



SHARING SPIRITUAL HERITAGE

Convening, Dialogue,
and Field Building

A Report from the Fetzer Institute

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INTRODUCTION

Religious and spiritual innovation is emerging in surprising places. Mindfulness has become a movement, with meditation—grounded in Buddhist practices of presence and awareness—increasingly commonplace even in corporate settings.¹ Similarly, the practice of Sabbath is growing in popularity as people seek opportunities for a regular schedule of unplugging and rest that is modeled on the weekly Jewish practice of Shabbat.² While a growing number of Americans identify outside of religious traditions, many still seek spiritual communities and rhythms. Many participate in practices drawn from traditions but sometimes without the rich lineage of histories, teachers, elders, and communities these practices can carry.

In response to these changes, some leaders within religious traditions are considering ways that practices, narratives, rituals, and community may be passed down in unconventional and imaginative ways that also connect to and respect the heritage. Religious and spiritual leaders seek to offer the wisdom and spiritual insights they have gained through many years of shared spiritual practice, service to others, and life lived together in spiritual community. The religious traditions offer a depth of spiritual wisdom, cultivated through ritual, narrative, symbol, myth, liturgy, silence, and other sacred practices handed down through the centuries. Steeped in and guided by these traditions, some religious leaders and practitioners feel called to share their spirituality with new groups of spiritual seekers both within and outside their traditions.



Sharing Spiritual Heritage refers to building on longstanding wisdom, offering practices and rituals from religious traditions, both ancient and new, to spiritual seekers within and outside those traditions. In a world hungry for spiritual growth and increasingly disconnected from religion, traditional religious wisdom offers pathways for seekers to find meaning, depth, and connection with mystery and spirit.

These models are representative of a much larger movement within and across traditions. Some people are already engaged in this sacred work, creating new paths to access ancient traditions. The Mystic Soul Project is a community that gathers and centers voices, teachings, and the dialogue of people of color (POC) to reclaim the history and ancestry of POC lineages and mysticism. Nuns & Nones brings together Catholic sisters and religiously unaffiliated millennials to talk about life's deeper meaning and to share spiritual formation practices, as sisters reimagine what it looks like to pass on their charisms to new generations. The Formation Project invited a multi-faith group of 56 participants and spiritual elders to undergo an intensive year of spiritual formation modeled after the novitiate experience of people who become nuns or monks. The Mystic Soul Project, the Nuns & Nones organization, and Harvard Divinity School's Formation Project are examples of reimagining the relationship between religious institutions and spiritual seekers.

In January 2020, the Fetzer Institute brought together a group of individuals who are deeply invested in religious wisdom and the spiritual formation of their communities. During this convening, participants engaged in spiritual practice, discussed new paradigms, shared learnings, and expressed a need for deepening this work to reach more and diverse peoples. This convening and conversations around it aim to address the needs of the next generation of seekers in their spiritual formation by building a bridge between the wisdom and practices of traditional religion and spiritual seekers both within and outside the traditions.



THE CONVENING

Twenty-eight individuals from diverse religious and spiritual paths gathered at the Fetzer Institute's retreat center Seasons for three days of dialogue. Facilitated by Rachel Plattus and Milicent Johnson, who are affiliated with Nuns & Nones, the gathering built on a series of conversations across the past two years, seeking to explore several overarching questions:

- What are possibilities for translating spiritual practices and formation processes from the faith traditions to meet the needs of diverse spiritual seekers? How do we honor both the heritage and practice of religious traditions and the experiences of those on spiritual paths outside the traditions? Inherent in these questions are themes such as appropriation and power dynamics, authority, language, identity, and innovation.
- What models or best practices are currently being implemented or explored by different constituencies? What are the strengths and growth edges of these models?
- What are the opportunities for spiritual formation and for collaboration with and among stakeholders in the field?

Convening participants came from various organizations and backgrounds, including rabbis working in innovative Jewish communities, Catholic sisters with decades of contemplative community life, lineage holders from multiple spiritual traditions, seminary faculty, denominational leaders, interspiritual and multi-faith teachers, and nonreligious seekers (“nones” or spiritual-but-not-religious “SBNRs”).



Please believe me when I tell you that I feel changed by our gathering last week at Fetzer. In the loving space of Seasons, I was reminded that my true task is to find God within, and only then to find God for others. My inner world came to life with each new conversation in our group or privately between group meetings. You could simply feel the love in the air, and maybe, too, whispering from the surrounding trees. I look forward to bringing the spirit I discovered with you into my congregation and into the broader world as well.

— Josh Beraha, Temple Micah, Washington, D.C.

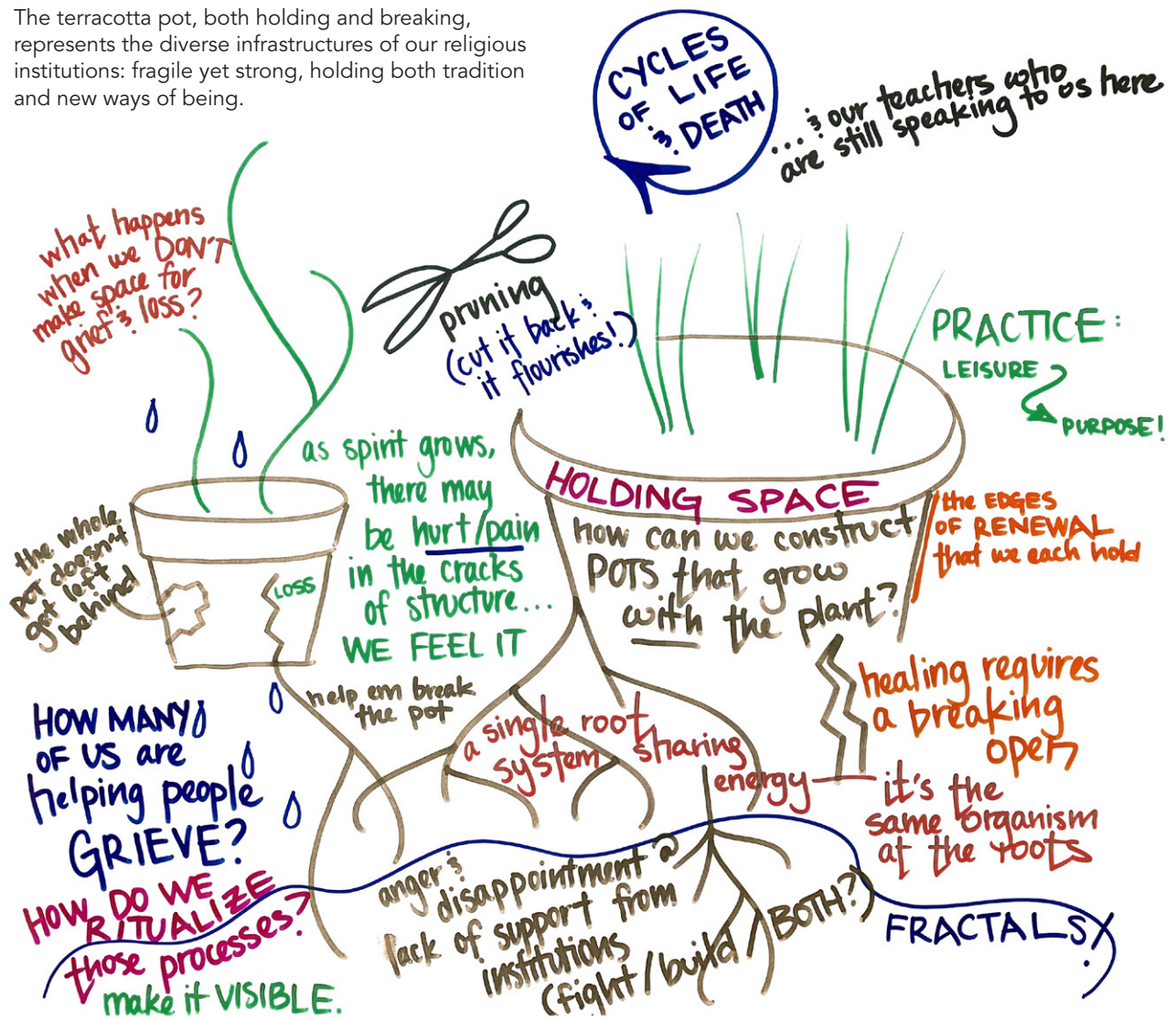


DIALOGUE THEMES: A REFLECTION OF THE WHOLE

The conversation held at the Fetzer Institute was one reflection, a microcosm, a fractal of a larger dialogue happening among spiritual seekers and those in the faith traditions.³ The dialogue included leaders and practitioners from diverse backgrounds—researchers, ordained leaders, devout religious believers, atheists, SBNRs, and leaders of secular communities. This report outlines—in five themes and four recommendations—important signals, pain points, considerations, and celebrations for this emerging field.

GRAPHIC ILLUSTRATION FROM THE GATHERING

The terracotta pot, both holding and breaking, represents the diverse infrastructures of our religious institutions: fragile yet strong, holding both tradition and new ways of being.



Art: Rachel Plattus, Nuns & Nones Co-Director

BRIDGING AMERICAN RELIGION AND SPIRITUAL SEEKERS

Scholars and leaders across traditions and disciplines recognize the changing face of religion and spirituality in the United States and in many other parts of the world.⁴ As religious affiliation decreases, accompanying declines in church membership, participation in religious activities, and the size and health of religious congregations are affecting traditional religious institutions.⁵ Despite these declines, interest in and practice of spirituality are growing across many diverse populations.⁶ People identifying broadly as spiritual seekers hunger for spiritual growth and depth, pursuing myriad opportunities for practice and for developing their inner lives and connection with the transcendent. Spiritual teachers abound—including both those grounded in religious traditions and those identifying as spiritually independent—in response to a growing movement of people seeking spiritual deepening. According to Diana Butler Bass and other religion scholars, the trend is clear. “Traditional forms of faith are being replaced by a plethora of new spiritual, ethical, and nonreligious choices. If it is not the end of religion, it certainly seems to be the end of what was conventionally understood to be American religion.”⁷

Contemporary life is calling for the next iteration of this profound heritage, as evidenced by the decline in religious participation and the increased opportunities for spiritual seeking. Butler Bass has articulated the critical need for religious adaptation in today’s cultural milieu. In her 2012 book *Christianity After Religion: The End of Church and the Birth of A New Spiritual Awakening*, Butler Bass discusses the radical shift currently underway and suggests that a changing American Christianity may be part of “forming the contours of a new kind of faith beyond conventional religious boundaries.”⁸ Butler Bass’s work also points to the ways in which religious and spiritual change is part of a larger transformation. “When a spiritual and religious upheaval and transformation twins with political and cultural upheaval, it often results in what we call periods of awakening: these times in which American history actually changes. And an awakening is not just like a revival meeting, where individuals might get changed; but instead, an awakening is a time when American society, as a whole, is transformed.”⁹

“

Is the spiritual heritage work itself a COVID-19 response? The things we are seeing during the pandemic resonate with the hungers that have been expressed in the world: differences do not matter in crisis; there is tender attention to the most vulnerable; we are separate and yet connected at the same time; and the raising up ways of being that are compassionate and expressive of gratitude. There is a global COVID-19 spirituality. Start there.

Spiritual heritage isn’t about dogma or creed. Isn’t what we are talking about a way to nourish the hunger for community and communion? We are creating a space for living a meaningful life in a global community. This is the spiritual heritage we are starved for.

— Carol Zinn, Leadership Conference of Women Religious

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PRACTICING THE WORLD WE WANT TO CREATE

Diverse leaders and seekers are eagerly pursuing the next phase. Contemplative experience is at the core of this task, embodying the work itself through spiritually diverse practices. Spiritual practice was a key design principle for the gathering at Seasons, grounding the conversation in contemplative practices and rituals drawn from different cultures and traditions. Sharing practices and being in communities of practice are also central to the broader spiritual heritage conversation. In Fetzer's ongoing experience, this is sometimes referred to as "being the work"—connecting the inner work of spiritual practice, personal growth, and intellectual thought with the outer action of carrying out the work itself in the world. Being the work is about striving to embody that which we are working to bring about in the world.

During the convening, participants were encouraged to share their own spiritual practices in small groups, and some participants led a practice for the full group. These examples illustrate ways in which the contemplative experience at the core of the conversation can embody the work itself.

- Sara Luria and Dasi Fruchter of the Beloved Network shared a mikvah ritual from the Jewish tradition, in which participants were invited to wash one another's hands in a symbolic letting go.
- Netanel Miles-Yepey and Rory McEntee of the Foundation for New Monasticism and Interspirituality led the group in an experience of Centering Prayer, a meditation practice grounded in the Christian tradition.
- Deepa Patel shared and guided participants through a song from Sufism, a repetition of *Bismillah, ar-Rahman, ar-Rahim*, in the name of God, the most merciful and compassionate.

Practices such as these are the work of Sharing Spiritual Heritage, rituals deeply grounded in various religious traditions that nourish the spiritual life of people within and beyond the religion that was the original source of the practice. Such sharing requires deep respect for the lineage itself.



“ How do we practice the world we seek to create? ”

— Milicent Johnson

HONORING LINEAGE

Faith traditions hold historical, familial, geographic, and spiritual lineages. What are the practices being handed down to others? Who are the teachers, elders, and prophets who have held those practices? Lineage is something to be carried from the past to now and on to future generations. The now becomes an intermediary between what has been and what will be. Speaking of lineage necessarily includes careful attention to the roots of a tradition, as sharing practices through time honors what was handed down and respects what is passed forward.

“I’d like to say that all my teachers are dead and that all my people are imaginary. And that my job is to make those teachers more alive and make those people more real.”

— Zac Kamenetz, *Beloved Berkeley*

This sharing must necessarily include deep respect for the source of the original practice, with attention to authenticity, cultural adaptation, and potential for appropriation that could misuse practices.¹⁰ Is it appropriate or even possible to utilize practices from a religious tradition without the larger meaning and history provided by the religions themselves? Do practices such as corporate mindfulness have anything to do with religion? Discussion of sharing religious heritage needs reflection and dialogue about avoiding the commodification of religious heritage and other potentially offensive appropriation that could inadvertently occur in these contexts. Key ideas include recognizing that practices change with transmission and examining questions of authority, with acknowledgement that individuals do not speak for their entire tradition.

At the convening, participants expressed a desire to preserve the value and spirit of what has been passed on, while at the same time acknowledging that pain and oppression are also embedded in the lineages of many faith traditions. Sharing the spiritual heritage of the wisdom traditions must include a reckoning with both the great gifts and great pain that have been handed down across the generations. Such reckoning can be fostered through the inclusion of a broad diversity of voices in the conversations—such as religious leaders from different traditions and cultures, scholars, and spiritually diverse seekers—who will respect and honor both the lineages they share and the need for healing.

“Our lineages are not just behind us, but they’re also ahead of us. And so, when I speak about my lineage, my lineage is the folks in the civil rights movement. As the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., said, these people knew the immersion of baptism and had water rituals so that when Bull Connor turned water cannons on them, they knew a type of spiritual transphysics that could not be stopped by his ideas of the physics of violence. They had a lineage of fire inside of them that no water, no violence, could put out. And now, as we look ahead to the next generation, I see that fire and transcendence again in the young people who are rising up all over this country demanding love as justice and justice as liberation via the rise of Black Lives Matter and spiritual movement building in Ferguson, and now, all over the world.”

— Milicent Johnson, Co-facilitator of January 2020 convening

SPIRITUAL FORMATION: A YEARNING FOR SOMETHING MORE

Spiritual formation is the deliberate attending to the process of growth, maturation, and learning on the spiritual journey. This developmental process is grounded in relationships: to sacred stories, practices, one another, elders, rituals, and communities. Most Americans consider themselves spiritual, yet less than 20% attend religious services regularly, and more than a quarter do not identify with a religious tradition.¹¹ During the COVID-19 pandemic, almost half of young people tried a new spiritual practice.¹² Spiritual seeking is happening everywhere, but often in isolation and lacking many of these critical relationships.


“When I was in 5th grade, I had gone to Hebrew school (religious school) for a number of years, and it was Hanukkah again. And they told the story of the eight nights, and the miracle and the oil, and I remembered thinking in my mind, ‘Is there anything else about Hanukkah? Like is that the whole... That’s it? That’s for the rest of my life we’re just going to do eight nights, a miracle, go have some presents?’ And my people are the people who ask that question: ‘You got anything else in there?’ Five thousand years of tradition and it’s all about eight nights and oil? Those are my people, who’ve been wondering for a long time if there’s more in there that we can draw out.”

— Sara Luria, Beloved Brooklyn

Religious innovators across geographies and traditions have created new spiritual offerings in response to this need. Thought leaders, clergy, religious practitioners, scholars, convening participants, and leaders of innovative spiritual communities have already contributed to this spiritual heritage conversation. Many people desire spiritual nourishment but feel as though they are not allowed access because of their identity or affiliation. Sharing Spiritual Heritage is a way to respond to this emerging need through the wisdom grounded in the practices of mystics and religious leaders handed down across centuries. By changing the context, but not the spiritual tools, spiritual innovators are able to meet more people where they are in their spiritual journeys.

“So that’s the thirst that I’m trying to respond to in my work ... that thirst for connection across all of those dimensions, especially in light of how many, especially young people, are not held within a tradition that they feel they can identify with or be served by or that catalyzes them to service in their lives.”

— Angie Thurston, Sacred Design Lab



“Who are your people and what are they thirsty for?”

KNOWING WHERE WE ARE TO IMAGINE WHERE WE COULD GO

Many leaders in this emerging sector identify as being on the renewal edge of their faith tradition. Others identify with multiple traditions or with no faith tradition. Nonetheless, these leaders are spiritual innovators who find themselves carrying forward wisdom from the traditions, agreeing that many of the core theologies are unchangeable, but the practices and social norms are evolving.

Imagining the future of religion includes a tension about whether the existing infrastructures will continue to sustain and nurture the held sacred wisdom. People within the field hold varying viewpoints as to whether they should work inside of traditional institutional structures or offer new spaces separate from and related to these structures. Religious and spiritual innovation is currently emerging in both places, including wisdom from the traditions as well as other sources, such as the arts and sciences.

Some leaders refer to this time as “de-institutionalizing of religion,” particularly within American Christianity but also in other traditions. They see themselves reclaiming the core of institutional religion and handing it on to the next generation of followers, which may look very different from the religions of the past century. On the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, Franciscan Fr. Richard Rohr reflected on this change in his Daily Meditation: “The Roman Catholic Church itself admits it is always in need of reformation. Reformation is the perpetual process of conversion that is needed by all individuals and institutions. We appear to be in the midst of another period of significant turmoil and rebirth. ... With each reformation, we don’t need to start from scratch but return to the foundations of our Tradition. We don’t throw out the baby with the bathwater, but reclaim the essential truths. And remember that truth anywhere is truth everywhere. With each rebirth, Christianity becomes more inclusive and universal, as it was always meant to be.”¹³

“I don’t claim to be in a particular tradition, but I have been lucky enough to have had very close mentors from various contemplative traditions who were established in religious traditions and who are my spiritual parents, really. A number of Catholic monks, a Hindu sannyasin, and a number of Tibetan Buddhist monks. But I always felt clearly that my path consisted of holding a space not embedded in a particular tradition, what is sometimes called an interspiritual space. And none of my teachers ever pushed me to ‘join’ their particular religious traditions. In fact, just the opposite. They affirmed my path, because really, these types of ‘identities’ just didn’t really matter in the end. They weren’t the point. So much of the spiritual path is about letting go of one’s identity. And the whole point of our relationship was about my transformation, spiritual growth, and the ability to categorize my path or label me in some way really had nothing to do with that.”

— Rory McEntee, Charis Foundation for New Monasticism and Interspirituality

Imagining the future of religion includes a tension about whether the existing infrastructures will continue to sustain and nurture the held sacred wisdom.



“To me, the formational processes and experiences that are living within these structures that are clearly dying or declining in relevance in public life, that’s the reason we’re all here. The notion of spiritual formation, a word that we borrow from the Catholic religious traditions, is a function that oftentimes happens in ways that aren’t named. So there’s something in here for me about popularizing this vacuum that is opening up in a big way, in a culture of individualism, that it creates a common language of formation. To popularize the idea of formative processes and experiences of a spiritual source. To simply make it something that is widely understood, shared, valued. Because these processes have been masked historically within the institutional structures and the need there is so profound. For me there’s a whole field-building element of the future: to create structures, languages, to make it a thing.”

— Michael Poffenberger, Center for Action and Contemplation

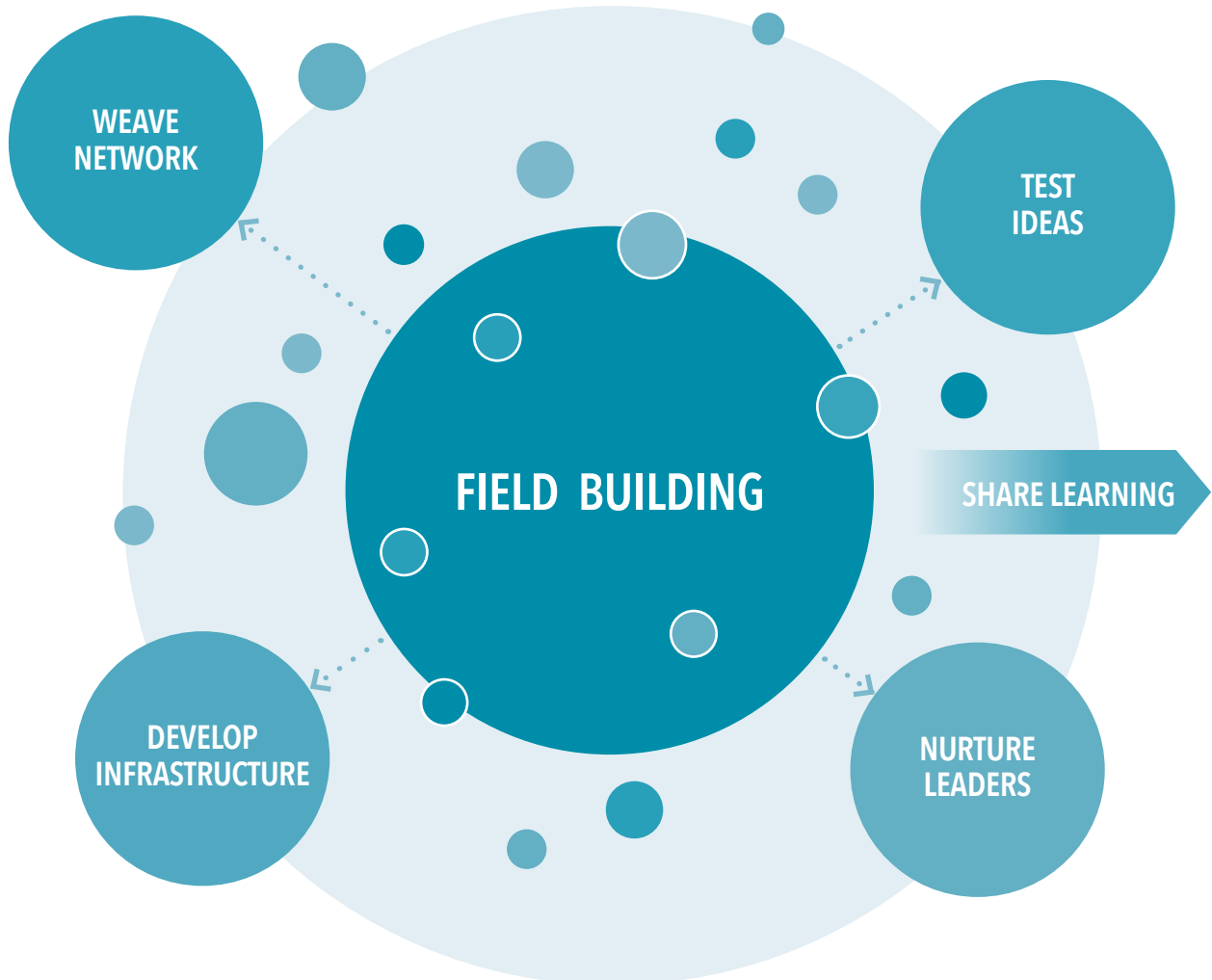
FIELD BUILDING: RECOMMENDATIONS

On the final day of the convening and in numerous follow-up conversations in 2020, participants shared ideas for potential next steps in developing Sharing Spiritual Heritage as a larger body of work. Field building emerged as a primary recommendation, pointing to a gap in current structures and disciplines. The critical work of field building can be addressed through four key tasks: network weaving, infrastructure development, leadership formation, and testing new approaches. This field building must necessarily take place within the context of transformative equity work that is central to the project.

“

A field is a community of organizations and individuals working together to solve a common set of problems, develop a common body of theory and knowledge, or advance and apply common practices. — Kevin O’Neil, The Rockefeller Foundation, “How Do You Build a Field? Lessons From Public Health”

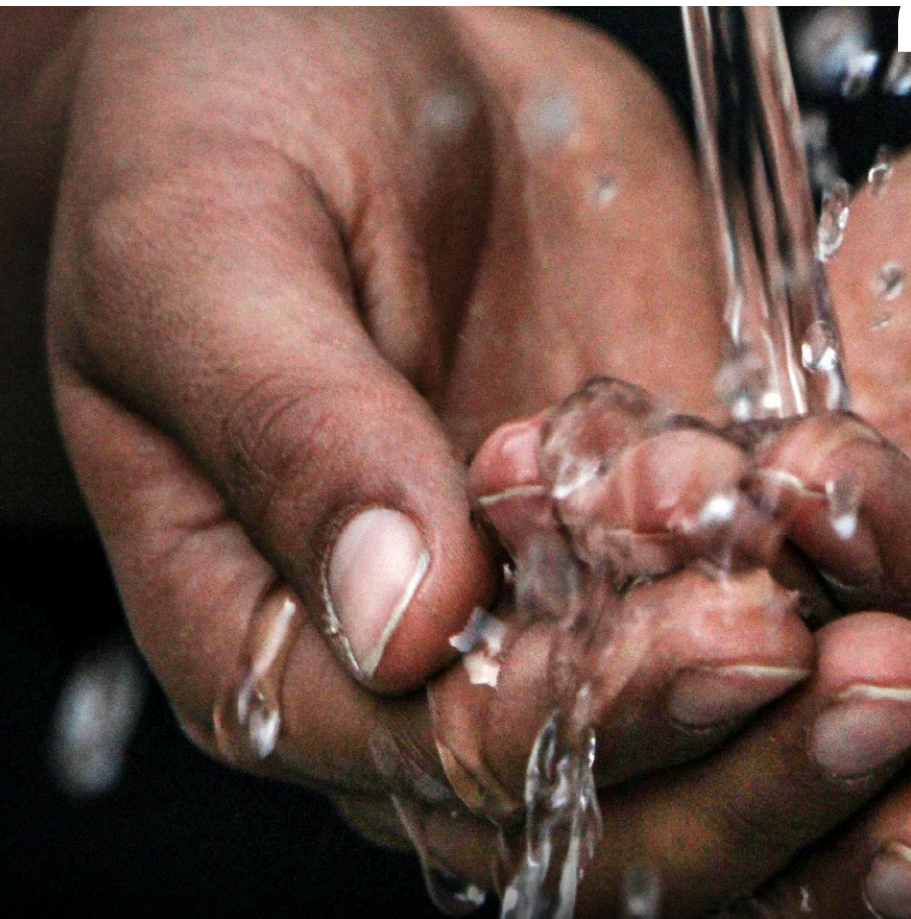
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The Primacy of Equity: Many conversations during the convening and beyond have focused on the pressing need to dismantle systems of oppression, de-colonize religious and spiritual traditions, and lift up voices that have been silenced by white supremacy and other forms of oppression. Participants named that spiritual heritage includes the pain of those who have been marginalized by religion, as well as the need to create diverse opportunities for spiritual healing. Suggestions for de-centering whiteness in this emerging sector include a focus on POC-led formation spaces, creating space for queer and trans POC (QTPOC) voices to be heard, and convening majority non-white gatherings to explore these themes more deeply. The much-needed conversation can include indigenous healers and teaching from marginalized people who are holders of ancestral wisdom. This will require hard work among the white majority, acknowledging the reality of racism in religious institutions and deliberately inviting to the table those who have not yet been heard in this conversation, such as indigenous people, people from outside North America, and people who identify as transgender or gender nonbinary. The emerging ecosystem offers an opportunity to find solidarity across radical difference by being together in a space of unknowns and finding unity in shared commitments.

“We each have important pieces of the whole We have to create futures in which everyone doesn’t have to be the same kind of person I want an interdependence of lots of kinds of people with lots of belief systems, and continued evolution.”

— adrienne maree brown, *Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds*



In the song ‘Formation,’ Beyoncé is telling us something crucial about the intersection of spiritual heritage, justice, and activism—and what it means to be formed as a Black American. For me, formation isn’t just about what happens within organized religious spheres . . . it’s not an undertaking that belongs only to Whiteness or colonizing religions (like Catholicism, for example). There is MUCH to be learned from BIPOC folx about how we make choices about what shapes and molds us. What our lineages impart to us. What our histories invite us to claim and wrestle with—and how all of this has to live at the intersection of spirituality and justice. I think for BIPOC folx, there isn’t the luxury of divorcing spiritual formation from real world matters of justice.

— Alicia Forde, Unitarian Universalist Association



FIELD BUILDING: WEAVE THE NETWORK

“Network weaving,” a term coined by June Holley, is defined as being aware of the networks in a movement and explicitly working to cultivate and strengthen them. This occurs through strong connections: “helping people identify their interests and challenges, connecting people strategically where there’s potential for mutual benefit, and serving as a catalyst for self-organizing groups.”¹⁴ Stakeholders across various traditions and organizations have named spiritual heritage work as an emerging sector in need of cultivation. The work may be advanced through convening, developing networks of connection, and building collaborations across multiple institutions, such as funders, denominations, faith leaders, and seminaries. Leaders envision a broad, multi-year effort to develop an emerging field with shared language and structures that don’t currently exist. One thought leader named this as a critical conversation not happening elsewhere in this emerging area of work. Participants in the Seasons gathering suggested that such field building would offer much-needed support for those currently serving in this sector who feel isolated and alone in their work.

This strategy is affirmed in a report from the National Council of Nonprofits. “A networked group of people and/or organizations can act in concert to accomplish what cannot be accomplished individually by ‘building relationships for sharing knowledge, goods and experiences and ... learning from each other.’”¹⁵ Networks allow innovations to spread rapidly because of the critical connections between members. Networks organize under a common vision and purpose to achieve change. They serve as both a “pathway and trusted connector” to create a shared understanding among stakeholders and a connective tissue of trust that further enhances learnings.¹⁶

“

If love were the core practice of a new generation of organizers and spiritual leaders, it would have a massive impact on what was considered organizing. If the goal was to increase the love rather than winning or dominating a constant opponent, I think we could actually imagine liberation from constant oppression. We would suddenly be seeing everything we do, everyone we meet, not through the tactical eyes of war, but through eyes of love. We would see that there’s no such thing as a blank canvas, an empty land or a new idea – but everywhere there is complex, ancient, fertile ground full of potential We would understand the strength of our movement is in the strength of our relationships.

–adrienne maree brown, *Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds*

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FIELD BUILDING: DEVELOP INFRASTRUCTURE

Developing new infrastructure is another key facet of the needed field-building work. Spiritual innovators and leaders of emerging religious and spiritual communities lack key supports for their work, structures which in the past were often provided by larger organizing bodies such as denominations and national networks. With many religious and spiritual groups currently outside the structures of organized religion, a larger infrastructure is missing from this emerging sector. Some of the supports such infrastructure offers include such practicalities as nonprofit status, human resources, liability insurance, health insurance for staff, legal services, professional development, training and certification of leaders, and other critical elements of organizational operation. Creating infrastructure to support religious and spiritual innovation is a critical next step in mainstreaming the work and making it sustainable.

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While our group represented real diversity, there was ample common ground. We largely agreed that spiritual formation needs support, space, and structure. It's too important to leave to chance, and it's too challenging to pursue on one's own. Our inner lives need attention. They really do. In the Jewish community, we love to talk, analyze, and stay very busy, and sometimes what we need most is to sit with ourselves and take our exploration inward. Much of spiritual growth begins beneath the surface and may remain there for some time, but that is not where it ends. Once the sap starts to flow, sweet flowers will soon blossom.

— Bethie Miller, Sanctuary, New York

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FIELD BUILDING: NURTURE LEADERS

The convening offered a model that many participants found inspiring and nourishing for themselves and for the larger ecosystem; many asked for additional convenings of this nature to help strengthen and support leadership in the emerging field. Ideas for additional convenings include: learning cohorts for diverse spiritual leaders, with regular gatherings over time; forums for spiritual innovators to connect and learn from each other; affinity groups (e.g., Jewish, new contemplative, Christian, Buddhist, interspiritual); study groups; field visits; gatherings for healers and ancestral lineage holders; regional gatherings for those working in both emerging and traditional faith communities; contemplative retreats for leaders' spiritual nourishment, connection, and professional growth; and dialogues to explore shared language, the meaning of heritage and charism, pedagogy, and diverse practices that foster spirit and soul work. This breadth of possibilities points to the need among leaders for professional development, training, and spiritual formation as a part of the field building needed to support and grow the work.

FIELD BUILDING: TEST NEW IDEAS

Conversations with leaders in this emerging field also identify the need for diverse opportunities for spiritual formation grounded in the wisdom and practices of the traditions. Ideas could be explored and tested through seed funds or a series of pilot projects, developing and incubating innovative formation methods and sharing learnings among innovators. Ideas for seed projects include experiments in new forms of communal life; immersive formation experiences; nurturing existing nascent communities; formation circles across traditions; a new monastery of radical diversity in contemplative community; retreat models inviting people into temporary monastic living; creative combining of religious practices, nature, art, movies, music, and other resources; and creating interspiritual communities of practice. Leaders express a need for dialogue and networking among innovators, creating new containers and a “spiritual sandbox” for visionary leaders serving as midwives for a new stage of spiritual formation.

“In order to create a world that works for more people, for more life, we have to collaborate on the process of dreaming and visioning and implementing that world. We have to recognize that a multitude of realities have, do, and will exist. The more people who cocreate the future, the more people whose concerns will be addressed ...”

— adrienne maree brown, *Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds*



GRAPHIC ILLUSTRATION FROM THE GATHERING

Grief, the resilient commitment to the gifts of the faith traditions, and the courage to imagine something new are steps on a journey. Each person and each step brings a different experience, creating a beautiful mosaic of tiles.



Art: Rachel Plattus, Nuns & Nones Co-Director

THE ROLE OF THE FETZER INSTITUTE

With its mission to help build the spiritual foundation for a loving world, the Fetzer Institute seeks to catalyze and support broad-scale spiritual transformation from separation and fear to wholeness and love. This deep transformation of self and society begins with each individual and their own inner work, growing in love and sacred connection with all that is, and integrating that inner work with the outer work of service and action. A more loving world emerges one heart at a time.

The work of Sharing Spiritual Heritage helps create the conditions for broad-scale spiritual transformation by offering pathways for individuals to engage in deep spiritual work. Religious and spiritual innovators create communities and formation opportunities for seekers to deepen their journeys. Grounded in diverse and ancient wisdom, spiritual community can integrate rituals, symbols, practices, and narratives that nurture the spiritual life, inspiring growth and depth. Such practices help seekers learn to better embody love and to enact the inner life through the outer life of service to others—ultimately fostering not just their own transformation but the transformation of society.

A vibrant field of religious and spiritual innovation is a critical element needed to catalyze and support the global movement for spiritual and societal transformation, with leaders and spaces to hold and guide transformation. Currently the work is evolving among individual leaders and communities who are not connected to each other and, in some cases, also not connected to the traditions that hold the ancient spiritual wisdom. As formal religious affiliation and practice continue to decline in the United States, a growing population of diverse spiritual seekers needs the legacy and wisdom the traditions have developed over centuries of teaching and practice. Leaders and practitioners across multiple traditions stand poised to respond to this increasing need, eager to share their learning and experience with those who continue the spiritual search.



Sharing Spiritual Heritage offers an opportunity for field building that will help create bridges between the religious traditions and spiritual seekers, developing and testing strategies for spiritual formation while at the same time building networks of collaboration and strengthening the sector. As part of the global movement for spiritual transformation, field building will foster spiritual formation grounded in the longstanding wisdom and experience of the traditions. These religious practitioners offer their gifts as an inheritance to the next generation, freely given for the future and for the common good. Religious and spiritual innovators serve as midwives of spiritual awakening, utilizing the rich depth of their religious heritage for further transformation of self and society.

"THE SEVEN OF PENTACLES"

by Marge Piercy

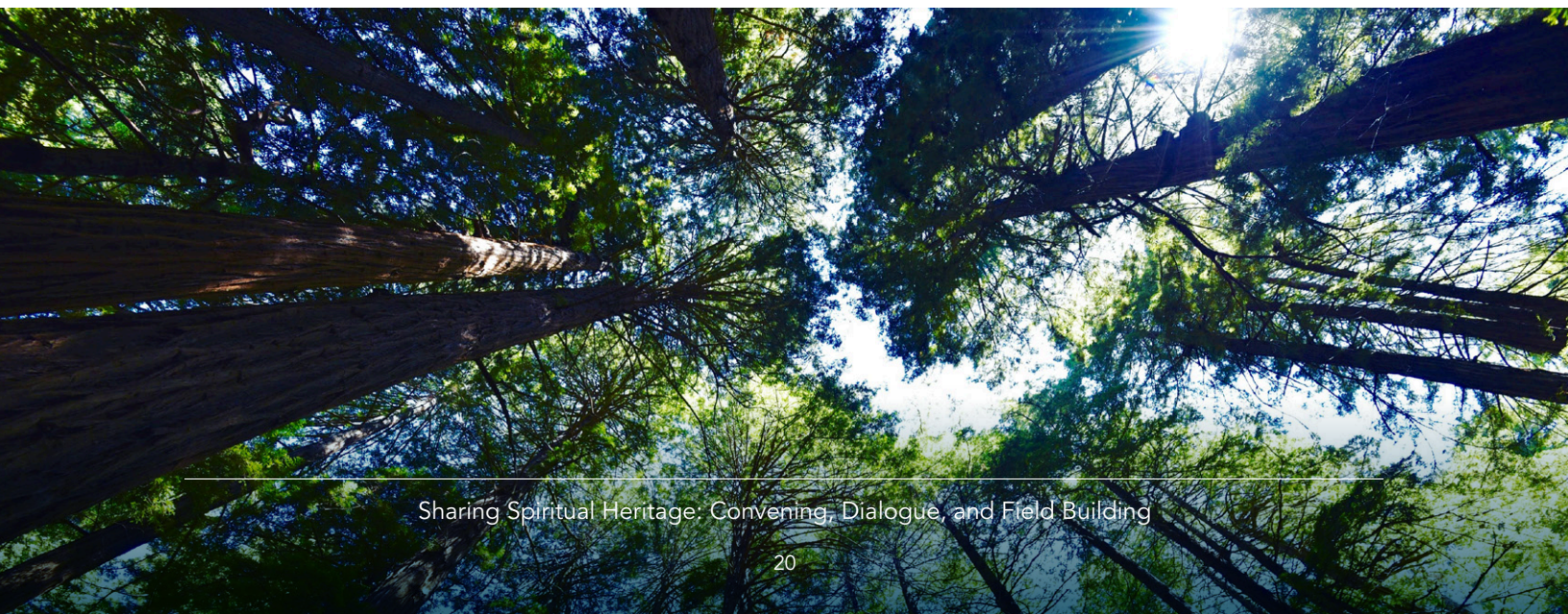
Under a sky the color of pea soup
she is looking at her work growing away there
actively, thickly like grapevines or pole beans
as things grow in the real world, slowly enough.
If you tend them properly, if you mulch, if you water,
if you provide birds that eat insects a home and winter food,
if the sun shines and you pick off caterpillars,
if the praying mantis comes and the ladybugs and the bees,
then the plants flourish, but at their own internal clock.

Connections are made slowly, sometimes they grow underground.
You cannot tell always by looking what is happening.
More than half the tree is spread out in the soil under your feet.
Penetrate quietly as the earthworm that blows no trumpet.
Fight persistently as the creeper that brings down the tree.
Spread like the squash plant that overruns the garden.
Gnaw in the dark and use the sun to make sugar.

Weave real connections, create real nodes, build real houses.
Live a life you can endure: Make love that is loving.
Keep tangling and interweaving and taking more in,
a thicket and bramble wilderness to the outside but to us
interconnected with rabbit runs and burrows and lairs.

Live as if you liked yourself, and it may happen:
reach out, keep reaching out, keep bringing in.
This is how we are going to live for a long time: not always,
for every gardener knows that after the digging, after
the planting, after the long season of tending and growth,
the harvest comes.

From *Circles on the Water*, Selected Poems of Marge Piercy



APPENDIX A: CONVENING PARTICIPANTS



JOSH BERAHA

Associate Rabbi, Temple Micah



KATIE GORDON

Staff Member at Monasteries of the Heart; a National Organizer with Nuns & Nones



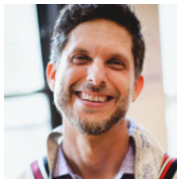
MEGHAN CAMPBELL

Program Associate, Fetzer Institute



MARY ELLEN HIGGINS

Vice President, Congregation of the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary



DAVID CURIEL

Founder and Spiritual Director, Asiyah Jewish Community



ADAM HOROWITZ

National Organizer, Nuns & Nones



ALICIA FORDE

Director of the International Office, Unitarian Universalist Association



MILICENT JOHNSON

San Francisco Planning Commissioner, Consultant



DASI FRUCHTER

Founder and Spiritual Leader, South Philadelphia Shtiebel



ZAC KAMENETZ

Co-Director, Beloved Berkeley



RACHEL GOLDENBERG

Founder, Malkhut



UVINIE LUBECKI

Founder and CEO, Leading Through Connection

APPENDIX A: CONVENING PARTICIPANTS

**SARA LURIA**

Co-Founder, Beloved

**MOHAMMED HAMID MOHAMMED**

Senior Program Officer,
Fetzer Institute

**RORY MCENTEE**

Co-Founder and Co-Director,
Charis Foundation for New
Monasticism and Interspirituality

**KATE OLSON**

Consultant, Saint John's Abbey

**ABDUL-REHMAN MALIK**

Lecturer and Associate Research
Scholar at the Yale Divinity School;
Program Coordinator at Yale
University's Council on Middle East
Studies; Director of the Muslim
Leadership Lab; Programs Manager
for the Radical Middle Way

**SU YON PAK**

Senior Director and Associate
Professor of Integrative
and Field-Based Education,
Union Theological Seminary

**TERESA MATEUS**

Co-Founder and Executive Director
of The Mystic Soul Project;
Co-Founder and Program
Coordinator for TRACC
(trauma response and crisis care)
for Movements

**CHRISTINE PARKS**

Spiritual Director, Congregation of
the Sisters of St. Joseph

**NETANEL MILES-YEPEZ**

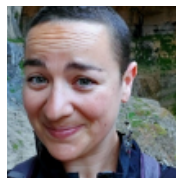
Co-Founder of the Charis
Foundation for New Monasticism
and Interspirituality; Professor at
Naropa University

**DEEPA PATEL**

Facilitator and Consultant;
Executive Director of the Zenith
Institute; Chair of Tamasha Theatre
Company and the Loss Foundation;
Advisor to the Charis Foundation
on New Monasticism and
InterSpirituality

**BETHIE MILLER**

Founder, Sanctuary

**RACHEL PLATTUS**

Organizer, Facilitator,
Co-Director of Nuns & Nones;
Co-Creator of Beautiful Solutions

APPENDIX A: CONVENING PARTICIPANTS



MICHAEL POFFENBERGER

Executive Director, Center for
Action and Contemplation



MICHELLE SCHEIDT

Senior Program Officer,
Fetzer Institute



ANNMARIE SANDERS

Director of Communications,
Leadership Conference
of Women Religious



ANGIE THURSTON

Co-Founder, Sacred Design Lab



APPENDIX B: PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS

The following organizations were represented at the January 2020 convening hosted by the Fetzer Institute.

The Beloved Network is a collaboration of Jewish religious leaders in the United States committed to fostering community through “home-based” Jewish experiences. Sara Luria, founder of Beloved Brooklyn, hosts Shabbat meals, rituals based on the Jewish calendar, meditation circles, and learning experiences for young children and families. The network includes Asiyah in Cambridge, MA; Beloved in Berkeley, CA, and Brooklyn, NY; Malchut in Queens, NY; Sanctuary in Westchester, NY; South Philly Shtiebel in Philadelphia, PA; and Temple Micah in Washington, D.C.

The Center for Action and Contemplation (CAC) is an educational ecosystem that seeks to connect spiritual seekers with the Christian contemplative tradition. This organization houses the work of Fr. Richard Rohr in the form of accessible meditations, courses, retreats, conferences, books, and online resources. The CAC network and teachings connect mystics from diverse spiritual and religious paths by exploring deep spiritual truths; in doing so, it has attracted a large following of diverse peoples.

The Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph is a religious community of nearly 500 vowed Catholic women and over 500 lay associates who live and minister in the U.S. and around the world. Through their Mission Network, they work with and support a diverse array of ministries, including three Catholic high schools, tutoring and literacy programs, spirituality centers, social service programs, spiritual direction, and pastoral assistance.

The Foundation for New Monasticism and Interspirituality (FNMI) is a nonprofit organization committed to supporting an interspiritual contemplative life that “embraces the ideals of all the world’s wisdom traditions.” FNMI is a community that hosts dialogue-based retreats for current and potential spiritual leaders, offers a two-year formation program for new monastics, houses a collection of audiovisual resources of interspiritual pioneers, offers online and in-person courses, and partners with monasteries and contemplative centers to provide retreats and training.

The Leadership Conference of Women Religious is an association of the leaders of congregations of Catholic women religious in the United States. This conference was founded in 1956 and represents nearly 80% of the 44,000 women religious in the United States. Annmarie Sanders, associate director for communications, and Carol Zinn, executive director, are leaders and a bridge to a network of 302 congregations with more than 30,000 members.

Leading Through Connection trains people to use compassion to transform how they lead and serve. Without compassion we cannot understand where others are coming from, feel for them in a genuine way, and help them to be successful. Founder Uvinie Lubecki and her team train people by providing tools and practices that harness compassion through various modalities—interactive workshops, executive coaching, speaking engagements, and thought leadership.

The Mystic Soul Project’s mission is to engage the wisdom, teaching, resources, and voices of People of Color (POC) at the intersections of spirituality, activism, and healing. Its purpose is to offer community space (through engagement in national and regional events, as well as supporting local community organizations) for POC to build a network and support around these three points of engagement.

Nuns & Nones is an alliance of spiritually diverse young folks, women religious, and key partners working to create a more just, equitable, and loving world. Together, they are envisioning and creating new futures for the legacies and sacred spaces of religious and monastic life in response to the social and environmental needs of our times.

APPENDIX B: PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS

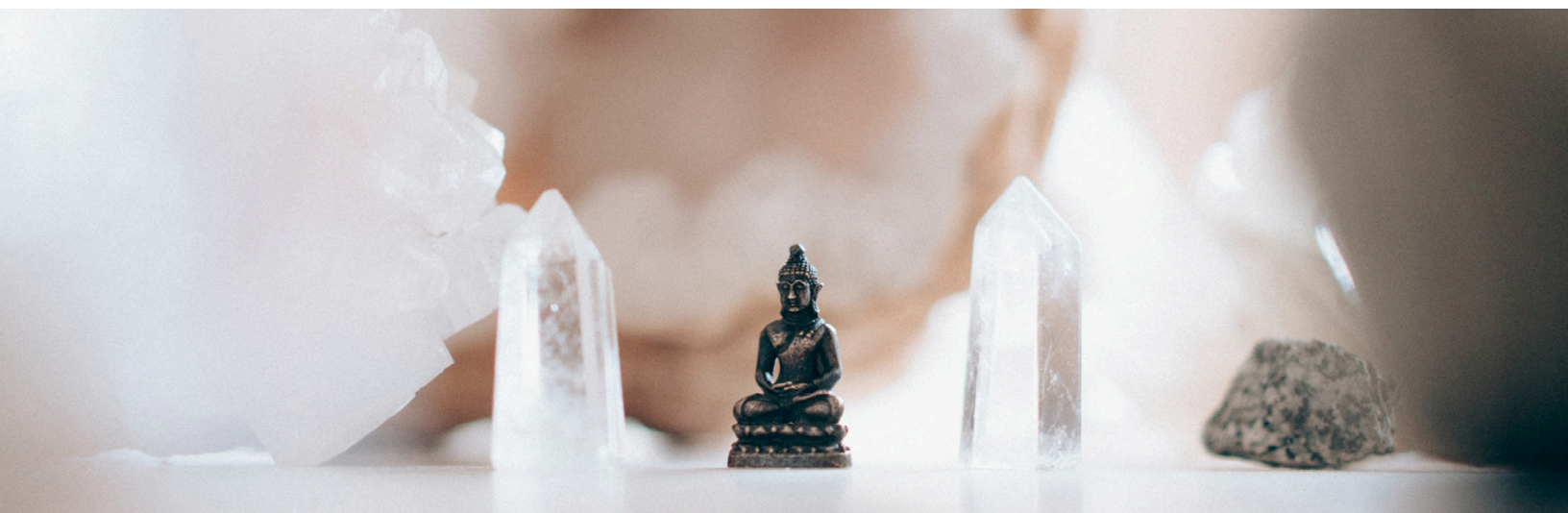
Sacred Design Lab is a research and design consultancy working to create a culture of belonging and becoming. The team of Sue Phillips, Angie Thurston, and Casper ter Kuile applies ancient wisdom to today's problems. By listening to elders, learning from scholars, and working with spiritual innovators and practitioners, they've collected a portfolio of ancient best practices to help clients tap into what matters most.

Saint John's Abbey is a religious community of Catholic Benedictine monks located in Collegeville, Minnesota. Founded in 1856, their campus includes the monastery, Saint John's University, The Liturgical Press, and The Center for Latino Ministry. Following the Rule of Saint Benedict, the Saint John's Abbey supports those whose lives are committed to service and prayer. Its pastors and chaplains share their ministry in approximately twenty outlying communities.

Union Theological Seminary was founded in 1836 by nine Presbyterian ministers as an urban seminary. They established a seminary during what they recognized as "the greatest and most growing community in America." The founders forged a new vision for theological education: to center ministerial training in an urban context so that academic excellence and personal faith might respond to the needs of the city. Today, Union Theological Seminary lives out this formative call to service by training people—of all faiths and none—who are called to the work of social justice in the world.

The mission of the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA) is to equip congregations for health and vitality, to support and train lay and professional leaders, and to advance Unitarian Universalist values in the world. The UUA is the central organization for the Unitarian Universalist (UU) religious movement in the United States. The UUA's 1,000+ member congregations are committed to Seven Principles that include the worth of each person, the need for justice and compassion, and the right to choose one's own beliefs. Their faith tradition is diverse and inclusive.

Yale Divinity School is that rare place in American society: one where it enthusiastically explores the questions and answers that lie between faith and intellect. It is a campus that not only dives into the gray spaces between the black and white that so often characterize public discourse, but thrives in them. It is Christian in ethos and tradition, but open to others. It welcomes the opportunity to have dialogues and learn from other faith traditions. Its students and faculty regularly engage in conversations and activism around issues of immigration, women's and LGBTQ rights, health care, and racial justice.



ENDNOTES

¹"Here's What Google Teaches Employees in its 'Search Inside Yourself' Course," *Business Insider*, August 5, 2014, <https://www.businessinsider.com/search-inside-yourself-googles-life-changing-mindfulness-course-2014-8>.

²"The Sabbath Manifesto," *The Sabbath Manifesto*, Reboot, 2010, <http://www.sabbathmanifesto.org/>.

³This notion of fractal was inspired and borrowed from adriene marie brown's *Emergent Strategy*. Many of brown's theme were discussed and infused into this meeting. adriene marie brown, *Emergent Strategy*, (Chico: AK Press, 2017).

⁴Mainline Protestantism, where the decline is greatest, decreased in membership from 41 million in 2007 to 36 million in 2014. "America's Changing Religious Landscape," Pew Research Center, Forum on Religion and Public Life, May 12, 2015, <http://www.pewforum.org/2015/05/12/americas-changing-religious-landscape/>.

⁵As religious affiliation decreases, 4,000 to 7,000 churches close every year, and less than 20 percent of Americans attend religious services regularly. Steve McSwain, "Why Nobody Wants to go to Church Anymore," *The Huffington Post*, U.S. Edition, The Blog, updated January 23, 2014, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/steve-mcswain/why-nobody-wants-to-go-to_b_4086016.html.

⁶Religious affiliation in general has shown steep decline in the United States, especially since 1990 and particularly among millennials and younger generations. In the first half of the twentieth century, approximately five percent of Americans had no religious affiliation; by 2017, that number had risen to more than one-quarter of the U.S. population. Studies from the Pew Research Center reveal an overall decline in rates of religious belief, practice, and affiliation. "'Nones' on the Rise: One-in-Five Adults Have No Religious Affiliation," Pew Research Center, Forum on Religion and Public Life, October 9, 2012, <https://www.pewforum.org/2012/10/09/nones-on-the-rise/>.

⁷Diana Butler Bass, *Christianity After Religion: The End of Church and the Birth of a New Spiritual Awakening* (New York: HarperCollins, 2012), 14.

⁸Diana Butler Bass, *Christianity After Religion*, 5.

⁹Diana Butler Bass, interview by Rev. Dr. C. Welton Gaddy, *State of Belief*, State of Belief Radio, May 19, 2012.

¹⁰This has been a strongly debated topic among scholars of religion, including at the American Academy of Religion, with regard to the mindfulness movement. Some Buddhists don't see mindfulness as part of their tradition, while others feel that secular society has co-opted their religious heritage, missing the depth and the purpose and turning practice into a consumer product.

¹¹The trends described here are evident in North America, Europe, North and East Asia. Religious affiliation remains strong in Africa, the Middle East, and some parts of Latin America. Phil Zuckerman, Luke W. Galen, and Frank L. Pasquale, *The Nonreligious: Understanding Secular People and Societies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 33-35.

¹²"Social Distancing Heightens Feelings of Isolation and Loneliness in Young People," Springtide Research Institute, April 9, 2020, <https://www.springtideresearch.org/new-social-distancing-study/>.

¹³Fr. Richard Rohr, "The Great Emergence," Center for Action and Contemplation, <https://cac.org/the-great-emergence-2017-11-26/> (accessed March 6, 2019).

¹⁴Beth Kanter citing June Holley, *The Network Weaver Handbook*, (Network Weaver: 2018), <https://networkweaver.com/network-weaving-handbook/>.

¹⁵Jennifer Chandler and Kristen Scott Kennedy, "A Network Approach to Capacity Building," National Council of Nonprofits, (2015), 3.

¹⁶Jennifer Chandler and Kristen Scott Kennedy, "A Network Approach to Capacity Building," National Council of Nonprofits, (2015), 3.

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