

# Jan Griesinger

## Campus Ministry/Ministerio Universitario

### 1. *Getting to Know You/Aprendiendo a conocerte*

Name/Nombre: Jan Griesinger

A.B. Recipient/A.B. honor: 1999

Career/Carrera: Campus Ministry/Ministerio universitario

Color of my hair/Color de mi pelo: Brown/Moreno

Color of my eyes/Color de mis ojos: Hazel/Color de la avellana

Brothers and sisters?/Hermanos y hermanas?  
Four – three sisters and a brother/  
Cuatro – tres hermanas y un hermano

My place in the order of birth/Mi lugar en el orden de nacimiento:  
First/Primera

Favorite school subject/Asignatura escolar favorita:  
Math/Matemáticas

Hobbies/Pasatiempos: Outdoor sports, music/Deportes al aire libre, música

When by myself, I enjoyed/Cuando estoy sola disfruto:  
Reading/La lectura

My friends and I liked to/Mis amigos y yo disfrutabamos:  
Do outdoor sport and activities/Hacer deportes al aire libre y actividades

I admired/Admiré a: Martin Luther King. Jr.



*The arc of the moral universe is long  
but it bends toward justice.<sup>1</sup>*

## **1. On Behalf Of**

When Jan Griesinger accepted the Antoinette Brown Award at General Synod in 1999, she recalled the 1977 Synod. At that Synod, she had participated in the United Church of Christ Gay Caucus. The Caucus would become the UCC Coalition for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Concerns [LGBT]. Jan served on its first council in the late 1970s and was its moderator in the early 1980s.

She was quoted in the award announcement:

I accept the congratulations on behalf of women in ministry who are still trying to find a call or decide whether to report sexual harassment. I accept [the award] on behalf of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender clergy who are still trying to find a call or survive harassment in their community or get on the agenda for discussion.

I thank God for the UCC. We didn't get here without a struggle. And it's not over. I feel perhaps more than most, that this Antoinette Brown award, given to me, honors the whole movement of people -- lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and allies. And I'd like all of us to applaud that movement inside and outside of the church.<sup>2</sup>

In a recent interview, Jan said, "I was the first Antoinette Brown awardee chosen because of my lesbian activism. I had been 'out' for so long by then."<sup>3</sup>

As National Coordinator of the Coalition from 1984-1997, Jan represented the Coalition at national United Church of Christ gatherings, organized meetings of the Coalition, edited the newsletter, and helped build the

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<sup>1</sup> By mid-19th century Unitarian minister, reformer and abolitionist, Theodore Parker, as quoted by Martin Luther King in Address to the AFL-CIO, Fourth Constitutional Convention, 1961 . See <http://www.commondreams.org/archive/2007/05/11/1118/>

<sup>2</sup> United Church of Christ Office of Communication, 06 Jul 1999 13:08:49

<sup>3</sup> In addition to a phone interview on January 31, 2007 and other papers provided by Griesinger, this paper draws heavily on her chapter in Sara Evans, Ed. Journeys That Opened Up the World. Rutgers: The State University Press, 2003. Sections ending with a page number within parentheses are used with permission of Griesinger, chapter copyright holder.

membership base. Among the national co-coordinators the UCC Coalition for LGBT Concerns from 1978-1984, she said, were Bill Johnson, Nancy Krody, Loey Powell and Sam Loliger.

## ***2. The Growing Up Years***

Dee: Please tell us about your youth.

Jan: My parents raised me to be independent. I observe now how children have to be watched all the time because of danger. At age six and seven, I just rode my bicycle for miles. It was a whole different time, and I apparently did not betray my parents' trust. It was a family with privilege and economic security, so I grew up fairly conflict free.

Dee: A number of people from church school, Vacation Bible School, Youth Fellowship, summer church camps and conferences influenced your growth.

Jan: They impressed me as persons with commitment and concern. They took the Christian faith seriously. I began teaching Sunday school at age 15 and counseled in church camp at eighteen.

Dee: How did that interest carry over into your college years?

Jan: In college I participated in local and regional church activities. I was president of United Campus Christian Fellowship. The formal study of theology and the Bible fascinated and challenged me.

Dee: You were the only woman in your graduating class at DePauw to major in religion and the sole woman to enter a sermon-writing contest.

Jan: The contest was open to all college students. In both situations, I felt odd. Male professors and students were nervous about my presence (*Journeys That Opened Up the World*, 191). I always had the sense that I did not quite belong, not because I was not smart enough but because it was a boys' club.

Dee: Even though you were in the Honors program in the Philosophy and Religion Department, you nearly abandoned writing the thesis midway through your senior year.

Jan: I told my advisor that I didn't see any reason to finish it because I was planning to get married (192).

Dee: But you continued.

Jan: If my regular advisor had not been on sabbatical that year,

he probably would have supported my idea of quitting. The substitute advisor reminded me that I had a good mind and should finish the work because I was capable of doing it.

### ***3. Career was not a word that went in the same sentence as women.***

Dee: What then?

Jan: It was assumed I would go to college, but there was never a sense of what I should do or that I would support myself. Marriage was the beginning and the ending of a career. During my education, I was not preparing for a career.

Preparation came through my formal education. I loved debating and reading and thinking without any real sense of what was going to happen with it. I learned to read and think critically and to speak as though I had some idea of what I was talking about.

Later, I added to that knowledge lessons in how to organize projects, march for peace and justice, and work to oppose racism.... I felt I was getting my real education in the streets, at demonstrations, writing for and distributing an underground newspaper, attending community meetings where strategies were debated, and at other events outside the seminary's ivy-covered walls (195).

Once I was bitten, especially with the feminist bug, it became clear to me that the career had to be shaped by that. The emotional end of my education came more from the feminist movement and from understanding that, as, Rosemary Radford Reuther said in lectures, "When you speak louder than a whisper, you are heard to be shouting."

### ***4. Energized for Campus Ministry***

Dee: What, then, energized you for a career and the ministry in particular?

Jan: I had started on the track of ministry in my last years of high school. I belonged to a federated church, American Baptist and United Methodist. I had not met any women clergy, but a woman there was hired part time as a director of Christian Education. She had gone through the Chicago Baptist Missionary Training School. I was intrigued by that.

Dee: Did you go to seminary immediately after college?  
Jan: I married right after college and worked as a director of Christian education in a local suburban church. After two and a half years, it was clear that was not what I wanted my life to be about.

I had no idea what I would do with my seminary education, but in March 1967, I began commuting forty-five minutes each way from my suburban Cincinnati apartment to United Theological Seminary in Dayton (193).

Dee: Something or someone nudged your sense of direction.  
Jan: United Church of Christ clergy, events and national conferences became my window to the world outside my suburb and my marriage. The Ohio Conference of the UCC served as the setting where I could hear debate on social issues of the day (192).

Dee: You were attracted to campus ministry.  
Jan: So many of the activist people I saw were in that field. I saw traditional ministry as an almost impossible task of trying to pastor the local church which had people from one end of the spectrum to the other and keep it from imploding. That was not my gift.

Campus ministry offered the possibility of being able to do what seemed to me to be interesting and creative work. On campus there was a fair amount of action.

## ***5. You Could Ask Your Questions Out Loud***

In college, Jan had been active in campus ministry. Campus ministry provided a community of seekers:

It provided adult figures that cared and spent time with you and helped you sort things out. You could ask your questions out loud. It affirmed my gifts and leadership skills.

The campus ministry that I was involved in was important in shaping my views and in giving me a larger perspective. It presented ideas to me that I would never have thought of. It also stressed opportunities for justice. I began living out my faith more and more in a public arena. Faith is not just some private, personal thing but something that has to be lived out.

## ***6. Justice is the strongest sense of God for me.***

For Jan, God is not a personal relationship, yet she related to the message and emotional content of songs led by an African American at church camp:

The Holy comes closest to me in music. I like to sing. I like to harmonize. I sang in a church choir. I sing in a feminist choir now. I still relate to the emotional content of the Spirituals.

My faith is that there is a sense of hope and a sense of power that is more than we can imagine, that, as many African Americans say, can make a way out of no way. The injustice that we see all around us does not always have to be. They found ways to escape out of Egypt.

Justice is the strongest sense of God for me. I am convinced that "we shall overcome because the arc of the universe is long but it bends toward justice."<sup>4</sup>

When Jan was in college in Indiana, the Civil Rights Movement seemed too far away:

My mother seemed distressed that I was not keeping up with the news. There was no television around. Somehow I had heard of Martin Luther King, but he did not seem like a real figure to me.

When Martin Luther King was assassinated, a car load of students at my seminary drove all night down to Memphis for a march held two days after he was assassinated. The Civil Rights Movement and Memphis activists wanted to make it clear that they were not going to be intimidated and quit. We were a bit frightened but glad to be there to join in the march.

## ***6. My life and work has been shaped mostly by activist movements.***

Although her focus was to be different, Jan had been exposed early to the political activism of her parents. Political conversations around their house were plentiful.

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<sup>4</sup> Martin Luther King

Later, the United Church of Christ and some pastors from the Cincinnati area where she lived influenced her. This encouragement led to her involvement in a peace effort at the Ohio Conference annual meeting in 1966. She supported a resolution opposing the Viet Nam War:

I knew little about it, but as the year went on, I got increasingly more involved. I participated in Vietnam Summer in 1967 going door to door seeking to mobilize opposition to the war. I was arrested at a draft resistance sit-in. It was my first experience of civil disobedience and arrest. . . . I can say only that I felt I couldn't *not* do it. I marched with Martin Luther King in Washington DC in February, 1968 at an anti-war protest sponsored by clergy and concerned laity (193, 194).

Jan reflected in this excerpt from *Journeys That Opened Up the World*:

We were hauled away and imprisoned in an ancient jail underneath the old courthouse. Many of us were packed into a single cell. We sang and kept ourselves entertained. Soon it dawned on me, and I think on most of the other women, that we had entered another world, one where we had absolutely no control and could expect no special attention. Requests to be let out to go to the bathroom or to take medication were ignored. No one could tell us what was going to happen or when. And no, we could not make any phone calls.

The judge decided arbitrarily to triple the usual bond for trespassing for all of us.... All of us were taken to the Cincinnati workhouse, an even more ancient prison, where the reality of our action really began to sink in.

I was one of the fortunate few allowed a phone call that evening. My friends in Cincinnati Action for Peace, longtime Communist Party activists, put their home and property up to serve as my bond, and I was freed to go home and spend the night in my own bed. My husband was not impressed. His parents were even less so when they read my name on the front page of the newspaper the next morning. My decision to take some of our savings to bail out two other women who had no college or family connections was the beginning of the end of a not-so-great marriage (194).

## **7. *The Women's Liberation Movement Gave Me the Ministerial Call.***

"My life has been a journey of doing what needs to be done in this long struggle," Jan said. "I am one of those people who do not sit down too often."

The date was September of 1969, her last semester in seminary. By then, Jan had joined First Reformed United Church of Christ, an integrated activist church. Her activity in the anti-war movement and the friends she made there positioned her at the start of the Women's Movement in Dayton, Ohio. She helped to co-found the Dayton Women's Liberation.<sup>5</sup>

With the Women's Movement, her life as a white woman began to take on a clear shape and meaning. The arrival of feminism captured her imagination and made her a convert. It propelled her back into church-affiliated organizations to reach other women with the good news of liberation to the captives (195).

She wrote the following in Chapter 10 of *Journeys*:

So many pieces of my own life that had not made sense began to appear as part of a pattern that was so much bigger than I: never being encouraged to have a career, being treated as a strange animal in college and seminary classes, feeling pressured to marry, never getting to be out front as a leader. I felt truly saved: from isolation, from always feeling "other."

We women were unsure what we were doing and unsupported by the men in our lives, as well as most of the women. We spent endless hours raising our own consciences, trying to get a fix on how our shared experiences formed a pattern and how to integrate that knowledge into our political work (196.)

Jan realized that white women had been seduced by the freedom and security that relationships with white men provided:

Women were oppressed. This was wrong. It was a matter of life and death to many women facing abortion, rape, battering, and severely limited or meaningless lives. So of course we had to act. Now. Regardless of what might be said about us. And things were immediately said about us (197).

The feminist approach to things colored almost everything I did – the jobs I looked for, the kind of work that I did.

## ***8. The Possibility of Ministry and the Emerging Feminism***

She heard the Rev. Elinor Galusha speak at a United Church of Christ gathering about her work with the Clergy Consultation Service on

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<sup>5</sup> For a chronology of the Women's Movement, visit <http://scholar.alexanderstreet.com/display/WASM/Women's+Movement+Chronology+1969>.

Abortion.<sup>6</sup> The pre-Roe v Wade, national network of clergy referred women to safe abortions.

"For me," Jan said, "that sparked the bringing together of the possibility of ministry and the emerging feminism." She began discussions that led to a position with the Dayton Area Campus Ministry and the organization of the specialized counseling ministry.

## **9. Ordination**

As it happened, one of her mentors in the ordination process was a campus minister. He created the part time job for her that gave her the call required for ordination. "I don't think it would pass a Church and Ministry Committee now," Jan said, "but it did at that time."

The all-male committee examined her qualifications. "The idea that maybe they should do something for women was new enough," she said, "for them to pick up the challenge and decide they would become advocates."

Jan defined ordination as being sent by the church to serve.<sup>7</sup> She proposed to the examining committee that they ordain her "despite the absence of what usually constitutes a call."

"I would rather earn my living as a tentmaker," she wrote, "in order to be able to serve where I feel the church needs to send me . . . . It would not be any less a 'call.' It would not be secular. It would simply occur in the corners of life outside and maybe inside church walls where people have needs that parish churches aren't equipped to meet."

She further argued her convictions, "It happens at this point that the church has not placed a priority on or reallocated enough resources to 'send' people into the things that interest me most, but I don't consider that this makes them any less areas of service. My point is that we must broaden the concept of a call . . . ."

Since ordination in 1970, she has worked in the field of campus ministry, first for the World Student Christian Federation<sup>8</sup> and then as the Director of United Campus Ministry at Ohio University in Athens, Ohio.

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<sup>6</sup> Visit [http://womenshistory.about.com/od/abortionus/p/clergy\\_abortion.htm](http://womenshistory.about.com/od/abortionus/p/clergy_abortion.htm).

<sup>7</sup> Ordination paper provided by Griesinger.

<sup>8</sup> One of the oldest ecumenical and student organizations, the World Student Christian Federation was founded in 1895. It was shaped by Charlotte Bunch, a prominent feminist activist in New York. See Sara M. Evans, Journeys That Opened Up the World: Women, Student Christian Movements and Social Justice, 1955-1975. Rutgers University Press, 2003.

Even in 1970, she had been the only woman getting in her graduating class to receive a Master of Divinity. Not until 1975-1977 did the wave of women emerge. Feminism kicked in and began to spread. Much of her other early work was spreading the message of feminism within the church. "That was a challenge," she said.

## **10. *World Student Christian Federation, 1971-1975***

The Women's Campus Ministry Caucus<sup>9</sup> was founded to support women doing campus ministry around the country. Through this Caucus,<sup>10</sup> Jan learned about a job at the World Student Christian Federation. The global federation of student Christian groups encourages dialogue between students of different traditions.

At age 29, as coordinator of the Women's Project for the North American Region World Student Christian Federation, Jan stayed in Dayton. In 1972, she edited an important WSCF series book<sup>11</sup> The collection of forty-five articles was written by women from six regions: Africa, Asia-Pacific, Latin America and Caribbean, Middle East, Europe and North America.

Another part of her work in staffing the Women's Campus Ministry Caucus, was to create national and regional conferences:

We shared our stories: the way men in campus ministry were treating us, the way male church leaders were ignoring us, the way the men we lived with were threatened, the sexism we endured at national campus ministry conferences, the way our jobs were so part time or tenuous or even unpaid, the way we risked our livelihood by being feminist activists. These stories helped make sense of our isolated experiences as women leaders in the church (200, 201).]

By 1973, the Women's Campus Ministry Caucus became Women in Campus Ministry. They lobbied for women speakers at national conferences and in staff positions, tried to get more women hired and ordained.

"We tried to get feminist faculty into the seminaries and feminist theology into seminary curricula," Jan said. She spoke about her rage and sorrow when one colleague was fired "for being an outspoken feminist, a not-very-out lesbian, and an organizer of campus feminist groups and programs on women's spirituality." Another was fired with the charge that her women's spirituality programs were witchcraft. . . . Change was

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<sup>9</sup> Visit <http://webtext.library.yale.edu/xml2html/divinity.064.con.html>.

<sup>10</sup> Visit <http://webtext.library.yale.edu/xml2html/divinity.064.con.html>.

<sup>11</sup> *Women in the Struggle for Liberation: Vol. III, No. 2/3*. World Student Christian Federation.

happening. Resistance was great. "It was both exhilarating and frustrating work" (202).

When the funding ran out in 1975, her feminist interests made finding a job difficult:

I did not identify as a lesbian at that point, but the work I had done and the things I could put on a resume not many campus ministries had much interest in. Some were interested in women, but women that were a little more quiet and a little more submissive. I could not pass as that.

## **11. *Ohio University***

In the fall of 1976, Jan took the position at Ohio University in Athens that she would hold for twenty-eight years. She "came out" in 1977 and since that time has worked as a lesbian pastor.

The campus ministry had already hosted meetings of a gay/lesbian student organization, so when she came out to the board and more publicly in the late 1970s, she said they were not afraid of the issue.

As no gay student organization existed, she helped to start one, which later was called Open Doors. This support group for the LGBT community still exists.

The whole time I was doing campus ministry, I was also doing other things. I went to the 1977 General Synod and met up with the Gay Caucus. By about 1979, I represented the Coalition at an event. In 1984, I became co-national coordinator for the Coalition while also continuing my campus ministry job. In 1997, I resigned from that position.

Over those thirteen years, that organization grew twenty to a hundred times. Things had really changed -- the Open & Affirming churches program was started, a budget was created, and a small stipend offered to staff.

Her work in campus ministry included administrative work and various kinds of justice organizing on local, national and international issues. She also worked with local women's collectives, co-founding a battered women's shelter, and co-founding groups like the Free South Africa group, the Coalition to Overcome Racism, the Middle East Peace Coalition, the Central America Solidarity Committee, and the Gay, Lesbian or Bisexual Employees at Ohio University.

"I love doing this work," she said in the closing words of her *Journeys* chapter. "I get energy from working with people for systemic change in church and society" (207). The competitive game had given way to collaborative and skill-sharing work with women. I continue to see myself as an activist, demonstrating, I hope, not only a feminist perspective but an international antiracist, anti-capitalist commitment (206).

## **12. Susan B. Anthony Memorial Unrest Home and Women's Land Trust<sup>12</sup>**

"In 1979, land was bought for the women's intentional community and feminist education center where I still live," she said. Its primary purpose is as an intentional living community. The center does feminist education. It also houses a women-only, safe space campground.

## **13. CLOUT**

In 1990, Jan co-founded Christian Lesbians Out (CLOUT). She served as its national coordinator from 1998 through 2006. It was started by a group of lesbian clergy across denominations to challenge abuses of power based on race, class and gender.<sup>13</sup>

## **14. Old Lesbians Organizing for Change (OLOC)**

*"We are not 'older.' 'Old' is very deliberate. We want to be old. We don't want to be anything else, and we don't think it is a bad word."*

Jan is co-director of OLOC, having come on board in 2000. The national network of "old lesbians" over the age of 60 works to confront ageism with education and public action.

"Ageism is an avenue of oppression that is little understood," she said. "It clearly affects young people, especially women, and they don't know it. It needs lots of study and action. Activism is an intergenerational dialogue."

## **15. So What About You?**

- When Jan was a student, she had no idea what she would do first with her college degree and then with her seminary degree. She remained open to some possibility and waited. Then possibilities began to emerge.

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<sup>12</sup> Visit <http://home.frognet.net/~sbamuh/newsletter.html>.

<sup>13</sup> From <http://www.cloutsisters.org>

***Tell about a time that you did not know a direction in your life but had to trust that something would come your way.***

***How do you feel about the risk of letting God be in charge of your present and your emerging life? What extra responsibility does this give you?***

- Jan said her life has been a journey of doing what needs to be done.

***Look around you. What needs to be done?***

- Jan Griesinger's life work emerged from the time in history/her story, the justice movements around her and her faith community's involvement in these movements.

***How do you see what is happening now locally, nationally and internationally as influencing your own life direction?***

***In what ways do you see the involvement of your faith community shaping your voice?***

***What justice movements do you identify as your justice movements?***

## **16. Family Church Project**

In your youth group or class, read Matthew 22:9. Discuss how this verse relates to the career of Jan Griesinger. Talk about what you think the banquet table represents. List those in your community, school or church who are excluded or who see themselves as being excluded from coming to the banquet table. Brainstorm about how to change that reality.

## **17. Still Curious?**

Bunch, Charlotte (Anne). Passionate Politics: Feminist Theory in Action. St. Martin's Griffin, 1987

DiNovo, Cheri. Qu (e)rying Evangelism: Growing a Community from the Outside in. Pilgrim Press, 2005

Evans, Sara. Tidal Wave: How Women Changed America at Century's End. Free Press, 2003

Friedan, Betty. The Feminine Mystique. W. W. Norton & Company, 2001

Griesinger, Jan. "Jan Griesinger" in Sara Evans, Ed., Journeys That Opened Up the World Rutgers University Press, 2003. Individual chapters copyrighted 2003 in the names of their authors. Chapter 10, p. 191-207

Moses, Claire Goldberg and Heidi Hartmann. U.S. Women in Struggle: A \*Feminist Studies\* Anthology. Board of Trustees of the University of Illinois, 1995

Potter, Philip and Thomas Wieser. Seeking and Serving the Truth: The First Hundred Years of the World Christian Student Federation. World Council of Churches, 1996

"No Need to Repent." About the ministry, life, and politics of Jan Griesinger. 16mm film. Distributed by Women Make Movies in New York, 1990. Alden Library at Ohio University has the video.

Websites to Visit:

CLOUTreach. Newsletter of Christian Lesbians OUT. [www.cloutsisters.org](http://www.cloutsisters.org)

L.G.B.T. Ministries. [www.uccoalition.org](http://www.uccoalition.org)

The LGBT Religious Archives Network. <http://www.lgbtran/org>

Old Lesbians. [www.oloc.org](http://www.oloc.org)

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[Dallas (Dee) A. Brauninger. *Antoinette Brown Women: Finding Voice*, March, 2008]