

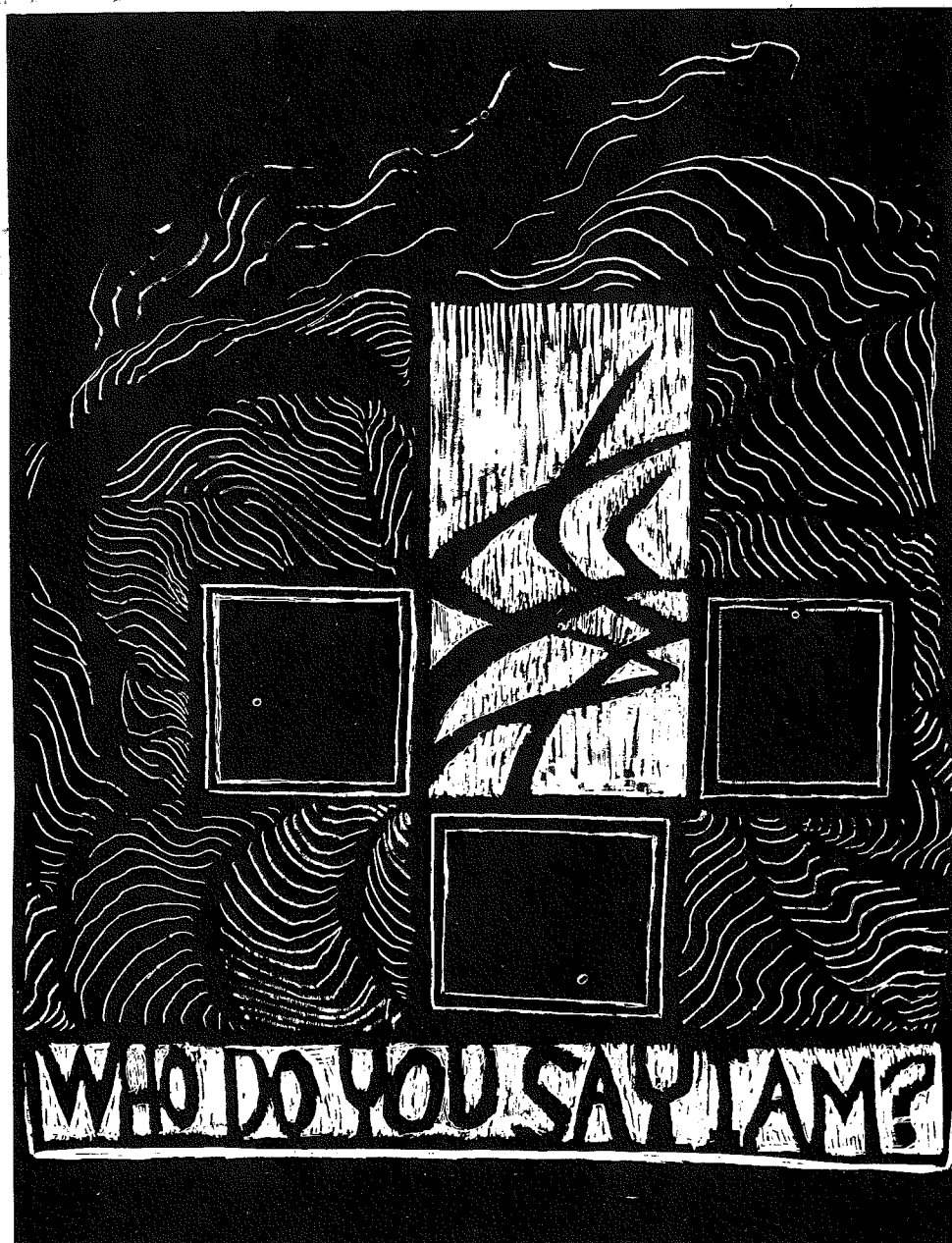


# Re-Imagining

Quarterly Newsletter of the Re-Imagining Community

Nov 1994

Issue 1



**Re-Imagining: Jesus, Christ, Us.**

## My Mother and the Magi

In the heat of the Re-Imagining backlash, I kept thinking about the Wise Men. You may remember that upon learning that Herod had laid a trap for them, they went home by another way. They didn't accept exile, they didn't become victims of Herod's betrayal, and they didn't hunker down into bitterness, cynicism, or despair. They found another way home.

I think this is what church women and men are trying to do with the work of Re-Imagining. We are claiming the church and the Christian tradition as our home, but we are trying to discover new ways of getting there. Like any process of renewal, there is a tension between stability and change. For some of us, old ways are insufficient. For some, new ways are threatening. Sometimes it's not so clear which are the new ways and which are the old, for our tradition is rich with insights that have been discarded along the paths of history, waiting to be re-discovered like clues to an enigmatic puzzle.

The tensions and discussions around Christology explored in this Newsletter are not new. We who call ourselves Christian have been asking these questions since the beginning of our faith. WHO DO YOU SAY THAT I AM? Who was the historical Jesus? Who is Christ? What does it all mean to us as we live together in community?

As a child I was taught that belief in Jesus as THE Christ was the one way to salvation. Yet, there is another scene from my childhood that I recall. For a short time my

father worked as a hired hand for a neighboring farmer whose family happened to be Seventh Day Adventist. They were good, loving, faithful folk. One day Albert came to call on my parents. He explained to them that he was concerned for their eternal security. He believed he knew the one true way, and he wanted my parents to share in that joy with him. My mother answered him like this: "I know you are here because you care about us. But, Albert, if you or I wanted to drive to town, there are several roads we could take. We could take the low road past Degraw School, or the old bridge road, or we could drive up north past Hobo Rock and onto the highway. We could even cross the river and come into town past the cemetery. Some ways make more sense to you or to me, but they all lead to town. That's how I think it is with God. There are lots of different ways, because there are lots of different kinds of people and we need to travel the way that makes sense to us. But all the ways lead to God."

There was, of course, some discrepancy between my mother's wisdom and what she (along with the rest of the church we attended) professed on Sunday morning. I don't know if that discrepancy bothered her. Maybe she separated statements of belief and common sense to live by. But I do know this—my mother would have been at home traveling with the Magi.

*Pamela Carter Joern*

### Cartoon Commentary

by Pamela Carter Joern & Marcia McEachron

*Church of Incessant Guilt  
Basement Furnace Room  
November, 1994*

*Dear Althea,*

*Remember when we were little, and the two-leggeds argued about whether Catholics or Protestants were going to Hell?*

*These days it's the pagans, homosexuals, and feminists—or it's the rednecks, bigots, and narrow-minded.*

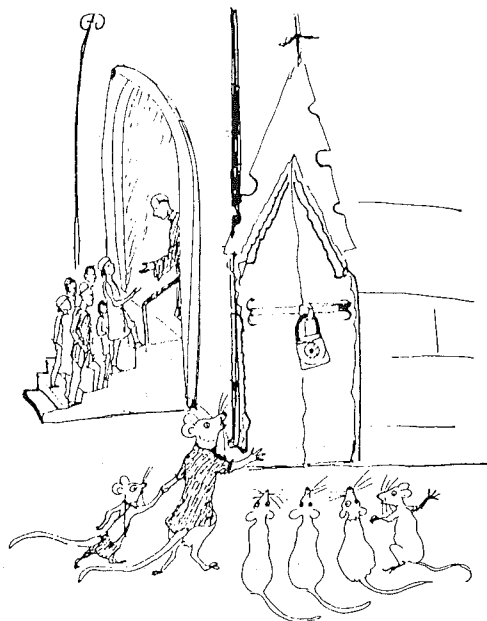
*They say Jesus is at the gates of Heaven, and he decides who gets in. They sure must all be scared of him, but he seems all right to me.*

*Anyway, if it comes to that, and Jesus won't let us in the front door, maybe his mother will let us in through the back. Try not to worry.*

*Love,*

*Cousin Eunace*

*P.S. The church is still our home, isn't it?*



*McEachron.94*

inspired by Andrew Greeley, NY Times, July, 1993

Marcia McEachron is a Minneapolis artist and sculptor.

# Quarterly Newsletter of the Re-Imagining Community

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The Re-Imagining Community Newsletter is a forum for the exchange of information and opinions. Articles represent the opinions of the contributors, and not necessarily those of the Editor, Editorial Board, Coordinating Council of the Re-Imagining Community or Community members.

**Submissions** must be received by the first of the month prior to publication. Re-Imagining does not pay for contributions, but wishes to be a forum for exchange of ideas and information. Unsolicited materials are welcome. The Editorial Board assumes responsibility for selection for publication. First priority will be given to Re-Imagining Community members. Please enclose SASE if you wish manuscript material returned. Copyright reverts to contributors upon publication.

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## How to Get the Newsletter:

Membership in the Re-Imagining Community entitles you to receive quarterly newsletters, news of mentoring packets and events, networking. Membership is \$20.00 for one year (\$10.00 limited income). Outside U.S. add \$5.00 for postage, U.S. currency only. Order form on page 14.

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## In This Issue:

### Thematic Features

Editorial: My Mother and the Magi by Pamela Carter Joern .....	3
Cartoon Commentary by Pamela Carter Joern & Marcia McEachron .....	3
A Movement from Christology to Christo-Praxis by Chris Smith .....	4
Why Christology? by Jean Mohrig .....	4
Can We Talk? Dialogue with Rita Nakashima Brock, Budd Friend-Jones, Virginia Pharr .....	5
Reflections on the Cross by Anonymous .....	8
The Healer by Bette L. Bates .....	9
Redemption through the Storm by Helen Quintela .....	10

### Community News

Write the Vision, Make It Plain by Betty Kersting .....	12
Building a World of Love Stitch by Nancy Berneking .....	13
Letter to the Re-Imagining Community from Mary Kay Sauter & Kathi Austin Mahle .....	14

### Resources

Ritual for Sharing by Lonne Murphy-Burkhardt .....	15
<b>Book Reviews:</b>	
<i>The Black Christ</i> by Kelly Brown Douglas reviewed by Nadean Bishop .....	15
<i>Reconstructing the Christ Symbol: Essays in Feminist Christology</i> ed. Maryanne Stevens, reviewed by Sally Hill .....	16
<i>Defecting in Place: Women Taking Responsibility for Their Own Spiritual Lives</i> ed. Miriam Therese Winter, Adair Lummis, & Allison Stokes reviewed by Mary Pellauer .....	17
<b>Recommended Reading</b> .....	17
<b>New Publications</b> .....	18

Happenings..... 18

Networking..... 19

Notes..... 18

Letters..... 19

### Cover Art by Nancy Chinn

*Nancy Chinn did the visual environment for the 1993 Re-Imagining Conference. She is an award-winning painter and liturgical artist.*

The Re-Imagining Community is a global, ecumenical community of acceptance where exploration, discussion, study, and practice of the Christian faith are carried out freely and responsibly to seek justice, honor creation, and call the Church into solidarity with all people of God.

The Re-Imagining Newsletter is published by the Co-ordinating Council of the Re-Imagining Community. Members are:

Nancy Berneking  
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Mary Gates  
Rev. Sally Hill  
Rev. Pamela Carter Joern  
Jean Justice

Rev. Kathi Austin Mahle  
Melody Martin  
Rev. Randy Nelson  
Manley Olson  
Doris Pagelkopf  
Rev. Jeanne Audrey Powers  
Jo Ringgenberg  
Mary Kay Sauter



transforming movements of the Christa community;<sup>5</sup> the redemptive power of African American women's invisible dignity, quiet grace, and unshouted courage;<sup>6</sup> the liberatory moments of "coming out" for lesbian women.<sup>7</sup>

These two agendas require a radical commitment from us and our religious communities. Dismantling, sacrificial theology is as painful as proclaiming redemptive activity is celebrative, and both are needed. We do this work with full awareness that nothing less than people's lives are at stake in moving from christology to christo-praxis.

*Chris Smith is a professor at United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities and writes feminist theology.*

1. Carter Heyward. *Speaking of Christ: A Lesbian Feminist Voice*. NY: The Pilgrim Press, 1989, p.13.
2. Ibid., p.20.
3. Nancy L. Eiesland. *The Disabled God: Toward a Liberatory Theology of Disability*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994.
4. Delores S. Williams. *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk*. Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1993.
5. Rita Nakashima Brock. *Journeys by Heart: A Christology of Erotic Power*. NY: Crossroad, 1988.
6. Katie G. Cannon. *Black Womanist Ethics*. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988.
7. Julia Penelope and Susan J. Wolfe. *The Coming Out Stories*. Freedom: The Crossing Press, 1989.

## Can We Talk?

### Participants in the Dialogue:

*Rita Nakashima Brock teaches at Hamline University. She belongs to the Christian Church, (Disciples of Christ), and writes feminist theology.*

*Budd Friend-Jones serves as Minister for Parish Mission of Mayflower Church, United Church of Christ, Minneapolis.*

*Virginia Pharr teaches theology at the College of St. Catherine. She was shaped primarily in the Roman Catholic tradition.*

*Pamela Carter Joern is an ordained member of American Baptist Churches, USA. She moderated and edited the final dialogue.*

**Joern:** I remember when I took Constructive Theology in seminary, my professor said she entered the conversation about Jesus with trepidation and a whole lot of crabbiness. It seems ironic that Christian folk should find the topic of Jesus so difficult or controversial. Yet, this seems to have been the case throughout history. In fact, it is the richness of possibility in interpreting the life and work of Jesus that has allowed the church to sustain itself through changing circumstances. So, where to begin? How are you thinking about Jesus these days? What does Jesus mean to you in terms of how you understand yourself as part of the Christian tradition?

**Brock:** I see Jesus as an important and powerful ancestor, someone I pay attention to and hold in high regard in terms of what his life meant to the history of the tradition I belong to. I also find the stories about him, when one reads them with some care, interesting in the ways they deconstruct power and privilege. He's an interesting model in many different ways.

**Joern:** Is that a change for you? From the way you were trained or raised?

**Brock:** When I was growing up, I didn't know what to do with him. This idea that he was alive didn't make sense to me, so there wasn't this personal relationship with Jesus that I was told I was supposed to have. There were all these stories about him, but he seemed mostly strange and distant. When I became a feminist, he was highly

problematic, so I tried to ignore him for a long time.

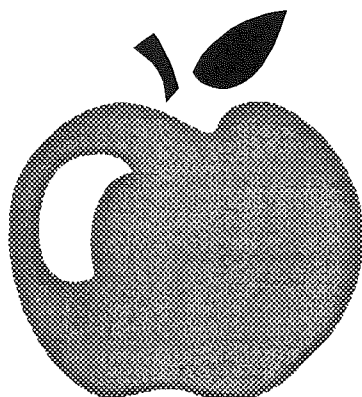
**Pharr:** I think that the way I grew up, as a child in the Roman Catholic tradition, has left me very skeptical. A great deal of what I learned did not come out of a scriptural approach to Jesus, but rather who Jesus was in devotion and tradition. As a Roman Catholic, Jesus was also the reason why my gender, women, could not enter wholly into the life of my tradition.

**Friend-Jones:** I grew up in an evangelical tradition and Jesus was quickly an embarrassment. I didn't know what to do with him. I really began to appreciate Jesus through the writings of

### "Do you personally have an understanding of Jesus? So what?"

Howard Thurman, a seminal African American theologian and a spiritual giant of our century. He used the African American experience of

slavery to throw light on the mind and spirit of Jesus. Thurman helped me—to understand how Jesus as a Palestinian Jew in a Roman-occupied province did not have access to power or recourse to law. If Jesus were spat upon, beaten or thrown into a ditch, he could do nothing. Working with this image, Thurman reclaimed Jesus as a Black Jesus. Against overwhelming odds, Jesus analyzed the various options open to the oppressed, and affirmed the power of Love to transform persons, systems and even history itself. It is said that Martin Luther King, Jr. carried Thurman's *Jesus and the Disinherited* in his brief case through all the years of struggle. I prefer the name "Yeshua" to "Jesus."



# A Movement from Christology to Christo-Praxis

by Chris Smith

"It is my thesis here that the historical doctrinal pull between Jesus of Nazareth and Jesus Christ, the human Jesus and his divine meaning, is no longer, if it ever was, a place of creative christological inquiry. Worse, it is a distraction from the daily praxis of liberation, which is the root and purpose of Christian faith."<sup>1</sup>

Carter Heyward—*Speaking of Christ*

I believe that Carter Heyward names what is ultimately at stake for us as women, as feminists, as church, when we approach the topic of christology; will our conversations distract us from the

concrete, material realities of injustice and liberation, or will our conversations reveal what liberating christo-praxis looks like in the world? It has become clearer to many of us in recent years that we need to cease participating in this abstract, intellectual debate and shift our faith commitments and energies into conversations and actions focused on what it means to participate in the redemptive, saving work of Christ in the world. In a world where the magnitude of human oppression and evil is overwhelming, we need to focus our work on christo-praxis, not christology.

There are a multitude of voices that are helping us shift our religious and theological attention to redemptive activity and its justice-making impact in

the world. These voices reflect the many challenges of our individual and collective work. The work is complex, yet perhaps two primary challenges face us:

1) One part of this movement from christology to christo-praxis involves a radical and systematic critique of sacrificial theology. Traditional christology has produced symbols, doctrines, and faith statements that idealize crucifixion, suffering, crosses, and self-sacrifice. There are unquestioned theological assumptions and affirmations in the church that proclaim sacrifice has saving power, that suffering is redemptive, and that crosses are something we are to bear. This theology not only masks the violence and horror of human suffering, but serves to justify its existence and continuation. There must be a fundamental reworking of this theology at every level of the church's life. We need to help religious communities of which we are a part begin to name crucifixions for the ugly and demonic expressions of evil they are, to enable those same communities to harness their power, their rage, and their ethical activity in an effort to stop them.

2) A second part of the movement from christology to christo-praxis involves identifying, naming, and participating in those activities in life that are truly redemptive. Carter Heyward describes this part of the work when she says, "In this praxis theological knowing would cease to be a matter of discovering Christ and would become instead a matter of generating together images of what is redemptive or liberating in particular situations."<sup>2</sup> Some of the most creative work being done among us comes from within oppressed communities, communities of resistance, communities of hope. Unlike theoretical christologies, voices of christo-praxis are specific, concrete, and rooted in everyday life. Some of these voices are asking us to encounter the saving, liberating power of the disabled God at the table of the Eucharist;<sup>3</sup> the moral and ethical agency of Hagar as she carves out a survival/quality of life ethic for herself and her child;<sup>4</sup> the

## Why Christology?

by Jean Mohrig

I live in a world where it is easier to be passive,  
harder to be passionate;  
easier to claim ignorance,  
harder to be wise;  
easier to quote slogans,  
harder to make ethical decisions;  
easier to be masculine,  
harder to be feminine;  
easier to comply with external authority,  
harder to claim one's own power;  
easier to be judgmental,  
harder to honor difference;  
easier to be intellectual,  
harder to be open to embodiment;  
easier to wield power over,  
harder to strive for mutuality;  
easier to remain silent,  
harder to speak;  
easier to deny privilege,  
harder to work to end oppression;  
easier to talk about the weather,  
harder to share feelings;  
easier to deny anger,  
harder to use anger to carry me out of the status quo;  
easier to remain isolated,  
harder to build community;  
easier to reason,  
harder to feel compassion.

I need a Christology which will enable me to become more fully the co-creator of the hard things in my life.

*Jean Mohrig is a theologically educated lay person.*

Yeshua helps me to begin putting him in his historical context, his Jewish context.

**Joern:** There seems to be a movement today to reclaim the historical Jesus or at least to figure out who the historical Jesus was. Where are you with that whole picture?

**Brock:** I feel that the search for the historical Jesus is a moot question. It keeps getting revived in each new generation, but people seem to find what they want to find anyway. For me, a more narrative approach to the text or a more holistic attempt to try to understand it is truer to the way the church deals with the text.

**Friend-Jones:** I don't want to disagree entirely, but I argue that the search for the historical Jesus introduces a

**"So the question is how does the image of the cross, of the God suffering with us, get turned into a tool for empowering liberation?"**

discipline that acts as a check on our tendencies to re-imagine Jesus in our own image. As the Jesus Seminar warns, we should beware of any Jesus who is too congenial to us! I recognize that the source materials are corrupted. There is a screen between us. I know that a lot of our talk is projection back into history. But it is not only projection from us. The Jesus of history stands behind that screen. Something of his nature is projected forward toward us and can be apprehended by us. For me, increasingly, even the flesh of Jesus is important. It speaks of the embodiment of the divine; the flesh becomes an expression of the sacred. I want to affirm the fleshiness, the groundedness, the historical reality of this singular person.

**Brock:** It's very interesting that until quite recently some of the most important scholarly fields for understanding human behavior, like cultural anthropology, were absent from the field of biblical studies and absent from the historical search for Jesus. What we have is a western scholarly projection. In mediterranean cultures, or the cultural world during Jesus' time, we find a much stranger and more interesting picture of what Jesus might have been like. It's also more uncomfortable.

**Pharr:** I have a set of questions I ask my students: Do you personally have an understanding of Jesus? So what? Is Jesus divine for you? So what? Is there a Trinity? So what? The point being—it doesn't really matter how we answer these questions if it doesn't compel us to behave in the way that we have come to know that Jesus behaved. I get angry with what people have done to this person—how people won't let the historical Jesus die so that the risen Christ can live on.

**Joern:** I'd like to hear more about the distinction you seem to be making between Jesus and the Christ.

**Pharr:** For my students, I use a bit of scripture in Jesus' own words; "I have to

go, so that my spirit can be among you." A spirit christology is saying that those who hang on to this historical Jesus have not understood,

scripturally, the message of the historical Jesus—I have to go . . .

**Joern:** Was this spirit born with Jesus or was Jesus one of many embodiments? How do you see that?

**Brock:** Jesus is one of many. The New Testament texts all reach back into the Jewish tradition for their authoritative sources. One of the strongest traditions they reach back into, which the title Christ comes from, is the messianic tradition. There are all kinds of messianic figures. They all have something to do with indicating the presence of God with the people, a power that reforms or restores the people. When the New Testament texts refer back to Isaiah and the suffering servant texts, they are folding a whole other tradition into the messianic tradition. But again, in those texts, it is not clear whether the suffering servant is one person or the whole community of Israel. Lone heroes don't save people. It's communities of solidarity and work and struggle that bring life and redeem situations. No matter how great one person is, without a base of support, they become fanatical crazies.

**Friend-Jones:** I don't believe that the historical Jesus was the only Savior. The historical Jesus, however, is at the center of my understanding of my faith as I try to work it out. I am comfortable saying there are many avatars and many expressions of the Spirit. But I'm uncomfortable saying that in my tradition Jesus and all these other Messiah figures have the same authority.

**Pharr:** I would say that I am comfortable with that. As a matter of fact, I find that very liberating. If the Christian tradition is a tradition of liberation, then I don't think we can imprison one figure and call it THE figure. In no way does that diminish the importance of the figure. Can it not enhance God's presence among us?

**Friend-Jones:** In a larger sense, I agree with you. Jesus is the finger that points to the moon. He points away from himself to God. It is silly to admire the finger, but miss the moon altogether.

**Brock:** I begin with the tradition of the Spirit in the text, which begins with the act of creation—the puzzling, ambiguous, troubling, often difficult, empowering, life-giving spirit that blows where it will, breathes life into old bones, and turns up in the most unexpected places. Jesus was one of those really unexpected places. I think that even in his own lifetime it doesn't just appear in him; it's a whole series of events that creates what happens.

**Joern:** I want to ask you about atonement. You all seem far away from the idea of Jesus' death saving us from sin, but for many people in our churches, substitutionary atonement is the norm. They do talk about savior and heaven and the hope for eternal security. What do you have to say about all of that?

**Brock:** There are a whole series of assumptions built into substitutionary atonement that are highly problematic. A starting assumption is Augustine's doctrine of original sin. This essentialist thinking about human nature is, I think,



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**Brock:** There are a whole series of assumptions built into substitutionary atonement that are highly problematic. A starting assumption is Augustine's doctrine of original sin. This essentialist thinking about human nature is, I think,

partly a mechanism of control. If I can make everybody wrong, and I can give you the answer, then you have to follow what I tell you. The tragedy is that there are quite a lot of church theologians who didn't believe these things—like Pelagius, who seems to have thought that human beings are born like a blank slate, maybe with a personality, but not with a moral essence of good or evil. Another problematic assumption is that you are so bad that you can't save yourself. It takes personal responsibility for behavior out of people's hands and turns it over to some other power that commands you.

**Joern:** We use that language about "letting go and let God."

**Brock:** I think this sense of helplessness keeps us fundamentally in a victimized state. It's telling people that you don't have a right to protest when terrible things happen to you. It short-circuits the legitimate expression of tragedy and grief that is fundamental to our psychological health. We ought to be outraged that the Roman Empire crucified Jesus, not grateful, not happy that he died for us, but outraged at this travesty of justice. Also, traditional atonement doesn't work universally. For example, Delores Williams got into trouble [ref: the 1993 Re-Imagining Conference] for saying we didn't need a doctrine of atonement. She was speaking from the experience of African-American women for whom surrogacy has no redemptive value, period. They were made to be surrogates, and they don't think anybody should have to be surrogates. Then Kwok Pui-Lan said that in the Chinese culture, they believe everyone is good enough, and they'll follow a moral example if you give them a good one. So substitutionary atonement doesn't make sense in Chinese culture.

**Joern:** The piece about atonement that is difficult for me is what it says about God. Especially since I've become a parent.

**Pharr:** Is it Brown and Parker who talk about the satisfaction theory as divine child abuse? The only way that this God could be satisfied was through the suffering and death of his only—and I

say intentionally—his only son, and that was the total purpose of Jesus. So what does this say about the Genesis story about life? What does it say about John's gospel, "I come to you to have life and to have it to the full." And why do we focus only on that suffering and death? What was the purpose of all the time before that? In the life of the historical Jesus, but also in the wonderful life-giving tradition of the Jewish people? Is that the kind of God I want in my life? My answer is no. Absolutely not.

**Friend-Jones:** And since we're dealing with projections, what does that doctrine say about us? In the name of love, it sanctions violence and victimhood. It reduces us to helplessness. In fact, it destroys the meaning of love. It shuts down any possibility for dialogue. There is no empowerment.

**Pharr:** I think the thing that is hurtful is the way Jesus' life has been interpreted as a big stick to be held over people's heads, primarily women's heads, around issues of suffering and victimhood. It's not liberating. It keeps you in your suffering because God wanted Jesus to suffer, and therefore if you suffer, you are like Jesus and God is satisfied.

**Joern:** I want to say that there is a place for comfort amidst suffering for me. If you have suffered with someone through incurable cancer or a lingering dying, those things that can't be "fixed," there is something comforting in the idea that God knows about this.

**Friend-Jones:** This is the distinction between curing and healing. God desires our fulfillment and not our suffering, our healing and not our pain. Yet suffering is a part of our lives. It isn't that Jesus or God keeps us from suffering, yet in suffering we may find wisdom. In that wisdom there is the power to confront. In that power to confront, there is the possibility for change. This is the basis of hope.

**Brock:** I do think there's a difficult discerning process. There are times

when tragedy just hits you, and there's really nothing you can do about it. Having someone who has been through it, someone who understands your pain, is a real comfort. I think the cross is, sometimes that kind of symbol. It's a symbol of God with us in our pain. On the other hand, there's a whole lot of suffering in the world that's inflicted, willfully done, and it's wrong. To acquiesce to that seems to me to acquiesce to evil. So the question is how does the image of the cross, of the God suffering with us, get turned into a tool for empowering liberation?

**Joern:** Let's talk about sin and evil. Critics of liberal theology have said that it fails to take evil seriously. Do you think that is true?

**Brock:** The contribution of liberation, rather than liberal, theology to this whole question of sin and evil has been that the idea of original sin and personal sin is a minuscule moral question given the forces of evil that are social. This collective energy of history and power and economics and social forces—that's where the forces of evil are.

**Pharr:** I agree. There's a difference between liberal theology and liberating theology. I say to my students, it's not important that you are liberal, it is important that you are liberating. God was not called a liberal God, God was called a liberating God. In the Exodus story God names Godself, first of all, as liberator, "I am the one who frees you."

**Friend-Jones:** The word evil is so incredibly charged. Once in a while, somebody will call someone evil....a rapist who has been returned to the streets is an evil person. I cringe at that. I don't like labeling anyone evil.

**Joern:** Trouble is, good people get caught up in evil systems.

**Brock:** Name calling about evil allows you to disassociate from your participation in those systems. . . I don't recycle everything. . . I drive a car. . . we're all implicated in evil systems. Probably the people who least participate in any kind of evil systems are the poor, illiterate, disenfranchised of the earth.

We are where we are because they are where they are—I think it's important not to be naive about that.

**Joern:** I heard a man from Nicaragua read the Beatitudes from a Philippine

translation that came out of a Christian based liberation community, and the language was quite

different. Instead of "Blessed are the poor in spirit," he read, "Fortunate are those who have the spirit of the poor." The reason was that the poor need to work for justice, and that is God's work. I found that very helpful. It's a way of getting past liberal guilt, because we can all have the spirit of the poor if we recognize the need to work for justice. The need must be so deep that it leads to action.

**Pharr:** I'm reminded of Jack Nelson-Pallmeyer's book, *War against the Poor*. He said the two things that people who work for justice need to be are a people of faith and a people of community. Individuals will almost always be overwhelmed by structural evil. Community is so important because that's what keeps you going on in the struggle.

**Brock:** The importance isn't just empowerment, it's also a reality check. The community is really important for you not to go off the deep end or try to do more than you can. For me it's grounding—real people who hurt and struggle and call me on stuff that I do that's stupid.

**Friend-Jones:** About this question of evil—we're a system, they're a system—how can we be sure that they are evil and we are not? They're a community too. I rather agree with Solzhenitsyn that the line of evil runs not just through states, groups or classes—communities, if you will— but also through every human heart.

**Brock:** That brings up another problem with atonement. We have this cluster of doctrines around Jesus as perfect and innocent. To me that is one of the most

debilitating things at the heart of Christology, that victims have to somehow preserve and protect innocence if they want to be worthy. I think we cannot be innocent. It's partly knowing what we are capable of

ourselves, but also just knowing about the world, being able to wade out into it and figure things out, that's what helps us resist evil. It's not withdrawing and being safe and innocent and walking around as if we had this little golden halo around us.

**Friend-Jones:** Some people would suggest that our participation in evil results from our embodiment or from playing our parts in history. In fact, our embodiment may be one of our principal glories! We would be less hurtful to each other if we could affirm

this more. I think evil has an ontological as well as systemic existence. Its being is rooted as much in spirit as in matter, and both need transformation.

**Brock:** It seems to me that one of the real sicknesses in Christian theology has been the bifurcation of spirit and flesh. Even though we have the doctrine of the incarnation so there is a union of the two, I think it is clear that the union was not meant to make you more comfortable with your body, but to draw you toward God who's a higher being. I think the doctrine of the incarnation has not functioned to restore people to a healthy relationship to the flesh. The clearest evidence of that is what we have done to the natural world. In academic life, theories for human behavior are focused on all kinds of ideological things. The material world—like the absence of food, or the presence of plagues—those aren't

even factored in as realities that impinge on the situation. I think probably one of the most important events that fed the feminist movement in the United States has nothing to do with feminist theory. It was the development of birth control. I think we should not underestimate how powerful a force in human life that has been.

**Pharr:** And what a fearful force that is, if we look at the world population conference and who comes together as allies around women not having power and decision and choice over their own body and reproductive process.

**Brock:** Because it's related to sexuality and to temptation and to pleasure...

**Pharr:** control and authority. . . it's huge. A contemporary example. I was embarrassed by the Roman Catholic hierarchy and who they choose as allies over this whole thing. How arrogant of elderly celibate males to think that they alone are capable of making decisions around world population and women's bodies. I fear our tradition loses even more credibility, and that troubles me deeply.

**Brock:** The issue of reclaiming the flesh is a real life or death issue for our whole species. It's not just an intellectual theological question. It's literally how are we going to come back down to earth?

**Friend-Jones:** It is also how are we going to be spiritual? Disembodied spirituality has wrought havoc on the earth and in our lives. A fully integrated, embodied spirituality reconnects us to the earth, to each other, to our communities and to history. It reconnects body, mind, and spirit in a wholistic way.

**Brock:** I agree. I used to dislike the word "humble" because it related to victimization, and then I discovered that the derivation of the word is from humus. The whole Micah text takes on new meaning—we do justice, we love mercy, and we are grounded in the earth.

**Joern:** There are many questions we didn't get to. We'll have to leave it up to our readers to take it from here. Thank you all very much.

### Questions for Dialogue

*These are the questions we used for our dialogue. Gather one or more friends and do some theological work together.*

1. What does Jesus mean to you?
2. How do experiences of suffering relate to ideas of atonement?
3. Do you distinguish between the historical Jesus and the Christ?
4. What does the cross mean to you?
5. What does resurrection mean to you?
6. Is evil a reality? How do you understand it? How do you fit it into your theology?
7. How do you define sin? Is this different than ways you were taught to think of sin?
8. Why does it matter how we think about these things? Can you point to differences in your living, your relationships, your making sense of the world?
9. What about life, in your experience, most needs saving? What would salvation entail?
10. How do images of divine spirit and images of flesh interrelate?
11. How is the human body a place of incarnation? What does this say about humans in relation to all creation?
12. How do we maintain definition as Christian without being exclusive or claiming superiority?

### Reflections on the Cross

by Anonymous

#### Crucifixion

My body is too huge to heft up on the cross.  
It will take some trimming.  
I shouldn't be so sensitive,  
That can go.  
Too smart for my own good,  
loud laugh,  
words like arrows,  
All that will have to go.  
Make myself compact,  
dim my light,  
look around for deep bushels.  
Lop off wanting the truth,  
hopeless crusades,  
reckless stampede through books,  
and—get this—no naming of my experience.  
Write OTHERS in capital letters  
so I am not tempted to forget  
and want myself.  
Cross arms over breasts,  
camouflage wide hips,  
no more turbans that reek of attitude.  
Step now into the limelight,  
finally and at last small enough  
no one will be offended.  
Friends who once deserted me  
crowd around  
and shake hands through my transparency.  
Socially accepted,  
politically purified,  
Clipped, spayed, and paper thin,  
I glue my body to the cross.  
Now then—a perfect fit.

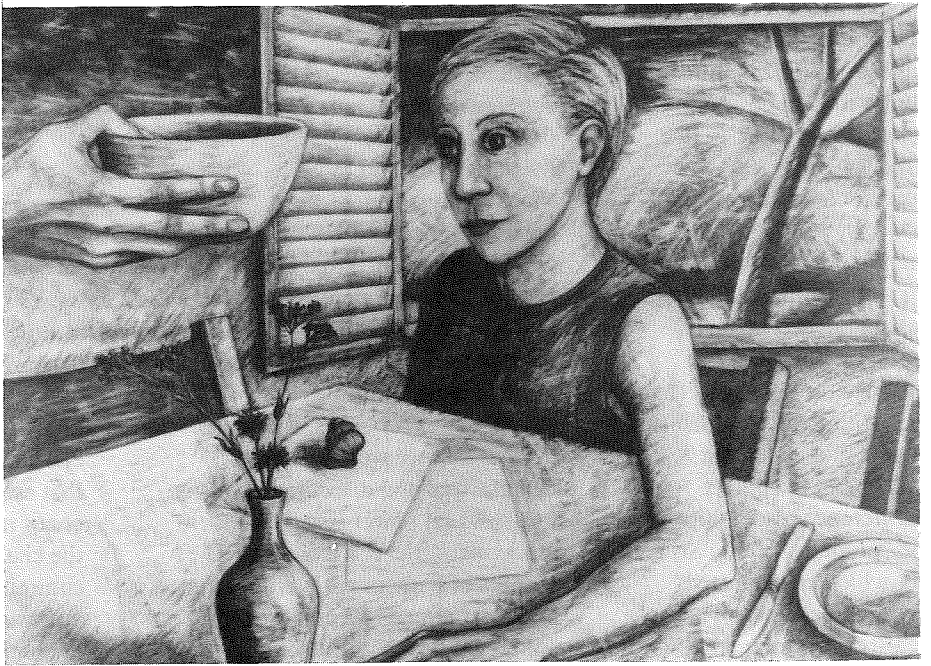
#### Resurrection

I am running on thin air,  
tank low on gas,  
flipping channels,  
eggbeater in my brain,  
can't remember if I took a shower,  
my daughter wanted something,  
why is my purse in the refrigerator,  
running in my walking shoes.  
Meet myself in revolving doors,  
requires an introduction,  
she has gotten old.  
Words I used to cherish  
are acrobats on high wires,  
I cannot approach them.  
I wear hurry like a badge,  
change trains through sleepless nights  
and wake pre-alarmed.  
This is the cross of the modern world.  
We have promoted, gold-watched,  
eulogized, stock-optioned, and  
make no mistake,  
glorified this suffering.  
Not me.  
I am climbing down off this cross.  
I will burn it at the stake,  
with its pile of expectation  
and veiled demand of emptiness.  
I will spread the embers in my garden,  
sit in the arms of a cottonwood tree,  
sip wine from a jug,  
and I will  
be  
incomplete and reaching.

### Try This

by Bette L. Bates

Original: Graphite on Paper  
45" x 60"  
1989



Bette L. Bates is an award-winning artist who teaches art at the University of North Carolina at Asheville.



## Redemption in the Storm

by Helen Wells Quintela

Just one year ago, many of us came together to RE-IMAGINE. I was one of those who gathered for the first seminar on Jesus. Before the seminar began, I sat and wondered, "WHAT am I doing here? WHY, at a unique conference that includes seminars on Creation, Church and Sexuality, have I chosen to attend a seminar on Jesus?" Within the next two hours my skepticism was transformed into an experience of profound grace.

Two weeks after Re-Imagining, I was thrown into a chaotic, destructive storm that threatened to obliterate my health, my ministry of ten years in an inner-city neighborhood, and the small Mennonite congregation that I pastor on the West side of St. Paul. In the midst of the raging storm, my heart remembered and re-imagined that Jesus seminar, where Delores Williams, Kwok Pui-Lan and Barbara Lundblad wove images of Jesus into stories of justice and redemption.

The storm which broke over me and my congregation had been brewing for many months. We are a congregation that has been formed and shaped by many gifted minority persons, including gay and lesbian people of Mennonite background. Many of us joined this small congregation in order to dwell within a body of Christ that abides in an inner-city, multi-ethnic neighborhood of St. Paul.

Since 1991, our congregation has sponsored and maintained an ongoing dialogue with gay and lesbian members, hearing about their spiritual journeys, exploring Biblical and societal attitudes toward gay and lesbian people, and agreeing to live together with our theological differences on homosexuality as an issue. In the winter of 1993, that congregational dialogue and the agreement to walk with one another faithfully was threatened by three individuals who became verbally abusive and threatening towards those who disagreed with their viewpoints. These men wrote and called me repeatedly and began to contact Mennonite conference leadership regarding the "problem" in the St. Paul congregation, which is supported financially by mission funds. They turned the reality of a congregation's commitment to gay and lesbian members into a sword and began to wield it at members of the congregation and at conference leadership in an

attempt to persuade, silence, and destroy.

In November, 1993, as I attended Re-Imagining, the storm was almost upon us. The horizon was choked by billowing storm clouds and the wind was approaching gale force. In response to this threat of chaotic power, I was becoming fearful and very anxious. My physical and mental well-being seemed at risk. My health was in a serious state of decline. I was bleeding profusely as my body responded to the reality of being cut to the heart and soul by months of harassment, fear, and despair.

The congregation decided to seek intervention from our conference minister and from a Mennonite laywoman who has professional skills in crisis management. We referred to these two persons as a "listening team." In mid-November, the listening team arrived and began a series of small group and individual listening sessions. Following these sessions, the congregation met to hear feedback from the listening team and to share feelings and personal reflections on what had happened for each of us in the months that had preceded this intervention.

As each of us shared our experiences, it became evident that we were seriously demoralized and discouraged by the tensions and power issues that were emerging in the congregation. The months of harassment, verbal abuse and accusations had polarized the congregation into two factions: those who believed strongly that our congregation needed to honor its history of dialogue and learning from gay and lesbian members by

responding firmly and concretely to the harassment, and those who believed that the congregation and pastor needed to be reconciled to the individuals conducting the harassment campaign.

The storm broke over how we would respond to the situation. I told the congregation that I could not continue to pastor in an environment that included harassment and verbal abuse. Emotions ran high during the process of deciding upon a response. A majority of the congregation voted to send a letter to the three individuals involved, requesting that they have no more contact with the congregation, its pastor and her family. This ACTION seemed to offend some members, who shortly decided to leave the congregation.

In the month that followed, other members of the congregation gave up from fatigue and emotional exhaustion. Decade-long friendships were torn asunder. As the enormous storm abated, there seemed to be nothing left except a tattered, beaten remnant of people that numbered nine adults and seven children. The landscape of the congregation was irreparably altered.

As any hurricane survivor knows, there is an eye to a storm of such enormous proportions. December was that eye. But by the end of the month, chaos returned. I received a letter from the chairperson of the home missions committee of our district, stating that, "we will need to talk about the problem of continuing to fund a work that is following a policy that is contrary to what the conference has adopted and at odds with the majority of people who would be giving toward this work." The



**In November, 1993, as I attended Re-Imagining, the storm was almost upon us.**

letter was devastating. Our congregation depended on mission funds to pay my part-time salary. For three years, my part-time pastor's salary had been the primary source of financial support for my family. The final blow was yet to come, however. In early January, my husband, Alberto, was hospitalized for a month-long ordeal that almost took his life.

There is a story about Jesus and a storm that usually confounds our Western, scientific minds. The Markan text says that the disciples "took Jesus with them in their boat, just as he was. While they were out on the water, a great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped." (Mark 4:36-37 NRSV) It is interesting that the text says the disciples took Jesus JUST AS HE WAS. The story is set within a frame of hard work and ministry. Jesus must have been exhausted, body and soul. Verse 38 says that while the storm raged and his friends frantically tried to keep the boat upright, Jesus slept. His sleep was deep and oblivious, almost comatose. The body of Christ lay there, profoundly asleep. The disciples, drenched, worn-out and afraid to death, shook Jesus awake with an accusation born of deep despair, "Teacher, don't you CARE that we are perishing?" And

this tired body, this one who was so fatigued that he slept through the chaos of storm and wind, got wearily to his feet and rebuked the sea, saying, "Peace! Be still!" Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm.

Sometime during my husband's hospitalization, the dead-tired body of Christ arose. Nine adults and seven children decided, tenaciously and radically, to be the church again. Drenched by waves of pain that threatened our existence, worn out by ministry that had ended in enormous suffering, we awoke and rebuked the forces of chaos and destruction. In February, as soon as Alberto was able to be present, we gathered together for a meal that marked the beginning of the long, hard task of recovery and resurrection. We identified a common ground, which includes these two statements: "we believe in the equality and worth of all people regardless of gender, ethnic background, age, ability, class, or sexual orientation," AND "we affirm the Anabaptist commitment to a 'priesthood of all believers' and welcome the full participation of every child and adult in the community regardless of age, ethnic background, gender, ability, class or sexual orientation. We encourage each person to use their gifts fully within the

community."

This new common ground of identity, written so that new members may more fully understand who we are as a congregation, places us at the margins of the Mennonite Church. Yet, we have been able to re-imagine the justice of true dialogue and the redemption of a future in which all God's people will be welcome in the church. We are seekers of justice because we are shaped by the stories of the One who arose and rebuked the powers of chaos and destruction. We are believers in redemption because we are formed by the stories of One who came to his people, walking on waves of pain, holding out his hand, saying, "Take heart, it is I. Do not be afraid."

*Note: Rev. Helen Wells Quintela and the St. Paul Mennonite Fellowship welcome responses of support and solidarity. Prayers for sustenance and letters of encouragement have been deeply valued over the past few months. Letters may be addressed to:*

*Helen Quintela  
c/o Re-Imagining  
122 W. Franklin  
Minneapolis, MN 55404*

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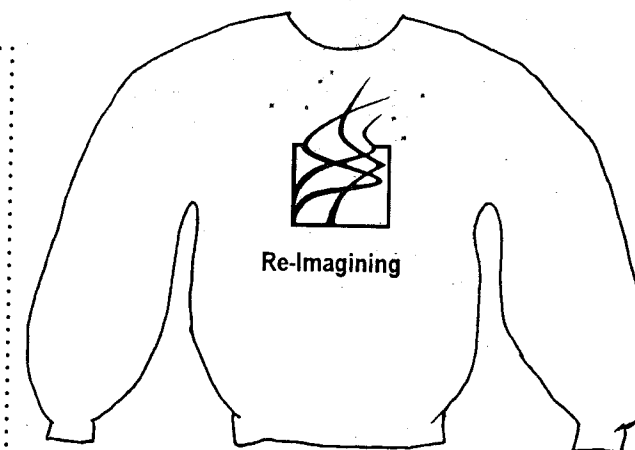
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## Write the Vision, Make It Plain

by Betty Kersting

Little did we women of Santa Fe attend the Re-Imagining conference know that it would become a mark in our personal spiritual growth and in our participation in the church at the congregational, community, and national levels. We represented age women across our country: one who had been active in the women's movement in the 70's, but had become involved in her profession and not given much thought to the women of the church; another had never had the opportunity to look at the women's perspective of our church and culture; a third was already deeply educated in women's issues; another had been in a different country for several years following her retirement; another was involved with Church Women United. All of us were Christian, six out of eight from the First Presbyterian Church of Santa Fe. We were drawn to the Re-Imagining Conference as individuals and in most cases did not know the others were planning to attend. The conference was a life-changing experience for us. We heard the speakers clearly, concisely, and authentically. We experienced equality, respect, and the sharing of one another's stories. We came away with excitement and challenge. We had questions about what to do with our commitment beyond our own personal lives. In our naivete we thought the journey had come a long way. A few days after our return we realized that we had been ringing and word processors and printers had been going... communicating to the church in the country a negative view of what had happened in Minneapolis. We wrote one another "Could this be the conference we attended?" We shared our experiences of Re-Imagining with our congregation through presentations to the deacons, pastors, and women's organizations, in the church newsletter, a file we created in the church library, and discussions with individuals, friends

and acquaintances. We shared the tapes of the presentations from Re-Imagining with those in our congregation also. They were receptive, listened, asked questions and discussed issues with us. Re-Imagining proved to be an awakening for the women and men in our church. Many said "I wish I had gone." "When is there going to be another?"

The response was one of excitement and yearning to know more. One of the women of the church who did not attend the conference set up an ecumenical women's luncheon in order for us to share about Re-Imagining. The women who came expressed the desire for women to come together ecumenically to share and to worship. "The Women Who Came," a once-a-month women's worship group, was

*Write the vision;  
make it plain on tablets,  
so that a runner may read it.  
For there is still a vision for  
the appointed time;  
it speaks of the end, and does  
not lie.  
If it seems to tarry, wait for it;  
it will surely come,  
it will not delay.*

*Habakkuk 2: 2-3  
NRSV*

formed. The desire of these women is to create their own liturgy, use inclusive language, study the biblical stories from a feminist perspective, share their insights and struggles, and support one another. These women continue their attachment to the denominational churches, but are seeking further spiritual growth with women in a feminist setting. The response in Santa Fe has been amazing. One article in the *Santa Fe New Mexican* concerning the backlash in the Protestant denominations brought 50 women to the next gathering. No advertising has been done, not even in the church bulletins, but the women have come, they have come by word of mouth.

Out of Santa Fe Presbytery came two overtures to the General Assembly in support of National Church Staff and in support of the Re-Imagining Conference. The "Santa Fe 6" was

evident at the Presbyterian General Assembly in Wichita. We were devastated when we learned of Mary Ann Lundy's leaving her position with the church. We were angry and disappointed with our Presbyterian church. We sent out a petition two weeks prior to General Assembly to all Presbyterians who attended Re-Imagining asking them to support the right of women to search out their own spirituality. The response to this petition was overwhelming. We took the hundreds of signatures with us to General Assembly and presented them to the review committee who were given the task of dealing with the furor in the church over Re-Imagining. Two of us from Santa Fe spoke at the hearings at General Assembly and made ourselves available to speak to people on an individual basis concerning Re-Imagining. We sat in on the hearings—some 40 hours—along with many others who were there to witness to the 'goodness' of Re-Imagining.

Our response to the report of the review committee which was adopted by the General Assembly is mixed. We are pleased the church did not divide over the issue, but we feel betrayed and deeply saddened and angry that Mary Ann Lundy is no longer a member of national staff and at the harm and abuse many of our sisters have experienced throughout the Presbyterian Church and other denominations. We wonder if the church will ever be inclusive? Our hearts are heavy with concern over this, and we search for how to respond.

We have continued sharing our wonderful experience through personal contact at events such as Churches in Solidarity with Women at Ghost Ranch, and at the Presbyterian Women's Gathering at Ames. Wearing the symbol of Re-Imagining through sweatshirt, pin, or handbag has brought the opportunity for dialogue at Presbytery meetings, peacemaking conferences, the Compadre/Comadre weekend at Ghost Ranch.

It has been a special joy to us in Santa Fe to have had Sally Hill spend an evening with us in May and to have Mary Ann Lundy spend an evening with us in August. These two women have shown us the courage, the love and the

spirit of what it means to be women who have been called by the Divine.

We who attended Re-Imagining have been challenged to be responsible for our faith. We have assumed responsibilities in our congregation with new insight and understanding of our place in the church, not only working behind the scene, but assuming leadership as partners with the men of the church. We have new energy to be on the pastor nominating committee, the session, the human sexuality task force, and to participate in planning and leading liturgy. As our church is in the process of seeking a pastor we find we are looking for someone to lead us in justice, equality and inclusiveness. A new vision, an exciting vision.

But while our local church is moving in the direction of deciding about inclusiveness we as women claim the right to be responsible for our own spirituality NOW. Most of us have read *Defecting in Place: Women Claiming Responsibility for their own Spiritual Lives* edited by Miriam Therese Winters, Adair Lummis, Allison Stokes. We identify with what is being said by woman after woman. We are experiencing the feminine in the Divine Spirit through "The Women Who Came," through our discussion groups, dream groups, and contemplative prayer groups. We dream of having an extension of one of the schools offering women's theological studies located in Santa Fe. We dream of having seminars and conferences in Santa Fe on Re-Imagining. Our faith has been renewed!

These are the thoughts that came to me during the Review Committee Hearing at General Assembly:

I was asleep,  
Now I am awake.  
My faith was old,  
Now it is new.  
I was hungry,  
Now I have been fed.  
I was becoming hollow,  
Now I am filled with the Spirit.

*Betty Kersting, clinical social worker and Christian educator, lives in Santa Fe with her husband, Raymond.*

## Building a World of Love Stitch by Stitch

by Nancy Berneking

Though it was Saturday morning, his beribboned nametag adorned a drab brown business suit. He was on his way to the next hall in the Minneapolis convention center, but he couldn't resist peering in the double doors of our room. I smiled. He was not surprised to be told that it was a gathering of church women and men. Lovingly stitched quilts were hung along the ramp to the center platform, a quarter of the room was clearly marked scent-free for the comfort of those with allergies or illness, centerpieces of golden autumn leaves and multicolored paper and drawing tools were atop each round table, and many of the people greeted one another with hugs and squeals of delight. Ah yes, he nodded. He was familiar with the gathering of church circles in his hometown in North Dakota. I smiled.

He was not far from wrong. This was indeed a gathering of the Church in circles, but it was more than a quilting bee. This particular group had assembled to stitch together blocks from the old church patterns using fresh and vibrant colors to create a faithfulness brimming with life, highlighting pieces normally found in the background, and delighting in different perspectives. This was Re-Imagining.

A year after the 1993 four-day Re-Imagining Conference, which sparked unprecedented interest in theological discussion, the newly formed Re-Imagining Community held its first regional event called "Re-Imagining: Jesus, Christ, and Us." Appropriately, it was the day before Reformation Sunday as the 470 of us who filled the room gathered in talking circles of ten to listen, discuss, dance, pray, break bread together, sing, and struggle to better understand core concepts of the Christian faith.

With leadership from Rita Nakashima Brock, Virginia Pharr, and Pamela Carter Joern, the circular groups explored the central question of this

Jesus of Nazareth, this Christ of faith, for each of us: Who do you say that I am? Unlike many conferences where one goes away with answers, I was surprised to find most of the sentences in my pages of notes ended with question marks. What killed Jesus: our sin or the powers he resisted? Are we supposed to rejoice that he suffered for us? Were the people who killed him doing God's will? What is life-giving love? Does love demand obedience? Is self-sacrifice the highest form of love? How do we find images that show us what love is? What are the criteria for truth in a theology? Shouldn't



Re-imagining a church that says yes to building a world of love stitch by stitch seemed not so impossible in those talking circles.

a theology liberate and make whole human beings? Is my faith deep enough that I will risk saying who Jesus is for me and change my behavior to work for justice? What did Jesus live for? What are we willing to live for?

It was a day of intense conversation and exuberant laughter, quiet

introspection and flamboyant works of art. But it was also a day to take stock of the Re-Imagining Community which became a new non-profit organization on September 1. Those gathered learned that while their conference fees had entirely covered the cost of this day, membership in the community would make possible a quarterly newsletter, packets of study, worship and discussion materials for children and adults, and the networking needed to facilitate the formation of small re-imagining circles around the world.

Re-imagining a church that says yes to risk-taking, yes to welcoming all people of God, yes to justice-seeking, yes to dialogue, yes to building a world of love stitch by stitch, piece by piece, block by block seemed not so impossible in those talking circles. I thought about the man who looked in on us curious to see what was happening and imagined him joining a circle in his hometown. I smiled. Circles: not just for women anymore.

*Nancy Berneking is a writer and a member of the Re-Imagining Coordinating Council.*

Dear Re-Imaginers,

The women and men of the Coordinating Council of the Re-Imagining Community invite you to become a member of this community. We are now a new non-profit "global, ecumenical community of acceptance where exploration, discussion, study, and practice of the Christian faith are carried out freely and responsibly to seek justice, honor creation, and call the Church into solidarity with all people of God."

One year ago many of you were relishing the Re-Imagining Conference experience, as were those of us who planned and implemented it. Some of you were just beginning to hear about it. None of us knew what the year would bring. But what a year it has been—a year of highs and lows across the religious landscape as we have seen acts of brutality as well as wondrous moments of grace, love and care. We believe God has been and continues to be in these wondrous moments and has given us an opportunity to keep on with the work begun at the Re-Imagining Conference. God continues to be revealed as we gather in community to explore and share old and new traditions, various interpretations of scriptures, the works of various theologians, and our own thoughts.

You are invited to journey with us. Our vision is to serve as a resource for you. We hope you will gather in community with others who are curious and eager to ask the sometimes simple, tough, or never spoken questions. Explore new possibilities out of who you are as a community in relationship with God. Agree, disagree, discard ideas, gather new thoughts and ideas, knowing this is a life-long Spirit-filled process. We can never know the totality of what it means to be in relationship with God and with each other, but we can continually grow in our awareness and understanding of what these relationships are and can be.

The Re-Imagining Newsletter is one resource for your use. Published quarterly, it will include articles, bibliographies, book reviews, networking possibilities, ritual suggestions and more. We intend to develop other resources that can be of use to you in your group processes, ritual and theological work. We

welcome your suggestions about this shared journey and how we can help and strengthen each other's play and work.

Many of you have already been supportive of our continued Re-Imagining work. We have received memberships, gifts of money and many encouraging letters. We thank you, for it will take all of us together to sustain the vision.

Come, "follow the Spirit of God, challenge our historic Christian traditions to vitality and responsiveness, and celebrate the power of community."

*Kathi Austin Mahle*  
*Mary Kay Sauter*

*Kathi Austin Mahle and Mary Kay Sauter are co-chairs of the Coordinating Council of the Re-Imagining Community. The Rev. Mahle is pastor of Hamline United Methodist Church. Ms. Sauter is a member of the United Church of Christ and a student at United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities.*

### Re-Imagining Community Membership

We mailed this issue of the newsletter to everyone on our mailing list from the November, 1993 Re-Imagining Conference, plus we added names of friends and interested folk. **If you want to continue to receive this newsletter and you have not sent in your membership form, you must do so immediately.** We will mail future issues of this newsletter only to subscribed members. We are operating without denominational funds. That means this newsletter has to pay for itself. We need 800 memberships to make that possible. Please express your interest and support by filling out the attached form and sending it in. Please consider making an additional contribution to help our work.



### Membership in The Re-Imagining Community

☐ Please include me as a member.

☐ \$20.00 membership \$ \_\_\_\_\_

☐ \$10.00 limited income \$ \_\_\_\_\_

☐ Contribution for the work \$ \_\_\_\_\_

☐ Gift membership @ \$20.00 \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Outside U.S. add \$5.00 \$ \_\_\_\_\_

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Make checks payable to Re-Imagining and send with this form to:  
Re-Imagining, 122 W. Franklin Ave., Minneapolis, MN 55404.

### Resources

Ritual for Sharing: Lonne Murphy-Burkhardt

### A Prayer By Heart

*"Christ-revelatory and redemptive witness of God/dess work in history is Christa/Community."*  
*Journeys by Heart, Rita Nakashima Brock, p.69*

Center yourself, notice your breathing, and place your hand on a pulse point at your neck.  
Feel the natural rhythm of your heart.

Tap with your finger, for a few moments, the rhythm of your heart today.

**Heart is what keeps us alive physically,  
emotionally, and spiritually.**

Pour oil generously on your hands, massaging them and let the oil penetrate.  
Experience its feel, its smell, its presence.

Massage one another's hands if you are with another or in a group.

Find your pulse once again.

Meditate now on your heart's strongest impulses.

Where is your heart? At home? With friends? In the work for issues of justice?

In your caring? In your search for true meaning?

**This unique human impulse/energy  
is Eros, love and power.**

(Read the following aloud and meditate on each or respond in your own words:)

"Christa/Community of erotic power is the connectedness  
among the members of the community who live with heart.  
We are connected and co-create one another at the depths of our being."  
*(Journeys by Heart, RNB)*

"Good People, most royal greening verdance, rooted in the sun,  
you shine so finely, it surpasses understanding. God hugs you.  
You are encircled by the arms of the mystery of God.  
And so, humankind full of all creative possibilities, is God's work.  
Humankind alone, is called to assist God.  
Humankind is called to co-create."  
*(Hildegard of Bingen)*

"The play space of erotic power is life sustaining.  
It is the basis of freedom, creativity, and spontaneity."  
*(Journeys by Heart, RNB)*

End with a Christa/Community creative, spontaneous play time.

Hum or improvise some heart music.

Respond through dance or movement as a group.

Create with clay.

Finger paint.

Write a poem.

Record your own laughter.

After the creative, spontaneous time,  
quiet your heart again and find your pulse.

*Lonne Murphy-Burkhardt is a Director of Pastoral Ministry at St. Bartholomew's Church, Wayzata, MN. She is a ritualist, grandmother of 6, seeker of wisdom, lover of life.*



### Book Reviews

*"Can the Black Christ Be a Woman?"*

*The Black Christ*, by Kelly Brown Douglas, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1994, \$12.95 (sc). Reviewed by Nadean Bishop.

Howard University theologian Kelly Brown Douglas has made a major contribution to Christology in her readable and at times daring book, *The Black Christ*. In her challenging final chapter she calls for "appropriate pedagogies for teaching church and community-based women" womanist theology (114). "Womanist theology," she says, "takes seriously Malcolm X's observation that Black self-esteem is sabotaged by the worship of a White Christ" (115).

While Dr. Brown Douglas affirms that the concept of a Black Christ "fosters a sense of self-esteem and pride in Black people" (84), she critiques it on several counts. The first is that the concept is one-dimensional: "it does not address the fact that Black people oppress each other, and that racism is not the only barrier to Black freedom" (85). Classism is also a major oppressor. She asks, "What does the Black Christ say to those Blacks who were to some extent 'integrated' into White racist political-economic structures, as a result of the Civil Rights/Black Power movement, and who vigilantly protect their positions within those structures, even at the expense of other Black people?" (85).

The final chapter is the strongest of the entire book. In truth, my only faulting of *The Black Christ* lies in the fact that only men are quoted in the first three and a half chapters. The footnotes tell the story: sixty-eight men and only three women are quoted in the first 88 pages of a 117 page book. This is a result of the historical survey method of organization, but some women may give up before the powerful chapter on Womanist Theology. In fact, you may wish to read from page 97 onward first and then turn back to get the background.

The book's middle chapter concentrates on the varying theologies of a Black Christ propounded by Albert Cleage (who saw Jesus as "the Black son



of a Black Israelite woman and of a Black god") (56), James Cone (who described Christ's Blackness as an ontological symbol derived from "Jesus' historical identification with the oppressed") (59), and J. Deotis Roberts (who contended "Christ identified with each person in his or her own historical particularity") (61).

Dr. Brown Douglas's harshest critique of these theories by Black male theologians is that none "acknowledged the presence or role of Black women in the Black community's struggle for dignity and freedom" (88). She says their "myopic visions" resulted from their being victims of their socialization in a sexist society.

Feminist theologians are also taken to task for ignoring Black women. One example: Delores Williams chided Rosemary Radford Ruether, after noting that her article "Feminist Theology in the Academy" included no Black women, saying her claims were "as exclusive and imperialistic as the Christian patriarchy she opposes" (95).

The prophetic voice of Kelly Brown Douglas comes through when she censures ethicist Cheryl Sanders for her homophobic remarks against Alice Walker's definition of a womanist as "a woman who loves other women, sexually and/or nonsexually" (100). Brown Douglas also faults other members of the same roundtable in *The Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*: "Womanist religious scholars missed a perfect opportunity to denounce heterosexism as

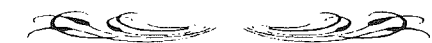
a part of 'an interlocking system of race, gender, class, and sexual oppression' (101)."

The stirring climax of the book calls for a "spirituality of resistance," shared by all Black women. The womanist Black Christ is, among other things, "a prophet, challenging the Black community to rid itself of anything that divides it against itself and to renounce any way in which it oppresses others."

Can this Black Christ be a woman? Emphatically "Yes": "Christ can be seen in the face of Sojourner Truth, a Harriet Tubman, or a Fannie Lou Hamer, as each one struggled to help the entire Black community survive and become whole" (108).

Only in the last pages does any personal statement come, and it is poignant. "My grandmother's Christ was one whom she could talk to about the daily struggles of being poor, Black, and female. So, it is in this regard that I continue to learn from my grandmother's faith. Her faith in Christ's empowering presence suggests, at the very least, a womanist Black Christ. But most importantly, it is in the face of my grandmother, as she struggled to sustain herself and her family, that I can truly see Christ. . . Christ is inside of my grandmother and other Black women and men as they fight for life and wholeness" (117).

*The Rev. Dr. Nadean Bishop is pastor of*



## Feminist Christology

*Reconstructing the Christ Symbol: Essays in Feminist Christology*, ed. by Maryanne Stevens, Mahwah, NY: Paulist Press, 1993, \$9.95 (sc). Reviewed by Sally Hill.

These six essays were originally delivered at a symposium sponsored by Creighton University, April, 1992, entitled "Who Do You Say That I Am? Christology in Women's Voices." The editor, Maryanne Stevens, speaks in the introduction of the necessity of reconstructing the Christ symbol "so that all who engage it may find in it a source of human liberation" (1). She

quotes T.S. Eliot in suggesting that the essays are offered as "merely hints and guesses, hints followed by guesses. . . the rest is prayer, observance, discipline, thought, and action."

I agree with Stevens' assessment. There are more hints and guesses in the essays than there are fully developed reconstructions. But the hints and guesses ask the provocative questions and suggest possible reconstructions that might lead us to new and helpful understandings of a Jesus whose life-giving power includes, not excludes, women.

The six essays are written by Rosemary Radford Ruether, Jacquelyn Grant, Marina Herrera, Rita Nakashima Brock, Elizabeth A. Johnson and Eleanor

McLaughlin. Each critiques classical Christianity and asks particularized questions out of her own experience.

Ruether, out of her Catholic background, asks about the use of Christology as a barrier against women's full participation. She outlines stages of revisionist thought, beginning by emphasizing Jesus as a lived message and practice rather than his ontological maleness.

Brock's work of creating new theological paradigms comes out of her work with persons suffering from abusive relationships and her struggles to live in our society as a mixed race Asian-American. She talks about the necessity of breaking out of the framework of obedience and innocence and understanding Jesus' death as tragic and unjust.

Grant, who is African-American, speaks of the historical imprisonment of Jesus by patriarchy, white supremacy, and the privileged class, a triple bondage shared by African-American women. Through identification with Jesus as co-sufferer and equalizer, African-American women and Jesus are engaged in a mutual struggle for freedom and liberation.

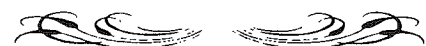
Herrera, Hispanic and influenced by Carmelite mystical spirituality, believes we must begin with a thorough critique of our Western tradition. We must change images of each other and then our images of God will change.

Johnson traces the wisdom/Sophia tradition through Scripture, early Christian theology and medieval mysticism. She suggests this pivotal way of speaking about Christ can help us "break the stranglehold of androcentric thinking which fixates on the maleness of Jesus" (108).

McLaughlin posited, for me, the most provocative images of the "I never thought of that before" category. She speaks of the radical identity of Jesus as being like that of a cross-dresser, one who calls categories and dualisms into question.

This book, overall, was a marvelous introduction to various feminist reconstructions of Christology. My responses ranged from "yes, yes," to "how interesting," to "I'm not sure about that," to "she is speaking for me."

*The Rev. Sally Hill was coordinator of the 1993 Re-Imagining Conference.*



## Women Constructing Alternatives

*Defecting in Place: Women Taking Responsibility for Their Own Spiritual Lives*, edited by Miriam Therese Winter, Adair Lummis, and Allison Stokes, New York: Crossroad, 1994, \$22.95 (hc). Reviewed by Mary Pellauer.

People who attended Re-Imagining may well have been among the 3,746 women and 112 men who were the basis for this new study. For these are people who have chosen both "to leave and to stay—to leave the old way of relating and to stay on one's own terms, to be present in a whole new way" (114).

Chapters three and four on Protestants and Catholics give the basis of what it means to defect in place. Re-Imagining people are likely to recognize ourselves here. If you are alienated from the church (like 3/5 of the Protestants and 4/5 of the Catholics surveyed here), you are familiar with the anguish, exasperation and anger over sexist language, ignoring or trivializing women, inhospitable atmospheres, denial of access to power and leadership, the contributions of religion to physical and sexual abuse. Denominational affiliation makes little difference to these dynamics. The news here is how many with high feminist consciousness remain active in their churches. "All but 4% attend church at least monthly, and 73% attend every week" (197).

If you've ever been in a feminist spirituality group, you're like the 86% of this research sample. Chapter four contains some lovely reports on the plethora of feminist spirituality groups around the nation. A delightful sense of the diversity alive and well out there pervades this book.

Chapter five on feminist spirituality was the meatiest for me. Women are now admitting "what they have known all along, that the rites of institutional religion do not touch the innate hunger for God crying out from deep within them, nor do these nurture their spiritual lives" (187). The news, once again, is that we are not waiting for somebody else to fix this. We are actively seeking and constructing our own alternatives.

I especially appreciated the note that the majority of respondents "are inclined to having shifting, changing

images of God and not one or two clear, definite images" (177). There is a lovely discussion here of the newly-weaving intricacies about parenting images of God (whether Mother or Father), and Goddess understandings, and the diverse ways that people relate Jesus to these God-images, making for a "harmonization of contrasting images" (182).

Nine feminist theologians were consultants for this study. Their observations make a pleasing counterpoint to the sociological reporting of the first 200 pages. Some are celebrative. Beverly Wildung Harrison speaks for the hope of many when she suggests that "it may just be that the genuine spiritual life of old-line Christianity really is being renewed in the expressions of alternative faith by women" (229).

Several bring cautions. "The reform of long-lived institutions is dangerous work, for the temptation to see improvement is nearly irresistible," says Elizabeth Bettenhausen (207). (I found myself addressed here.) Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza warns that feminist spirituality groups can be empowering options or they can "function either as a spiritual safety valve for the patriarchal church and as a religious refuge or as a training ground for patriarchal society by fulfilling the religious consumer needs of women" (224).

Respondents are not the average woman in the pew. That was not by mistake, but by design. The purpose was "to learn about why feminist women leave or stay with churches" (29). Demographics of the group make this clearer. About 3/5 have some graduate education after college; half the sample is married and 11% more are in a committed relationship; 19% are ordained (31). They don't tell us the age of the respondents (which annoyed me a bit).

The authors say only that "a majority" of the respondents are white (30) and I found this unaccountably coy. They give raw numbers of respondents of color, rather than percentages. My calculator tells me that the 49 Asian American women were 1.3% of the sample, the 63 African American women 1.7% of the whole, the 173 Hispanic/Latina women were 4.6%. (So, women of color were 7.6% of the whole

population and 92.4% were white.) The next sentence says, "80 respondents identified themselves as lesbian" (that's 2.1%), and doesn't tell us whether they asked about sexual orientation or whether these women volunteered that information. However, at several key points in the text (like those God-images), the authors make insightful comparisons between the views of white women and African American women or those of lesbians and straights.

*Mary Pellauer is currently not employed for pay. She is in Chicago and writing about good sex.*

## Other Recommended Readings

*Additional perspectives on Christology.*

Brock, Rita Nakashima. *Journeys by Heart*. New York: Crossroad, 1988.

Brown, Joanne Carlson and Carole R. Bohn, eds. *Christianity, Patriarchy, and Abuse: A Feminist Critique*. New York: Pilgrim Press, 1989.

Chung, Hyun Kyung. *Struggle to Be the Sun Again: Introducing Asian Women's Theology*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1994.

Grant, Jacquelyn, *White Women's Christ, Black Women's Jesus: Feminist Christology and Womanist Response*. Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1989.

Johnson, Elizabeth A. *Consider Jesus: Waves of Renewal in Christology*. New York: Crossroad, 1990.

Johnson, Elizabeth A. *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse*. New York: Crossroad, 1992.

Lorde, Audre. *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*. Trumansburg, NY: Crossing Press, 1984.

McFague, Sallie. "Christology: The Body of God," in *The Body of God: An Ecological Theology*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993.

Tamez, Elsa, ed. *Through Her Eyes: Women's Theology from Latin America*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1989.

Williams, Delores. *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1989.

Wilson-Kastner, Patricia. *Faith, Feminism, and the Christ*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983.



## New Publications

The following are recently published or soon to be published works brought to our attention, but which we have not previewed.

**Rattling Those Dry Bones: Women Changing the Church**, ed. June Steffenson-Hagen, LuraMedia, publishing date January, 1995. Contains articles by Mary Hunt, Madeleine L'Engle, Marie Fortune, Carmen Guerrero, Toinette Eugene, Virginia Ramey Mollenkott, and many others. LuraMedia also publishes a variety of other books concerning women's spirituality. Call 1-800-FOR-LURA for information or a catalogue of listings.

Yes International Publishers of Saint Paul announces a new book: *The Divine Mosaic: Women's Images of the Sacred Other*. Twenty-four professional women from many religious and spiritual traditions express their views about God. Ed. Theresa King collected the writings to form an ecumenical mosaic that challenges old assumptions and brings the divine fully into the lives of women today through fresh, first-person stories. Seven Minnesota women are amongst the writers of this book.

Yes International has also published *The Spiral Path: Explorations in Women's Spirituality*, ed. by Theresa King. *The Divine Mosaic*: paper, 275 pages, \$15.95. *The Spiral Path*: paper, 325 pages, \$15.95. Available from Yes Publishers 612-645-6808 or 1-800-866-2672.

## Theme for February Newsletter

### Re-Imagining: Body and Soul

How do we build a wholistic theology? What are the dangers in splitting body and spirit? In everyday living, how does the particularity of your embodiment influence your life?

Send us your thoughts, letters, stories, poems. We need art, small black and white drawings especially. Please enclose an SASE if you would like your manuscript returned. Deadline for February newsletter is January 1. Send to:

Re-Imagining  
Editor Pamela Carter Joern  
122 W. Franklin Avenue  
Minneapolis, MN 55404  
(612) 879-8036

Re-Imagining  
Community

## Happenings

### Wisconsin Conference of Churches Announces November "Decade" Program:

*Women and Men Discuss Women & the Church: Our Vision for the Future* will be held 1:30-5:00 p.m., November 13, 1994 at St. Benedict Center, County Highway M, north of Madison WI. Keynote speaker: The Rev. Sally Hill, ordained Presbyterian minister and coordinator of the Minnesota Re-Imagining Conference in November, 1993. Sally has recently retired as director of the Twin Cities Metropolitan Church Commission. In her work she touched many lives by coordinating choral festivals, children's advocacy networks, peace education for youth, and building links between Central and North American congregations. She will analyze the Ecumenical Decade's goal of empowerment.

The event will also feature a panel moderated by the Rev. Bonnie Van Overbeke, United Church of Christ Conference staff, as well as small-group discussion time. It is sponsored by the Wisconsin Conference of Churches' Task Force on the Ecumenical Decade: Churches in Solidarity with Women. Decade resources will be available to all participants.

Registration is \$5.00. Please register in advance by phone, 608-222-9779, or mail your check to: Wisconsin Conference of Churches, Decade Event, 1955 W. Broadway, #104, Madison, WI 53713.

**A Reforming Church: Gift and Task—A Conference for pastors and lay people** gathering at Central Lutheran Church, Minneapolis, MN, November 17-19. Persons from throughout the ELCA and others in the ecumenical community are invited to gather. A Minneapolis-St. Paul Steering Committee of folks concerned for the unity of the church is planning the details of this conference (Erik Strand, Chair). Presenters include Elizabeth Bettenhausen, Barbara Lundblad, Martin Marty, Mary Pellauer, and many more. Cost is \$75.00 per person (meals and lodging not included), \$20.00 for seminary and college students, \$300.00 for congregations sending 5 participants. To Register: Send your check payable to A Reforming Church c/o Central Lutheran Church, 333 South 12th St., Minneapolis, MN 55404. If you have questions, contact Allison Bondy, Conference Registrar at Central Lutheran Church, 612/870-4416.

**Church Women United of Southern California-Southern Nevada** are holding a Conference in February, 1995 that will continue Re-Imagining themes. It will be held at the Claremont United Church of Christ, 233 W. Harrison Street, Claremont, CA, 909/626-1202. Accommodations are available at Griswold's Inn, Foothill Blvd., Claremont, CA, 909/626-2411.

## Notes

Mary Ann Lundy, who resigned from her position as Associate Director of Churchwide Planning of the Presbyterian Churches (U.S.A.), is currently a visiting scholar at Hartford Seminary. She has been nominated to serve as a deputy general secretary of the World Council of Churches. The World Council is supported by 324 Protestant and Orthodox churches around the globe.

We have heard there may be a rumor circulating that Sally Hill's retirement was forced as a result of the backlash against Re-Imagining. We assure you, Sally's retirement from the Twin Cities Metropolitan Church Commission had been planned for a long time, and she was appropriately lauded and saluted. She continues to be active in the Re-Imagining Community and as a spokesperson within the Presbyterian Church.

Nancy Berneking and Pamela Carter Joern are collecting stories from/about the 1993 Re-Imagining Conference for a book to be published by Pilgrim Press in November, 1995. The goal is to give readers a flavor of the participants, the planning and the impact of the Conference. If YOU have a story, send to Re-Imagining, attn. Nancy & Pam, 122 W. Franklin Ave, Minneapolis, MN 55404.

The Minnesota Re-Imagining Community is working hard to develop small groups—for study, for ritual making, for support! We hope to make mentoring packets available soon to help you develop groups in your area. If you have ideas about what resources would be helpful, please let us know.

## Networking

Contact person for those in the San Francisco Bay Area: E. Louise Hermanson, Interim Pastor, Fruitvale Presbyterian Church, 2735 MacArthur Blvd, Oakland, CA 94602.

Rev. Mary McAnally of Tulsa, OK, offers to speak to women's groups or churches on "Sophia" or any issues related to the 1993 Conference. Mary writes, "My presentations are not lectures nor reactive speeches, but gentle attempts through participatory formats to bring others along in their own spiritual development/faith development to an understanding of the nature of God-language and the content/quality of women's spiritual experience. Contact Mary McAnally, 76 N. Yorktown, Tulsa, OK 74110, 918/583-3651.

Re-Imagining participants who would like to be on a mailing list for the Resource Center for Women and Ministry in the South, please send your name and address to: Jeanette Stokes, Director, Resource Center for Women & Ministry in the South, 331 W. Main, Suite 608, Durham, NC 27701. The Resource Center is a 17-year old organization for women with the purpose of weaving feminism and religion into a vision of justice for the world. Resources include a book catalog, conferences, a newsletter, and the company of spirited women. Ph. 919/687-0408.

Megan Miller is interested in hearing from people in the Twin Cities area who want to explore Re-Imagining with children. Write Re-Imagining, attn. Megan Miller, 122 W. Franklin, Minneapolis, MN 55404, or call 879-8036, leave your name and she will contact you.

Those interested in Re-Imagining concerns from Vermont, eastern New York, or western New Hampshire, contact Howard Stearns, 230 College St., No. 5, Burlington, VT 15401-8318, 802/658-2540.

*If you are willing to be a contact person in your area, please send us your name, address or phone. If you have a news story of a Re-Imagining Community in your region, please send it. Send us resources, happenings, networking. We'll do our best to let our readers know what is going on. We need each other to stay grounded and to stay in the struggle.*

## Letters

☉ You have totally made my day! I received, through a friend, a copy of your update. I am thrilled to know the groundbreaking work presented at Re-Imagining lives on!

I am someone who could not afford to attend the conference, but had friends in the presbytery who attended. I read each word of the conference liturgy from the program. I listened for hours to tapes of the conference alternating between cheers and tears as I heard words of healing, challenge and affirmation of the role of women in the church.

Thank you for being bold and courageous enough to continue the work started last November. I am amazed at the irony in that the conference basically organized and presented the feminist and womanist theologies and philosophies which have existed and circulated for quite some time. The material has been out there, though one had to know where to look. The conference made it much easier to find this material, and let others who never knew it existed discover it!

Patricia Gruver  
Los Angeles, CA

\*\*\*\*\*

☉ We, who are members of the Grail present at our General Assembly, write to express to each one of you our deep appreciation for all you have done and will do for the development of theology, liturgy and opportunity within the church that will fully include women, our ways of knowing, of working, and of doing theology. This is a major task of our time. The organized attacks which women are suffering, attacks by forces outside and inside the churches in response to the Re-Imagining Conference, are evidence that women are making breakthroughs of great significance. Our voices, silenced or ignored for so long, are being heard. May God continue to bless you and support you and all women who are striving for freedom of thought, openness to the Spirit, and continued exploration of the will and purpose of the God who is the central mystery of our lives.

*Members of the Grail  
An international movement of women rooted in Christian faith*

*We want to hear from you. Let us know what is on your mind. We reserve the right to publish all or portions of any letters we receive.*



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to become a

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**In This Issue:**

**Re-Imagining: Jesus, Christ, Us**

**Upcoming Issues:**

**Re-Imagining:**

**Feb - Body and Soul**

**May - Ritual in Community**

**Aug - Death and After Death**

**How do we sustain hope?  
How do we stay connected?  
How do we nurture our faith in God?**

# **Be Part of The Re-Imagining Community**

We may have your name on more than one list. If you receive more than one copy of this issue of the Re-Imagining Community Newsletter, please pass it along to a friend.

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