



the  
Lesbian,  
Gay,  
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## **Oral History Interview: Karen Doherty**

Interviewee: Karen Doherty

Interviewer: Doris Malkmus

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Transcribed by: Teresa Bergen\*

Doris M. This is Doris Malkmus interviewing Karen Doherty on December 10, 2004, at her home in Brooklyn. Karen, thank you so much for agreeing to interview with us for the Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Religious Archive Oral History Project. We're particularly delighted that you're agreeing to share the story of the Conference of Catholic Lesbians with us. Maybe to begin you could just tell us a little bit about where the idea for the CCL came from or how it came about.

Karen D. Thank you very much. And it's my honor. It started probably with a process in terms of making us aware that we needed to have a separate space for Catholic lesbians. And how it came about were really two ways. Number one, Jeannine Gramick, Sister Jeannine Gramick, held a retreat solely for Catholic lesbians in May of 1981. And it was really the first time that someone had attempted to gather just Catholic lesbians together to talk about our needs and who we were.

Doris M. And had she had to struggle to get some space to make that space for lesbians within the church? Because she was part of an Order. I think she was School Sisters of Notre Dame, wasn't she?

Karen D. She was School Sisters of Notre Dame, and in terms of her own history, she was awakened for the need for a ministry for gay men and for Catholic lesbians by a gay male friend, I think, that raised her attention that the church was very

oppressive to homosexuals. So Jeannine, that really became her ministry, her unique ministry. And outreached, I think as more of a figure of comfort in many ways than, a figure of the institutional church, that Catholic lesbians and gays can relate to—because we grew up with clergy people and still look to them for leadership and authority and vindication, validation. So I think especially in the early days of New Ways Ministry, Father Bob Nugent and Jeannine Gramick were so important because there was a clergy figure—a nun and a priest—that cared about us, that accepted us for who we were, and we could go to. So I think that was extremely important symbol, and irreplaceable symbol, for many gay and lesbian Catholics and also their families. Because their family looked to acceptance by the clergy. And you know that it wasn't a sin and the person wasn't sick, or was really a normal person. You know, was a normal person. That was really the first. That was the first outreach by the institutional church to lesbian and gay Catholics, particularly lesbian Catholics.

Doris M. And in the context of providing ministry to the rejected (and maybe could I use the word “sinful?”)—that’s where she found the authority within the church to respond to the needs of Catholic gay men and lesbians?

Karen D. Yes. Because she took a piece of church teaching, which is varied, sometimes it’s the punishment for the sin, and the emphasis on the sin. And sometimes it is the emphasis on Christ’s love. And Christ’s outreach to the people that had been rejected by institutional authority. And that is what New Ways Ministry really did, which was to take that piece of our Catholic heritage and amplify it to outreach to lesbians and gays and their families.

Doris M. I’m just wondering, before you talk more about this conference, about your own . . . the depths of your own Catholic experience. Can you say a few words about how you came to identify as a Catholic?

Karen D. Well, my own family; I went to public school. And I'm trying to think of my early, before this interview, my earliest form of religious rebellion. And I would think it was that as a public school kid (and we went to catechism class for communion after school), we would have to run the gauntlet of Catholic kids who would throw snowballs at us and fight and things like that. And I remember a boy throwing a snowball at me and hitting me in the face because they felt perfectly able to abuse the public school kids because they [public school kids] weren't as Catholic as them. And it was really something that the institutional church, meaning the priests and nuns, didn't look at until it really became an issue. And I remember when that boy hit me, I just dropped my books, there was just something that happened, and I said, "I'm not going to put up with this abuse anymore. This is it." And I remember grabbing him by his lapels and putting his face in the snow bank and all the other public school kids behind me getting in a big fight with the other Catholic school kids because we weren't going to put up with getting hit with snowballs anymore on the way to catechism class. And I remember we were all stood up in the classroom because anyone who fought or was in any way disobedient was punished. And I remember staring down at my dirty shoes and my ripped knee socks and this puddle that I was standing in, and just feeling miserable. But also feeling good that I just wasn't going to go along with things as they were anymore. And things changed. Because after that, the nuns put a stop to anymore abuse of public school kids by Catholic school kids. And what was interesting is that after we had that explosion, we started to interact more with the Catholic school kids and we started to break down the barriers between what it meant to be a Catholic in public school and what it meant to be a Catholic in parochial school. So it was interesting, out of that whole snowball fight there was a, I don't want to say an integration, but bridges were built.

Doris M. What a wonderful story.

Karen D. So that was, I would say the earliest beginnings of my beginning in CCL was a snowball fight.

Doris M. Were you, as a family, did you participate in all the Catholic Church rituals and masses and days of obligation?

Karen D. I would say yes and no, because I come from a mixed background. My mother converted. She was a Norwegian German and was raised Episcopalian and converted when she married my dad. But there were Catholics and Protestants on both sides of the family. So I would say that my heritage wasn't. . . was certainly a Catholic heritage, but it wasn't of a lot of the Catholic lore that so many Catholics seem to be brought up with. That it was more secular. And my father, who had gone to parochial school and had been an altar boy, was very adamant that my sister and I go to public school. Because he felt the level of education was better than parochial school. And one of the fights I had with my father was—for me, in terms of education, I would have preferred to have gone to parochial school in high school because I need to study in a more of a protected, calm environment, which public school was not.

Doris M. Where were you born and raised?

Karen D. I was born in Elizabeth, New Jersey, and raised in Princeton, New Jersey. And I finally ended up in a Catholic college. I went to Trinity College in Washington, DC. For women.

Doris M. Well, I'm asking all of that just because it gives such a rich background to the reasons that you were involved in forming the CCL. And maybe you could say a little bit more about how that came about.

Karen D. In Dignity, coming out, I also wanted to come out as Catholic. When I realized I was lesbian, I knew one of the most formidable pieces that I had to confront was my whole issue of being Catholic. Because it was such a, [my Catholic heritage] was very role-oriented in terms of women either becoming a wife and a mother or becoming a nun. And there were so many issues involved with sexuality. And one thing I needed to do in order, right away, was not to put it off to the side and not deal with it, but deal with it immediately. So I found Dignity.

Doris M. Where were you living then?

Karen D. I was living in Manhattan, on Water Street. And I found Dignity. And I have to say, I will always be grateful for them. And for the men and women, but primarily the men that founded Dignity, because it was such a place of refuge for many, many Catholic lesbians and gays that came out.

Doris M. Were you involved with other lesbian organizations in New York at that time?

Karen D. No, I was not. Not at all. So actually the first gay and lesbian organization I went to was Dignity.

Doris M. What was that like?

Karen D. It was wonderful for the first part. Which was when we . . . when you walked into a church and you saw in the pews people that were just like you—you know, homosexual, lesbian and gay people—is an overwhelming feeling. And I think especially twenty years ago, or twenty-five years ago when I did this, to go into a room, or go into a church that was filled with people like you, it broke down all the feeling of being alone. And it really addressed that. So I can't overemphasize

enough how important that was to go into a place where there were a lot of people like you.

Doris M. Can you remember about what year this was? Because of the context. Or maybe you could describe a little bit about the context of being gay in that particular time.

Karen D. Well, I came out in May of 1980. And that was when I also went to Dignity. I think that with the beginning, there was obviously a lot going on because of . . . the Stonewall [Riots] had been then—eleven years before. But there was a gigantic state of chaos in some ways, because feminism was really also a defining issue in terms of women. More than anything, I think.

Doris M. Had it affected you? Feminism?

Karen D. It certainly did in terms of all the battles I had with my mother and father over being a feminist. I think it did as a tremendous support in terms of determining my own life. But more than that, not living in a role. And I think that my role [in life] wasn't to be a mother or my role wasn't to be a wife. But feminism then also affected my impact in terms of lesbian. Because I didn't want to be in a role either as a butch or a femme. And the, I would say the—especially pre-Stonewall lesbians—were more divided into butches and femmes and having a very defined role. And it seems like that's coming back now, which amuses me in some ways. But I didn't want to be in a role. Whether it was in a heterosexual role or a lesbian role, and I think that was one thing about feminism that had made an impact at that point. With Dignity, feminism made a tremendous impact with that. Number One is that the women didn't want to be the women's auxiliary of Dignity; we wanted to not serve coffee and donuts, but to take an active role in the spiritual life of the community. So I think that was one. But the big issue was over the

issue of inclusive language: inclusive language from the pulpit, inclusive language from all of our prayers; women speaking, even women being able to speak. And I think what people don't realize now, because Dignity has changed, is when I went [1980], women didn't speak from the pulpit. Only men. And we really pressured and struggled to have the women deliver the homily. But the men would not permit it to be called a homily, because only men delivered homilies. So it was called a non-homily. So once a month we had a non-homily, which was the sermon delivered by a woman of our community. And I can't tell you how many fights there were over, you know, God being referred to as "He" and "She." Or even what we thought was sexist language from the Gospels being adapted to be inclusive for women. So actually the birth of CCL, and why we felt we needed to start a group for Catholic lesbians, was a lot over the issue of inclusivity—that we felt we were being excluded. Yes, we were accepted as lesbians, but we were not accepted as women. And we didn't have images of women and we didn't have words of women. And even a lot of the ways of worship, which we would have changed, you know, to be more inclusive or even the forms of prayer, were not wanted. Because, I think the issue with Dignity at that point was, "We are just the same as any other Catholic, we just happen to be homosexual." And that wasn't how it was for the lesbians in Dignity. We were *women* and *lesbians*.

Doris M. I noticed that some of the women who were involved in the first conference for CCL actually stayed pretty active in Dignity. I'm thinking of Beth Gorman in particular. Were there some women who were more comfortable with the patriarchal structure of Dignity at that time?

Karen D. I think there were some women, because it was such a, it was a fight, and I think there were some women that didn't want to necessarily get into a whole fight with that. So were there some women that were more comfortable [in Dignity]? Yes, I would say so. Or they were able to, which I could not do, because at that point—

and again, I'm going to go back to my younger self when I was twenty-nine, thirty years old—[I was] very passionate, very intense. Very idealistic. I mean, you have all that energy that a young person has. Not the perspective that everybody has tragedy and everybody has dull edges and you're a lot more understanding when you're older. Maybe they were, you know, already more understanding. Or maybe they had more of a tolerance to be able to live within that system than what I was able to do.

Doris M. So the age groups of the people in Dignity varied.

Karen D. Yes.

Doris M. Interesting.

Karen D. And I have to say too, not all of the men were very anti-feminist. I mean, some of the biggest feminists, more than other women, were some of the Dignity men. And I think that that has never come out. And there were some very, very strong supporters in Dignity among the men, to make things more inclusive. They really saw the injustice to women. But by and large, I think the people that were most misogynist in terms of women were ex-seminarians. Where men or priests, men that really saw (this is what I guess), that saw their place as being eroded or changed or tampered with by women gaining power in terms of words and imagery and speaking and everything else. And they didn't want that. So the bulk of the resistance to inclusiveness and feminism at the time that I went to Dignity was by priests and ex-seminarians.

Doris M. So, in the midst of this, you found out about Jeannine Gramick. Through Dignity, pretty much?



Karen D. Jeannine used, which was great, the chapters of Dignity, to disseminate her information. Because of course that was her natural audience. So it must have been through Dignity New York chapter that we found this invitation for Catholic lesbians to gather. And Jeannine had found (I think it was) a Carmelite convent, or a Carmelite community, near Philadelphia—and you’ll have to ask her which one, I can’t remember—that would host this gathering for Catholic lesbians. And I think it was probably not widely broadcast because the archdiocese, or whoever could have, would probably have tried to put some pressure on them for [it] not to happen. And you never get to thank anybody; it’s always too late. I would certainly thank those [Carmelite] women now. Because it was brave of them to do, because no one wanted, really, to host any gathering of Catholic lesbians. Particularly a Catholic institution. So that was great that we really had our start there.

Doris M. It might be a good time to say that Jeannine Gramick was ultimately asked, or decided to leave the School Sisters of Notre Dame [SSND} because of pressure to . . . not accept her work. And after she left the order, the order [SSND] decided to fund this series of oral history interviews out of respect for Jeannine.

Karen D. Oh, that’s great. She was, I think, I think, the Vatican and especially through the inquiry they had--which is really, I don’t know what the current name of it, but the old name of it was the Inquisition--had investigated both Jeannine and Bob Nugent and really hectoring them and harassing them to the point that she did have to leave her community, which was sad. But went to the School Sisters of Loretto, so she continues her ministry there.

Doris M. And can you tell us a little bit about this initial New Ways Ministry conference that you went to? It would have been in May of 1981?

Karen D. May of 1981. I remember I didn't particularly want to go. I can't remember why it was.

Doris M. Were you in a couple at the time?

Karen D. I was a couple with Christine Nusse. And she had been a Sister and had left her community. And I think that meeting with other Catholic lesbians in this environment was more important to her than it was to me. Because I was just kind of bumbling and rejectionist in some ways of the institutional church. And we went. I remember I met Allaire at that gathering. So that's where I met Allaire. And met Jeannine. And I would say of the people pivotal in CCL's history, there would be three. One would be Jeannine Gramick. And we would not have existed without Jeannine. So I would want to honor her that way. Another would be Mary Hunt. Who is really an articulate voice and a leader, and I think in many ways as a theologian paid the price for coming out as a Catholic lesbian. And I think we should never, ever forget that, because we are forever in her debt. And the other one is that person I was with at that time, Christine Nusse. Who was really one of the driving influences in organizing CCL. But also I think her great contribution was setting a spiritual base for CCL through her, through all the liturgies she developed. Because it's all wonderful to sit around in a circle and tell our coming out stories and have potlucks and all those kinds of things. But I think the transformative event for many people that came to a CCL meeting or CCL conference was through the liturgies and interacting and connecting with all the other women there in a spiritual setting. In a communal, liturgical setting. And when people would comment on the conference, I think the thing that meant the most to them was worshiping together as Catholic lesbians. So I think the three of them really are the great lights of CCL.

Doris M. Mmm. So at that first meeting, was it mostly non-liturgical? Would you say that it [the conference] was a way to discuss issues?

Karen D. I think it was, we evolved. It was very primitive and the goal was just to get people together.

Doris M. And that was Jeannine Gramick's role.

Karen D. Yes. Yes. Absolutely.

Doris M. And so how did it work? When you left there, were you determined to do it again? Or. . .

Karen D. No. But it left a seed in my mind; it really planted a seed. So that was where the seed was planted. And then we went back to Dignity. And then had another horrendous year of trying to, you know, implement some kind of feminist and women changes with very limited success and a lot of fighting. And I think we had hit a point after that . . . the fighting was eating up all of our energy and creativity. It was just negative. We were tired of doing that. And the other thing was we thought at this point in Dignity, even though they have a women's concerns group—a national one—it wasn't sufficient and it wasn't enough and it wasn't what we needed. And there was another woman in the group who really articulated [this]. She said, "Now it's time for us to withdraw and eat at our own table." Meaning we need to feed one another and we need to be with one another. And the food imagery was really great, because that's very much of a women's image. And I thought about that. We need to sit at our own table at this point. And that was the beginning, to get together and reach out for anyone we could find of Catholic lesbians that could come together to start to create a spiritual community with one another and for one another.

Doris M. So you were involved with Dignity New York. Were you also involved with Dignity at the national or regional level?

Karen D. I was not. Christine was. And again, I don't take away anything from the women there. But at that point, I don't think in Dignity's life women's issues were of a particular concern. They were very happy to have women—so it wasn't a men's only group. But it didn't address what nourishment or what expression, really, that women needed to have, or lesbians needed to have.

Doris M. I only mentioned it because it seems to me that you went from a New York group to a national vision pretty quickly.

Karen D. You know what it was, it wasn't deliberate. I have to say, if there's a work of the spirit; it was simply just going out to see whoever it was. There wasn't any plan. It was just trying to reach out to other Catholic lesbians. And it was for two needs. One was to be visible. Because we could not find one another if we weren't visible. We had to have visibility. And then the second was, and the other part of the dimension was we needed to have a spiritual life and spiritual community. So it was for visibility and for spirituality. We were also budding at that point. Although we didn't know what [we] were, [we knew] that being a Catholic lesbian itself was going to be a contribution to Catholicism in terms of bringing both together. And that there was a spirituality expressed through sexuality. And what would that be? And I think that was some of the writing and the thinking and the worshiping that came out in later years. We always tried to integrate the two—our sexuality and our spirituality. And that was one of the dynamics of CCL was the integration of both. Because for too often, in a lesbian community, you would deny your spirituality and your religious heritage and in Catholicism, you had to deny your womanhood in many ways, and also your lesbianism. So, I mean

it was a gigantic order, I think. But [in CCL we had] to try to integrate them both. And to try to live our lives as integrated Catholics and lesbians.

Doris M. Can you say more about how you went about organizing the CCL after the disappointment with Dignity—when you went back after the first New Ways Ministry conference?

Karen D. Well, we had to, we had to find out who was going to speak at the conference. We were going to have some conference and gathering. We found Kirkridge [Conference and Retreat Center], which was a retreat, Christian but nondenominational, retreat center in Bangor, Pennsylvania. And we actually chose that because we were afraid of being kicked out of a Catholic facility even if we could get one that would take us, which they probably would not. And the second is, we also had to be assured that the people that knew our names would protect them because at that point, most people, the vast majority of people, had to be closeted. There were married women, there were women whose families didn't know, there were women in the armed services. And we could not compromise their identity. So that was really a major issue for us. We had heard . . . word had gotten back to us that Archbishop Krol from Philadelphia had heard that we were going to be meeting in Pennsylvania and tried to put a stop to the conference. I think he had called Kirkridge and asked them to not host our conference. And they refused. So we had our first and second conferences at Kirkridge. They were a great group of people. And so we could be in a group together and then not have to worry about issues of . . . security issues.

Doris M. Were any of the women who came to the first conferences at Kirkridge not Catholic?

Karen D. I think a few may not have been if they were a spouse, you know, if they were a partner with a Catholic person, a Catholic woman, they may have come. But I would say by and large, most of the women there were Catholic. And most of the speakers were Catholic. I had, well, one of my heroes, actually, Teresa Kane gave the keynote address.

Doris M. Can you just say a couple of words about her?

Karen D. Yeah, I can, She really was a hero, I think, to many Catholic women, because she was a woman who really stood up to the pope.

Doris M. How did she do that?

Karen D. When he came to Washington, DC, I guess it was a year or two before, Teresa Kane read a statement to him about not admitting women to all the ministries of the church. Particularly the priestly ministry. And I think there were eight or nine other nuns or sisters that came with her and stood up in protest. And I was so impressed with her courage in confronting the ultimate authority in the Catholic Church for women. I said, this is who we need. And we wrote to her and asked her if she would keynote this address for us. I don't even know if a copy of the letter has survived. But she was really very brave and a role model and really someone who would have something to say to us about that. And she accepted.

Doris M. Even though it was for a group of lesbians.

Karen D. Well I know that Mary Hunt had mentioned that to me. So what I did was ask Mary Hunt to give the welcome—because Teresa Kane is not a Catholic lesbian—and asked Mary Hunt to give the welcome. And probably I can't remember a lot of Teresa Kane's address, but I do remember Mary Hunt giving

that welcome and saying, “For the first time in the history that we know of, we have gathered together as both Catholic and lesbian. So welcome to the world anew.”

Doris M. It must have been a very moving time.

Karen D. Oh, it was. It really was. I think for all of the people there, too.

Doris M. Were a lot of the people there integrated either with Dignity or with other organizations like the Women’s Ordination Conference?

Karen D. Yes. There were a lot of members, I think, of the Women’s Ordination Conference, including probably Marsie Silvestro, who had been instrumental in that. And I think Mary Hunt, although I can’t remember, but she was probably pretty active with Women’s Ordination Conference, now. So it was interesting. When we drew people and drew speakers, we drew them from New Ways Ministry, as Jeannine, but also I remember getting a hold of, I think her name was Sister Fidelis, from Women’s Ordination Conference, and saying, “Can you send a representative to the conference to talk about the whole issue of women’s ordination?” So, yes. And what it was, was Catholic lesbians like Mary Hunt and Marsie Silvestro that weren’t out, or weren’t encouraged to be out that much in Catholic women’s groups. And needed to be. Because they were giving a lot of themselves. And again, where spirituality and sexuality are intertwined and co-related, they could not say all of who they were.

Doris M. So can you, we’re talking about 1981, so for the previous maybe, I don’t know, five years or something, there were Catholic lesbians active in the kind of feminist end of reform groups for the church, and they weren’t really widely

acknowledged as lesbians. Was there a little homophobia, do you think, going on in those years?

Karen D. I think yes, I think it was. And also a lot of lesbians that were active in Catholic institutions like teachers or social service ministries. I mean, I think they would shut down if they lost the amount the lesbians, and still would, that are in the social service ministries—that are teachers, that are in the whole social justice movement, but remain closeted or remain silent because they're afraid of losing their job and losing a certain worthy purpose in which they're doing work, too.

Doris M. So as women came together at this first conference, they brought with them an awareness of how much they were contributing. Did they have a sense of the national extent of lesbians?

Karen D. No. Not at all.

Doris M. Can you say a little bit about what it was like for women to meet each other? For lesbians to meet each other at the first conference?

Karen D. I think the thrilling thing was—yes, meeting people from different states. And there was even different countries. I think there was a woman from Argentina that came. I don't know whatever became of her. And some women that came from Canada—so there was, in that first conference, an international dynamic or an international aspect that no one had even thought of at all. And I don't think, still thought much of. You know, we're still very American focused, though we try to be a little more international.

I think that Catholic lesbians have always been in a bind with Catholicism or with other women's institutions in that with other institutions there is a lot of prejudice toward Catholics. I think that it still remains. I think that we are the last



group that comedians can mock, that politicians can mock, that people can joke about and not even attempt to hide it. And I think that's because Catholics haven't put their foot down and said, "I am not going to let you make fun of me, let you make fun of my family and my heritage." For some reason, it may be rooted in the whole Catholic immigrant experience, we are still apologetic for who we are, or people don't know us to the extent. But I think we have permitted [ourselves] to be the butt of jokes. And we have not said anything. So I think there may even be, [Catholics who do] not want to be anti-Catholic, but I think there's a certain shame and reserve in terms of talking to people about being Catholic and what it means to us. And maybe anti-evangelical, I don't know, but I think it's a combination of fear and reserve. And Catholics haven't spoken enough to the outside world about what it means to be Catholic and why it's important. And why it's integral to who we are.

Doris M. So, if I understand you, within feminist circles it would be difficult to be straightforward about strong Catholic belief, about dignity, and not capital "D" Dignity, but just respect for your religious tradition as an integral part of who you were.

Karen D. Yes. And I think they have some good reasons for that, and they have some not so good reasons for that. Because they have made us, society and feminism have made Catholics very one-dimensional. And they have reduced that dimension to the pronouncements of some bishops. Not even all bishops, but some bishops. And then that has turned around and become the Catholic Church. And unfortunately, even for a lot of lesbian and gay Catholics, that has become the Catholic Church. And I would say the step that they, the part that they miss and they want to go back to is the connection with other people. And they want to be authentic. And I think that's the thing that you will hear: "I want to be authentic and I want to be whole. I'm not just Catholic. I'm not just lesbian. I'm both." And

when they were Catholic, they missed the lesbian part. And when they were lesbian, they missed the Catholic part. And I think that could also be with gay men, too. And I think what we were trying to do was to integrate both. And also have pride in both. You should be proud to be a lesbian. You should. It's a wonderful thing. And you should be proud to be Catholic, too. And it is a wonderful thing.

Doris M. Would you say that the women who got together in CCL had some fairly . . . . Were there some common threads about what part of Catholicism was very dear to them? Because, if I understand you right, it isn't the papal pronouncements and it isn't the patriarchy, but there is some essence of the Catholic experience . . . Did women share what that was? Were they able to articulate?

Karen D. I think they were. And what they missed was the community experience. And I know that is what I enjoy in terms of being in a parish today is being in the pew, being with other people. Praying with other people. You know, having a commonality of background and a commonality of prayer together. So I think, especially the women that came out of religious communities that left [their community], deeply, deeply missed the experience of community, and praying together and being with one another.

Doris M. And did CCL help provide that sense of praying together?

Karen D. I think that we did, because the meetings the CCL groups had, (but it was interesting—very much on a women's dimension, there was always like a potluck food dimension in terms of breaking bread together—but there was also a prayer dimension where groups had liturgies or prayer together. And different women often took turns developing a prayer, or developing worship together—which a lot of times, especially if [they] were not a religious, or former religious, people were

often happy to leave that to them—because they [women religious] had a comfort level in terms of leading people in prayer or developing prayer. Whereas women like myself, who were not of that religious formation background at all, were very uncomfortable with that. And really at a loss once we left the traditional prayers—and what on earth do we do?

Doris M. What did you do? What kind of—were the liturgies to the Goddess? Or did they reflect more of a Catholic format?

Karen D. One thing that we. . . well, I would have to say both. And it wasn't to the Goddess. Because we were always very aware of our Catholic heritage and identity. What we did was refer to God as "He and She." So I think there was more of a (which was very radical in those days, in starting to see God as a woman. Or God as having feminine principles as well as masculine ones), it was a little bit of, kind of a hodgepodge of feminism and traditional Catholicism and whatever we had or whatever happened to be important in your life at that point. So it was interesting.

Doris M. That can be a very creative time.

Karen D. It was.

Doris M. Were your thoughts on your—I want to use the word "theology" loosely—was it fertilized by women who were theologians in other traditions?

Karen D. I think by and large it came out of Catholic women, or Catholic lesbian women both, that were theologians. I think major influences were Mary Hunt. Rosemary Ruether was a major, major influence because of, because it is good to write your story, but it is also good, I think, and that is where the Catholic comes, with the

teaching, to write, to see scripture in a scholarly, interpretive way. And I think, we don't hear their names as much—Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza. And there were some other Catholic women theologians, religious and non religious, that seriously approached scripture from a feminist perspective. And they had a major, major impact on Catholic women's thought and Catholic lesbian thought.

But the other one, the other group that had a major impact, was Starhawk. (Short silence) And a lot of our liturgies, in the early days, we read all the Starhawk books. And never met her, but we incorporated a lot of her thinking and the way she looked at the world and how she constructed liturgies and way of prayer, were incorporated into the early CCL liturgies and the conference liturgy. So she was a tremendous influence on us. And also the whole issue of creation spirituality that came out with Matthew Fox. That it wasn't original sin, it was original blessing. And starting to change our perspective a little bit in terms of the judgmental sin to what is wonderful. You know, what was the blessing. So I would say those were three influences, really.

(End Tape One, Side A. Begin Side B.)

Doris M. Karen, you were just talking about the influences on the early liturgies of Catholic women. Can you say more about it?

Karen D. Yes. And there was one other major influence, too. There were some women Episcopalians that were ordained as priests. And I think this was a little earlier than CCL, but certainly fresh in our mind. And one of them was Carter Heyward. It had a tremendous impact on Catholic lesbians to see the ordination of women in a faith very close to our own. And Carter had come out, I think, as lesbian, soon after that or early after that. And she was a tremendous role model for us. There was also a group of Christian lesbians, and they did invite CCL to become a member. So we were a charter member of CLOUT. Which is Christian Lesbians

Out Together. Which was another sister group, also dedicated to being Christian and out. So they were a tremendous—I wouldn't say they were a tremendous influence, but they were there. They were a support. They were moral support.

Doris M. Did some CCL members belong to CLOUT, and vice versa?

Karen D. Yes. So there was integration there. But CLOUT was primarily not Catholic, but Methodist, Presbyterian, and I think to some degree maybe Episcopalian or Lutheran. But I think primarily Methodist and Presbyterian.

Doris M. It had a pretty Protestant tone to it?

Karen D. Yes. And I think, again, one of the differences in terms of Catholicism was the whole issue of ordination. Ordination was a prominent issue for Catholic lesbians. We're happy for our Protestant sisters that could be ordained, although they face their own host of issues in terms of being out or not. But they did have ordination available to them, where Catholic lesbians who felt called to the priestly ministry could not be.

Doris M. They had two barriers. One was being a woman, and one was being gay.

Karen D. Right. And that was to impact in some way the leadership of Catholic lesbians. Because many of those women did feel called to ordination, like Mari Castellanos, (who is, I think, a tremendously spiritual person. I would say she is even a holy person. She's a wonderfully warm person. Being with Mari is like standing close to a warm sun. She's one of those rare people that will make you feel good. It has been a tremendous loss to Catholicism that we lost Mari as a priest. And it will always make me sad); she had a calling within her to serve, you

know, to serve as a priest. To minister, to be prophetic, to teach. To administer the sacraments. And that was not available to her as a Catholic woman.

Doris M. Were there other women in CCL that could express that same feeling?

Karen D. What they did, either they compromised as best they could and led a CCL group or served in some capacity like that. But many Catholic women that felt the call to ordination left, and became either Episcopalians or went to more women-centered religions where they could lead a group of women. Really in administering sacraments or designing religious rituals. And that whole section of creativity in spirituality was closed to them in Catholicism. And I think it was a terrible interior struggle or fight or burden or whatever, that they just couldn't let go of. So they needed to follow their call to ordination, which meant leaving Catholicism.

Doris M. I remember reading that Mary Hunt expected when she graduated from the Jesuit college or theological seminary [she] expected that she might, or that women's ordination was a potential. That there was a moment at which it was sort of up in the air whether women would or would not be ordained. Do you remember anything about that?

Karen D. Probably not in the same way Mary did. Because I think that she was in a meeting that was before CCL. Prior to CCL, and even my whole involvement with the Church, where there was the first meeting of like, I think Women-Church had its roots in that—in Baltimore, of all places. That they brought a bunch of Catholic women together to discuss feminine issues or women in the Church. And I think at the beginning, there was a lot of hopefulness that the institutional Church (meaning more the bishops) would hear [that] these Catholic women were very sincere and were Catholic, but they were not whole in terms of they couldn't

express all of who they were in all the different kinds of ministries, including priestly ministry. And [then] there was the belief that there would be an understanding of that, and a change would come from that understanding.

Doris M. Can you say a little more about. . . Did you say Women-Church Convergence? Or—?

Karen D. There was a group, a coalition, actually, of Catholic women's groups called Women-Church Convergence. And that was started in the early, early 1980s, and brought together a bunch of different Catholic women's groups from all varieties and perspectives. CCL had . . . They were brought together, I think, to discuss these issues of feminism and the whole role of women in the Church. CCL had applied to join Women-Church Convergence shortly after we founded our group in 1983. And I remember, because I was there with one other woman from CCL, sitting out in some hallway while the groups of Women-Church Convergence *debated* whether or not they would admit the Conference for Catholic Lesbians. I remember being very angry, and again, this is the young person probably speaking, because at least a quarter, probably more, of the women debating whether they would admit lesbians were lesbian themselves. So the . . . I have found, like it or not, often the worst enemies of lesbian and gay Catholics are other lesbian and gay Catholics that are closeted. [They] are very fearful that any association or connection with out lesbians and gays [means] they're going to be spotted or their whole position will be compromised. And I think the fear was, "Will women stay away if lesbians are admitted because they don't want to be connected with them in any way, shape or form? Both lesbian and straight. And will that diminish the ability of the organization to function?" And there was a debate. I think that Mary Hunt was one of the really strident supporters of admitting CCL to Women-Church Convergence. I do believe several groups left,

including Black Catholic Sisters; [They] left, when we were admitted to Women-Church Convergence.

Doris M. What a painful rift.

Karen D. Yes. Yeah, really. Yes.

Doris M. (Pause) So you participated. Did they have regular meetings, or newsletters or conferences? How did . . . how were they organized? Briefly.

Karen D. They had a membership of organizations. And they held a conference every other year in which the members of the different groups would invite their members to attend. And [Women-Church Convergence] focused on, again, women's spirituality issues and issues of justice in the church and in society. And I think in terms of Women-Church Convergence, there was a drift from the early Eighties, where it was very Catholic focused and Catholic women's focused, to the end of the decade, maybe the beginning of the Nineties, when I more or less left, when it seemed to be very diffuse in terms of focusing more on justice issues, global justice issues. And I think there had been a philosophical evolution. How that came about, I don't know. What was originally focused on Catholic women in the Catholic church, [became a] tying all forms of oppression together, whether it was racism, anti-Semitism, anti, you know, misogyny, homophobia, whatever it would be. So it had broadened enormously. And there is probably great truth in terms of the connection of all oppressions with one another. But I think it becomes such a vaporous, philosophical [position], it becomes . . . You're almost in a cloud of unknowing at that point, wondering, "Who am I? What am I? What am I doing here? It is so overwhelming, I don't even know what to do." So I think a lot of the effectiveness of the organization, you know, fell away because it became so broad and so unfocused.



Doris M. We were talking just in general about organizations that were influential on CCL in its early years. Are there any others that we haven't talked about?

Karen D. Not I would say, not in the early years. It was Dignity, New Ways Ministry. [They] were primarily the major influences. At the very end, the end of the organization [CCL] as a group (which would have been really the beginning of the Nineties), A Call To Action.

Doris M. Maybe we could go through a little bit of the [CCL] history before we talk about A Call To Action, because that might flow kind of a little bit. And I would like to hear more about how CCL organized itself after its first conference. The first [CCL] conference was in . . . ?

Karen D. November of 1982.

Doris M. And it was just called the Conference of Catholic Lesbians at that point.

Karen D. It was called the Conference *for*—

Doris M. For Catholic—

Karen D. For Catholic Lesbians. Because it was a conference *for* Catholic Lesbians. And there was no plan, actually, ever, to have an organization after that. We were just going to have a conference for Catholic lesbians and come together, and that was it. There was no thought behind that. What happened, though, is that [in] the weeks following the Conference for Catholic Lesbians, there were many letters from women that could not come. [Letters] that expressed absolute sorrow that they couldn't get there. For whatever reason, whether it was, you know, money,

or they couldn't come out, or whatever. And there had been such a tremendous reaction by the women who had been there that [the conference] was a bringing together of, really, the two parts of themselves. So in the few months afterwards, it was actually in February of 1993 [1983], with all these letters and the mailing lists that we had, which I think was at least five or six hundred women at that point, we said, "Well, should we start a group and see where we go?" So we did. (Prolonged cough) And we couldn't figure out for the life of us what name to have. So we thought of the conference and the way it was a coming together of women. And we just kept the name, Conference for Catholic Lesbians. And then shortened it to CCL. So that was how the group started. And we thought we would publish a newsletter, which was Xeroxed, a Xerox copy [made] on somebody's Xerox machine at work; that was the newsletter. Because we were afraid to go to any kind of a public place to have it Xeroxed. And the other thing that we thought we would do is we wanted to recognize . . . because women are often asked to volunteer but are never paid for their work. So we said, "Okay, we're going to do something different. For the feature article of our newsletter, we're going to pay the writer fifty dollars. Because we want to, there's no reason why women can't start to be paid for the value of what they have to say." So that was one of the first things that CCL did, which was to pay our feature writer (at that point, it was donations and passing the hat to do it). We would not [work for nothing], we would have everyone ( in terms of subscription fee or the membership fee) pay. And we didn't know how to do a sliding scale, but we put in lesbian couples—there was a couple membership and an individual one. [Another] one if you were also retired or on disability and you didn't have the money. So in some ways, I think that we were really certainly right with our time, or ahead of our time, in how the membership structure was set up.

Doris M.      And I hear you say "we." Can you say a little bit about who was thrashing these ideas out and coming up with some sense of an organization?

Karen D. The first four organizers of the conference, the first conference, were Christine Nusse and myself; there was a woman, I cannot remember their last names now. Barbara. So when Chris and I wanted to start something, we got Barbara and Cathy together, and they were very instrumental; Allaire, who we knew from that meeting with Jeannine Gramick, and Allaire's lover Anne. So they were also involved; Mary Mendola, who had been one of the speakers, was also a good writer. Mary Mendola was involved with the founding of CCL; and that was kind of the first batch that I can remember that came together to talk about putting together a newsletter and what to do.

Doris M. Of that group who did the work? It seems to me that doing a newsletter would be a tremendous undertaking.

Karen D. Allaire did the first newsletter. Christine had found, she had gotten some kind of circular from the National Association of Female Executives. So based on their decentralized system, because the other thing that we wanted was more of a decentralized organization as opposed to a very centralized one, which Dignity had. So I think there was a little bit of, that was very good, but there was a little bit of reaction to [Dignity's formality] to not have chapters and bylaws and Robert's Rules of Order quoted every time that you tried to open your mouth. And to let people have what they needed to do and what would work for them versus a structure superimposed on the system. So the whole beginning was somewhat decentralized where the groups could organize and have their own say. The CCL groups that were encouraged to start and wanted to start were not given a charter or anything like that by the national organization. No, we didn't have formal structure like that. So it was very much of a connectedness, but each group could have its own flavor and own organizational structure.

Doris M. So the newsletter *was* the national organization, pretty much. And most of the groups were local and devised, in an autonomous way, how they would participate and identify themselves as Catholic lesbians.

Karen D. Right.

Doris M. And they [groups] didn't pay a fee or a membership fee to the national organization. The newsletter membership fee was, at the individual level, was how it was arranged?

Karen D. Yes. So it wasn't, it wasn't a group or a chapter membership at all.

Doris M. Was there a local New York group?

Karen D. There were two. Actually, the first group was founded in Philadelphia. So that was the first CCL group that was founded almost immediately after that first national conference. There were two groups in New York, one of which I belonged to and one of which I did not belong to. There was a group—and they were called the Home Group and the Center Group. And the Home Group was a group of women that met in each other's homes. And they were founded after the 1984 conference. As far as I do recall, they were really pivotal in the founding of that group. And they were a very closely knit group. They had a wonderful community, they really did, of parties and remembering anniversaries and birthdays. And it was a tremendous support, I think, for the women that were involved with that. And they also had a, certainly a liturgical celebration component to their group. What was different, though, and the reason the Center Group started, which was the one I was more involved with, is there was an evangelical part to me at that point that wanted to outreach to other Catholic lesbians. And the thing about [groups held in someone's] home, with home

security, is you don't know; you can't invite somebody that you don't know to your home. Because it can be very dangerous and you don't know who you're getting. So there was a tension in CCL in terms of being out, to be more [concerned with] outreach, to bring the good news, to be evangelical to the public versus the women that needed to have a place of sanctuary; they needed to have a place of safety that didn't . . . They had been vulnerable their whole life and now didn't want to be vulnerable. So they weren't outreaching. And I think in the New York area, there really was a tension between the two. The Center Group was the Lesbian and Gay Community Center on (I guess it was) Fifteenth Street. And what we did was have monthly meetings that were publicized in the center's bulletin, and that anybody could come into. So we reached a lot of women that way—[women] that found us through the Center. Or we could say, for people that wrote to us [from] the New York area, "Here is a place where you can come."

Doris M. It sounds wonderful.

Karen D. Yeah.

Doris M. How else did you advertise CCL? Was it all word of mouth? Or through Dignity?

Karen D. It was, you know, the relations with Dignity thawed over the years. So that was very good. New Ways Ministry sent a lot of people. And we also advertised in a number of lesbian publications, most prominent of which was the *Lesbian Connection* in Michigan. And we found a lot of women throughout the United States through the *Lesbian Connection*. The other one was the *National Catholic Reporter*.

Doris M. They took your ad?

Karen D. They took our ad. Yes.

Doris M. (In surprise) What do you think of that?

Karen D. I think that was great. So a lot of people came in through both those things.

Doris M. I think it's interesting and ironic that NBC recently wouldn't take the United—

Karen D. Church of Christ?

Doris M. Church of Christ ad that was positive toward homosexuality, but the *Catholic Reporter* would.

Karen D. *National Catholic Reporter*. Yeah.

Doris M. So things are working along pretty well in the mid-1980s. And you've had two conferences by 1984. It seems to me that there's a tremendous amount of wonderful creative writing about being Catholic and lesbian. With the book by Barbara Zanotti Hope and another one by Nancy Manahan and I'm forgetting the name of the co-author [Rosemary Curb].

Karen D. And I can't remember, either. But I do remember. That was really a defining moment.

Doris M. *Breaking the Silence: Lesbian Nuns*.

Karen D. It was really defining. I'll just say I'm sorry I can't remember her co-author, but Nancy Manahan's book.

Doris M. Do you want to say something about how that affected CCL? Or energized it? Or how that was?

Karen D. I cannot remember what the controversy [was]; there was some controversy over Nancy Manahan's book. And I know that, I don't know if she was . . . what had happened? But I think that she was happy that she was welcomed as much as she was at CCL. She was a speaker at one of the conferences. She recruited [interviewees at CCL], because we made that available to her—to recruit authors for her book at the conferences and talk about it. So I thought that was great. I think that she really contributed a massive amount of—I don't want to say, “work,” [that] is the wrong thing, but it was breakthrough. And I had met a number of people, many of whom were anonymous, in her book, but I had met them. Especially an area like lesbian nuns, to show how their sexuality affected things and had an impact on them, was really much within the spirit or the mission of CCL. But I think she was a very brave woman to do that. The controversy that followed that book, though, was when the publisher sold some of those stories to, it was like *Penthouse* magazine.

Doris M. The *Forum*, yeah.

Karen D. Yeah, the *Forum*. Charlotte Doclar's story was sold. And I think there was another one sold. Or maybe she got *Ms. Magazine*. But I remember one of them was for a men's magazine. And we were *horrified* with that. The publisher's rationale had been that she would reach an audience that otherwise she wouldn't reach. There is probably some truth to that. So that, I don't take it away. But by and large to have something where people put their heart out there and then have it given to a men's magazine where primarily they're going to use it as a masturbation aid or a fantasy about Catholic lesbians, was kind of repugnant to the organization. And I do remember we wrote to the author and said—

Doris M. To Naiad Press?

Karen D. To Naiad Press. And said we were really disappointed in them that they had done this. And we didn't receive an answer, by the way. That I remember. That I recall.

Doris M. Wasn't the name of that book *Breaking Silence*?

Karen D. Yes.

Doris M. And what I remember [you saying] is that [during] the first year it was very important to keep the mailing list very secure. Is that starting to change by the time this book is published?

Karen D. I would say probably not really. I think more women are coming out and using their name. One thing I always did from the beginning of CCL and still do on the Web is to use my real name. Because I think ultimately we need to say exactly who we are. And, even if we're afraid, to stand up and say exactly who we are. Because the people that want to keep us silent or want to keep us hidden, if they take away our real name, are winning.

Doris M. So in CCL, there's every effort to protect the anonymity of people who need it or want it, and there's a role model of being out and open and courageous.

Karen D. Yeah. And still encouraging that, though. Meaning—you have to understand where people are and what they have to deal with in their life. And that ultimately it's up to each woman to make the decision. And when and if she wants to come out—but it was still there that the better way to be was to come out and be who you are. And I do now remember within the collective, because there are tensions



in any group, and there of course were tensions in our group, too, is that there was a tension between those of us who were out and those of us who were not out. And after awhile, it got to be tiring to me to be out, to use my name, to have the stress and the burden of being out and then other people not being out. And I think that that was a dynamic, I don't know how much it will ever be addressed, with lesbian women who are out versus lesbian women who are not out. Because often our complaint was, women would come to a lesbian group, find a lover, and disappear until they needed to find a lover again, and then they would come back to a lesbian group.

Doris M. This reminds me of similar, a related topic which is that, women [lesbians and bisexuals] who could pass in the early years, in the 1970s, 1980s were somehow held to be trying to use the heterosexual privilege that their looks would give them. And that was an issue. Was that an issue in CCL? Was bisexuality okay? Or was there tension around that as well?

Karen D. Well I think there was tension about that. Because I know in the early days, bisexuality was perceived as fence sitting and being able to indulge your sexual enjoyment with women, but able to run back and be a heterosexual and not have to worry about the condemnation lesbians had at that point. So yes, I would say that was an issue. Two stories particularly stand out in my mind from around that time period. One was in those early days, maybe less so now, many Catholic lesbians had been married, or were married. And I would also venture to say still, a lot of Catholic lesbians today are married. They didn't. . .

(Phone rings. Tape shuts off, resumes.)

Doris M. . . . interrupted by the phone. But you were saying?

Karen D. Okay. I was thinking of two stories that always stay with me from the CCL days. One was there was a woman who was married and she had several children and she was married to a captain of the army. And she was trying to decide what to do because she had a woman lover that she loved very much and wanted to be with, but she didn't want to leave her children. She loved her husband, but she wasn't in love with him. But she had a real problem with leaving her children. Which in those days, if a woman came out, you left your children. And she just was terribly, horribly torn. She had me to speak to, so I would call her. You know, we'd speak on the phone from time to time. And she had someone to talk to, so she wasn't alone. But she didn't know what she was going to do. And we had set up a time for me to give her a call. Again, so it couldn't be traced. So I called her, and her mother picked up the phone, and I just was about ready to die, because the woman knew who I was. She said, "I'm so and so's mother." And I said, "Okay. And we [your daughter and I] normally would be speaking at this time." And she said, "I want to tell you that my daughter decided for the sake of her children that she was going to give her marriage another try. And she and her husband and the children left the country. They went off on another assignment." But she said, "I wanted to tell you thank you very much for everything you did for my daughter. You were a tremendous comfort to her, and I will always remember you and I really—bless you for what you did with my daughter." And I said, "I want you to let her know that I will always think of her, and I hope things turn out for her." (crying as she tells story) And I think the sad part was so many women were in that position that they either followed the woman that they loved, and then they had to leave their children. Or they stayed with their children and they had to leave the woman they loved behind. And that was so painful and so horrible. There was story after story that was like that. But I thought of that mother who was so nice. And that rather than be abusive or nasty or anything like that on the phone—which I would have expected—but was really very kind and grateful. And I always wondered whatever became of that woman. But I hoped that she

was happy somewhere. The other story was, in terms of the bisexuality, a woman in one of the groups in CCL had been with her [woman] lover and had been a prominent member of the group, and then fell in love with a man. And left her lover and moved in with a man. She was cast out by her community; the lesbian community of friends who wanted nothing to do with her anymore. And we [Karen and her spouse] had a rental house at that point which we used to rent to this woman and her lover to go for the weekend. And she called me up and asked if she could go there with her boyfriend. And I said yes, that she could. And she really felt badly and she started to cry and said, "I really feel badly about how I treated you. Because particularly now I'm feeling, really getting, I was really cast out, thrown out. My friends don't speak to me anymore. All of these women that I was very close to have nothing to do with me anymore." And I said, "So often, that is what happened to us when we came out. That we were exactly the same person, but because we changed in terms of who we had a relationship with or had sex with or whatever, people didn't want anything to do with us anymore." And I said, "I think that's wrong." Because if we could accept a woman who has been straight all of her life and then goes into a relationship with a woman and becomes a lesbian, we can accept a lesbian who has been with women all of her life but has fallen in love with a man and chooses to pursue a relationship with him. And I think that is one area where many lesbians have changed these days, I don't know. But there was a real rigidity in terms of rejection that if a woman had a sexual relationship with a man or fell in love with a man, she was out. And that's exactly what happened to all of us generally when we came out as lesbian. Because we weren't with someone that our group thought we should be. We were thrown out.

Doris M. Those are very evocative stories. Was bisexuality more accepted as a way of being after a certain number of years? Or did that sort of "in or out" mentality persist?

Karen D. What I remember, it was more of an “in or out” mentality. My feeling was, except in very few cases, that we are all bisexual. And at some point, you know, we are somewhere on the scale, (gesturing by holding her hands apart) and at different points on that scale, depending on the stage in our life.

Doris M. Would you be willing to say a little bit more about the structure of the collective itself? The collective as sort of the governing or the work group for the national organization?

Karen D. The collective was, more or less, women from the New York area. Because we had to gather around in everybody’s homes to do the work together. So it wasn’t, you know, that groups sent representatives or there was any kind of a chapter structure at all. It was friends and people we knew, or people we met at conferences and thought they had something to contribute—whether it was a particular skill like newsletter editing or something else. So, that was the collective. There were different tasks assigned to different people. Some people kept membership lists; some people did the conference; some people edited the newsletter. So various and sundry organizational jobs were given out to the different collective members. If you were out, it may have impacted what you did. So the out ones did the conference, because they would have to be using their name for people to talk to or send things to. And people that weren’t out, perhaps did other things. Where there became a conflict in the later, in the life of the organization, in that the groups felt the collective members should be doing this or that. And the collective members, since it wasn’t an elective kind of a group, and volunteer work is a lot of work to begin with, it came to be, well, it came to be a sore point, a source of irritation, meaning we’re providing a service, but we can’t do everything people want. If you want to do something then you can get off your duff and you volunteer and do it. And I don’t know why, it became a

communication issue, probably. But there started to be some friction, not with all of the groups, with some of the groups, thinking the collective was trying to run them or dominate things; versus the collective saying, “We are tired.” You know, “We all work full time jobs. We have this volunteer commitment. Other people need to step forward and help.” Again, in the later years of the organization, we had even a hard time—we wanted people to feel empowered. So perhaps if they had to vote for the slate of collective members that they would do so. And what happened is the group fell apart because elected people, unless they feel a sense of mission and connected to the other people that are working, really don’t do anything. So the structure worked much better when people (we were open to anyone volunteering) but also when people knew one another best.

Doris M. It sounds like it would be a situation that was a set up for burning out.

Karen D. Yes. And the woman who I think has said it the best of anyone I’ve ever read is an author named Phyllis Chesler who talks about women’s inhumanity to women. I’m not quite sure why that is. I think there is, and I noticed it with CCL, there is a certain antagonism [toward] women that feel powerful. Or the whole issue of power. And I think there’s a whole issue of power that women weren’t comfortable with twenty years ago. Maybe they’re more comfortable with now, I don’t know. But I think there was, it was kind of a pulling up, pushing up, and a pulling down. There was an admiration, and there was also an antagonism to women they saw as powerful. And it may have a lot of tie-ins in terms of Catholicism, with the feeling of powerful and powerlessness, I don’t know. But I think so. And I think that the collective members after a while took on more of a paternal, maternal authority figure that again [they ] needed to accept and needed to support [less powerful women], as opposed to challenge and to be individual. I think there was a dynamic there that was probably bubbling under the surface and helped to burn the organization out, because after a while the leaders felt tired.

And the leaders didn't feel supported—like pecked at. And that was maybe where women, less than men, women didn't have the verbal skills to confront “but then we're still friends” or to disagree “and I still respect you”, that men seem to have. They can fight and then okay, we'll go off and have a drink together. It doesn't have to have [destructive implications for the relationship]. Women seem to have an edge of that—that if you disagree, you're rejecting. Well, not really. You're just disagreeing.

Doris M.      Interesting. So who did what kind of jobs in the collective?

Karen D.      Well, in the early, the newsletter editor, the first editor, was Allaire. The second editor was Pat. And she was from Florida.

Doris M.      All this time?

Karen D.      Yeah.

Doris M.      She stayed there?

Karen D.      She was there. What was interesting about Pat, and I can't remember how we found her, but she was a find. She did come to the conference in California. And her history had been is that she had been a former editor of *The Ladder*. Which was the publication of the Daughters of Bilitis.

Doris M.      Was she a local editor? Or the national. . . ?

Karen D.      She was a national editor.

Doris M.      What a skill to find!

Karen D. Yes. And so she was really, she was really excellent. She knew how to get a story; she did interviews. How to put the newsletter together. She was very, very good. And edited. Was a good editor. So she was fabulous.

Doris M. That was after 1986. That's when the conference in California was.

Karen D. Yes. So she was the editor from '86 through '90, around there. And in some ways, that was CCL's heyday. I would say from about '86 to maybe '90 or '91 was really CCL's heyday where there were about fifteen different groups throughout the United States. There were hundreds of members, probably 700 members, which is pretty good. And that didn't encompass all the people that were involved. Because a lot of people read *Images* that were not members of the CCL groups, since we didn't require people to be a member to attend the group. You know, they could do it or not. There may have been two members out of a 15-person or 16-person group.

Doris M. What sort of things do you know that the groups were doing in the heyday years?

Karen D. Well, they really provided a local presence for Catholic lesbians to get together. And I think one thing that's missed now (though CCL is on the, it exists on the Web) is the ability to actually meet in the same room among other Catholic lesbians. So that they did, and I think that is really a missing part. But that doesn't exist anymore.

Doris M. And they were also active in liturgies and in—but not branching off into political action. Is that happening around this time, too?

Karen D. There weren't, I don't remember, although there could be, I don't remember Catholic lesbians particularly being involved politically. We were a little in New York with the passage of the Gay Rights Act. Because I do remember when we were, I was certainly there and other people were there from Catholic groups to be a visible presence as the council was voting on that bill. And the two groups most actively protesting, ferociously kind of protesting that, were some of the Catholic groups and also Orthodox Jewish groups that did not want that bill to go through. So I remember being kind of in a clump with everybody, waiting as the bill passed. And it was a tremendous round of applause when it did pass.

Doris M. And that was the New York City Human Rights Ordinance?

Karen D. Yes. The other political piece that I remember, although I was not directly involved in, because I was ill at that point, was something called the Cathedral Project. Which some members of Dignity New York, and also some members of CCL were involved, you know, were involved in those protests. I can't exactly remember all that went on. I do remember that at some point in the cardinal's sermon, they [the protesters] would stand up. (it reminded me of Teresa Kane) and be a visible lesbian and gay presence in the cathedral. Which of course is very symbolic with Catholics in—American Catholics as well as Catholics in the New York area.

(Tape off. Tape resumes)

Doris M. It sounds like there's a lot of energy. A lot of wonderful stuff, and a lot of potential for burning out. Is this part of your own health crisis?

Karen D. I came down with something called chronic fatigue syndrome in 1987. And it is a devastating illness, because I literally had a fever for a year and a half. And lost a



little bit of the use of my right leg. But what it is is just overwhelming fatigue. And you get to a point where you become incapacitated. And that dovetailed at a time where I had been active [in political groups]. Even before Dignity, I had been active in the Sierra Club, [and active] with Dignity since 1980. And however strong you may be, unless you take the long distance view and become less emotionally involved, when you are passionate and intense and very emotionally involved, at some point I believe that you burn out. And I burned out. I burned out because of the illness and I burned out because I went through a breakup at that point. So that was involved.

Doris M. With Christine?

Karen D. With Christine. And, I just was burned out on trying to do so much and do a lot for Catholic lesbians. And again, it probably is me as much as anyone else—you don't mean to rub people the wrong. . .

(End Tape One, Side B. Begin Tape Two, Side A.)

Karen D. (Congested cough)

Doris M. Karen, you were just saying that you had a lot of personal energy going out, and not a lot coming back in and that you had chronic fatigue syndrome.

Karen D. So that had an impact on what I could do and was able to do with CCL. So it was around that time, after the '88 conference, especially, when I was very ill, that I stepped aside and was not actively involved in the organization. I was certainly there and present, but not taking the leadership role that I did at one point. And then after that, I became involved with my current partner. And we'll be together

actually 18 years this year, Dr. Dolores Mei. And she had a three-and-a-half year old son. So I thought after I had come out as a lesbian I wouldn't be having any children. Although I certainly did end up with a son. Lori has said she's happy she went to CCL to find the mother of her son, which she did. And I transitioned for many years from a Catholic lesbian activist to a Catholic lesbian hockey mom and Cub Scout Mom and mom. It took quite a few years to be able to cope with the illness and get back on my feet where my energy was more or less restored. But yes, that did have an impact—it seemed to me, and I don't know, maybe it was just fate. But illness, there had been a tremendous energy with a lot of the lesbian and gay movement. And I remember sitting at the board of Dignity New York when we voted the first grant to the Gay Mental Health Crisis to try to cope with an illness called Kaposi's sarcoma, which is what eventually became recognized as AIDS. And illness was certainly a galvanizing, organizing factor for many of the gay men in the Eighties. But it robbed the lesbian and gay community of a lot of people, too. So it's funny to see what things, [how] illness and trends will (play on), [will] effect the lesbian and gay movements, but it did.

Doris M. I'm hearing you say that you gave a tremendous amount to CCL over these years, with total volunteer status. And I remember that you also said that there was a need for women to nurture and sustain and feed each other. Do you personally see any way that you have found ways to nurture yourself as you do volunteer work and as you remain active?

Karen D. In some ways; it's always a pro and a con, as I am less emotionally open than I was. I think when I started CCL, and it may be because of the difference between being a young person and an older person, I just threw myself in it like throwing myself in a river. And I didn't have a lot of, you know—not boundaries, that's the wrong word—but I was very open. I think that, especially when you're in a situation like that, then you get hurt very easily. Whether the people intend it or

not. More likely, they don't. They don't mean to. But you just get hurt. And I think the accumulation of hurts builds up to the point that you either can become bitter or sour or disillusioned—this is a scenario that happens over and over with leaders; they give of themselves. We're very idealistic. We're very open. We're hurt. And then we have to stop and take a break. The difference now is—and again, that's the minus—I have a lot more common sense. I have a lot more understanding of human nature. But there's also, certainly a freshness and innocence and an openness that doesn't exist [anymore]. And that is too bad, too. But I guess with age, you lose one and you get the other.

Doris M. That's a wonderful way to put it, Karen. I am thinking about one thing we didn't talk about from the early time in 1984. There was a Coalition for Lesbian and Gay Rights that was in dialogue with Archbishop John O'Connor. And I know you took an important role in that. I wonder if you'd like to say anything about that.

Karen D. Well, it was certainly some moment in my life that I will certainly remember. I remember going into the building on Second Avenue where we were going to meet Cardinal O'Connor.

Doris M. Was it a papal property? I mean, did they own the building [where the meeting was to be held?

Karen D. Yes. I think, as a matter of fact, I think they're still there on Second Avenue. And we walked in as a group. And everybody, I have to say, was nervous, particularly the Catholics in the group. And I remember there was a man who said to us, "Good luck." He must have been, again, probably he was a closeted gay man and knew we were going up to meet with Cardinal O'Connor.

Doris M. And what were you meeting with him about?

Karen D. We were going to talk to him, I think, just about the issues of the Catholic Church and lesbian and gay civil rights in New York, actually. Because the Church had been very actively opposed to them. So I remember being in a room, and there was a very long table, and I happened to be the person just about next to Cardinal O'Connor when he was going to be seated. I saw him striding down the hall and he looked grim. You know, he really looked grim. And I do not know what possessed me to this day, but I winked at him. And he winked back. So he came in—(laughs) it was just one of those moments. I have no idea why I did that. But I just winked at him and he winked back. And he sat down. And that. . . a woman, a Catholic lesbian woman I had invited with me had lost her children when she came out. So again, [this] was one of those naïve, hopeful beliefs that if they [the Church leaders] would only hear us and hear our story, then they'd change. And I did remember thinking about him, because his predecessor would not meet at all with lesbian and gay groups, that at least he did. And he didn't come in with a battery of advisors or canon lawyers, or anyone. He came in alone. So he met alone with about ten or twelve representatives from the various groups, including Dignity and CCL. And he listened to what people had to say. And there was some heated exchange. And what he ended the meeting was, is that the teachings of the church are very deep on this issue, and I've heard you, but I do not see that there is going to be any change whatsoever. And I remember (cries as she tells this story) a man sitting next to me that had lost his children starting to cry. And all the Catholics crying because there was no escape. You were hearing it, that no matter what, we can't take you as you are. And I remember just sitting there feeling bad. And there was just a sense of resolve that we were going to go on. But I have to tell you that hearts were broken in that room.

Doris M. To hear that from someone [Cardinal O'Connor] who had so much authority.

Karen D. That was it. And I went back to work, because I walked to work from the meeting.

Doris M. And you actually had a very. . . an executive job at that time.

Karen D. I did. I did, [was] in a managerial position at that point.

Doris M. And to be so powerful in one sphere, and to have so little power in another.

Karen D. And I thought about him and I thought about that meeting and I thought well, at least he told us the truth. Because it's better sometimes to hear the truth than someone to say, "Oh, I really feel for you" and then stab you in the back. So I wrote him a letter. And I thought we also have to say what's true for us, no matter what. And we can't condemn someone because they have said what is true for them. So I wrote to him and more or less said, "I appreciate you meeting with us, and I appreciate you standing for what you believe in." And that's when he wrote me back that letter, saying "I'm sorry I don't see things changing. But if there's any way that I can reach out to you, I will. And that I'm sure that we both love this Church." And I thought that was great. That was great. I never met or spoke with him again. But I often thought that it is so important for us, as hard as it is, (and I think it's the hardest thing we can do) not to demonize the people that disagree with us. And to try wherever we can ([even if] it is the hardest, most painful thing we can do) to try to reach out so that they can see us as human beings and try always to see them as human beings. Because at that point, the battle lines were really getting drawn in the Church between liberal and conservative, between people that were pro-lesbian and gay, [and] people that felt they were an abomination. And it was really calcifying, it was really hardening. In some ways, it was as much of a statement to all my friends in the gay and lesbian

community or Catholic activists to say, “We cannot demonize people in the Church that don’t agree with us. Because then we’re doing to them what has been done to us.”

Doris M. You were saying that Call to Action is another important group for Catholics. Was that, had that come about yet?

Karen D. Call to Action. I cannot remember when it started or why it did, but it galvanized over a particular issue. And it was from an Ash Wednesday ad that was put in the *New York Times* that all kinds of Catholic signed for some issue, for some democratic issue in the Church. And I think at that point there was a movement to make the Catholic Church democratic. To bring a certain element of democracy and lay participation in the Church that had never been before. And as a matter of fact, Voice of the Faithful is probably standing on the shoulders of A Call to Action. [A Call to Action] was really the group that did this. So I think that that was where the movement of making, at least the American Catholic Church democratic and representative and not just simply hierarchical came from.

Doris M. So you’re saying that the meeting, the 1984 meeting with Archbishop [Cardinal] John O’Connor was kind of, not a watershed, but at least part of that process where the Catholic Church was moving [being split] in two directions between conservative forces and progressive forces.

Karen D. Right. And after that meeting, of course, Cardinal O’Connor at that point had Dignity thrown out of all the Catholic parishes in—you know, such as they were—in New York. So they [Dignity had] officially had a Mass at St. Francis Xavier Church on Saturday nights.

Doris M. You mean Dignity did.

- Karen D. Dignity did. Yeah. And he [Cardinal O'Connor decided] that was out.
- Doris M. Was that part of a papal worldwide exclusion for gay men? Because I think John McNeill somehow lost his job at that time, too.
- Karen D. Maybe. Maybe there was at that point. More of a crackdown in terms of visible Catholic lesbians in Church facilities.
- Doris M. Right. Right. So organizations all around the country may have been excluded.
- Karen D. Right. Now probably that whole issue of being in a Catholic facility has worked good and bad for Dignity. Because I remember one of the issues (and even more than feminist issues) that we ended up leaving Dignity New York for, was the whole issue of holy unions in Catholic facilities. And there were a group of us in 1982 that wanted to hold, in St. Francis Xavier Church, a holy union ceremony. Because our feeling was that we wanted our relationships to receive this . . . to be inclusive within our spiritual community. That we wouldn't worship in one spot and have relationships blessed in another spot. That we really needed, that we wanted them sanctified within our religious group. And we [Christine and Karen] had asked for (because I was going to be one of the first) permission from St. Francis Xavier to celebrate a blessing of union ceremony in a Catholic [church], in St. Francis Church. And they said no. Because it just wouldn't [work]; they would end up getting in all kinds of trouble. And our feeling was that if we cannot hold the blessing of our unions where we worship, then we need to worship someplace else. And we wanted to move Dignity out of St. Francis Church and go to a place where we could both worship and have blessing of unions. And there was a tremendous schism in the membership over this. Because the majority of the people in Dignity wanted to stay in St. Francis Church, and felt that it was

very important in terms of the expression of their faith that they worship in a church. And there was another group who felt (I was among them) that it was very important in the expression of who we were to get out. And that we could be Catholic, but we weren't going to be in a place where we couldn't have a union. And that was really a split in Dignity New York in 1982. And a lot of men left, too, over the issue of not having a blessing of unions.

Doris M.      Interesting

Karen D.      And what turned out anyway, in some ways it was prophetic because they were thrown out anyway three or four years later.

(tape shuts off, resumes)

Doris M.      So one thing that we haven't really talked much about is the relationship between lesbian nuns in CCL and ex-nuns or women who had never been religious, women religious. Can you offer any perspective on how that worked?

Karen D.      I think that lesbian nuns and women who had been nuns really formed a very important leadership component of CCL. Because they were very. . . they were more comfortable in a prayer and worship, and in leading prayer and worship, than women who had not been nuns. I think they also had a very strong sense of community. And that was what they had when they were in the convent, but could not express the lesbian part of themselves. So they flowered, in a way, when they came to CCL. And the fact that they could, [because] they were in a women's community [CCL], they could be who they were. They could be in a relationship, sexual relationship with a woman, or a love relationship with a woman, and acknowledge it. Because what came out of a lot of the lesbian nun stories were—they had all these torrid romances and affairs and longings and crushes and



relationships—but they could never be open about them. If they were found out, they were either separated or someone was asked to leave the community. So there were all kinds of consequences to that. So I think [because of] a lot of the oppression of lesbian nuns in the community, when they got out, [they] just flowered in terms of creativity—a lot of the creativity and the thought and the worship, especially in the liturgical, I want to say, creation. Really, liturgical creation in CCL was because of lesbian nuns and ex-nuns.

Doris M. Are there any that you would be comfortable naming by name because they're fairly open about their ex-nun experience?

Karen D. Pat O'Donnell I think, was a tremendous role model in terms of standing up as a lesbian nun and being open. Christine Nusse, certainly, with the whole liturgical part of CCL. So I hope they [the unnamed nuns] forgive me. Many of them are nameless because I just can't recall them now. But I do remember as a group they were really tremendous.

Doris M. In a way, mentors.

Karen D. Yes. Diann Neu had been a marvelously creative liturgist for CCL. And, you know, for other people as well. Very much. And they had a large component of social justice motivation, the sisters did.

Doris M. That they somehow saw their role in the world as working for Christian causes.

Karen D. Yes. And for justice. And made, probably, connections between different things more than women who had not been part of a religious community.

Doris M. One of the common themes in the stories in *Lesbian Nuns: Breaking Silence or A Faith of One's Own* by Barbara Hope is that women appreciated the skills that they got out of the convent. And several women also talked about, if they hadn't entered the convent, they wouldn't have had any chance for an education. And saw those as opportunities. So the women not only came out with direction and purpose. They, it seems like, came out with some fairly intact skills that was quite a resource for society at large.

Karen D. Yes. In terms of strictly lesbian nun groups, there was a group called Communication, or Communications, that was for gay and lesbian Catholic clergy. So that existed. They were extremely secretive, needless to say, even more than we were, because they were afraid of persecution. So lesbian nun groups did exist, but they were very much, even more underground than CCL.

Doris M. I'm wondering if lesbian nuns would be inclined to contact you [CCL], or if Jeannine would have been more approachable?

Karen D. It would have been Jeannine. It would have been Jeannine. And she may have, again, my memory fails me, she may have had retreats or get-togethers for lesbian nuns. And I think she did. But again, they were *very* safeguarded.

Doris M. One of the things that I noticed in [Images], a newsletter of yours that I read, is that there were some issues where lesbians who—(interruption) I was just asking about the reception of the Catholic lesbians among other lesbian feminist groups around the country.

Karen D. We were a little surprised, I guess it was our naiveté, that we thought we would be welcome with open arms. And what we found is that we were not. And as a matter of fact, I remember when we were outreaching to lesbian groups, we wrote

to a group in Australia and received a letter back from them saying that they wanted absolutely nothing to do with any lesbian that would call herself Catholic, and thought we must be not in our right mind to do so. So that was a reaction that we would experience a lot where we thought at some point it was much easier to come out as a lesbian to a Catholic group than it was to come out as a Catholic to a lesbian group. Because if you did so, you were generally . . . people thought they could give you a lot of abuse and question your sanity and question how you could possibly identify yourself as a member of such an oppressive organization. And I do remember being at parties where people would ask me, or women would ask me, what I worked on, and I said I worked on lesbian, Catholic lesbian issues for the Conference of Catholic Lesbians. And I would unleash about a forty-five minute torrent, a sermon, scolding, “How could I possibly continue to identify with such an oppressive institution? What was wrong with me for continuing to identify?” So I would make some attempt to try to defend myself because I was really on the defensive. And would listen in silence until they finally wore themselves out. And then try to scurry over to a corner, lick my wounds, in a corner somewhere. And hopefully they didn’t find me for the rest of the evening. And that was usually drink one when I would get the lecture. And then by the time the evening wore on, I knew inevitably about an hour, an hour and a half later, when they had three or four drinks, I would again be cornered by this person, by the woman, who would begin to cry. She would come over and want to speak and want to cry, because what she would say is that she felt so hurt and she was angry but she just missed, she would say, “I miss the Church so much, but I can’t, I’m afraid to go back because I had been so hurt and felt so rejected.” And what she would say is, “I feel like a large part of me is missing.” And then we would talk for the rest of the evening. And sometimes they would come to CCL, and sometimes I would never see them again. But when I first—this experience happened over and over and over again. So when someone would find out you were Catholic they would feel fine to abuse you and spew and dump and unload.

And then a while later they would try to find you again in a quiet corner and cry. And what I realized was a lot of the hatred and the fury and the angry feeling was their reaction against feeling the rejection of the Church. And that it wounded them deeply. And what was speaking to me was not them, but they were speaking out of their woundedness and their hurt. In trying to, in some ways, there was a connection that often started out of their anger. Where they articulated how wounded they were. So I have learned to understand, although I have to say sometimes it stretched my patience because I'm not a person who will take a lot of abuse very lightly, but learning how to, for the sake of the person who was hurt, hold my tongue and let them get it out of their system in some ways. To be able to let the hurt out, to let the love come back in. And I think that is a lot of [what's] behind [scorn of Catholics]. Especially when we hear a lot of Catholic scorn, in terms of [against] Catholics that choose to continue to identify themselves as Catholic, it is really the [speaker's] pain, the sense of loss, and maybe even a sense of guilt that for some reason some Catholics can continue to identify as Catholic, but they could not. I would say that [is how the dynamics played out] among Catholics.

In terms of among feminists, again, I think the Catholic Church can be turned into [a] one dimensional [issue]. And even I have been angry at the Church. But I think where I've grown over the years is, I have said to myself, "I am not perfect. I accept myself as not being perfect. I accept myself as having the good and bad. And this is who I am and this is how I am." And then being able to accept other people and institutions which are made up of people as having both good and bad and being imperfect. And when I stopped expecting perfection and nothing but goodness from the Catholic Church is when I was able to reconcile to going back and becoming active in the parish and being active in that particular way in the body of Christ again in the Church.

Doris M.      You're active in a parish now?

Karen D. Yes, in St. Andrew the Apostle, in Brooklyn.

Doris M. Can you say how that came about?

Karen D. Well it came about, and it's always—(laughs) one of those Catholic, Catholic kinds of things where on certain holidays we feel drawn. And on Ash Wednesday, for whatever reason, I felt drawn to go back and observe this ritual of getting ashes on Ash Wednesday. But the little rebellious part of me wanted to wear my Mets jacket. So I wore my Mets jacket on an Ash Wednesday service. And I'm sitting there in the pew. And I see this man in another Mets jacket crossing the street to come in the church.

Doris M. And what's Mets again?

Karen D. Mets is a baseball team. One of the baseball teams here in New York.

Doris M. I wasn't sure. I thought that's what it was. (laughs)

Karen D. And he turns out to be the priest. And I see him looking at me with my Mets jacket. And I knew who he was. And I said to him, "Well how do you think we're going to do this year?" (laughs) And he knew what I meant. And he said, "Well, we have to get by Atlanta, the same way we always do every year." So that was my welcome back to the Catholic Church. Finding my fellow Mets fan, pastor. And entering again on Ash Wednesday.

Doris M. How did you end up at St. Andrew's?

Karen D. Because I wanted to just simply go to my neighborhood church. I didn't go shopping or look for one particular place or another. And I knew St. Andrew's was down the street, so I walked to St. Andrew's.

(tape shuts off, resumes)

Karen D. How we first found St. Andrew's, although I didn't go for a while after we joined, is that our son Robert is an avid ice hockey fan. And when he left grammar school, he wanted to go to a high school that had ice hockey. And the only schools that had ice hockey were the diocesan high schools and then some of the other Catholic academies. However, to qualify to go into a diocesan high school, preference was given to families that have registered members of a parish. So we decided that we would register as a family with our local parish so that Robert could put that down on his application. So we did. And much to our delight, oh, we used both of our names, by the way, Karen Doherty and Dolores Mei. And it wasn't K. Doherty or D. Mei. It was—

Doris M. Which you could have done.

Karen D. Right. But we refused to do, because we were going to go in as who we were. And much to our delight, we got envelopes back, you know, the monthly envelopes, with, printed on the envelope, "Karen Doherty and Dolores Mei." So we have been members of St. Andrew ever since. And it was really great. And if they accepted us as a household, a family, we certainly wanted to be there. After all of that, Robert ended up being at Packer Collegiate Institute, not at the diocesan high school. But that's all right.

Doris M. You were telling me something, a very lovely story, about how meaningful religion is to people within the gay and lesbian, bisexual, transgender movement. And you were relating a story about the St. Patrick's Day Parade.

Karen D. Yes.

Doris M. Or the gay pride parade.

Karen D. A gay pride parade, right. Every year in June, commemorating the Stonewall, the Stonewall uprising. I have to tell one thing, though, aside from that. One of the people who was very involved with Stonewall uprising [commemoration parade], was Eddie Murphy, and Eddie Murphy's sister was a nun. And he always had a soft spot in his heart for Catholic lesbians. So every year after the parade we had a table to distribute information right out in front of St. Veronica's on Christopher Street to distribute information about CCL.

But one thing I did want to say, I think there is a tremendous need and a tremendous appreciation with lesbian and gay people of Catholic lesbians or Protestant lesbians and gays or Jewish lesbians and gays that continue to identify with their faith. And it was pretty common knowledge that the largest round of applause for the groups that marched on that parade were the religious groups.

Doris M. In the Pride Day Parade?

Karen D. In the Pride Day Parade. Yes.

Doris M. And who would be applauding? The gay and lesbian people in the crowd?

Karen D. The gay and lesbian people in the crowds, and the crowds along the side of Fifth Avenue. And Broadway. When they would see the banner, especially see the banner the Conference of Catholic Lesbians, a lot of people, I mean it was really just general applause all the way that the banner went down the street.

Doris M.      What courage that speaks of.

Karen D.      But what a great feeling that was. It was always a great day.

Doris M.      And that kind of brings us around in a full circle. Because you started by saying the Church is more than the hierarchy; the Church is the people who are raised Catholic.

Karen D.      Yes.

Doris M.      And I have a feeling that the people who are cheering in the crowd weren't necessarily the hierarchy.

Karen D.      No. But they were Catholic lesbians and gays that saw one another.

Doris M.      It's a wonderful story, Karen. Have we . . . are there things that you want to share that we haven't covered?

Karen D.      Not that I can think of. Just to send my greetings to all the people that will hear this tape. And thank you and God bless you.

Doris M.      Thank you so much, Karen, for sharing your story with us.

[119 minutes]

(End Interview.)

\*The transcript was reviewed against the tape by Doris Malkmus. Obviously misspoken, repeated, and overused words such as "like," "that," and "kind of" that are common in speech, but awkward in print were deleted or corrected. This was done to make the transcript as fluid to



read as the audio recording is to hear. Where necessary, Malkmus added words in square brackets to clarify the meaning of the transcript. The last name of one individual was deleted to protect her privacy.