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Making Room for Women Project

Interview with Janet Cawley

January 31, 2014

Oral History Recording Summary

Interviewee: Janet Cawley (JC)
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MI: We're going to start with a little bit about your early life. My first question involves your family, your community and participation in the church. 01:09

JC: Okay.

MI: How would you like to define your family?

JC: Define my family. (Laughs). Define my family. Well ... it was a so-so family. (Laughs). Define your family ... it's fine. Okay, I have two older sisters. My parents were both university graduates, little bit unusual for that time—University of Saskatchewan. I was born in Saskatchewan, but I basically grew up in Ottawa. My father was a mechanical engineer, actually, but he was working for the Board of Transport Commissioners.

MI: What year were you born?

JC: 1946.

MI: I found a reason that I can actually ask that and not be embarrassed.

JC: (Laughs). Yes. So I grew up in Ottawa and my dad was a civil servant, like everybody else's dad in Ottawa, and my mother was ... she taught, not full time, but she taught supply and special class and so on—both in French—and then violin. So, that's kind of the picture. And my two sisters, who are four and five years older than I am. So I was the baby of the family, the post-war baby. We lived in the South part of Ottawa and we went to Southminster United Church. That was a pretty good church, I think. You know, I hear people's horror stories about being terrified in church, but church was a very safe place for me. I was very fond of it.

The biggest part of that church, for me, that was great, was signing in the junior choir. I sang in the choir and that began a life-long love affair with choir, so, always, while I've been able, I've sung in a choir: church choir or any other choir I can get hold of, basically. It was lovely; it really spoke to my soul. It was a very Presbyterian type United Church, quite proper. The ushers wore tail coats and grey kid gloves. They were far more impressive to me than Dr. Donald, who was the minister. He was kind of a little short guy with white hair and a long black dress. But these guys, the elders—and they were all men—they were very ... when they marched up the aisle with the offering, it was something to behold, it really was. It was like the Royal Household Cavalry or something [... the mail person coming]. It was great. I remember the shock—really, I remember these things—I remember the shock when the first woman was elected as an elder and therefore served communion, at one time.

MI: Wow. Do you remember when that was?

JC: Well, it was before I was ten years old, so it would be early '50s, because when I was ten we moved. Yup, and she wore a hat, of course. Everybody wore a hat—I had to wear a hat to church. I got two new hats a year: a felt one for winter and a straw one for summer. You wore a hat to church, that was just a given, which is kind of funny. But anyway, I remember the kind of frisson of unease, excitement, disapproval, approval, whatever, when this woman walked up the aisle with these men all in their morning coats and grey kid gloves and she had a flowery hat on.

At that time it was very clear to me that the elders were really, really important people. They served communion—a row of chairs was put right in the chancel and the minister kind of stood in front of them doing the actions of celebration and so on, but it seemed like it was really their show, which is interesting. It wasn't ... the minister was very important but he wasn't maybe as important as the elders. He didn't look as fancy, anyways. (Laughs). So I think it was a relatively kind church to grow up in, not a bad place for a kid. There were some stresses at home and the church was a good place for me.

When we started, Sunday school was before church, not during church, and I got out of church every chance I could when I was a little bit older and able to walk home on my own, you know, once I got to be six or seven. Sometimes if I begged hard enough my mother would let me go home rather than go to church after Sunday school. Then it got blended, I think. One of the Sunday school teachers—not my Sunday school teacher, but did teach one of my sisters, I think—was Anne Squire. So that was one of my first connections with the great Anne Squire.

Then my parents moved, when I was about ten, and we went to Rideau Park United Church, a suburban church, so suburbs of Ottawa.

MI: We lived in Rideau.

JC: Did you? Ah, well.

MI: Yeah. I grew up there as well.

JC: Oh, really? (Chuckles.)

MI: Yes.

JC: Well. Yeah ... sang in the choir. There was a kind of a—like, once you were confirmed ... I guess we hadn't fully switched over. Seems like I was confirmed at—I mean, I was confirmed at Southminster, so we must have been going there from the Alta Vista suburb, but then we were in Rideau Park. It was kind of a thing; when you got confirmed you quit church—which most kids did—or you got stuck in the Sunday school, which would be my phrase for it. Or you could sing in the choir. Well, of course, no-brainer for me, so I started in the adult choir right away when I was about thirteen or so, I guess. That was great.

It was a pretty nice choir, too. And it had two services because those were kind of baby boom years. Lots of people and a booming suburb, and all that. The choir sat through both services, which was fine—the preacher was relatively good. And I was quite involved in it. My middle sister, Susan, at this time decided she wanted to be a candidate for ministry, which was pretty unusual.

MI: And this is, would you say, early '60s?

JC: Yeah ... yeah, would be. When did I graduate? I graduated high school in '64, so it would have been the early '60s. She was in university then, but the idea of ordination did not hold too long. But I was intrigued and I'm sure it gave me a tip that such things were possible. I mean, I knew that women ministers existed but I'd never actually met one ... I don't think. And they did not ... they were not prominent, it was mostly—whether they were suited for it or not—they were generally into the diaconal pastoral thing, very much second banana to the senior male minister, but that was the way it was. Anyway, Susan was very active in the SCM—the Student Christian Movement—which was quite big at that time, large in Canada.

MI: I keep hearing about it.

JC: And very well supported by the United Church. So, I was very tightly tied to church all the way through high school, unlike most of my friends, I think, although it was totally unusual ... it was very much part of my life. When I went to university, I went to what was then Wilfrid Laurier—well, no, actually it was Waterloo Lutheran then, now it's Wilfrid Laurier—and was more Lutheran in its character and had quite a lot of opportunity for religious activity so I was quite enthusiastic—and of course was in the choir, which was a wonderful choir, Lutherans certainly know how to sing, but I was also in sort of the chaplain's group of SCM there and we also were linked with the national SCM. So lots of exciting, religious stuff. We were all involved in the protests around the Civil Rights Movement in the States and we had teach-ins. So it was a very, very strong, still, religious upbringing.

10:20

What kind of other religious things ... I got another scholarship—like I went to WLU because I got a full scholarship and it seemed too good a chance to miss, and it was indeed very nice. Then I got another scholarship, which they kind of scrounged up somewhere for me out of nowhere, to do a third year abroad and I went to the University of Geneva. I actually worked as an au pair for the first few months for a Canadian who was part of the WSCF—the World Student Christian Federation—former Canadian SCMer type. They were very kind and they had three little kids. I was there for a few months and then I moved into the Protestant University Centre dormitory housing kind of complex, which was very nice. So I was involved in the World Student Christian Federation kind of stuff and got to go to World Council of Churches work project in Cypress the following summer—all these wonderful opportunities I had—just great. And came back for my fourth year doing an honour's program at WLU.

MI: So what was your course of study?

JC: Philosophy.

MI: Oh, my.

JC: I love philosophy.

MI: Maybe I should get you to do my class for it.

JC: (Laughs). So that was great. I finished my honour's degree and got married to a guy that I met when I was abroad—wouldn't exactly recommend that, but anyway. That was not a good idea for all sorts of reasons, some of which didn't become apparent until very much later. We did not last long together—couple of years, really. But I started graduate studies in philosophy and then, partly because of the personal crisis of the marriage falling apart so badly right off, and partly because of finances, suddenly the philosophy seemed kinda dry to me and I didn't finish the degree. I went off to work for CIDA—Canadian International Development Agency—in Ottawa. Became a civil servant, something I'd sworn I'd never do, and worked with them.

By then I was fluently bilingual – my studies in Geneva of course were totally in French and during my summers before that I'd worked in a SCM summer work project in Montreal at the hôpital Saint-Jean de Dieu, which is now called Louis-Hippolyte Lafontaine, I think. This was a work project with the—I don't know if SCM does those anymore, but we all lived together and worked at the same place and, you know, some crummy job where we got a chance to reflect on work and psychology and mental illness and all sorts of interesting things.

So when the federal government saw I was bilingual they were pleased, and they were trying to promote women, I think, having seen that as somewhat important and also wanted everyone to be bilingual, so those were two kinda new things. This was 1969, I guess. So, that was okay in proceeding to the working world, not terribly exciting at that point, but I think, thanks to my SCM background, I was a strong believer in development aid and it sounds very innocent now but we really believed that if we worked hard and shared we could improve the world for everybody and everybody could develop to be just like us. (Laughs) However, that was good and I got a position and spent, what, three years with CIDA while my marriage ended and then was seconded from CIDA to the United Nations and worked in Africa for a couple years. So that was great, I mean just think of all those wonderful experiences I had. They just sort of fell into my lap. I dunno, It was ... excellent stuff. Yeah, worked in Zaire, which is back being Congo now, used to be the Belgian Congo but now it's so-called Democratic Republic of Congo. So that was all wonderful.

And from the time when I really—must have been the marriage ... but anyway, for a few years I had been totally disconnected from church and hadn't really done anything, but when I went off to Congo, living in Kinshasa, I connected with a house church through a friend of a friend sort of thing—a Catholic house church—and they were great. Somewhere along there I also had a crisis of

vocation. While it was a wonderful privilege to be in Africa, just to be there, the job was not very interesting and I realized that I was, in a way, being ... I mean I got the job, quite frankly, because I obviously showed promise and I was going to be—I was being groomed for good stuff in the civil service, which is fine except that I realized that the further I would go in that, probably, the less I would enjoy the work. That was sort of a puzzle and at the same time the house church was my community. It was more or less, run by a Catholic priest who was in Kinshasa for other reasons—he was a Canadian. His ministry and his struggles with how to be a faithful priest in the days when he was pretty upset at how his church was. Anyway, I was struck—yes, struck—by the sense of call to ministry. So I wrote back home and said, “What do I do?” When I came back home from Africa in 1974, it was to begin theological studies at Queen’s Theological College, which I did for the usual three years. I was ordained in Hamilton Conference on June 5th, 1977, and four people from my house church in Africa made it.

18:25

MI: Wow!

JC: (Chuckles). Not African people but people ... they were international types who happened to be kind of wandering around. There was one guy that was sort of on his way between an assignment in the Arctic and Mexico and came through and ... yeah, so that was really amazing. It was lovely. And I was settled in Rouyn-Noranda, at the Noranda-Rouyn United Church.

MI: Where was that?

JC: Rouyn-Noranda, Northwest Quebec, which is part of Manitou Conference, which was brand new then. I wanted to go to Quebec; I thought M&O Conference or ... but that didn’t work for some reason. Then I was sure I was going to be in Saskatchewan or whatever, and then Manitou Conference said, “We actually have a couple places in Quebec and we need your skills” so my bilingualism turned out to be a useful thing there. So that was exciting as you can imagine—because it was the time where Quebec was stirring. The independence movement was getting very strong; the first referendum was coming up.

20:08

Noranda, of course, is a company town of Noranda Mines ... had been very much Anglo and then they brought in boatloads of DPs after the war to work in the mines and French Canadians were off there in Rouyn, which is sort of the parallel city there, and it was just kind of ... they were the hewers of wood and drawers of water ... I mean it was really old-fashioned Quebec, which was being challenged to adapt and it was a tough time for the English people there and more exciting for the French people but ... company towns, are company controlled ... It’s a place where I was very grateful for the larger church, ‘cause certainly as young and totally inexperienced minister in that town—unless I wanted to be completely foolish—there were things I couldn’t address very directly. They were beginning to be aware of issues about pollution, and lung disease, particularly, was very prominent and the justice issues with Quebec

and so on. Boy, you really were grateful there's a larger church out there saying things that you can use as backup and also take shelter behind, frankly. (Laughs).

It was an exciting ministry because one of the immediate impacts of the whole change in Quebec was that the English communities and places like that were declining drastically and the church, which was a large church—I mean, it would hold twelve hundred—it was a big northern church kind of thing, right at the center of Rouyn-Noranda, which was an important town. I think the congregation was down to about 50 or 60—the Anglican church the same, even the English Catholic church was declining.

And of course part of the context at that time was the failed Anglican-United Union. Northern congregations that had hoped for such a ... had hoped to see that come, didn't see it. But there you are. Congregations have to cooperate anyway, so we did a local union in the three years I was there. It was, again, you know, "the Lord moves in mysterious ways" or something, because it was one of my—actually, my only student internship, my summer internship, had been at the Pastoral Zone of Saguenay-- Lac Saint-Jean, which was an Anglican-United Union, the "pastoral zone" terminology was from those union years. So I had some sense of what that might look like and how it might work and what might happen with it. So that was great.

So, I and the somewhat elderly, Anglican priest—we put all that through—sold the United Church, all the United Church property, took the United Church organ and a few other things and everybody moved into the Anglican Church. Norman (Edwards, the Anglican priest) and I both left at the appropriate point for a new person to step in. That was a very interesting three years. It shaped a lot of my understanding of ministry and I think it was probably really, really important for my professional development and my spiritual development, too.

25:00

I went back to school. I had been holding the graduate scholarship from Queens for three years and knew that I would be going back to school for a year at least, or whatever. Enrolled in a doctoral program and decided yeah, that was pretty darn good. I didn't know whether I'd finish or do a year of courses or whatever, but, actually, I finished it.

MI: Is that doctor of ... ministry? Divinity?

JC: No, no. It's a PhD—actually a ThD in terminology of Emmanuel College a ThD in Systematic Theology. My field was Ecclesiology, the doctrine of the church, which nobody in the United Church has ever cared very much about. I kept getting pushed into all sorts of administrative type functions and realized that there was a split between what we did as an institution and what we said theologically and, should there be a connection or should we just accept that? Did the business world have the best practices, or ... ? And then after that there's kind of a funny way where you sprinkle a few Bible verses, a little Holy Water on and it suddenly becomes God's Church or something. A very interesting process.

And you have a high, high Ecclesiology, which says, well, the most conservative Roman Catholics say—"outside the church there is no salvation" and the church is God on earth, it is the authorized distributor of grace. And at the other extreme you have what I call Baptist Ecclesiology where there's no ... there is no theological value to the church, the church is an aid and an educational place, but salvation is all about saving souls; it's about individuals. The church might help that process a bit but it's not essential to it. And Reformed Christianity sits somewhere in the middle of there; the church indeed does have a theological purpose, and it is probably best described to be a ... a foretaste of the Kingdom of God or a place where people actually get to live in Christ now, or are called to live in Christ now, but it's not the only way to salvation and it may not even be the center of God's plans. I mean, we're not God's little darlings just because we call ourselves Christians.

28:04

Anyway, that's a question that fascinated me and still does. So that was my project. I spent five years at Emmanuel in Toronto. They're very good to graduate students. I had nice teaching assistantship that covered most of my costs, for the academic year, anyway. Yeah, it was great. I surprised myself by going to the end. I wrote my thesis on ... oh my goodness, it's a terrible, long title—theses are supposed to be... It was something about organization—"Ecclesiology and Organization Theory" ... yeah, there it is, right there. And I used the Anglican-United Union talks as a kind of a base of that. So it was quite interesting. I enjoyed it, anyway.

29:34

And, of course, in the meantime, being a sort of a ... being in Toronto, an ordained body and interested in church things, I got to sit on any committee group whenever I might want to. I was on, well, you probably saw the list on that CV ... I can't even remember them all. There they all are, all those wonderful things.

And there was also that time ... at that time there was also fermenting this great feminist Christianity stuff, it was really just percolating there, it just starting right at the ... So, to go back a bit to 1977, in that space between the end of school and when I was ordained, which is like a couple of months when you're sort of in limbo—there was a conference of women, United Church women, in Toronto and all our founders were there. B.J. Klassen drew me into that. I had worked with John and B.J. in Kingston and really—I don't know if you know B.J. she was just great ... great, great person. She is not well now, unfortunately. But, she was a real leader in the women's movement in church and there was also ... goodness, the one from the Center for Christian studies. I was living at the Center for Christian Studies for a couple years ... all of those people. And, gosh, who else was there ... ones that ... the Western ones ... Anderson ... I've forgotten her name now—Terry Anderson's wife—turned her back on the whole process at some point. But, it ... it blew my mind—I just ... "Woah".

So it was sort of like I graduated in one framework and then went off to do my ministry in Rouyn-Noranda in a totally different framework, like suddenly I was really hooked on this Christian feminism stuff. I think I spent most of my time in theological school at Queen's sort of trying to convince everybody: "No, I'm not

one of them, I'm not a feminist", because feminists, I think in my mind, were sort of bra burners down in New York somewhere, and I wasn't. It wasn't that I was against women, of course, obviously not, with what I was doing, but I was pretty undeveloped at that point. So, whole new doors opening and it was just very exciting, just great. When I came back to do the graduate studies there was much more going on and everybody wanted—suddenly you couldn't really have a United Church committee without not just one token woman but hopefully a couple—two or three! Or maybe even as many as men, although that was really pushing it, obviously.

I just had all kinds of interesting things to do. I was on two agenda committees for General Councils—the Montreal General Council and the Morden General Council—and, I mean, I think of those as privileges, I guess some people think of those as very dull and there are dull moments, but they are exciting, too ... they are just really interesting. I worked on the WUSIJ—the Working Unit for Social Issues and Justice—and WUSIJ was kind of fun because Bob Lindsay was the head of WUSIJ and was staff person and he was a really neat guy. But feminism was very new to him and he had trouble seeing it as a social justice issue. But it was ... I mean, of course it was ... but it wasn't like the "real social justice issues" like poverty and so on. And I think for a lot of men who had given their heart and soul to issues like racism, poverty and so on, they felt really stunned to be confronted with what was labeled as an issue of social justice kinda right in their household and their church. This was difficult for them. But he was a terrific guy, [he's great—he's still alive, living in Beamsville.] Good guy and a lot of great arguments. I lived at their house the first two years I was in Toronto—that's how I got on that committee, I think, because I had a room in their house, the first two years in Toronto, and then I was in the Center for Christian Studies for the last three years. So it was all ... all exciting stuff.

34:51

And the other one that was of course coming up in the church—was the issue of gay and lesbian ordination and—I had no idea of myself as a lesbian, so I just sort of assumed I was heterosexual but not very good at it, which was kind of my conclusion. (Laughter). And it's not like I was innocent, I mean the issue was there. I had gay and lesbian students in the class. I was very, very active; I was active on their behalf at Conference and Presbytery level. I kept thinking, "Well, I bet they think I'm one" and "Haha, I'm not" and ... (Laughs). It's kind of funny.

That was also percolating up as an issue, and again in the academic world it wasn't too difficult. But, of course, that was before the '88 decision of ordination so with the students, they kind of had to keep their mouths shut and make it past the ordination thing, when they could be a little more open, or they went down in the committee structure somewhere along the way.

MI: Now, the 1988 decision: that was on ...

JC: The ordination of self-declared homosexuals.

MU: That's it, okay.

JC: So, by that time it was ... people were more out in the open, although I think for students it was still very difficult. When ... in 1985, really, I finished—I mean I didn't get my degree until 1986 so you always ... you end up doing stuff in your dissertation in the last year, but '85 I finished and there was no job and I thought—I wondered about, you know teaching... I decided: "Well, I'll look for an academic job", but there weren't any at that point. 36:36

So, rather than take a call, which seemed to me kind of immoral when what I really wanted to do—was jump off and teach—I looked for just kind of casual work, and I ended up doing an interim in Toronto at Ebenezer United Church in Scarborough, Agincourt. That was very interesting, I actually thought it was kind of applied Ecclesiology, it was sort of ... when you're working with the church, trying to help it direct itself in some particular way or area. That was a great—it was a very nice interim and it's lucky that I started at that point because it was kind of a shake-down cruise: they had built a new building, there had been a new church development thing and they needed to kind of find out how to be church on their own, to become less dependent on their minister because I think, inevitably, in the development phase they do get dependent; everything comes from the minister, it all comes from the minister, it all has to come from somebody because it's a creation on the ground. But then they had to develop their own structures and work out their stuff.

So that was quite fun for a year and they had—we had, I think, over a hundred children in their Sunday school and by that time that was already really unusual and they were all under five. They were all under five! Except there was one teenager in the whole thing, I think, and a few eight, six, nine-year-olds but all these little kinds ... I turned out to have a real blast with them. I just loved them. Of course I'd never had any real children of my own, but ... So that was a great year and the next year there still weren't any academic jobs around. I was applying here and there but nothing turned up so I did another interim in a town north of Toronto and then another year I did another interim at Victoria Village and that was 1988. Yeah, it was ... '87-'88 that I did that. So we are in the midst of the crisis at the church. It was very interesting leading a church through the 1988 year, it was quite ... it was traumatic for them: a couple of people left, the chair of the board was just violently opposed and—I never could figure out why—but it was just ... he was quite, I mean, you know, as some people are ... he was just so totally outraged... 39:49

MI: And where was your stance?

JC: Oh! I was supportive, but everybody knew that. I mean I was speaking up at Conference and stuff like that. I of course "was not lesbian".

(Laughter)

JC: I remember saying to this guy, whatever his name was, I've forgotten: "What difference would it make to you if I were lesbian?" And he was confused; it

really wasn't about lesbians, see, it was about gay men—for a lot of men it is, like, lesbians are sort of ... I think they are failed heterosexuals, for most of those guys. (Laughs). It's just irrelevant.

Anyway, we did well. I think I did a really good job; I really honed my conflict management skills and worked very, very carefully with them to make sure everyone had their say.... They signed a petition against the motion and that was fine by me, but that was the process—the process was honest, those who were otherwise inclined, which was maybe 20-25% of the congregation, they had a good, fair say; we had a good, fair process ... I was very careful, I said, "You know where I stand, that's not an issue, but I'm not going to preach from the pulpit about it, I'm not going to ... What I think about it, it's not my role to promote or condemn a particular stance, this is an important decision-making time for the church and my job is to be the leader of the best decision-making process you can find. And then you make the decision that you need to make and let's make sure it's effectively communicated and you don't damage your community in the meantime."

42:39

Okay, they could go along with that. It was a good experience, I learned a lot. Following that, I was called, invited, to VST to teach. So I taught at VST for four years and that was a difficult experience. I was on—I was in a tenure track, which was nice, but I was in a position which had started with Morar Murray-Hayes being a sort of pastor in residence. She left in unhappy circumstances – there was some trouble around her, I never got the straight goods on that, and I don't know, well, didn't really hear the details on that, but it was some anxiety around when she left. And then they hired ... can't even remember her name, you would find it, I'm sure ... a woman with a doctorate from Edinburgh, no less. Good, strong scholar type. They had problems with her, too, and she left after just a couple years. Then they brought me in and, what do you know, they had trouble with me, too.

I was hired to teach Pastoral Theology and Feminist Theology, which I did, and ... it was a rough go. Hard time for me and hard time for the school, which ended, oddly ... I had a review, which ended very badly and I was really shocked at the way it went, and appealed, and it was all wiped off ... but it had been so hurtful and everything. I left—I resigned. So I left after four years.

MI: And so that was ... what ... that was 1990?

JC: That was ... yeah ... it was ... '90 ... (addressing mewing cat) ... Yoho, quit it! (Claps). There Yoho, come on. (Claps) Come on, you're being a nuisance. The landlord will throw you out—he will. Yes, come here, you.

They ... yeah, '91, I guess ... '91-'92 was my last year there. And again, when I left, I didn't kind of know what I wanted in terms of a call so I took an interim. And somewhere along, just in the few years in there, it ... and I was sick of doing interims and thinking, "Why can't I get a call? Is there something wrong with me?" and whatever. Somewhere along the way it occurred to me, "I think I'm meant to do interim. I'm a damn good interim, and I actually like working

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with these rather small, inglorious churches that really ... I mean, I think they deserve a lot of ... a lot of help and good care to sort themselves out after years and years and years of faithful ministry and whatever problems they've got. They deserve better than just, you know, just die or something."

So that turned out to be very interesting, and that was really ... I think that was really my calling in ministry. To be an interim. So that's been the most exciting part of my ministry in the last—the last turn of the ... it'd be twenty years or so that I spent in interim, basically. I find it a very exciting ministry, it's probably past its heyday now, I think, because the amount of change is so enormous that you just can't ... I think it's almost a luxury model, too. Well ... it just is too intense and too complicated for everybody to do.

MI: Are you retired now?

JC: Yeah. Yeah, I ran into serious health problems about ten years ago and I can't work.

But some of the good things that came out of that: when I started doing interim in 1985—my first interim in Toronto—there really wasn't any formal understanding of it. There was no collected wisdom about it. The Interim Ministry Network in the States was just starting then. A lot of people realized that when a church is in trouble, or even, just basically, when a church finishes a longish pastorate, something needs to happen to help a new minister move in, because it seemed that a lot of times ministers were moving into congregations and, gee, it looked like it should work, but it would all fall apart in a few years. And it would fall apart, it would seem, not because of that person and what was going on with that minister but because of leftover issues from before.

48:03

So the idea of having a space, an interim between pastors, was adopted, I think most formally, first by the Methodist Church in the US and the UMs had a rule that if a pastorate was longer than a certain amount, or if there had been trouble or something, at the discretion of the bishop, somebody would be put in there. It was presumably kind of a wiser, older minister, really to just kind of settle things down. But sometimes other things were happening, too, more interesting. So in 1985 when I did my first interim there wasn't much about it. I consulted a lot with John and BJ Klassen, who seemed very wise pastors to me, to think about, well, what happens with this and how might I deal with that, just fine. But it began to get more and more nuanced and when I started doing interim ministry here, there was—the Alban Institute had a lot more tools available and there were Canadian Interim Ministry networks that were able to kinda help people along, so it was getting more formalized. Very excitingly for me.

50:38

Around 2001, Joan McMurtry—and I sure hope she's on your list there somewhere—

MI: She is.

JC: She was the [Conference] Personnel Minister at the time and she pulled together a small group of people, myself included, to help develop an interim ministry training course called Building Skills in Transitional Ministry, which would serve to train interim ministers but also people working in transitional ministry because you could already see that lots of congregations were going through transition. Everybody needs now to have skills for helping congregations go through transitions. Which didn't used to be part of the game; church sort of existed and you went there and you did things and changed in some way, but it wasn't a whole sort of rapid change, but now, obviously, it is.

So we worked in building up a course and that, I think, is either the best or the second-best ministry project I was ever involved in—it was just enormous fun. The other big one I was involved in before that was the Celebrate God's Presence worship resource book: pulling together and editing the worship book. And that was a national resource. Gee that was fun.

MI: I bet you loved that!

JC: Oh, I did! I love liturgy, it was great, and I did ... the two sections I was responsible for: one was the Ash Wednesday to Easter Vigil and that was great, I had great fun with that, and the other was the marriage section. And we were able to—although nobody had legal same-sex marriage yet—we were able to include services ... all our services were perfectly adaptable for same-sex or heterosexual and we could ... we just matter-of-factly put in notes about, "Keep the records, because there is an expectation this may come," and "If you choose to do this," but it was kind of a nice, ironic way of doing it and I'm very grateful that we could offer that as a tool for the churches to do. So that was lovely; that was fun. We met in Toronto and here and everywhere else. It was good stuff; went on for several years.

MI: So, I have a couple questions.

JC: Yeah.

MI: You actually have covered a lot of the stuff on here, so that's pretty impressive. Let's see ... so we've talked about that, you've talked about what were the important issues, joys, challenges in your life.

JC: Mm hmm.

MI: You've mentioned a few of those.

JC: Yeah.

MI: Project or work you're particularly proud of: you just talked about that.

JC: Yup.

MI: One of the things that we're trying to trace is the idea of what effect your race or your class or your sexual orientation has had on your life—both your personal life and your ministry life.

JC: Hm.

MI: Or even in your participation in your church.

JC: Mm hmm, mm hmm. Well, you know, until ... so again, I need to bring my lesbianism into here. When I was in ... in the summer of 1991, the great and famous theologian Sallie McFague came to teach summer school at VST. And I fell in love with her. I was totally dumbfounded. Anyway, I did. What can I say? Unmistakably, head over heels, ass over teakettle, in love with her. So I suddenly had to think of myself as lesbian, which was very strange. It's not that I was innocent, I was quite involved in the pro-movement and so on and my lesbian friend Sylvia Dunston, was my very good friend and she died ... but ... she'd say, "Oh, Janet, I must fix you up with a good woman," and I'd say, "Well, you know ... I can't really fake it: I'm not ... sorry." There you are, just hadn't met the right woman yet. 54:18

So there I was, in love with Sallie. And what was interesting was that was, of course, post-1988. I guess ... I don't know why ... I mean, I was looking for a call. Did that influence that? I used to think maybe, but now I'm not so sure. Anyway, I'm glad it went the way it did because I think I was a better interim than I would have been in a called position and it gave me a whole ... I mean, interim was a whole, exciting career development angle that I hadn't really considered.

Many clergy, myself included, really did interim when there wasn't anything else available, or when you needed a break, as an interim for yourself. Well, that's not a bad thing, but to think of it very seriously as a professional calling ... it is a peculiar one. You do have to have flexibility and you also have to be very good at boundary setting and willing to tolerate shit wages and periods of unemployment, frankly. It's not been very well handled by the church. Although I did get to write the new Policies and Procedures thing but I think in the kerfuffle of the whole—the way the personal, administration and so on is changing, I think that's kind of got buried a bit. But we did hope and perhaps it's happening that the interim ministers will be able to get some protection from the really ... harshest effects of doing short-term employment. 57:33

One of the things that happened to me: in 2003, I was doing an interim, I was at Ellesmere and Willingdon Heights and my God, if you ever think of church as hopeless (laughing)... you just wait. Those two churches amazed me! At first I thought they were awful. I really had no respect for them. And you know what they did? They invited a United Church Korean congregation to be the new Willingdon Heights. I mean, they just let them take over the church. They became Willingdon Heights United Church—they all joined, they got memberships they got ... I wouldn't have predicted that in a million years. And little Ellesmere United Church, up in the hill, they sold their property and moved 57:57
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58:04

up to the Burnaby SFU campus.

MI: But they're still going.

JC: No, actually, it wasn't a big success: they're probably going to close, and I ... I don't know that Willingdon was a big success ... I don't know what success means, but those people reached out in the Spirit to do something I wouldn't have believed they would have done in a million years. The courage! You know? Just amazing. So you get to see amazing things like that.

59:24

2003 I was there in the—it turned out to be three years, which was really too long to just get things done. I had what was supposed to be routine surgery to have my thyroid removed, because I used to have a goitre and it wasn't settling down. And then I hemorrhaged after the surgery and I nearly bled to death and I had a heart attack and it was extremely traumatic and so on. I didn't ... I mean, it took me several years to realize I didn't really ever recover from that.

But then there were whole bunches of other things. I had my knees replaced, by that time my knees were ... and I'd thought I was recovered sufficiently from the thyroid surgery to do that, and I did. First one was fine, second one I never really got back together from, so it's just gone on and on and in 2008 I was diagnosed with ME [myalgic encephalomyelitis], which is one of a number of conditions which are sometimes grouped as chronic fatigue syndrome. And I can't really do more than ... like this enjoyable conversation will take all my energy for the day. So that's ... just the reality of it.

So I had to take retirement. And being an interim, because I was on contract ... and I was not on contract at the time that I had to retire—I couldn't get disability. Disability comes through your congregation. So there was no disability. So you just take unemployment and then I took early retirement, which takes an awful whack of your retirement [pension] off, but I really didn't want to go to be without any income at all. Sallie would've been okay with that—by that time we were certainly living together but ... so it's kind of rough. Everything runs by the pastoral charge so if you're not in a pastoral charge and pastoral call, it's kind of iffy, what happens.

MI: It's like the United Church kind of dropped the ball on that one.

JC: They really did ... they really did. So the new interim ministry policy—which is another big thing I've worked on and did manage to finish with quite a bit of help after I got ill—if it's going through, we're trying to take care of that so there's kind of a national compensatory system for people working on short-term contracts like that, that can get a contribution for disability insurance and so on.

MI: I know we're running out of time ... I just have a couple more questions. One of the things that came up is this idea of a defining moment. And so our question is: Can you remember an early defining moment that made you aware of gender inequality?

1:02:15

JC: Hm.

MI: And you kind of touched a little bit on it when you talked about how it was shocking to you that a woman could be an elder.

Yeah ... yeah ... yeah. I don't know if I ... I just remember—I must have been six or seven or something like that, eh—I just remembered that, but I don't know that I was shocked at it. I was shocked at there being a woman elder ... I mean (chuckles).

I think it hit me more in the working world, especially in Africa. I was at the United Nations Development Program office and my boss was thoroughly sexist and I realized that he had no intention of giving me any work to do that was of any significance. I was seconded from CIDA; the idea was I would ... you know, as a bright, young aid administration foreign service type person, I would get a little field exposure, which is really good, and do some work there and learn about the working of the UN, then come back and be fast-tracked on a nice career to ... whatever. [I'm] thinking, probably part of the Harper Government (laughs).

MI: Yay! (sarcastically)

JC: Whoopee.

MI: Oops, back up the opinion, I'm not supposed to have those.

JC: You're not supposed have opinions.

Well, anyway, he did away with CIDA, so it's gone now.

You know, that boss was really difficult. And I think it made the work—this sounds awful—the work was terribly boring. I mean, trying to look like I was actually doing something. And then the stuff I was given—like, reorganize the archives: I don't know how to do that! I had no training in that. The UN office in Kinshasa was huge, 'cause they had, you know, there was a civil war there early in the sixties, and the UN really ran the country for a time. So they had a huge office and all kinds of files—I had no idea what was important to keep. Could've—ho, man—you throw it all out. I had no idea. It was just stupid that ... and I realized after a bit looking at a colleague of similar age and rank, who happened to be male, that that was really what that was about. And there wasn't anything I could do about it. That was probably the most ... but I think I also had a lot of pride in being strong and intelligent and healthy and nobody was gonna put me down. So a lot of times I think I just nailed them to the floor rather than ... (laughs). I don't know.

In some ways I thought of the feminist movement as being kind of a victim's movement and I didn't need that, I didn't want—nobody had put me down as a woman, or if they did, they didn't get away with it for long. A kind of pride in that that probably isn't useful to the movement.

MI: Did you have any problems in the church? With the idea of gender equality or inequality?

JC: Well, certainly in Toronto when I was finished my doctorate and kind of thinking, "What comes next?" There were no women occupying their own pulpits, single pulpits, in Toronto—in the whole of the Toronto Conference. I was—I think I was the first ... Jean Marmora(?) may have been before me or just the same time. One of my real proud things in my interim—the three interims I did in the Toronto area—in two of them I was succeeded by a woman. And I don't think that would have happened without having a female interim in there. So that was one of the strategies; some of the US churches were doing that quite consciously: they were putting in women interims knowing that people would think, "Oh, well, it's only an interim, we can live with her for a year or two or whatever, not that we'd ever call one."

But when I was presented to the congregation that sponsored me—which was Trinity United Kitchener, in 1974, when I got back from Africa—the minister there, Frank Morgan, presented me to the official board, which was like 120 people, most of them men, not all of them ... he presented me and they had to vote on me and whatever, and I said to them—I had a minute to sort of say something about myself—and I said, "Do you have any questions about women in ministry or whatever?" and one of the fellows from the back said, "Well, we'll support you but we'd never call you." So, well, that's clear and the assistant minister, who was a sweet little old guy, a retired assistant, once made a comment to me, "They didn't think they wanted women in the pulpit—there'd be, like, topless dances in the pulpit."

MI: What? (Laughter)

JC: Topless dances in the pulpit or something ... So I said something about well, there were few well-hung guys in there ...

MI: (Laughter)

JC: The minister who was ... the minister, Frank Morgan, he was quite amused at the whole exchange. Yeah, there were things like that which was really ... I must admit I didn't feel particularly threatened because they didn't actually threaten me, they didn't seem to have power over me. I think the kind of sexism I ran into at VST, that destroyed my academic career and had thrown out two other women before me, was very ... it was more subtle and more scary and left me feeling really violated. That was long after these things were not supposed to be such an issue.

MI: I've heard that from a few women, actually.

JC: Yes, it's been a very hard place for women. Very, very hard. But ... what's his name? ... Bud Phillips you know, who was the principal at one point ... anyway, he, bless him—after I had been savaged in my review and was sort of in total,

stunned disbelief—he managed to get the appeal for me, really instigated it, by saying, “You know, we’ve had such problems with the women we’ve hired; we work so hard to hire them and now we’ve had three very different women in this position and you know, they’ve all had problems. And I wonder if maybe we’re the problem.” (Laughs). Good for him, yeah. ‘Cause Morar Murray Hayes and ... what’s her name ... Wier, something Wier, and me, we’d all kind of come to grief there. But it’s a cultural thing there that’s very surprising.

They got a notation from The Association of Theological Schools for the way they handled my review and my departure because it was so badly done and you think ... Churches are like that. Small institutions have a problem ... they think their smallness is a virtue, which indeed it is: we can all be one happy family, until we’re not so happy, and then we’re like one dysfunctional family and we don’t do so well ... There’s where fair, external structure and stuff really helps, because you get to say, “Let’s go by the book for a while, at least, and see how this will do.” And they were not following proper labour practices, sort of thing. Joan McMurtry was a big help to me in that. She wrote a couple of good letters. Anyway, it was a tough one. You keep running across it, and even now I think people do run across it.

MI: Every now and then.

JC: Yeah, I always wonder what ... there’s sort of a good ... (vacuum cleaner noise interruption) We should get going. Grab your stuff, let’s go. (Movement)

MI: One of the last questions I have is: what direction do you hope the church will take in the future? 1:13:12

JC: Hm. That’s a big question. Well, I hope it’ll find a way past its fixation with the pastorate and the congregation, with church buildings and full-time paid ministry. I guess partly just because I think that’s a disappearing model. Also, I think it’s a limited model and it served its purpose well, but for a lot of the church: time to move on. I think it still will exist, you know, churches with congregations, some of them good, some of them not so good, and all of those things. I mean, there will be plenty of variety there. But I’m most excited about being able to move into small, mission focused groups who might use all sorts of leadership models.

I think you do need leadership—I’m very much a realist about organizational issues: having worked a long time on Ecclesiology, I notice how bad the church can be, at times. And sometimes it’s at its worst when it has no structure. People think structure is the problem—I’m not sure about that. It can be a burden, but it also is a ... a help, in many cases. So I hope to see a good, lively mix of things, where everybody doesn’t get forced into the one model or another, but that we can learn to support different models, and that’s hard. We’ve been quite rigid about the models of ministry that are central to our church experience, but I wouldn’t like to see that continued. So kind of freeing of the spirit that will allow us to move into various different things.

I think the ... I mean, I don't know if it grows, if anything grows at this time as a church, I don't know, and I don't know if that matters—what matters is the mission and what matters is that the mission of God continues—whether it bears the name of United Church of Canada or even Christian, I'm not sure is central. I think we're in a very uncomfortable, transitional time that is not gonna be anything but very uncomfortable for quite a while. And I think a lot of congregations, which we have made the central focus of the church, are in extreme pain and we don't ... most of us don't react very well when we're under extreme stress.

So all kinds of not very good things going on. There are some clear temptations already, I think, as we gain a lot of money from sale of church buildings, and that's happening in various places. What we're gonna do with that money, you know, the temptation to buy stability, to buy ... to conserve large amounts of past ... I don't know. So that's one of the issues, and I think as more and more congregations hit those painful points, the issues of money are gonna become more and more difficult to handle. So I see that as being probably dominating the next fifteen, twenty years maybe, till we sort out who's left and what there is.

MI: Okay, I have one more question for you: Looking over the last eighty years, what are some lessons that you would like to give to future generations. What would you like them to know? 1:17:59

JC: Future generations in the church, you mean? Or just future generations in general?

MI: Either, or.

JC: Goodness. I'm not sure if I have anything profound to say. (Laughter)

MI: Someone said chocolate.

JC: Well ... laugh, love ... I've been reading the Persian poet Hafiz for my spiritual gratification as well ... he talks about laughing a lot and loving beauty. One of my favourite quotes is: "God and I are like two very fat men in a very small boat and we keep bumping into each other and laughing." I like that. I think if we can keep bumping into God and laughing about it, that would be good.

MI: I like that, too.

JC: Yes.

MI: Okay, well, thank you very much, Janet. We have been talking for an hour and twenty minutes. This is the end of the interview on January 31st, 2014 with Janet Cawley.