

- Rebecca, thank you so much for your willingness to be interviewed. And if you could please tell me your full name.

- Reverend Rebecca Tollefson.

- And could you spell Tollefson?

- It's T, as in tomato O-L-L-E-F, like in farm and then son, S-O-N.

- Great, I like that t as in tomato. That's great. Um you are clergy.
(laughing) You are clergy.

- Yes.

- In the Presbyterian Church USA, correct?

- Correct.

- And when and where were you born, Rebecca?

- I was born in Princeton, New Jersey.

- Hmm.

- On March 25, 1952.

- Okay. Thank you. And where did you go to school?

- Are you referring to seminary?

- Yes.

- Okay, Louisville Presbyterian.

- Okay.

- Seminary. Louisville, Kentucky.

- Thank you. And what work or ministry were you doing at the time of Re-Imagining?

- I was the associate for women employed by the church in the women's ministry unit for the PCUSA.

- Great and could you say a little bit about what that involved. What that work involved.

- I had a wonderful committee across the United States. I think there were maybe, gosh, I wanna say 15 of us.

- Wow.

- We worked on issues concerning women's church administrators, church educators, clergy women. We looked at pay equity. We looked at the lack of women as head of staff for churches. I'm just trying to think. We really worked more on collaborating with other pieces of the women's ministry unit. When I first came, Maryann Harvey assigned me to the general assembly writing team on the sexual misconduct policy for the denomination.

- Oh.

- And so I explained to her ever since that I'm still the key point person here in the Presbyterian. (laughing)

- For that issue?

- Well, yeah. And now instead it's called sexual misconduct. Well there's that policy but it's called selfie boundaries now and I appreciate that, more positive aspect of how do we better care for ourselves and our congregations.

- Yes. Yes. And what work or ministry did you do after Re-Imagining, Rebecca?

- After that, then with downsizing on national depth, I was able to get a position with Call Referral Services in Louisville, still on national stats. And in that, I worked with all the personal information forms that contain true the denomination line people seeking other positions.

- Okay. And your current position is...

- I'm the executive director of the Ohio Counsel of Churches.

- Great. Thank you so much. Rebecca, how and when did you first become aware of feminist theology?

- You know I was looking at that question and I'm trying to remember. I'm thinking maybe in the mid '70's with the International Women's Year.

- Okay.

- In 1975. And both my mom and I became part of consciousness awaring groups. So I'm thinking there was some of that. I don't think there was much in seminary. I don't remember that. Seminary was 35 years ago so I remember 75 but not 35 years ago. (laughing)

- Well obviously that was really important. I'm curious, what do you remember about that? About that international year and the consciousness raising groups. Any memories stand out?

- Oh yeah. I think it was pivotal for my own self-awareness and development as becoming independent and seeking to do the ways that I as a female wanted. Became aware of my rights. And I think that was the real grounding for where I am today in terms of my own personhood. And how I've been able to maneuver, how I've been able to develop relationships and be in different positions.

- That's fascinating. Could you just say a little bit more about how that happened? How the group or the international year developed that in you?

- Well, I remember I graduated from college in '74 and I then spent time in Grand Teton National Park. And then came back to my parental home and was just kinda sittin' around and my dad said "you need to leave". (laughing) Seriously. So I moved to Des Moines from Charlotte, Iowa. So it was not far.

- Yeah.

- But being on my own, my mom was a strong individual.

- Yeah.

- Again, very much a mentor I would say and an example.

- Yeah.

- And when she started in one of these circles in our hometown, I was still there and I joined her with that. And all I remember is that sense that women have rights too. And, yeah. And there was, well I won't say because that would not be confidential then.

- Yeah. Good.

- There were certain people at that time could care less about women's issues.

- Yes.

- And so this was just a real growing time. And when I went to seminary in '78, I got known as this uppity woman.

- Oh.

- Well, it was okay.

- Yeah.

- I was sticking up and at that time, the Presbyterian church had come out with a new hymnal. No, we didn't have a hymnal but we instituted inclusive language. And I was the one who you know, you've got to use inclusive language you know when it wasn't used. I remember my second year, somebody said, who came to seminary, I was told to be aware of you. And I said "really?"

(gasps) (laughing)

- Wow.

- Yeah, watch out for her. Yeah, I didn't put up with crap.

- Yeah.

- So I think that International Women's Year just kinda set me on a path where I continued to learn. Where I was given opportunities to learn outside the box, if you will. I look back and I think that was really the pivotal time for me.

- Uh-hmmmm. And I love it that it was you and your mother. And your mother was kind of the mentor for this.

- Well, she went to the Re-Imagining conference in '93.

- Oh she did?

- She did and she also had her best friend from high school meet her there. So that was really neat.

- Yes. You know I notice there's a beeping sound on the phone. Do you know what that's from, Rebecca?

- Let me go back to speaking like this. It could be incoming calls.

- Oh okay. Sure. Okay.

- Let me try this.

- Okay. (laughing) Good. Thank you.

- Yes.

- Good. So we're moving to Re-Imagining now. Could you tell me about what led to your initial involvement in Re-Imagining? Rebecca? Rebecca? Rebecca? Have I lost you? Hello?