanding. And this conversation about the Eucharist, that probably happened sometime along in the early '90s, might have happened around that time, I don't know, I can't, I think it would have been before 2001, but that was a very, the '90s were a very turbulent in a very good kind of way for us at the time. We were working through a lot of things together and this assembly, assemblies '82, '88, '92, that 10-year period, gave us a way of negotiating what was very difficult for us theologically and communally. I mean, the fact that in '91 we worked our way into team leadership from having a superior. Well, we called her a province director, so we were into a corporate model by that time, but we moved from a corporate model into a real team model. Three would share authority equally and we had to learn, they had to learn by doing it. We worked our way into saying that's what we wanted and we were done with superiors. In local communities we had coordinators and that wasn't very, but we were also, the large living groups were becoming smaller and smaller and smaller as people were moving out of them and learning new ways of being connected with each other. So that's a lot of ferment, ferment more than turbulent would be my descriptor of those years. There was a lot, we were teaming with energy and life and we were losing, we were continuing to lose lots of members and not retain new members and there was grief and a lot of angst and a lot of pressure on people in formation about that because we say formation is the work of the whole community but we expect these numbers and we were into that corporate model. Numbers, it's about numbers. And so underneath the radar, we're teaming with working on all that together.

Interviewer: Well, this is fascinating, because when I ask about the backlash, there was well-organized backlash by organizations within the United Methodist and Presbyterian Churches and Mary Anne Lundy lost her job.

Susan Hames: Yes.

Interviewer: So it's interesting how different the experience was here and how it tied in with what you were already doing, which is really interesting.

Susan Hames: And among Catholics, in the association of pastoral ministers, RE-Imagining would have been celebrated because a lot of those people were at RE-Imagining. Pastoral ministers, women pastoral ministers were a part of it and they would be interpreting it to their counterpart, to their male counterparts. They're different in terms of the clergy and there are clergy, there's a circle of clergy, the ones who are helping in our liturgy now, our guys who have thought for years that women should be ordained, that's the reason they haven't become bishops because they've very much on the side of including women in different ways and they think we should be celebrating our own liturgies. So they would be all for RE-Imagining. They've been learning with us about, in parishes, how to make liturgies more inclusive and they're becoming rarer now and that's a huge, that's something we should be grieving in this local church more publicly, truly.

Interviewer: The loss of those kind of priests?

Susan Hames: Yeah, I think some of the Vatican II, the most faithful, we've never altogether thought what it cost them to be as faithful to Vatican II as they have been. That will be really something. I hope that [Hamden 58:42] has some smarts about that. They've gotta know about the priests. Anyway.

Interviewer: So I'm wondering in the end, how would you define RE-Imagining?

Susan Hames: How would I define RE-Imagining?

Interviewer: Yeah, what was RE-Imagining?

Susan Hames: Well, I think of it as a community that emerged in the process of hosting these ritual events that were lifechanging for the participants and that we're lifechanging... Oh, okay, how much time do you have? Are we doing what you hoped?

Interviewer: Yeah, this is great! This is good, sure. Do you need to go at a certain point? Do we need to...?

Susan Hames: Let me just make a phone call.

Interviewer: Sure, let me just stop this now, great.