



Making Room for Women Project

**Interview with Wendy Bily
August 9, 2020**



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Oral History Recording Summary

Interviewee: Wendy Bily (WB)

Interviewed by: Katherine Gear Chambers (KGC)

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Transcribed by: Katherine Gear Chambers

Auditor of Transcription: Wendy Bily

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00:02

KGC: Today is Sunday, August 9th, 2020, and I'm interviewing Wendy Bily for the Making Room for Women Project. Wendy, do I have your permission to proceed with this interview?

WB: You do, and my last name is pronounced "Beelee".

KGC: So, Wendy, could you tell me a bit about your early life, your family, your community, and your participation in the church. 00:25

WB: I'm Vancouver born. My mum and dad had a hardware store in East Vancouver on Kingsway. I was raised more or less as an only child, but I have a sister who's fifteen years older, and she was off married when I was very young. So, I was raised there. In thinking about some of your other questions, I was thinking it was a kind of lower middle-class background, I guess. My dad had been a farmer. And Mum and Dad shared the work pretty equally, so I always grew up thinking that women were very competent. My mum was very competent. She could cut glass and mix paint and do all the things the same as my dad could do. She also was a wonderful sew-er. So that was interesting, to think about that. So anyway, I went to the local schools. My involvement with the church was pretty small. I went I think only a year to Sunday School that I remember. Mum and I would go, I remember walking up at Easter, I don't remember going at Christmas, but Easter, holding her hand and wearing white gloves. And an Easter hat and a coat she had made me. Yeah, it was pretty wonderful. That was Beaconsfield United Church, which is no longer there. Well, the building I think is there. But the minister there, Duncan Chalmers, had an impact on me. I think he used to come into our store. So, I met him that way, too. And when I was exploring my call to go in for paid ministry, he was one of the people I went and talked to about that. He was at North Surrey United at that time. So that was pretty neat, that connection. And he just took that so seriously, that call, and helped me explore it. Anyway, that was part of my upbringing. It was a pretty typical church. I was thinking one of the church things that was important: when I went to high school at Gladstone, my locker mate was this really good-looking grade twelve student – I think I was in grade eleven or ten – anyway, and he went to High C. It was the first time I'd heard about High C, which was the United Church youth group kind of thing at that point. So, I thought, "Oh, ok, cute-looking guys like him are at High C, maybe I should explore." And you know, I don't actually remember going. I think I must have. Anyway, it sort of turned me back to think about the United Church a little bit. Anyway, one of the really influential things in high school that really had a huge impact on the course of my life, was I had thought I'd wanted to be a nurse. And my guidance counsellor in grade twelve ... I was sixteen when I graduated from grade twelve, and so I had to wait two years to go to a nursing school, and she said, "Well, why don't you go to university. They now have a nursing program at university." So, I could enter right away. So off I went to UBC, and that was pretty important. I've got friends from there that are lifelong friends, we've known each other over fifty years. And part of what was important in that is – several things – but we used to go over to the Student Union building, and over cinnamon buns and hot chocolate, talk about faith. And really, three of the five of them, I think that I

chummed with, were Christian. One a Baptist, one United Church. A couple of United Church. And we used to have these wonderful discussions. And really that became a place where my faith began. I think I said at that point, "Ok God, if you're really there, show me." Like it was a very beginning kind of faith. But then I started reading C.S. Lewis, and just different things, exploring, and so pretty influential. And when we graduated, off I went as a nurse to the Kootenays to be a public health nurse, and I was baptized there. In March of 1972. I think it was called Trinity United Church, and it turned out that the man who did that, Frank Baldock, was a student at what would become my home church in North Delta. Small world, right? Small world United Church. Anyway, I was involved in leading CGIT, and then I came back to Vancouver and my goal was to work in community mental health, so I did a year of inpatient psychiatry, emergency psychiatry, at VGH, and then ... I can't remember, something else, I'd done my year of public health. And so I was hired as a community mental health nurse in Burnaby. So, it was part of what would become my spiritual direction practice eventually, you know? I was an introvert, I am an introvert. I loved – and I recognized that in nursing school – I love one-on-one with people. And so that eventually kind of – I don't know if you've read Parker Palmer's *Let Your Life Speak*?

KGC: I've heard of it, but I haven't read it.

WB: It's a great little book. Anyway, he talks about noticing when you're younger what your passions are. And so, this one-to-one conversation passion of mine was when I was seventeen, eighteen, came around again in my early thirties, when I started with spiritual direction work. So, it's just lovely to see how the threads go through your life. Anyway, so I did health nursing, and bought a townhouse in North Delta. And I was lonely. And so, I walked down the street to Royal Heights United Church and it turned my life around again. I sat beside someone, Steve Sharpe, who happened to be the husband of the choir director, and said, "Do you want to join the choir?" So, next thing you know I'm singing in the choir, my faith is deepening in singing the songs, and the other sacred music we sang. A great preacher, old school Welsh preacher, Berwyn Roberts, showed me that you could use your brain and still be a Christian. That you didn't have to believe those miracles that didn't ... you know, actually make sense to my science degree person. So that was really important. And so, I just was involved more in leadership eventually. I led the youth group, sang in the choir, and then I was on the Session, back in the days when we did Session and Stewards and then an Official Board. And then at some point the choir director became a really good friend of mine and a really faithful Christian woman, Norma Sharpe. She said, "What's stopping you from recognizing your call?" And next thing you know, I was testing that out and kind of saying, "Ok God, if this is what you want for me, let me know." And God did. And I think that was in February of 1980. By September, I was an intended candidate and enrolled and started at VST. It was just wild.

KGC: Was it difficult to leave your nursing life and all of that behind, or were you so sure that this was your career and your call that it wasn't as difficult to make that transition?

WB: I was ready to change. And I experienced that when I finally stopped congregational ministry. I experienced a call away from – like, it was time to

leave nursing. And that happened in 2006 when I did my last congregational ministry. It was time to leave that, and then I went full time into spiritual direction work. Or, not full time, but as full as I could get it. So, both a call away from – so that was clear, I couldn't question that – and then off to VST, which was ... which was actually a wonderful experience. You had asked, or had a question about gender inequality. I'm not so sure this is an inequality, but a gender difference: one of the things in my first year at VST I realized, was that women know differently.

KGC: Yes. Yes. Absolutely.

WB: Yeah. And I had not really realized that before, or didn't own it, or wasn't as aware of it. So, I remember we were doing some philosophers or something, and really it just bored the heck out of me. I wasn't interested. There were these young ministry students who just had studied all that, and at some point I thought, "You know what I studied. I studied people's mental health, I worked in palliative care, I helped people with their dying, their families." I had all that body of knowing that they – they had their knowledge, but I also had mine. So, I was able to own that, and it made me feel smarter and ... yeah. I guess I always kind of felt competent, but more sure of what I knew and what I could offer. It was quite wonderful.

KGC: Did you find that the school and the faculty, as well as the other students, acknowledged and validated that form of knowledge as much as they did the other forms of knowledge that were more conventional?

WB: Not so much the staff I don't think, then. Maybe one of the profs. But we were into head knowledge, like we were learning Bible and History. I think the students did. There was another university nursing student who was there in my class, that was great. I had to think about that for a minute, but that was a long time ago. I graduated in '84. That is a long time ago.

KGC: It is. Were there other women in your class or did you find - ?

WB: Yes.

KGC: Ok. Did you find it was at any point isolating or difficult to go through ordination as a woman, or was there a strong community?

WB: No, there was a strong community. I think there were five of us ordained, nobody commissioned that year, in '84. And four of us were women.

KGC: Good. Great. Who were some of your role models or mentors during that period of your life?

WB: I think when I was experiencing my call, Vicky Obedkoff was a ministry student who did a year with us at Royal Heights, and it was the first time I realized a woman could be a minister. It was my first experience of that. So that was quite lovely. Otherwise, when I think about it – honestly, nobody really leaps to mind in terms of women, other women. I was thinking in terms of Bible, Lloyd Gaston was amazing. I thought, "Please God, let me be able to be as faithful to the text as he is." And he was a powerful preacher, so I'll always kind of carry that with me. Otherwise, you know, then I was just sent off. They did Transfer and 13:37

Settlement in those days, so off to Alberta I went. And I was thinking, of all the places I served, I was always the first woman in ministry.

KGC: Every single - ?!

WB: Every single time.

14:45

KGC: Oh, my goodness.

WB: Right through to 2006 – or '04 – was my last call to a place.

KGC: Right. And you were the first woman in 2006?

WB: Well, 2004 I accepted the position half time in Richmond Sea Island, and I was the first female clergy they had.

KGC: Wow. How did that go in all the congregations? Did it change the atmosphere, was there any tension, excitement?

WB: Was there? Hard to tell, really. I don't think any resistance. I did run into some at Ladner United at one point, when it was time to leave, I think.

KGC: In the 90s? Early 2000s?

WB: Yeah, I left in 2000. But I think not. My settlement charge in Vulcan, they had pictures of the ministers all down the wall, and they were all black and white lovely photographs, framed. And then, mine was around the corner – it was the next one – it was in colour. And the joke was, "you drove us around the bend." But it was said lovingly, and I think it was true – I did take them from a direction they were going that was a bit conservative United Church, in a different direction. And that was a good thing. And they were very accepting, and very prairie accepting.

One of the stories at Ladner United, where I was for thirteen years, there and St. Stephen's, was that one of the old farmers, dear Murray Davie, in the call meeting, which I of course wasn't a part of, said, "Well, but how will she be doing a funeral? Maybe she'll just be crying too much, or something."

KGC: Oh, no.

WB: Now, he became one of my biggest fans. Eventually. Yeah, he used to bring Mars bars in and say, "You're too skinny." And feed me Mars bars.

KGC: [Laughs] My gosh.

WB: I eventually did his funeral, you know. I would go up and visit his grave in Boundary Bay cemetery sometimes, and think, "Oh, dear Murray." Old school. But quite lovely, in the end. So, you know, I don't think I did experience any resistance that I was aware of.

KGC: How did it feel for you when you were just stepping into those positions, knowing that you were the first woman?

WB: Fine. I don't think it – it didn't really affect me. I was certainly aware, like I wore an alb. I was aware that people would see my dress or my clothing, so I just put that on and it put me into the role, for them as well as for me. But I would still get comments about, "Oh, I like your earrings," and I was thinking, "Okay, well I am a woman and I do wear earrings, and that's fine." Yeah... say a bit more about that question, that was kind of interesting. Or say it again.

KGC: How it felt to know that you were the first woman, stepping into it?

WB: I think mostly it was just when I was just starting out that it seemed to have some impact on me. Otherwise, I was just me. And they had called me. So obviously they wanted me. So, I went in with that sense of trust that we were going to build a relationship, and we did. So, it was good.

KGC: I'm glad that those were positive experiences. So, in terms of the jobs that you have had, can you sort of summarize or list where you were working and the roles that you had in each position.

WB: Now, I might forget that list because I don't have it in front of me -

KGC: I have it here.

WB: Maybe some highlights: so, when I was in Vulcan, I was there for three years. One of the joys of Vulcan was I was invited by one of my VST profs, Gerald Hobbs, to be on the editorial committee for the creation of a new hymn book supplement, Songs for a Gospel People. Which, you know, was a huge hit for B.C. and Alberta United Churches and really impacted the next generation of hymn books, bringing in music we had not had before. Klusmeier, the Strathdees, some other traditional music. So being on that committee was wonderful. I was rural, I was female, and I loved music. So, I kind of helped them tick off some boxes. And it was a delight to work with those people. So that's something I'm really proud of.

KGC: Yeah. And then after Vulcan you were at Ladner, which you've talked about.

WB: Yeah, Ladner St./ Stephen's, so a two-point charge. For thirteen years. I was thinking about that in preparation for today and thinking there were some wonderful joys out of that. One, being in a place thirteen years, they had a history of clergy being there a long time, so they settle in well, you know. I did two services every morning, travelling the miles in between. So, having been there so long, I got to experience the generations. So, for instance, I did Glenda and John's wedding, then I baptized their two boys, then when they were in their teens, I was involved in their confirmations. And just this summer, one of them got married. Unfortunately, he went where his wife-to-be's minister was, so I didn't get to be involved, but just that long history with people has been a real joy and a privilege. I've been around this community – I still live in Ladner – since '87. So, somebody will come up to me and say, "Oh, you did my Dad's funeral." Or, "Oh, you married me." I say, "actually, I didn't I might have done your service, but you married whomever," and have a little joke about that. It's a lovely sense of rootedness. In a way, it's what you might expect in a rural community, so that's been neat. There was another piece about that – hmm. Anyway. Oh, and then, St. Stephen's just closed this last November, and they invited me to be part of the closing service.

KGC: Beautiful.

WB: And it was. And the person that I did that with, who had been with them for the fall, was a classmate of mine, we were ordained the same day. So there, you know, I was able, the two of us together, to see these folks through their final service. It was immensely touching and moving for me, because I love them all.

KGC: And had you kept in touch with that classmate?

WB: I had not. Which was kind of interesting, so we reconnected. Yeah, that was good. And our lives of course had taken different paths, but it was still really good to be together with her. So that was Vulcan, and then Ladner/ St. Stephen's, then I was off for a year because I got ovarian cancer, and knew that I wanted to come back part time. So, then I did five years of part time in three different places. So, I went to Shiloh United Church, which then became part of the United Churches of New Westminster, which was a short-lived experiment in New West. We worked with Sixth Avenue and Queen's Avenue to become the United Churches of New Westminster. And that was great, I loved teaming. It was good to have that experience. And I was with a Taiwanese congregation, right, so that was a whole new experience for me, Shiloh.

KGC: Yeah, can you speak more about that?

WB: Yeah, they were like 95% Taiwanese folks. I learned a lot, I learned that without the language, you know, I had no idea about their culture. I had to have my sermons translated, so that was interesting to adapt in worship. I worked half time with a Taiwanese student from VST, and he really gave me some insights. Like, I knew nothing that was going on in the dynamics of the congregation, because I'm not part of that culture. It just showed me, I can think I know, but from the outside you really are an outsider. So, no assumptions, right. You can't make assumptions. And because of their particular culture, and I think it's sort of Asian culture more generalized, honour is really important and keeping face is really important. And so, they were not going to let me know what they didn't like or what was going wrong, so it was really a challenge.

KGC: Right, but it was out of respect for you?

WB: Yes, and not helpful, in the long run.

KGC: In the long run, yeah.

WB: It was good. So, I was there for a couple of years, and then I did one year at Renfrew United, and that was kind of neat because it was in East Van, although not my part of East Van, although it was kind of neat to go back. I was able to use my discernment skills from Spiritual Direction work to help them discern if it was time to close or not. So, that's what we spent the year doing. And they decided to close. So, someone else came in and helped them with that process. And then off I went to Richmond Sea Island, which then became Richmond United, and was with them for two years half-time. And again, it was good I had the Shiloh experience, because they welcomed into their building, somewhat guardedly, a group of Chinese Immigrants who then formed Richmond Chinese United Church, and they met just after our service, and so I got to know the ministers that were there, and we would try to do some services together. So, I

was really glad to have that experience in the Taiwanese Church. Anyway, then it became clear to me – for many, many years in there, at least ten years, I had been doing spiritual direction off on the side. I decided that I really wanted to try to do that more. And try to float a new position at the Conference, for the spiritual care of ministers. It didn't fly. They weren't ready to put money into that, but they did ... I think I had some impact, in that shortly after I had proposed a new position for that work – because I knew it was so important, because people were burning out. People are still burning out. They're going on medical leave left, right and center, all over. I'm still aware of that happening – And they started the Spiritual Care Network, and that was good. And I hope maybe I had a little bit of impact in raising awareness of that, and the need for something to be done. 'Cause that's always been a real passion of mine, because I know how hard it is to be in full-time ministry. It's draining on many, many levels. And I was in that time when there was no such thing as a sabbatical. I never had a sabbatical in thirty-some odd years of ministry. No sabbatical. It might have saved the position at Ladner United, but it didn't exist in those days. So that's another good piece that's come in. And another – this makes me think of another piece around that: so, from '06 – when did I retire? 2015 – for five years, I was allowed to put into my pension with the national church, and then they would not recognize spiritual direction as a valid ministry, and so I was not able to put more money into my pension. So, I got a reduced pension in the end. 27:23

KGC: Oh, that's very frustrating.

WB: Yeah. Oh yes, they were going to be looking into that, but I don't think they ever did. And I kind of gave up. So that was a piece on the national church level. But I think spiritual direction is more widely accepted now than it had been. Anyway, somewhere in there I went back to VST and did a little bit of some course work in their MATS program.

KGC: MATS?

WB: MATS: Master of Arts and Theological Studies, which was geared towards spiritual direction. So I did do some courses with Sheila Fodchuk, who was the head of that program, and she, for a period of time, was my spiritual director. So, that was good. Otherwise I was mentored with a group of people, both lay and clergy, in spiritual direction things. So, church-wise that was it, and so I stayed clear of Ladner United, even though I continue to live here. Mostly I attended worship at St. Stephen's after that. And then eventually I think I'd been away long enough that I checked out with the minister, Jim Short, at Ladner United, how he'd feel about my coming into the congregation, and so probably five or maybe six years ago now I started to worship with them. And two years ago I was offered to be the Minister Emerita there, so I wear that hat now. Which is kind of coming full circle, right?

KGC: Yes, it is.

WB: It's been good. So, I'm trying to think if there's been other involvement. I guess, while I was at Ladner United/ St. Stephen's, I was on the editorial committee for the United Church's magazine *The Gathering*. So that took me to Toronto every once in a while for meetings. That was a good experience, I did that for several 31:22

years. I also served eventually on the Conference Interview Board, which is now CAB, and chaired that for a few years. So that was good. And I suppose that followed up on my work with students. I had six field students doing their placements from VST, over the time I was at Ladner United, and loved having students. That was great. One of them, being Tim Stevenson who was, at that point, the first openly gay minister, and so the first openly gay student placement in the United Church, as far as I know. You can put me down for that one. So, Tim came for the fall. I was friends with him and Gary prior to that. And so that was really difficult, not the student placement but getting it okayed by the congregation. We had twenty people leave.

KGC: I heard, yeah.

WB: Twenty people. Twenty families.

KGC: Twenty families?

WB: Well, twenty people, I don't know. There was a bunch, who came because they did not, you know, believe that gay and lesbian people should be ordained. So, that was a really difficult time. Actually, I was ordained in '84, which was the year that the report on human sexuality came out, and in '88, which was the precursor to the '88 General Council, and I was ordained in '84, I went to a really conservative rural placement, and this is happening in ... so then I come back to Ladner, they had all these negative petitions against the ordination, and then I think it was 1990 or maybe '89, to bring a student in who was openly gay, that was a huge turnaround for that congregation. And I had a big part in that, both in education, probably in being female, like a difference – there was somebody who was a difference to what they were used to, plus some key lay people who spoke about their own transformation, their own change in heart. But the chair of the Board at the time and I worked really hard at pastoral care and education, and it changed, you know. And that church culture has changed 'cause of what we did.

KGC: How did you go about that education? What resources were you drawing on, or what were the conversations that needed to be happening and how could you use your experience to teach in that moment?

WB: Partly because I knew this was on the radar as a student at VST, I had done a paper, I did my Hebrew Bible major exegetical paper on the friendship between Jonathan and David. Which had taken me into all kinds of resources. So, I had done some really good Biblical work on it, so I was able to provide some Bible study that was, I think, helpful. Probably mostly it was just listening, and saying, "Well, you know, I know some gay people, they're just like regular people." And trying to help people see, because they trusted me enough, they could say, "Oh yeah, well my nephew, we don't talk about it much, but he's gay, too." For people to be able to bring it in to the open, I think. And in my preaching. People probably got sick of hearing that, because I would just say, you know, we're all made in the image of God, right. We're all God's beloved.

KGC: And you said that being a woman also helped in those conversations, that it was something different.

WB: I think so. I think so. I think it was easier for men to talk with me, probably, about that, then maybe to a man.

KGC: Why do you think that is?

WB: I don't know, because there's that guy thing that they've got to put up the masculine thing, rather than own what they're feeling. That's a bit of a stereotype, but it is true to some extent.

KGC: Absolutely.

WB: Yeah, so that was an important ... for that period of time, it was an important part of what we were about, working away at that. It's interesting, I hadn't thought about that in terms of my being female, but at the time the chair of the Board was also a woman. And so off we went, to these, to people's homes to visit with them and talk with them. We'd go in pairs sometimes just for...

KGC: For the support.

WB: The support, yeah. Because it was a confusing time for people. It was quite different, back in the '80s, than it is now. And then Tim came along, you know, and he didn't have horns and -

KGC: Yeah, he's Tim Stevenson.

WB: Yeah, he was just, you know. He'd wear his NDP button, people would want to talk about that more than anything else.

KGC: [Laughs] Fantastic. Did you find that in supporting Tim and the other students, were you able to draw on your experience being a woman in congregations that were accustomed to men in order to support Tim and others entering these congregations where there would be some resistance, or, in his case, quite a lot of resistance?

WB: I don't know, that's actually a complex question, I think.

KGC: Yeah, I mean the situations are very different for sure, but there may have been some overlap.

WB: I certainly, of the six students I had, I guess three were men and three were women. I don't know if we really – other than with Tim – I don't know if we addressed the issue, around the ordination issue. I don't really think so. I mean it was obviously an issue for Tim, because he was wondering, one, would he be ordained, and two, would a congregation accept him. And as it turned out, he went to St. Paul's. But I don't know if that was a huge part of our discussion, either. So, I would say no, it wasn't really something that we were talking about or being intentional about. And maybe I should have been, I don't know, or could have been, but I don't really think I was, too much. We were just trying to make it through, right.

KGC: Yeah, take it a step at a time.

WB: Yeah.

KGC: So, in terms of your volunteer involvements, I think you've listed a few already, but what were some highlights there, some things that stood out? 39:52

WB: Are you thinking in terms of the church?

KGC: Yes, but also beyond if there's something else that was quite formative.

WB: I know when I was at the end of my nursing time, we had had Dr. Kubler-Ross speak to us when we were at UBC nursing, and so the whole thing around death and dying was something that pulled me. And so, for a while, I did a lay person's training with Catholic Services Society in New West and was a visitor with people who were dying. And then, after my cancer experience, so in 2001 and probably 2002 and '03, I was a volunteer with the Canadian Cancer Society on their – they had a phone service, Cancer Connect I think it was called – and so I went through a training with them, too. Honestly, I could have taught it, it wasn't anything I didn't know, but basically it was good interpersonal skills stuff. Listening and such. Anyway, I would get matched with somebody else who was just entering into the ovarian cancer journey and I would try to do some support with them over the phone. So, I did that for a while. And then it got, you know, that I got to be done with cancer, put that away. So, volunteering. Around the church I do gardening, we have community garden beds out the back of Ladner United and I help weed. I do that regularly. And I also am the banner changer. Because they weren't being changed, and I thought, "this is driving me crazy." So, I also have made a banner, I am interested in the creativity of that, and trying to get some other ones made. So, we just finished making a new Pentecost one, which we couldn't hang in the church for Pentecost, but we were able to show on our Zoom worship, the design for a new Pentecost banner. So, that's all volunteer.

KGC: I think you also mentioned in your Bio form that you were the speaker for the Western Women's Conference?

WB: Oh yes! Thank you for bringing that up. That was a lovely time. Again, during the 90s, I don't remember what year, but there was quite a group at Ladner United who used to go to that, and so they, I guess, put my name forward, some who were on the planning team, and so I got to work with Keri Wehlander – well! What a treat! We worked for a year. We would meet about once a month for a year, we got to know each other pretty well. And she's so creative, and I'm pretty creative, and we put together the theme of Seasons of our Hearts. And we did the four seasons, and looked at spirituality and music and whatever, and the movements in our lives, in these four seasons. Anyway, it was one of the best experiences. It was just lovely. And there were like four hundred women there, it was terrific. And Geordie Roberts was the musician, who was wonderful. And if you can believe it, I did winter, Keri did spring, maybe spring and fall and I did summer – I don't remember – anyway, I did winter, and I remember standing up in front of all these women, and started by singing, with him playing for me, Gordon Lightfoot's "A Winter's Day" or "On a Snowy Winter..." whatever it is, I can't remember. But you would recognize it. And I thought, "I can't believe I did that, in front of all those people," and then proceeded to talk about the winters of our lives. That was terrific. And since then, Keri and I keep in touch a bit, and I'm just delighted to have gotten to 42:57

know her. And my aunt and cousin were at that conference from Calgary, which was so neat! And I got initiated, Keri and I got initiated, by this little group of women from Ladner United. You should have seen us. Anyway, they dressed us up in funny things and put hats on us.

KGC: Lovely! So, was there a strong sense of community during these conferences?

WB: Oh, yes. Yeah. And it carried over, at least into our congregation. A real strong sense of support and community.

KGC: Good. A place of openness, too?

WB: Oh, I think so. It was really – it was quite wonderful to have all those women together, all from the church, all doing their part, right. I mean that's a big thing we do now, "I'm doing my part," people showing signs on the TV, "I'm doing my part." Well, they didn't do that, but you just knew they were all doing their part. In UCWs, boards and teaching Sunday School and preaching and whatever. Women working together. It was quite lovely.

KGC: Did you feel there was a lot of support for the different levels of engagement? Was there a hierarchy between, you know, Sunday School teachers and preachers, or was there a mutual sense of all of the values of those contributions?

WB: You know, I'm not sure, but I think among women there was.

KGC: Good, yeah.

WB: I think so.

KGC: You felt supported by the community?

WB: I certainly did.

KGC: Good.

WB: I hope that over the years I was able to be supportive of people doing other work in the church.

KGC: Oh, I'm sure.

WB: I hope so. Because at Royal Heights I had been doing that work, right, and taught Sunday School, I had done the youth group.

KGC: Right, and sang in the choir.

WB: Sang in the choir. Loved the choir.

KGC: Lovely. Good, yeah. So, you knew how valuable and meaningful that was, in your life.

WB: Mmm hmmm.

KGC: Good. And so you've mentioned that you've done silent retreats, clergy retreats educational support

WB: Right, right. So, because I was doing spiritual direction work, and I was somewhat involved at Presbytery over the years, at Vancouver South Presbytery we did a support network visiting other people in paid ministry, trying to make sure, and providing one-day things. So, some other Presbyteries knew about that and I was invited to be the resource person for Fraser Presbytery in Westminster. At different times, these one-day things. But also, as part of my work, I led maybe three eight-day silent retreats. I've assisted on others, mostly at Bethlehem Retreat Center, near Nanaimo. And then I had done the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius, which is a forty-day experience. I did that when I was coming out of my cancer, so I finished my last treatment at the end of November 2000. In January of 2001, I went to Guelph to an Ignatian Centre, a farm, a 600 acre farm, and was there for the forty days to do the Exercises, which was wonderful. My mum had died in the fall, right in the middle of my cancer treatments, and so I spent a lot of time grieving. But, it gave the space for that, and to do that with Jesus, you know. To pray the life of Jesus and to bring together his experience, his passion and the suffering I was going through and had gone through, really deepened my faith, and helped. I learned lots of stuff from it, too, at a spiritual director level. And so that place is a place I go back to every other year or so, for retreat. I love walking the farm, and there's always good direction there, good food, they grow lots of their own food, and wonderful well water. A place of God, for me. Beautiful artwork.

KGC: Lovely.

WB: But we were talking about retreats. Oh, and then in the last few years I have been part of a group of spiritual directors – I don't know if I've mentioned this – we meet together for peer supervision.

KGC: Oh yeah, lovely.

WB: Yeah. And we do some education, you know, we read books, we do verbatims, which nobody likes to do. So, now we're a group of ten, men and women, who meet on Zoom once a month, not in the summer, and try to be accountable to each other for growing and for our work. And we get help. Anyway, that group at one point decided we wanted to support the spiritual lives of other people in a one-day-retreat, which was called The Gathering. It was started by Rev. Elly Bradley and his wife, Evie, and then we took over eventually, he's 87 now. And so, maybe six times a year, we would resource that. So, we'd do a one-day thing at Redeemer Lutheran Church at Granville and Twenty-Sixth, and so I've led those as well, and helped out. And it was great, we'd get United Church people from the North Shore, from Highlands, from different places, would come. Anglicans, Presbyterians, no church. It's been wonderful ... mostly women, again. But very supportive ...

KGC: Interesting.

WB: Very interesting, actually.

KGC: Yeah.

WB: I don't know why. What is that? That men don't want to come? Or that they do and there's not enough men, so they don't feel comfortable? There needs to be like a certain number for them to be comfortable? Because they certainly would

come to the clergy days through Presbyteries. I don't know. I don't know what that's about. Do you? [Laughs]

KGC: I don't, although in my experience, sometimes women are a bit more able to admit a need for help and direction and openness, but I don't know if that's true of the United Church culture, because it is in general quite an expressive place, so I don't know.

WB: Yeah. I'm not sure, either. But anyway, it was a good place for us as spiritual directors to be able to channel some of our directees to a place where they could get some other support for their faith. So, that's been good. One of the other places that I did some volunteer work – I guess you could call it that – in the last while, at St. Stephen's and at Ladner United was around M.A.I.D. 52:35

KGC: M.A.I.D.?

WB: Oh, the Medical Assistance in Dying.

KGC: Oh, yes, yes.

WB: When that was first coming out. So, the United Church did some papers on it, a theological paper, and an ethical paper, and so I led some discussion, a couple of discussion groups. Because I had worked in palliative care, and I've worked with people who had been dying, and their families, for a long, long time. And I've had deaths in my own family, my mum and dad have both died. So that was really, I was glad to do that, and it was really interesting just to have a connect. So, one of my ministry classmates from VST, Rob Oliphant, is a Liberal MP, and he was the co-chair who did the paper, or the bill, to introduce M.A.I.D. to Parliament.

KGC: Really?

WB: Yeah, so I thought, "Oh, Rob, I know Rob. There's Rob." So, this is one of Rob's documents, so I'm thinking, "I'll have a look at that." It was neat to have that connection.

KGC: Yeah, that's very important, as well.

WB: Yeah, and to be able to say, "This is a real person. Here's a United Church minister person who is behind this paper." That implies some good ethical judgement, some good theology.

KGC: Yes, absolutely. Some thought.

WB: So, that's another little piece of something that I've enjoyed doing. Every once in a while, something comes along that, as a retired person, I can get my teeth into, that's interesting to me. So now I've led my first Zoom worship, and I'm doing my very first Zoom communion on Labour Day weekend, because our minister's on holiday. 54:25

KGC: That's exciting!

WB: Well, that's different, right? So, I preached once so she could have a day off, because she was graduating, and you know there was no graduation – or, she

was supposed to be ordained that Sunday, and there was not a service. I thought, “you shouldn’t have to preach on the day you’re supposed to be ordained,” so I preached that day, and then a month or so later I led the service just so she could have a week off.

KGC: How has that gone? Has it gone well? Definitely been a challenge...

WB: It has, actually. I thought, you know, I can learn. It was interesting – I don’t know how our time is – oh, I guess we’re pretty -

KGC: We’re ok.

WB: I was just thinking, as some point I was looking at the people on the screen, on the gallery, and I stopped, and I said, “I’d like to see you nod your heads or something.”

KGC [Laughs]

WB: I really stopped the preaching and just spoke to them. And they did. And I would have said that if we had been in person, you know, I would have wanted some response, like, “I’m talking to you!”

KGC: Yeah, yeah. I guess they forget that there’s that interactive element.

WB: Yeah. So that was good.

KGC: Yeah. That is good.

WB: So.

KGC: So, what have been some of the important issues, joys and challenges in your life and a project or work you’re especially proud of. You’ve talked a bit about some of them. 56:12

WB: Yeah, I think we’ve done that. Around proud: Songs for Gospel People, the work around the ordination issue of the 80s, I’m proud of that, that was hard won. I think, I don’t know if ‘proud’ is the right word, but I’m really pleased that God has been able to use me to show compassion for folks in the congregations I’ve served. In some of the situations they’ve been in, of one kind and another. So, to be able to share God’s love for others, through those hospital visits and other kinds of caring. Other joys: leading worship. I was realizing that it’s a place I feel called to, I feel at home in, I feel humbled by, I love, like I love leading worship. I like the creativity of it, I like the Biblical work of it, and I just think, “Oh, thank you God! That you called me to this.”

KGC: Wonderful.

WB: Yeah. I really love that. So, and I think I talked about this, being part of a community for a long time, and the joys of relationships that continue. That’s been good. Probably those are the main things. Oh yeah, also, I guess this was a volunteer piece too, because I never got paid, I was on the Board of the United Church Health Services Society. It’s now dead. We killed it a year ago or so.

KGC: Oh, bad timing.

WB: Yeah. Yeah. By the time I got onto the Board – I think I was on for maybe four years, we had let go of being involved in the United Church hospitals in Bella Bella and Bella Coola, and still had our hand in Wrinch Memorial in Hazelton. So, we had some members on the Board who were in the community, only one Indigenous person, because others didn't want to come. Anyway, and a couple of clergy down here, some other people, and we would meet a couple of times a year and do conference calls otherwise. So, I learned about handwashing reports, and mostly doctors are the worst ones at not washing their hands!

KGC: Yeah, I've heard that.

WB: But it put my nursing and my ministry together for a period of time. And then at the end we were able to see it through to turn it over to Northern Health, which is where it should have been, to take the money and to put it into the United Church Foundation, where it's going to be serving, for instance, the Walking House, no, The House that Walks Around ... is that what it's called? It's through VST and the Indigenous program that Ray Eldred has put together. The church that walks ... I forget what it's called, but anyway. So, the money's going to good sources, good ministry. Anyways, so that was a great experience, too. I think quite different, towards the end of my time.

KGC: Very busy. You've been very, very busy.

WB: Not anymore, though.

KGC: Yeah, so what have you been passionate about and focused on the past five years, since you've -

WB: In the past little while?

1:00:28

KGC: Yeah.

WB: Well, I think trying to support the ministers at Ladner United and St. Stephen's, in whatever way I could. So, different ways. About the spiritual direction work. About my garden. I love to garden. Doing some family support. Yeah. I can't think what else.

KGC: That's quite a bit. You're still very connected.

WB: I love to sew, and I've been doing some design stuff. So, I designed a pattern for a housecoat. I redesigned a skirt into a skinny skirt, and a vest. That kind of creative piece, of trying different things, has been really fun. And making connections with people. So being in touch, especially in this last while, since we've done the Covid thing of calling up people. I did a few travel trips with Gerald Hobbs and Lynne McNaughton, which were wonderful, just wonderful. Anyway, the last one I roomed with somebody I didn't know. We've turned out to be friends, she's a retired Anglican clergy, lives on the island. So that's been fun, I talked to her yesterday. So, just trying to keep up those connections. I think as I look at all these things I wrote down, that's about all of them.

KGC: All of the pieces, yeah. I think we've touched on all of the work that can be, that's concrete. So, we have spoken about this before, but I was wondering if there was anything you wanted to add to the effect that your class, gender, all of that has had on your life and/or participation in the church.

1:02:41

WB: Oh, right. Do you know, that question just floored me. I thought, “Oh my gosh, I don’t think I’ve ever thought about that.”

KGC: Really.

WB: Yeah. Really. So, I was talking to a friend about it, who said, “Well, you’ve served mostly middle-class churches,” and I thought, “Yeah.” I don’t think that was intentional. On the other hand, when I first started out and for much of my ministry, women were not in major churches. They were not at St. Andrew’s-Wesley, as the lead minister. They still are not, right. Not as a lead minister. As you well know. And in Toronto. You know, you kind of keep an eye on that, on what’s happening with that. So that’s a gender, not a sexual orientation thing, but that’s a gender thing.

In terms of class, I think probably the biggest thing might be around my attitude around money, that would come from being lower middle-class upbringing. That you don’t spend what you don’t have. Or maybe that was just my mum and dad who had been through the depression. That depression era thinking. So, it was the church, I think most churches are pretty much in that place, too. They don’t want to go into debt. Although I guess some do, but none of the ones I’ve been in really do. I’ve certainly been aware of the congregations I’ve been in, and I think this is just United Church, is mostly a middle-class church. There are some professionals who are wealthy. There are lots of teachers and nurses and insurance agents and home makers and whatever else people do. Shop owners. And every congregation I served had one or two lawyers, one or two doctors maybe, but not a lot. So, I guess maybe the fact that I ended up in the United Church is a function of being middle class. Could be. I had never really intentionally thought about that.

And in terms of being white, gosh, I don’t know. You know, I was brought up in a – not entirely white world. My very next-door neighbours being brought up were Chinese; their living room window opened into my backyard. I could hear them when I was lying in bed at night playing mahjong. Down the street were the Hattoris who were the Japanese Canadians who had the bakery. So we were a mixed neighbourhood in East Vancouver, but fairly white, still. You know, Italian, British, but still pretty white. Oh, there was the Chinese restaurant on the corner, too, now that I think about it. So, it was all shops and stuff. But how did that impact me – you know I walked up to the United Church and I guess I just got connected to the local church, which was in the local neighbourhood, which was mostly white, although somewhat immigrant, right.

KGC: Right. Well, that definitely would have also impacted your time at the Taiwanese church.

WB: Yes. Well, we’ve talked about that.

KGC: We’ve talked about that, but yeah.

WB: In terms of being white. Interesting that they hired me.

KGC: Yeah, do you know if you were one of the first white ministers, or was that a pattern?

WB: No, there had been, I think that was the pattern. I'm trying to remember who was there before me, but I can't. But finally then, there was a Taiwanese student available, so that was new, too. And that was wonderful, he ended up being the minister at Amazing Grace United Church in Surrey, which was a Taiwanese Church. So that's about all I can say about that.

KGC: So we've touched on what's important to you in your life now, is there anything else you want to touch on that's giving you energy and joy, or meaningful work?

WB: What did you say?

KGC: Or any meaningful work?

WB: Or meaningful work. An important part of my day is that I call – on a very personal level – my sister every day, she has dementia. Lives in Aldergrove. So that's an important commitment, to talk to her. What's giving me joy right now is that the Canucks won on Friday!

KGC: [Laughs] Yes, that's giving a lot of us joy.

WB: [Laughs] I was so glad! Eleven seconds into OT. That was terrific. I really miss sports, I have missed sports. I love sports! I have been a hiker, a skier, a downhill skier, cross country skier, I love getting out in the woods. But the woods are a long way away now. They're where you live. And it's two bridges and two tunnels for me to get to the woods. And given the traffic, it's just a little too far these days. So, I go to the water, the beach. We have a beach not too far.

KGC: That's good.

WB: Now, there was a question about the direction about church, and I thought, "I have no idea." "What direction do you hope the church will take in the future?" Honest to goodness. I do hope that with the Black Lives Matter movement, if you can call it that, that that awareness being raised in our church both at the last General Council and now, that there is some work that continues on that and that it filters out through the church. Because just like your question about what effect does my class and my race have, that's not something I've thought about. And it's something the United Church needs to think about. Because lots of immigrants, for instance, don't come to the United Church. They come to the Catholic Church, they go to the – so what is it about us, that we're not as ... that we're just so middle class and white? How do we open ourselves? So, I think there's some work to be done there.

1:09:08

KGC: Yes, I think there's a lot of work to be done there.

WB: Yeah. So that's one piece. But certainly, in terms of ... you know, I love this United Church, right. I wouldn't want to be in any other denomination. And I'm proud of our work on sexual orientation issues, transgendered folks, there's lots that we've done well. I fear some of the social justice stuff is dropping off. We

used to be quite involved with concerns about El Salvador, Guatemala. Well, that stuff's still going on.

KGC: Yes, it is.

WB: Yeah. And here we are. So that would be another thing. And also, and I suppose this is many churches, but how do we involve families and children more, is a concern. So, I don't know how we do that. How we can be supportive.

KGC: Do you think that these changes can be made with the church maintaining the structure and the rhythms and the patterns that it's had, or do you think that there needs to be structural changes, or on what levels are these conversations needing to be had?

WB: I don't know. Certainly, at the local level, but maybe that's not enough, I think that's kind of the implication of your question, that there might be other layers. And really, because of the pandemic, our change to three courts has not really had a chance to filter down, I don't think. Like, what difference is that making to us? I'm not sure. I mean, I know that one of the differences it makes, not having Presbytery, is that ministers are not getting together anymore unless... so in some ways it's more isolating, which I think is not a good thing. But I mean, we're trying. But there's not the same support between or among lay clergy, other paid staff, in local areas. Like, we used to get together to talk, share ideas, share support. So that's a direction that's happening that is not good, I think.

KGC: In your recent conversations, what have you noticed about the way that the pandemic is affecting people's faith right? Is having an impact on people's faith?

WB: I think it's having a good impact, actually. Our Zoom worship is followed by a coffee hour, as I think many are, and we're doing significant sharing that we've never done before, in that time. I mean really significant sharing, every week. Now that's amongst maybe thirty people, twenty-five people, but it wouldn't have happened otherwise. And it is about faith, and it's ... we also had a great book study with another congregation. We did Henri Nouwen's *Genesee Diary*, and the sharing was deep, all on Zoom, you know. So, perhaps there's, because we're not doing the same busy-ness of the church, there's time for some more in-depth sharing. I know I needed to have a retreat, and I was able to do that on Zoom through an Ignatian Centre in Seattle.

KGC: Oh, that's very cool.

WB: Yeah, it was very cool. There were seventy-eight people from across the States and here in the Lower Mainland.

KGC: Wow!

WB: Yeah, it was quite wonderful. And there are others being offered, you know. Anyway, I think people are looking for places of refuge, and we have a phone tree, which we didn't have before. So, people are being phoned. So, this week I picked up that someone who had been diagnosed with cancer and hadn't, you know, didn't tell the minister of course, so I'm able to do that. So, we're able to pick up on some things and do some sharing: "So how is it?" Somebody of my

people works at Air Canada, she's in full PPE, you know, how *is* that? Just able to ... connect. And to pray for each other. Being in this for the long haul is ... Dr. Bonnie had not said that at the beginning. She lied, or she omitted.

KGC: She omitted, yes. Probably didn't want to shock us.

WB: She did omit. Wisely, I'm sure. If we'd known in March what we know now, we'd have all gone into shock.

KGC: Yeah, she would have had a lot of other problems on her hands.

WB: No kidding. But we're adjusting. I think it's going to shake us up as a church into doing other things, other ways. And we'll just see. If we go back into the building and we can't sing, what is that going to be like? So, nothing is the same. Except for God, right. Hopefully God is the same.

KGC: That's what faith is, yeah.

WB: Yeah. These have been great questions.

KGC: Good. Is there anything else you wanted to add or to share?

WB: I don't think so. I think that this is good. I hope that this has been ok.

KGC: Absolutely, yes. Thank you so much for making the time and for sharing so much.

WB: Well, thank you for asking. It's not often one gets to talk about one's vocation, and what it's meant and what it's been like, and it's been an amazing journey. I just am very, very grateful that God called me into this life, right.

KGC: Definitely a wide web of connection.

WB: Oh yeah, wonderful friends along the way, along the journey. And continuing to add new people into that. It's lively, right. And so, one of the things I'm praying for now is, "What are you wanting to call forth in me now, God?" Like, whether you're retired or not, it's always the question: what is my call? So, thank you, Katherine!

KGC: Thank *you* very much, Wendy. Thank you.

WB: Yeah, it's been great.

KGC: Yeah, it has. We'll be in touch. We'll send the interview transcripts, so if there's anything you want to omit or add or change, or misspelled -

WB: Oh really? Ok!

KGC: If I've missed something then yeah, you can work through that before we publish it.

WB: Ah. And how does it get published?

KGC: It will be – I'm just going to pause the re -