

# HEALING THE HEALERS

SPECIAL EDITION: COVID-19

A **LIVE** TOWNHALL

## Movement Chaplaincy: Meeting Spiritual Needs in our Struggles for Justice

EXPERT REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION GUIDE

A PROJECT FROM

**ODYSSEYIMPACT!**

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# Introduction

At Odyssey Impact, we believe in the power of personal story to change perspectives, change attitudes, and even to change the world. As the COVID-19 pandemic intensified in the U.S., Odyssey Impact responded to the needs of faith leaders, spiritual care providers, and faith communities by convening live town halls on requested topics. Experts, leaders, scholars, and on-the-ground providers shared their candid insights and questions arising in this unprecedented time.

Our hope is the following guide will help current Faith Leaders in their work to lead a thriving congregation or community and faculty as they prepare future faith leaders to navigate trauma.

May our networks of care be strengthened, our imaginations expanded, and our hope ignited.



For the creation of this written resource, we are grateful to the Dr. Chanequa Walker-Barnes who is a clinical psychologist, womanist theologian, and ecumenical minister.

# Panelists



**HELEN BENNETT**  
Movement Chaplain  
Tzedek Lab  
Boston, MA



**REV. KIM JACKSON**  
Atlanta Protest Chaplains  
Atlanta, GA



**IMAMA TRINA JACKSON**  
Muslims for Progressive Values  
Atlanta, GA



**VICTOR NARRO**  
Project Director and Labor Studies  
Professor, UCLA Labor Center  
Los Angeles, CA

# Moderators



**REV. DR. KATIE GIVENS KIME**  
Director of Religion and Civic Engagement  
Odyssey Impact



**MICKY SCOTTBEY JONES**  
Director of Healing and Resilience Initiatives  
Faith Matters Network

# Expert Reflection and Discussion Guide

Dr. Chanequa Walker-Barnes

In further exploring a conversation between congregational faith leaders from July 29, 2020, about what wisdom and insights can be drawn in our context of the COVID-19 pandemic from experiences of other kinds of communal tragedy and anxiety, you are invited to consider the following three themes in light of your and your community's situation:

**Video Clip #1: What Is Movement Chaplaincy?**

**Video Clip #2: The Wells We Draw From**

**Video Clip #3: Movement Building without Martyrdom**

We invite you to reflect personally, with your staff or colleagues, or in small group discussions among those with whom you provide spiritual care. After viewing each of the following sections, please take time to reflect first on what the speakers share. Then, consider the prompts below for ways you may continue to respond and practice care amid the compounded crises in your midst.



## Dr. Chanequa Walker-Barnes

Dr. Chanequa Walker-Barnes is a clinical psychologist, womanist theologian, and ecumenical minister whose work focuses upon healing the legacies of racial and gender oppression. The author of *I Bring the Voices of My People: A Womanist Vision for Racial Reconciliation* and *Too Heavy a Yoke: Black Women and the Burden of Strength*, she currently serves as Associate Professor of Practical Theology at Mercer University. <https://www.drchanequa.com>

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# What Is Movement Chaplaincy?

## Video Clip #1

(if using the link to the hour long town hall please refer to time code - 5:00-18:35)

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*“Our focus is to open up a deeper conversation about the resources of spirit and struggle that course through our individual and collective histories. The tools are a way to build community and to get whoever is present to remember and be renewed in what most deeply motivates and inspires them to activism/teaching/organizing/ministry/etc”*

- ROSEMARIE FREENEY HARDING, *Remnants*

In contrast to the clergy-dominated civil rights movements of the twentieth century, today’s social change movements are marked by horizontal structures where leadership is often shared by people on the margins: Gen Zers and younger millennials, women of color, queer and trans individuals, indeed often all of the above. These populations – while deeply spiritually grounded – are suspicious of religious establishments that have often excluded and denigrated them. What, then, is the role of religious leaders in the modern movements for social change? It is movement chaplaincy.

Micky ScottBey Jones defines movement chaplaincy as “spiritual accompaniment to justice movements and their leaders.” Although a new term, movement chaplaincy is rooted in the legacies of spiritual activists such as Fannie Lou Hamer, Ella Baker, Howard Thurman, and Rosemarie Freeney Harding. Movement chaplains are sometimes those who show up on the front lines of protests, praying, singing spiritual songs, or wearing religious garb as a visible reminder of divine protest. But it is also those who have been in the backgrounds, providing hospitality, emotional support, and spiritual leadership to activists, as well as articulating the theological visions that keep movements rooted in spirituality and spiritual imagination.

As bell hooks asks us, where is your spirit? How do your religious and theological convictions guide your beliefs about what a just society looks like? What spiritual practices sustain and inspire you, helping you to view and treat yourself, your co-laborers for justice, and even your adversaries with compassion, dignity, and respect? How are you bringing yourself fully into social activism and how do you encourage others to do the same, regardless of the settings in which you do ministry?

### ★ **Additional Resource**

For additional reading:

*The Interfaith Chaplains of the Capitol Hill Organized Protest*, by Gregg Brekke

*Chaplains Provide Spiritual Care for Activists in Movements Across the Nation*  
by Alejandra Molina

*Daring Compassion Movement Chaplaincy Project*

# The Wells We Draw From

## Video Clip #2

(if using the link to the hour long town hall please refer to time code - 11:35-17:52)

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*“Conjure and healing are both forms of transformation, processes of change. As is activism.”*

- ROSEMARIE FREENEY HARDING, *Remnants*

The typical path to becoming a chaplain involves processes of formalized education, credentialing from religious and ecclesial bodies, and institutional employment. Movement chaplaincy, however, is rarely a paid or even formally recognized position. Yet as Helen Bennett notes, it begins with the same core values and motivations. As with all chaplains, movement chaplains tend to have well-developed gifts of compassion and empathy and to hold the core value that all people are capable of goodness. In addition to that, however, movement chaplains are grounded in their distinct communal identities, not just as members of a particular religious tradition, but as belonging to a specific ethnocultural collective that shapes how they view the world and how they are affected by – and perhaps complicit with – the social issues that motivate justice movements. Imama Trina Jackson, moreover, explains that movement chaplaincy requires a skillset not traditionally emphasized consistently across chaplaincy modalities: a sharpened capacity for social and political analysis.

How do you describe the role of chaplains? What is distinctive about movement chaplaincy? Who are the faith leaders in your tradition whom you see as providing spiritual accompaniment for social justice movements? How do they embody the stance of movement or protest chaplains? How is the work of movement chaplains broader than participating in protests?

### ★ **Additional Resource** For additional reading:

*The Protest Chaplains: A New Paradigm in Chaplaincy during a Time of Social Transformation,*  
by Maia Duerr

# Movement Building without Martyrdom

## Video Clip #3

(if using the link to the hour long town hall please refer to time code - 40:41-51:30)

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*“Professional activism has come to mean self-sacrifice for the greater good and embracing disconnection from self and others in order to survive. We justify this self-sacrifice by telling ourselves that there’s not enough—people, resources, time, empathy, intellect, etc. We build this reliance on non-profits into the design of our activist systems and begin to lie and breathe a scarcity model. This is all in an effort to catch up to the entities which we are resisting or wanting to transform.”*

- NAOMI ORTIZ, *Sustaining Spirit*

Activists and clergy are two groups with high propensities for burnout. So when clergy become involved in social activism – whether as protestors or protest chaplains – the danger of burn out, compassion fatigue, and vicarious traumatization are multiplied. As Victor Narro shares from his personal experience of burnout, martyr syndrome is often entrenched among movement activists. Activists tend to pride themselves on what they do, often measured in terms of people present and programs organized. The funding systems of the nonprofit industrial complex contribute to this pressure to be unendingly busy and to generate numbers indicating efficiency. Moreover, as Imama Trina Jackson explains, the hegemonic Christian theology of redemptive suffering has been foundational to activists from multiple faith traditions. Movement building without martyrdom requires alternative theological perspectives. Even in the midst of a global health pandemic, we can continue engaging in the struggle for justice without sacrificing our health and well-being.



To whom are you or your organization accountable for your activist work and what are their criteria for success? How does the need to be successful or effective as an activist impact your health or that of your organization? What are the disciplines, habits, and practices that you need to enhance and maintain your spiritual, emotional, relational, and physical health as you engage in the struggle for justice? What new commitments do you need to make to yourself?

## ★ Additional Resource

*Black Activist Burnout: 'You Can't Do This Work If You're Running On Empty,*  
by **Christianna Silva**

*Clergy Neglect Themselves While Serving Marginalized* by **Chanequa Walker-Barnes**

*Relinquishing Selflessness: A Lenten Journey* by **Chanequa Walker-Barnes**

## For further reading:

*Remnants: A Memoir of Spirit, Activism, and Mothering* by **Rosemarie Freeney Harding** with  
**Rachel Elizabeth Harding**

*Sustaining Spirit: Self-Care for Social Justice* by **Naomi Ortiz**

*I Bring the Voices of My People: A Womanist Vision for Racial Reconciliation* by **Chanequa Walker-Barnes**