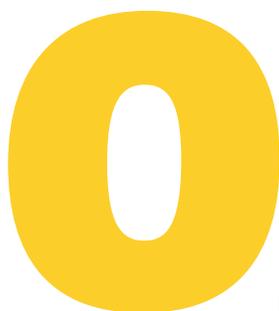


Reckoning, Redemption, Resilience

Lessons from Religion on
Community Life Today

REV. JENNIFER BAILEY



On November 1, 2018, a group of 95 strangers gathered in the basement of the historic Sixth and I Synagogue in Washington, D.C. less than one week after the massacre at the Tree of Life, L'Simcha Congregation, in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Eleven souls lost their lives that fateful Shabbat morning, marking the deadliest attack on the Jewish community in modern United States history. The names, faces and stories of those killed were front of mind for many gathered that chilly night as they took their seats and began to pass the entrees and salads that would become a centerpiece of their shared experience.

The topic for conversation that evening was “bridging partisan divisions in a toxic political culture” and was sponsored by [The People's Supper](#). A collaborative project launched in the aftermath of the 2016 presidential election cycle, The People's Supper aims to heal the divides and fortify communities over shared meals and storytelling. Since January 20, 2017, the project has held more than 1,400 suppers in 132 communities nationwide, focusing on bringing people together to engage constructively on

issues affecting their communities. It has teamed up with ordinary citizens, schools, workplaces, neighborhood organizations, and faith communities like the Sixth and I Synagogue.

Rather than dive into a debate on policy or culture, those gathered began by sharing personal stories about their hopes and fears for the future of our nation. People like Phyllis. A conservative, self-proclaimed “born-again follower of Jesus,” who came to the table expecting to have little in common with those who gathered. She surprised when she found camaraderie with a woman seated next to her at the table — a liberal rabbi. When Phyllis shared about spending time with her father as he was dying and hearing him share that he doesn't believe in God after all — it resonated and led to the two women into meaningful connection and conversation. In an era dominated by news cycles that amplify all that divides us, Phyllis was able to find unexpected community with someone radically different from herself.

It is perhaps not surprising that Phyllis' transformative experience happened within

the four walls of a religious congregation. Indeed, the centrality of faith communities in the formation of American communal life predates the founding of the republic, from the rich traditions of indigenous peoples who saw no distinction between the sacred and the secular to European refugees fleeing religious persecution in their homelands. Yet, the People's Supper is a secular civic project by nature. Against the backdrop of declining rates of religious participation and affiliation in the United States, it is part of a growing ecosystem of initiatives, organizations and projects reclaiming sacred rituals and redefining everyday practices, like sharing meals, as a means of building community today.

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My own life journey embodies this nexus between the deeply rooted foundations of traditional religious institutions and the fluidity of an as yet to be named field of spiritual innovation and community building that seeks to fortify the collective ties that bind us together while also attending to holistic wellbeing of the individual. In my role as co-founder of The People's Supper and a clergywoman in the African Methodist Episcopal Church, I have personally seen both the tensions and opportunities that can arise when established religious communities, which are concerned with stability and continuity, interact with dynamic new projects exploring the intersection of spiritual practice, social cohesion and communal life.

Yet, both seem to be pointing toward the same fundamental question which I believe to be the core question of 21st century American life as we attempt to further the project of building

a multi-racial, multi-ethnic democracy. To paraphrase my 87-year-old grandmother, a proud leader in her rural Baptist church, how we *be* together? I use the African American vernacular English here intentionally. Just as the verb “to be” changes meaning depending on the grammatical context, so must we be willing to be fluid in our understanding of our relationship to one another and community during this time rapid societal change.

The tectonic plates of our communal life are shifting as the old economic and social institutions that shaped American identity collapse and new land masses in the form of new cultural norms and practices emerge. Those of us called to lead communities must thus be cartographers, surveying the land and mapping these new terrains so that the generations that follow can build well. I have come to believe that building well in the 21st century and beyond will require centering the voices, experiences, needs, and genius of those who have historically been pushed to the margins of our society. For it is at the margins that we are able to see that which connects and divides us more clearly. It will also require careful thought and intention toward how we treat and care for our physical environment lest the new land we survey collapse due to the exploitation of our natural resources.

In this essay, I will explore one of these transforming landscapes — the state of American religious life — and what it may have to teach us about how we brace for change in other sectors. Ever evolving, religious communities in the United States have much to teach us about resilience and adaptability in the midst of the social upheaval. Often, adaptability means the emergence and defining of new roles to accommodate shifting demands.

In the context of today's evolving religious landscape, these new roles can be loosely defined into seven broad categories first

defined by Thurston, ter Kuile, and Phillips in their groundbreaking report *Care of Souls*: the gatherer, the seer, the healer, the steward, the elder, the venturer and the maker.¹ As we will explore, these new “jobs to be done” are not an attempt to supplant the role of traditional clergy and lay leadership roles within religious communities, but rather to expand the boundaries of what spiritual leadership looks like today. As these new roles begin to take shape, an emerging network of social innovators are helping re-define what community life looks like in the United States.

American Religious Life in Flux: Shifting Attitudes and Affiliations

Despite making great strides for equality in the last 60 years, the social fabric of the United States has suffered, threatened by the segregation of urban spaces, a staggering wealth gap, and an individualistic narrative that now fails to meet expectations of upward social mobility. Indicators point to growing social isolation, such as the highest suicide rate in 30 years, a record number of Americans who believe the American dream is out of reach, and levels of social trust reported at historic lows for millennials. With the rising tensions of an increasingly polarized political discourse and a new wave civil rights movement calling for Americans to implement the rights hard-won over the last 60 years, it is clear that the country is in need of a real conversation about its morals, values and identity.

Historically, religious leaders and institutions have helped anchor us through these moral crises and provided stability in a time of dynamism and change. Faith communities have played pivotal roles in shaping the cornerstone

institutions of our communal life, including hospitals, schools, social service organizations, and civic organizations like the YMCA and Boy Scouts.² Today, the 2017 American Hospital Association Annual Survey estimates that one in seven patients in the United States are treated in Catholic hospitals. The first school in the American colonies, Boston Latin School, was established in 1635 to educate Puritan children so that they could read the Bible. The American Civil Rights Movement began in the basements and fellowship halls of Southern churches in places like Greensboro, North Carolina, and Montgomery, Alabama. Groups like the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society have been essential in the settlement of immigrants and refugees. These examples point to an important reality: There are few aspects of American civic life that have not been touched by religious institutions.

Despite the influence of a wide spectrum of religious traditions, the locus of power in American religious life over the first two centuries of the nation lay largely with white Protestants. This power was not just religious, but cultural. Protestantism provided a common moral vocabulary, historical legacy, aesthetic, and means of assimilation for early European migrants of different national origins. As David Hollinger notes prior to the 1960s, “Persons at least nominally affiliated with these denominations controlled all branches of the federal government and most of the business world, as well as the nation’s chief cultural and educational institutions, and countless state and local institutions.”³ With white Protestant identity came power, privilege, and deepening sense of social capital and cohesion.

In his 2016 book *The End of White Christian America*, scholar Robert P. Jones traces the

1 Angie Thurston, Casper ter Kuile, and Sue Phillips, *Care of Souls* (Cambridge, MA: 2018), 9.

2 Robert P. Jones, *The End of White Christian America* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2016), 2.

3 David Hollinger, *After Cloven Tongues of Fire: Protestant Liberalism in Modern American History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 35.

origins, legacy, and declining influence of white Protestantism in the United States. According to Jones, the early 20th century saw white Protestantism begin to develop along two main branches defined by geography, social class, and theology: a more liberal mainline Protestantism anchored in the New England and the Upper Midwest/Great Lakes and a conservative Evangelical stream with roots in the South and Ozark Mountain region.⁴ This geographic split was a byproduct of the Civil War, when churches, like families, split in their allegiance to the country and their commitment to uphold the institution of slavery.⁵

That is not to say that mainline Protestant denominations in North were somehow less invested in the upholding racial hierarchies based on the color of one's skin. Indeed, one of the greatest schisms in American Protestantism occurred in Philadelphia in 1787 when the black parishioners of St. George's Methodist Episcopal Church, led by Richard Allen, left the congregation in protest after white leaders refused to allow them to pray alongside their white counterparts. This act launched a new branch of Christianity known as Black Protestantism or "The Black Church."

The scientific and technological advances of the modern era brought a new challenge to the forefront as white Protestants began to wrestle with the implications of these innovations on their theological doctrine and core beliefs. New fault lines were drawn between modernists, who adjusted their worldview to be inclusive to

new scientific revelations, and fundamentalists who saw these concessions as a betrayal of biblical authority and the supernatural nature of the divine. As Jones notes, events such as the 1925 Scopes Monkey Trial that brought into the public eye the debate around teaching evolution in schools would prove to be just one of many events that widened the chasm between these two groups.⁶

The implications were far reaching and can still be felt today. While Protestant Christianity has a long history of dividing along theological lines, the timing of the debate between modernists and fundamentalists occurred just as the United States was beginning to emerge as a global superpower and at the advent of mass media. With power came resources and the means of creating new organizations reflective of the theological disposition of its founders and with the means of the spreading their messages far and wide. Suddenly, the average white Protestant had direct exposure to distinct theological worldviews and the ability to choose which one to adopt.

The influence of white Protestantism hit its peak in the 1950s. Having just contributed to winning the Second World War, American GIs returned home and joined civic, religious, and social groups. As Robert Putnam notes in his seminal text *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, the war gave people "shared adversity and a shared enemy" while also ushering in a period of intense national patriotism and local civic engagement.⁷ The country saw a surge in the

4 Jones, *The End of White Christian America*, 30.

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6 Jones, *The End of White Christian America*, 32.

7 Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon and Shuster, 2000), 268.

membership of fraternal organizations like the freemasons and the Elks, bowling leagues, labor unions, *and* peak church participation. White Protestant denominations memorialized this period through a surge of building projects – new church edifices, office buildings to house denominational ministries, recreation centers, summer camps, and country clubs – many of which denied access to Jews, Catholics and African Americans.

The social upheaval of the 1960s sparked an exodus from traditional religious institutions with the largest loss experienced among white Protestants. Despite a brief revival in the 1980s culminating 20 years later with the election of self-identified Evangelical George W. Bush as President of the United States, the declining trend in affiliation and participation continued. According to the Public Religion Research Institute in 2017:

White Christians now account for fewer than half of the public. Today, only 43% of Americans identify as white and Christian, and only 30% as white and Protestant. In 1976, roughly eight in ten (81%) Americans identified as white and identified with a Christian denomination, and a majority (55%) were white Protestants.⁸

Particularly troubling to those invested in maintaining these communities is that the sacred world appears to be losing influence among certain key demographics. The fastest growing population are those who are religiously unaffiliated. The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life reports that today 22.8 percent of the population is religiously unaffiliated.⁹ Among people under the age of 30, the statistics are even higher with nearly one-third identifying

as unaffiliated “nones” or “dones” who have left their faith communities of origin. The reasons for disaffiliation vary. However, among surveys of millennials and members of Generation Z who once belonged to a faith community, there seems to be consensus that faith often seems to play a one-sided role in American civic and political life – one that is politically partisan, conservative, and that leads to the further disenfranchisement of marginalized communities.

One may ask why we ought to pay attention to these demographic trends and the decline of white Protestantism in particular or question what this single group's trajectory has to do with the broader national understanding of the landscape of community? European nations are full of examples of populations that have become more secular over time. Indeed, as the nation becomes more diverse by race, religion, and ethnicity, it follows that white Protestants would make up a smaller portion of the population. We may celebrate the waning influence of institutions that wielded too much power to the exclusion and detriment of minority groups.

As a woman of color and clergywoman, I must confess that do not find myself particularly concerned about the attendance numbers of white Christians or former Christians at Sunday church services. Their engagement in religious life is a question to be settled between themselves and their God. I do worry when white disaffiliation leads to feelings of disaffection, alienation and isolation, for those are the conditions that provide fertile ground for recruitment into dangerous ideologies with violent ends. When a vacuum is created, something always rises to take its place. The best-case scenario is that former white Protestants begin to affiliate and find

8 Robert P. Jones, and Daniel Cox, “America's Changing Religious Identity,” Public Religion Research Institute, last modified September 6, 2017, <https://www.prrri.org/research/american-religious-landscape-christian-religiously-unaffiliated>.

9 “Religious Landscape Study,” *Pew Forum on Religious Life*, accessed March 26, 2019, <https://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study>.

meaning in communities that embody the values of pluralism, inclusion, and equality that make the American project so enticing. At worst, those left behind close ranks and hold tightly to a grasp on power that can have dangerous consequences. A 2019 report from the Southern Poverty Law Center saw the number of hate groups in the United States rise for the fourth year in a row in 2018 with over 1,000 hate groups active nationwide. These groups tear at the fabric of national tapestry by insisting on the supremacy of one racial, ethnic, or religious group over the other. At their most extreme, they advocate for the extermination of minorities by any means necessary.

It is no surprise then that a rising number of white Evangelical Protestants increasingly view themselves as a persecuted minority.¹⁰ Having lost the culture war around issues like same-sex marriage, more conservative white Protestants have staked their last stand on political candidates and policies that previously would have been abhorrent to them. Indeed, it is hard to fathom now that it was Evangelicals who were among the most ardent supporters and advocates for comprehensive immigration reform during the administrations of Barack Obama and George W. Bush. In some circles, a fidelity to the faith has been supplanted by an almost cult-like worship of whiteness as ideology and means of power.

Faith communities are full of resources to help us wrestle with the unknowable and make sense out of the intangible. There is ancient wisdom embedded in these traditions about what it means to do and be community that is perhaps worth interrogating as we consider the future of communities.

On my more pessimistic days, I find myself feeling hopeless about the possibility of creating communities in which difference is seen as an asset and not a threat. When I feel more charitable, however, I am able to see clearly that these are communities in the midst of a deep grieving process. Encounters with death remind us of the anxiety and fear each of us holds when thinking about our own morality and what we leave behind once we are gone. They can also cause us to lash out. Luckily, faith communities are full of resources to help us wrestle with the unknowable and make sense out of the intangible. There is ancient wisdom embedded in these traditions about what it means to do and be community that is perhaps worth interrogating as we consider the future of communities.

Resilience, Redemption, and Being Together

When 21-year-old Dylann Roof murdered nine parishioners at the Mother Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina in June 2015, the nation paused in horror. How was it possible that a young white man could intentionally plan to execute innocent people in their house of worship solely because the color of their skin? Had not that form of vehement racism died out along with the segregationists who had resisted racial progress in the 1950s and 1960s? Perhaps just as surprising was the response of the victims' families. Less than 48 hours after the tragic death of their loved ones, those left behind stood to confront Roof and one by one forgave him. Their actions echoed those of the Sikh families in Oak Creek, Wisconsin. In 2012, white supremacist Wade Michael Page entered a local

¹⁰ Robert P. Jones, Daniel Cox, Betsy Cooper, and Rachel Lienesch, "Majority of Americans Oppose Transgender Bathroom Restrictions," Public Religion Research Institute, last modified March 10, 2017, <http://www.prri.org/research/lgbt-transgender-bathroom-discrimination-religious-liberty>.

gurdwara with a semi-automatic pistol killing six members before taking his own life. On March 15, 2019, Husna Ahmed was murdered alongside 49 others at two mosques during Friday prayer in Christchurch, New Zealand. After leading others to safety, she had returned to search for her husband, Farid, and was shot in the back. Afterwards Farid, who survived, would tell journalists, “I lost my wife, but I don’t hate the killer. I don’t have any grudge against him. I have forgiven him and am praying for him.”

What gave these communities the ability to show *forgiveness* to the perpetrators of the horrific, unspeakable, crimes their families experienced? A flat reading of both scenarios elevates the virtues of the bereaved, granting them an otherworldly saintliness. It is certainly appropriate to applaud the courage of these individuals. To do so exclusively, however, would ignore that within both faith traditions are frameworks for racial hope and optimism that is born not out of naivety but in the experience of living in community and experiencing forgiveness firsthand. Forgiveness in this context is as much for the person granting forgiveness as it is for the one who is on the receiving end. It is not something to be demanded, but rather can be helpful starting point in the journey toward wholeness after loss.

We are living in apocalyptic times. The apocalypse before us is not the stuff of cinematic blockbusters but rather reminds us of that the Greek root of the word apocalypse means to “uncover.” What is being uncovered in this period of rapid societal transformation is just how tenuous the ties that bind our democracy really are. It seems like every week there is a new uncovering — a new

reckoning — that exposes a festering wound that endangers our ability to be in relationship with one another and be in community. From stories of sexual assault and violence being amplified by the #metoo movement to renewed attention on police brutality against black and brown people captured on cell phone cameras, these reckoning moments are important in so far as the show a more complete picture of the deeply-rooted barriers to community building across difference.

It is also true that moments of reckoning without pathways of accountability *and* redemption for perpetrators do not reach their highest potential. At best, these moments lead not just to awareness but to transformation in the very systems and practices that wound. Systems are not abstract. They are made up of people who contribute to their creation and upkeep. Likewise, redemption is not a solitary act of confession and forgiveness. As colleagues in the restorative justice field have shown over decades of work in schools and the criminal justice system, central to this conversation is the relationship between victim, perpetrator and community.¹¹ It is a process of truly taking account for one’s action by acknowledging wrongs publicly, hearing public account of the harm one’s actions have caused, taking steps to amends and changing harmful patterns of behavior. Building new communities will require us to get into the practice of redemption if we want to break cycles of harm and incentivize truth telling.

Religious communities have centuries worth of ritual, writings and practices regarding the role and necessity of redemption and atonement. For example, the highest holidays

11 Black Youth Project (BYP) 100, a member-based organization of Black youth activists creating justice and freedom for all Black people, provides a helpful definition of restorative justice as, “An approach to criminality by seeing “crime” a less of an act of law breaking but more of an act of harm against person(s). RJ is a practice that seeks to instigate communications between the harmed and harm doer and to mitigate a process that seeks to restore harm done which will eventually aid in the transformation and reconciliation of all involved parties.” <https://byp100.org/faq/#glossary>.

on both Jewish (Yom Kippur) and Christian (Easter) liturgical calendars are both centered on this theme. Though vastly different in their theological origins and requirements of practitioners, both emphasize divine judgment and divine mercy. Indeed while the world's religious traditions may deeply disagree on concepts of rebirth, salvation, and the nature of divine, nearly all have something in their sacred text or practices that deal with community and what do so when a violation has occurred from within.

The New Ecology of Community: Re-Defining Roles

In recent years, organizations have increasingly shifted their gaze towards sustainability. People are more conscious of the need for self-care and of the loss of vision, imagination, and play in our community-building work, remedied through gifts from spiritual practices like yoga, meditation, the arts, and engagement with the natural world. A proliferation of practitioners, programs, and organizations working within the realms of healing justice, engaged activism, resilient leadership, and faith-rooted organizing has emerged to respond to this need. Examples include the Healing Justice Track at the annual Allied Media Conference, generative somatics, Liberation School South, Mystic Soul Project, and National Queer and Transgender Therapist of Color Network among others. While there are many intersections within this emergent “as yet to be named” field, it's leaders and participants are often unaware of each other, or even, at times, in direct competition for funds and people.

In their 2018 report *Care of Souls*, researchers Angie Thurston, Casper ter Kuile, and Sue Phillips suggest that caring for the souls of individuals and communities — once the exclusive territory of religious institutions — is being recast and democratized against a changing social landscape. They note several defining characteristics among these actors which includes: moving beyond the so-called secular/religious divide to find the sacred in the everyday; communities bound by shared practices and goals, more than identity or belief; and individuals unbundling wisdom and practices from ancient traditions, remixing them into a personalized spiritual life deepened in community.

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The work of embracing redemptive practices is difficult and can be extremely draining. It makes sense then that faith traditions offer a rich array of tools for cultivating individual and collective resilience and fortification. Prayer and meditation practices, yoga rituals, singing, fasting, fellowship over a meal, and communal study of sacred text are all spiritual disciplines designed to strengthen one's connection to oneself, one's community, and the divine. It is no surprise then, that even as traditional religious participation declines the artifacts of these practices can be still be found in the growing landscape of organizations and projects concerned about the holistic well-being of communities. As we shall see, groups that focus on incorporating personal and spiritual practices have clear priorities that are shaping fresh expressions of communal life: collective care and community building around healing modalities, creating spaces and centers for repair, restoration, and building connection to the land.

Along those lines, Thurston, Ter Kuile, and Phillips identify seven emerging roles that are necessary to the formation of this growing sector:

- **The Gatherer:** Brings people together to form communities of meaning and depth. In the face of loneliness, suffering, and oppression, the Gatherer fosters personal and social transformation.
- **The Maker:** Reminds us to be human. They bear witness to our humanity through art, song, ritual, and myth. The Maker is a human mirror, reflecting us back to ourselves and spurring our prophetic imagination.
- **The Venturer:** Invests in creative ways to support human flourishing. They prioritize transformative work over existing assumptions. The Venturer funds new organizational structures, wise but emerging leadership, and collaborations that defy previous logic.
- **The Elder:** Grounds our gifts in history and community. They help us to find our path and stay on it. The Elder calls forth our gifts, and grounds those gifts in history and community. They provide perspective when we think our problems are new.
- **The Steward:** Creates the infrastructure for spiritual life. They work at an ecosystem level, providing the services that make innovation sustainable. The Steward models servant leadership, often working behind the scenes to support new growth.
- **The Healer:** Breaks cycles of violence. They teach the tools of resilience, courage, and pleasure for individuals and communities. The Healer changes culture by investing in and accompanying individuals and communities on their journey toward holistic wellbeing.

- **The Seer:** Helps us perceive and approach the sacred. They give us language to make sense of our lives and pass on the teachings of our ancestors. The Seer helps us understand the divine around us and our inner divinity.

These roles are not static and often result in robust collaborations between different groups. Within this framework of new roles, new language such as the term “community weaver” is being birthed by *seers* to describe those *gatherers* whose work encompasses bridging some of the most tenuous divides in our society. Groups like the The People’s Supper, Be the Bridge, The Bridge Collective, Speaking Down Barriers, On Being’s Civil Conversations Project and the Aspen Institute’s Weave: The Social Fabric Project, are beginning the hard work of mapping the field of social healing projects that seek to fill the gap in social cohesion left by declining congregations.

Likewise the past several years has seen a thickening of relationships between *healers* and *venturers* who seek to support their work. Smaller public foundations like, the [Astraea Lesbian Foundation for Justice](#) and [Fundors for Justice](#), who have long supported practitioners and organizers that center healing modalities in their work to break cycles of violence are taking a key role in educating peer colleagues in the field to so that they might expand the pool of resources directed to healing justice projects. New opportunities like the [Ford Foundation’s Next Generation Fund](#) and [Novo Foundation’s Radical Hope Fund](#) developed from growing calls from frontline organizers and leaders to learn from restorative and transformative practices in order to support a rising generation of social justice leaders and nurture sustainable approaches to organizing and community building.

These new roles are even taking shape in the form of spiritual innovations within traditional religious structures. *Makers* such as [the Glean](#)

Network, led by ordained rabbis, are equipping visionary leaders who are re-imagining faith by supporting the new models they design from ideation to implementation to scale. Nuns and Nones is forging unlikely friendships between women in religious life and spiritually diverse Millennials as a means of opening up new possibilities for cross-generational collaboration, learning, and community. While hundreds of church plants like Root and Branch Church and The Double Love Experience are returning to the house churches of the Early Christian Church by using the dinner table as one of the central organizing tenets of their new communities.

Conclusion

The future of American religious life is not as bleak as the statistics would have us believe. The death that so many fear is part of a life cycle and as many of the world's religious tradition teach, out of death can come new life. That new life can be seen both within traditional religious institutions and in a new and growing ecosystem of roles that is rising to meet the challenges of our time. The future of religious communities

may not look like Friday night services or Sunday morning sermons, but the human capacity and desire for connection to spirit and one another will certainly not fade away. In communities of faith, we find models of being together anchored in the real experience of living with one another through the best and worst of times. At their best, they provide models of hope *and* lament, accountability *and* redemption. These are lessons that are not only applicable within the confines of religious life but should be heeded by all concerned with the future of community. For what good is community without a moral code that binds, nurtures and sustains the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual well-being of each of its members?

The opportunity before us is to build a new social contract that expands the horizons of our collective imagination about what communal life will look like when no one is cast aside without a pathway back home. How we *be* together in the 21st century hinges on our ability to keep aspiring toward that goal. It will not be a perfect process but that is not the point. Being community is a discipline that requires practice and unshakable commitment to never fully give up on one another.

About the Author



Rev. Jennifer Bailey, Founder and Executive Director, Faith Matters Network

Named one of 15 Faith Leaders to Watch by the Center for American Progress, Rev. Jennifer Bailey is an ordained minister, public theologian, and a national leader in multi-faith movement for justice. She is the Founder and Executive Director of the Faith Matters Network, a Womanist-led organization equipping community organizers, faith leaders, and activists with resources for connection, spiritual sustainability, and accompaniment. Bailey is Co-Founder of the People's Supper, a project that aims to repair the breach in our interpersonal relationships across political, ideological, and identity difference over shared meals. Since 2017, the People's Supper has hosted over 1,500 dinners in 125 communities. A sought after commentator and public speaker on the intersection of religion and public life, Bailey has spoken at the inaugural Obama Foundation Summit, Makers, TEDxSkoll, and the White House. Bailey is ordained in the African Methodist Episcopal Church. Follow her at [@revjenbailey](#).

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200 South Biscayne Boulevard
Suite 3300
Miami, FL 33131-2349
(305) 908-2600
[KF.org](#)



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