

# HEALING THE HEALERS

A **LIVE** TOWNHALL

## Election Extremism 1: Lessons for Leading with Healing, Hope & Bravery

EXPERT REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION GUIDE

A PROJECT FROM

**ODYSSEYIMPACT!**

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HEALINGTHEHEALERS.ORG

# 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 Rev. Jill L. Snodgrass, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Theology at Loyola University Maryland.

# Panelists



**REV. DR. JAN FULLER**  
University Chaplain, Truitt Center for  
Religious and Spiritual Life,  
Elon University, Elon, NC



**RABBI MATTHEW GEWIRTZ**  
Senior Rabbi of Congregation B'nai Jeshurun  
Short Hills, NJ



**DR. DANJUMA GIBSON**  
Associate Professor of Pastoral Care  
at Calvin Theological Seminary  
Grand Rapids, MI



**REV. DR. GABRIEL SALGUERO**  
Pastor at The Gathering Place  
Orlando, FL

## Moderator



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

# Expert Reflection and Discussion Guide

Rev. Jill L. Snodgrass, Ph.D.

On October 15th, Odyssey Impact engaged with Faith Leaders in a Live Town Hall to explore where the ways in which faith communities may serve as healing public spaces where Americans of diverse political and cultural viewpoints can meaningfully dialogue and be in relationship. Panelists and attendees shared that many people want a safe space to voice their opinion without retribution. “Brave spaces” are critical in order for communities to explore convictions, hear difficult truths, and seek guidance.

**Video Clip #1: Standing Against Violence**

**Video Clip #2: Living and Listening Together**

**Video Clip #3: Making Moral Judgments that Respect the “Other”**

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.



## Rev. Jill L. Snodgrass, Ph.D.

Rev. Jill L. Snodgrass, Ph.D. is Associate Professor of Theology at Loyola University Maryland. She is a pastoral and practical theologian, a scholar-activist, and an ordained minister in the United Church of Christ. Her research focuses on spiritual care and counseling with traditionally marginalized populations. She is the editor of *Navigating Religious Difference in Spiritual Care and Counseling* (Claremont Press, 2019), the author of *Women Leaving Prison: Justice-Seeking Spiritual Support for Female Returning Citizens* (Lexington, 2018), and the author of numerous peer-reviewed articles and chapters. Dr. Snodgrass has served as a pastoral counselor in churches, shelters, transitional housing facilities, and community centers, and she is the Clinical Director of Spiritual Support at Greater Baltimore Medical Center.

# Standing Against Violence

## Video Clip #1

(if using the link to the hour long town hall please refer to time code - 5:30-8:48)

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In diverse cultures within the United States, people are told, implicitly and explicitly, to avoid talk of religion and politics. Although religious organizations with non-profit status are prohibited from political lobbying, faith leaders are hard pressed in today's political climate to ignore election extremism. Faith leaders with privilege, particularly those with racial/ethnic, sex/gender, class, and religious privilege, may hesitate to speak into the public sphere about politics from a faith-based perspective. Faith leaders may be concerned about how members of our communities will perceive and interpret our actions and rhetoric. But when are faith leaders compelled to decry what's occurring in the political sphere? When must faith leaders speak prophetically against political extremism?

According to panelist Danjuma Gibson, Ph.D., when politics incites violence “faith leaders have to unequivocally step up at that point and say, ‘You’ve gone too far.’ That’s not politics. That’s violating our standards of what it means to be human and what it means to be American.” According to Gibson, many faith leaders have developed a “muscle memory” that allows us to close our eyes to politically-incited violence, be it physical or psychic, and to overlook “those who were being violated.” This muscle memory enables us to celebrate leaders like Rosa Parks, Martin Luther King, Jr., C.T. Vivian, and John Lewis, to honor the legacy of what they did in the past, but to ignore our own call to non-violent resistance today.

Physical and psychic violence are insidious within U.S. politics. Antifa has been repeatedly accused of inciting violence by President Trump. Gun rights activists are calling for a “boogaloo” – a civil war. Threats to kill Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer were responded to at a Trump rally with chants of “lock her up,” and the President provoked the crowd’s ire stating “lock ‘em all up” (Impelli, 2020). According to *Time Magazine*, “American cities are already on edge.

Upset protesters have routinely taken to the streets this summer, facing off with police officers, federal agents and counter-protesters” (Hennigan, 2020, para. 3).

Huma Haider, writing from a global perspective, argued that faith leaders are uniquely poised to address electoral violence. “There are various characteristics associated with religious leaders that make them well placed to mobilise stakeholders and to engage in efforts to counter violence and promote peace. These include:

- Trustworthiness and credibility
- Shared and respected set of values with different sides of a conflict and unique leverage as spiritual leaders
- Understanding of the local context, presence in local communities and local legitimacy
- Strong networks and access to various levels of power” (Haider, 2016, pp. 1-2).

The U.S. is not on the brink of violence. Violence is already occurring. As we anticipate increased violence following the presidential election—regardless of the outcome—how are faith leaders called to respond? What do our traditions and sacred texts embolden us to say in the face of politically-motivated violence? At what point, as panelist Gibson argued, is speaking out not about politics but about honoring that “every life is valuable?”

## ★ Additional Resource

Freedman, M. (2019). Fighting from the pulpit: Religious leaders and violent conflict in Israel. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002719832346>

Haider, H.(2016).Religious leaders and the prevention of electoral violence (GSDRC Helpdesk Research Report 1366). Birmingham, UK: GSDRC, University of Birmingham.  
<https://gsdrc.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/HDQ1366.pdf>

## ★ References

Haider, H.(2016).Religious leaders and the prevention of electoral violence (GSDRC Helpdesk Research Report 1366). Birmingham, UK: GSDRC, University of Birmingham.

Hennigan, W. J.. (2020, September 25). 'Plan for the worst and hope for the best.' Why law enforcement officials are worried about post-election violence. *Time*.

<https://time.com/5892945/law-enforcement-post-election-violence/>

Impelli, M. (2020, October 22). Fact check: Did Trump say he wants to 'lock up' Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer? *Newsweek*.

<https://www.newsweek.com/fact-check-did-trump-say-he-wants-lock-michigan-governor-gretchen-whitmer-1541438>

# Living and Listening Together

## Video Clip #2

(if using the link to the hour long town hall please refer to time code - 30:43-33:56)

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COVID-19, white supremacy, and political extremism challenge our ability to live and listen together. There are seemingly few spaces wherein civil dialogue amid difference can occur. Panelists repeatedly highlighted the negative impact social media has had on our ability to listen and to engage in meaningful political discussion when we've been conditioned to "unfriend" those with differing perspectives and limit our political discourse to memes or attacks. Panelist Rev. Dr. Jan Fuller questioned, "Where do we have those spaces where we say [...] let's talk together? [...] Where are the spaces where we say it's not about me, it's about us?" According to Fuller, "one of the great heresies of American Christianity [is] that we've made this all about one individual at a time and lost the sense of how are we together."

Rugged individualism was born on the American frontier. Life on the frontier necessitated independence and self-reliance. Bazzi, Fiszbein, and Gebresilas (2020) defined rugged individualism as "the combination of individualism and opposition to government intervention" (p. 1). Although such individualism "is often associated with resourcefulness and innovation," it also challenges us to live and listen together and "undermine[s] collective action against COVID-19" (p. 1).

Faith leaders need to name the ways that rugged individualism contradicts the scriptures, teachings, and wisdom of our traditions. Spiritual and religious communities are called to be places where "it's not about me, it's about us." By confronting individualism, faith leaders are better equipped to foster spaces where civil dialogue amid difference can occur—where people live and listen together.

How can faith leaders model living and listening together by opening ourselves to hearing "things that are painful?" We can prepare ourselves to listen and hear things that are painful by practicing calming breaths.



Inhaling to the count of 4; holding your breath for a count of 7; and exhaling to a count of 8 is a “natural tranquilizer for the nervous system” (Arizona Center for Integrative Medicine, 2010, p. 1).

How can faith leaders promote spaces within their communities wherein “things that are painful” can be shared and received? Consider hiring a trained facilitator to guide your community through a difficult conversation. Consider educating your community in techniques like nonviolent communication or models like courageous conversations. Opportunities for online training have increased, thus making evidence-based resources both more accessible and affordable.

### ★ Additional Resource

Arizona Center for Integrative Medicine. (2010). *4-7-8 Breath Relaxation Exercise*.  
<https://www.cordem.org/globalassets/files/academic-assembly/2017-aa/handouts/day-three/biofeedback-exercises-for-stress-2---fernances-j.pdf>

The Center for Nonviolent Communication. <https://www.cnvc.org/>

Courageous Conversations. <https://courageousconversation.com/>

### ★ References

Bazzi, S., Fiszbein, M., & Gebresilasse, M. (2020). *Rugged Individualism and Collective (In)action During the COVID-19 Pandemic*. NBER Working Paper No. 27776.  
[https://www.nber.org/system/files/working\\_papers/w27776/w27776.pdf](https://www.nber.org/system/files/working_papers/w27776/w27776.pdf)

# Living and Listening Together

## Video Clip #3

(if using the link to the hour long town hall please refer to time code - 38:55-43:37)

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Faith leaders are imbued with moral authority. Being a faith leader means making moral judgments. Faith leaders seeking justice are required to speak into the public sphere from a place of moral authority and to name immoral atrocities. Given the seeming chasms that divide the United States along lines of race, political affiliation, class, and more, how can faith leaders make moral judgments that build bridges rather than erect barriers? As panelist Rev. Dr. Gabriel Salguero asks, “How do we balance making moral judgments that contribute to justice and hope while respecting the other?”

Before speaking with moral authority faith leaders need to identify and own our biases and prejudices. Whether conscious or unconscious, implicit or explicit, all humans are biased, and our biases impact our moral perspectives. When faith leaders practice reflexivity and make conscious our biases, we are better prepared to consider if or how they may nuance or co-opt the moral truths of the institutions and persons we represent. Faith leaders might consider participating in Project Implicit through Harvard University as a first step toward uncovering our hidden biases.

Speaking with moral authority does not necessitate “otherizing” those with whom we disagree. Rather, it requires engaging them. Rev. Dr. Gabriel Salguero argued, “it’s not just what you do, it’s how you do it.” Salguero and fellow panelist Rabbi Matthew Gewirtz developed an apt metaphor for how to engage the “other”: individuals and communities with differing moral perspectives should engage one another in a dance. A salsa. A cha cha. A merengue. We need to enter into conversations about moral difference with nuance and with a give and take that honors the other enough to both lead and follow, speak and listen.

Howard Clinebell, a leader in the pastoral counseling movement beginning in the 1950s, argued that “GROWTH = CARING + CONFRONTATION” (Clinebell, 1979, p. 55). Because faith leaders are imbued with moral authority, we are compelled to confront. Yet only when we confront with care can growth result.

How can faith leaders honor the moral imperative to speak out from their position of moral authority by making moral judgments that foster communication and dialogue rather than conflict and divide? How can faith leaders caringly confront moral injustices in a manner that results in growth?

### ★ Additional Resource

Join in an interfaith effort to Defend the Democratic Process and work for a “peaceful transfer of power” by visiting <https://p2a.co/qA5rqFR>

Project Implicit <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/>

Mitchell-Yellin, B. (2019, December 5). The Relationship Between Politics and Morality: It Might Not Be What You Think.

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/life-death-and-the-self/201912/the-relationship-between-politics-and-morality>

### ★ References

Clinebell, H. (1979). *Growth counseling*. Abingdon Press.

## Additional Resources

### Online Articles and Blogs

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**“What’s a Church To Do? Dealing with Conflict During a Pandemic” by Leanna K. Fuller, Associate Professor, Pittsburg Theological Seminary**

[https://faithandleadership.com/leanna-k-fuller-whats-church-do-dealing-conflict-during-pandemic?utm\\_campaign=faith-leadership&utm\\_medium=content&utm\\_source=albanweekly](https://faithandleadership.com/leanna-k-fuller-whats-church-do-dealing-conflict-during-pandemic?utm_campaign=faith-leadership&utm_medium=content&utm_source=albanweekly)

**“How Corrosive Politics Make Us All Less Safe” by Simran Jeet Singh, columnist for Religious News Service and visiting professor of religion at Union Theological Seminary**

<https://religionnews.com/2020/09/25/how-corrosive-politics-make-us-all-less-safe/>

**Blog by Reverend Rob Schenck, Evangelical minister, activist, and public theologian**

<https://www.revrobschenck.com/>

### Online Resources

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**“Better Conversations: A Starter Guide” published by OnBeing and Civil Conversations**

[https://onbeing.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/8.5x11\\_BetterConversationsGuide\\_July2020\\_FINAL.pdf](https://onbeing.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/8.5x11_BetterConversationsGuide_July2020_FINAL.pdf)

**Doing Theology in Pandemics: Facing Viruses, Violence, and Vitriol**

Doing Theology in Pandemics: Facing Viruses, Violence, and Vitriol is a public lecture series featuring wisdom and insights from 12 leading practical theologians and religion scholars engaging the various ways in which theological perspectives and faith practices, across traditions, help us make meaning, cope, care for ourselves and others, and act in this time. A Chicago Theological Seminary and Odyssey Impact series, provided with generous support from the Henry Luce Foundation. For more information click here: <https://doingtheologyinpandemics.org/>

## Recommended Books

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### **Costly Grace: An Evangelical Minister's Rediscovery of Faith, Hope, and Love by Rob Schenck**

<https://www.amazon.com/Costly-Grace-Evangelical-Ministers-Rediscovery/dp/006268793X>

### **A House Divided: Engaging the Issues Through the Politics of Compassion by Mark Feldmeir**

<https://www.amazon.com/House-Divided-Engaging-Politics-Compassion/dp/082720096X>

### **Resurrecting Wounds: Living in the Afterlife of Trauma by Shelly Rambo**

<https://www.amazon.com/Resurrecting-Wounds-Living-Afterlife-Trauma/dp/1481306790>

## Projects and Organizations

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### **Braver Angels** <https://braverangels.org/>

“Launched in 2016, Braver Angels is a national citizens’ movement to bring liberals and conservatives together at the grassroots level – not to find centrist compromise, but to find one another as citizens.”

### **We Are Not Divided**

“Conventional wisdom says that we are hopelessly divided [...] but this narrative masks the larger truth. We humans are incredibly skilled at overcoming division. For six weeks, *Reasons to be Cheerful* is exploring our capacity, and our deep desire, to bridge our divides.”

<https://wearenotdivided.reasonstobecheerful.world/>

## Partners

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### **ODYSSEY IMPACT is the creator of HEALING THE HEALERS**

HEALING THE HEALERS provides resources and support for clergy, laity, chaplains, social workers, first responders and other spiritual care providers who are facing community-level trauma. To see free recordings of other Town Halls, or for more information on our five part film series on Communal Trauma, as well as other supportive resources visit: <https://healingthehealers.org>