

# HEALING THE HEALERS

A **LIVE** TOWNHALL

## Election Extremism 2: Hope & Healing in the Aftermath

EXPERT REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION GUIDE

A PROJECT FROM

**ODYSSEYIMPACT!**

WITH GENEROUS SUPPORT FROM

 Lilly Endowment Inc.  
A Private Philanthropic Foundation

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



**LUCAS JOHNSON**  
Executive Director, Civil Conversations  
and Social Healing, The On Being Project  
Minneapolis, MN



**PÁDRAIG Ó TUAMA**  
Poet/Theologian and Host of Poetry Unbound,  
The On Being Project  
Co. Fermanagh, Ireland



**REV. JACQUELINE J. LEWIS, PH.D**  
Senior Minister for Public Theology &  
Transformation, Middle Collegiate Church  
New York, NY



**ROXANNE STONE**  
Managing Editor,  
Religion News Service  
New York, NY

# 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.

“Who will we be together?” Our Live Town Hall conversation with faith leaders and change makers included special guests from The On Being Project and Religion News Service as we considered together how we listen, learn, and move forward in the face of deep national divisions.

**Video Clip #1: Traffic in Honesty**

**Video Clip #2: Complexifying the Divide**

**Video Clip #3: Opening Up to the Transcendent 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.

# Traffic in Honesty

## Video Clip #1

(if using the link to the hour long town hall please refer to time code - 8:37-10:07)

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Panelist Pádraig Ó Tuama recounted a poignant story of grief wherein two politicians in Ireland – one Protestant and one Catholic – were able to “hold differences, and difficult differences, differently.” Most people agree that differences among people are good. Our theological and spiritual traditions support this in various ways. For example, the trinitarian understanding of God in Christianity celebrates the three persons of God, each distinctive and unique, but with unity amid diversity. But when differences among people challenge our beliefs and values, it is far more difficult to experience difference as good. In the wake of election extremism, how can faith leaders help their communities to “hold differences, and difficult differences, differently?”

Panelist Rev. Jacqueline J. Lewis, Ph.D. posited that the fundamental means by which faith leaders can help their communities to hold differences differently is to “traffic in honesty.” What does this mean and what does this look like?

To traffic in honesty, we have to first acknowledge that, as humans, we are different, and we do not always like or value our differences. In various ways, our religious traditions largely teach us that we do not have to like all others, but we do have to love them. The Gospel of Matthew in the Christian New Testament states, “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous.” This was the sacred text that compelled Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in 1957 to implore the members of Dexter Avenue Baptist Church to love their enemies. And this requires beginning with a long, deep look at our own selves. “So we begin to love our enemies and love those persons that hate us whether in collective life or individual life by looking at ourselves” (King, n.d., para. 11). As King affirmed, trafficking in honesty means beginning with ourselves.

Why do I not like the person(s) who are different? What, in me, feels threatened or challenged by this difference? How can I love this person even if I do not like them?

Through critical self-reflection we can acknowledge our biases and reaffirm that even if we do not like those who are different, we can indeed love them. We are then better prepared to think and act intentionally about how we encounter difference. Rev. Jacqueline J. Lewis, Ph.D., advocated four things faith leaders can do to help their communities traffic in honesty: 1) Encourage people to listen to several sources of news. 2) Be critically reflective about what makes sense. Do not simply consume the news, but discern it. 3) Invite members of our communities to be in conversation with people who are different than they are, because “then we’re listening and learning and our minds can be expanded and stretched.” 4) Pray.

Trafficking in honesty is essential to religious leadership today. This is not optional, but foundational. As a Christian minister, Rev. Lewis sees that “the whole code in the scripture is geared toward helping us love our neighbor as ourselves, as we love our God with everything we have. And that’s about not bearing false witness. And that’s about being kind and generous and good to each other. It’s so basic. But it doesn’t happen, and especially in this polarized environment.” How can you traffic in honesty and begin to “hold differences, and difficult differences, differently” in a manner that leads your community into more authentic ways of being amid difference?

## ★ Additional Resource

On Being’s Civil Conversations and Social Healing Project. *Better Conversations: A Starter Guide*.  
[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)

The Greater Good Science Center and Bridging Differences. *Bridging Differences Playbook: Learn Research-Based Strategies to Promote Positive Dialogue and Understanding*.  
[https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/images/uploads/Bridging\\_Differences\\_Playbook-Final.pdf](https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/images/uploads/Bridging_Differences_Playbook-Final.pdf)

## ★ References

King, M. L., (n.d.). *Loving your enemies, Sermon delivered at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church*.  
<https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/loving-your-enemies-sermon-delivered-dexter-avenue-baptist-church#fn2>

# Complexifying the Divide

## Video Clip #2

(if using the link to the hour long town hall please refer to time code - 11:17-12:01 + 19:25-22:31)

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Since Donald Trump was elected President in 2016, the U.S. media has continuously reported on the deep divide plaguing the nation. The results of the 2020 Presidential Election indicate, at-a-glance, that the U.S. appears to still be very divided. Red vs. Blue. Republican vs. Democrat. Us vs. Them.

Dichotomous, binary thinking can be comforting. That's how our brains work when we are young. As young children, we are not yet developmentally capable of abstract thought. We construct rigid divides between good and bad, right and wrong, Spiderman and the Green Goblin. As panelist Rev. Jacqueline J. Lewis, Ph.D. stated, "These binaries come from our base brain. Fear. Survival. Y'all are mine. You're not. That kind of place."

For years we have been told that we are a deeply divided people. Panelist Roxanne Stone, Managing Editor of Religion News Service, stated, "I think the media carries a lot of responsibility for otherizing the people who vote differently than you." But are, or how are, we divided? Panelist Pádraig Ó Tuama posited that the U.S. is experiencing a "civic addiction to bipartisanship." He argued that there are "so many more than two sides." Are we not as divided as we fear or, paradoxically, are we comforted by the seeming divide?

In the wake of election extremism, what is lost and what is gained in seeing the U.S. as pluralistic or "more than two sides?" How can faith leaders acknowledge the political discord in the U.S. but not affirm us vs. them thinking?



In the wake of the 2020 Presidential Election, President-elect Joe Biden stated, “I sought this office to restore the soul of America [...] and to make America respected around the world again and to unite us here at home” (Lemire, Miller, & Weissert, 2020, para. 2). He declared this moment “a time to heal.” Religious leaders have a role to play in healing the nation. The word religion comes from the Latin word *ligare*, meaning re-bind, re-connect. Yet how can religious leaders lead the nation in healing in a way that recognizes how profoundly our beliefs and values contribute to our differences? How can religious leaders re-connect America in a manner that honors our pluralism rather than ignores it? If we cannot heal amid our differences, then the next four years may reflect what the past four years have revealed: “a doubling down, a lot of people on both sides actually polarizing more” (Panelist Roxanne Stone).

### ★ Additional Resource

Beyond Conflict. (2020, June). *America’s divided mind: Understanding the psychology that drives us apart*.

[https://beyondconflictint.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Beyond-Conflict-America\\_s-Div-ided-Mind-JUNE-2020-FOR-WEB.pdf](https://beyondconflictint.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Beyond-Conflict-America_s-Div-ided-Mind-JUNE-2020-FOR-WEB.pdf)

### ★ References

Lemire, J., Miller, Z., & Weissert, W. (2020, November 7). *Biden defeats Trump for White House, says ‘time to heal’*.

<https://apnews.com/article/joe-biden-wins-white-house-ap-fd58df73aa677acb74fce2a69adb71f9>

# Opening Up to the Transcendent Other

## Video Clip #3

(if using the link to the hour long town hall please refer to time code - 31:30-32:54)

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As the multiple pandemics of 2020 endure, many in the U.S. are experiencing a profound sense of separation and seclusion. Yet the sheltering-in-place and lockdowns triggered by COVID-19 conceal a much deeper form of isolation: segregation from self, and segregation from the Transcendent. Paraphrasing the wisdom of Christian mystic Howard Thurman, panelist Lucas Johnson stated, “True religious experience not only sends one into life, but sends one into lives.” Opening up to the “Transcendent Other” enables us to enter into the lives of “the other” in a manner of genuine curiosity and openness.

Intentionally or not, many in the U.S. rarely engage “the other.” According to panelist Roxanne Stone, “We don’t go to church with people who think differently than us. We don’t live near people who think differently than us ... we don’t actually converse with people who are different than us very often.”

Yet panelist Pádraig Ó Tuama rightly argued that the other is not innately oppositional. “We already live with a vibrancy and an argument of being with all these kinds of other others where it isn’t oppositional even though there may not be consensus.”

Faith leaders can help their communities to break free from their ideological lockdown. Whether understood in a theistic framework or as a cosmological reality, opening up to the Transcendent Other can awaken “curiosity in us because we’ve encountered something so profoundly other than ourselves” (Lucas Johnson).

When the immanent realities of our daily lives amid multiple pandemics threaten to segregate us from our true selves and others, how can faith leaders encourage communities to re-engage with the numinous?

How can re-engaging with the numinous and opening up to the Transcendent Other re-orient us to the earthly other as brother/sister, not opponent? How can faith leaders leverage this moment where so many in the U.S. are socially distanced from loved ones to eradicate the distance between the self and the Beloved, Transcendent Other?

### ★ Additional Resource

On Being with Krista Tippett: Rev. Otis Moss III. *The Sound of the Genuine: Traversing 2020 with 'the Mystic of the Movement' Howard Thurman:*

<https://onbeing.org/programs/rev-otis-moss-iii-the-sound-of-the-genuine-traversing-2020-with-the-mystic-of-the-movement-howard-thurman/>

## Additional Resources

### Books

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**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>

**Uncivil Agreement: How Politics Became Our Identity by Lilliana Mason:**

<https://press.uchicago.edu/ucp/books/book/chicago/U/bo27527354.html>

### Articles and Reports

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**America's Divided Mind: Understanding the Psychology That Drives Us Apart by Beyond Conflict:**

[https://beyondconflictint.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Beyond-Conflict-America\\_s-Div-ided-Mind-JUNE-2020-FOR-WEB.pdf](https://beyondconflictint.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Beyond-Conflict-America_s-Div-ided-Mind-JUNE-2020-FOR-WEB.pdf)

**Amid cries for church unity post-election, some Christians say 'Not so fast' by**

<https://religionnews.com/2020/11/11/amid-cries-for-church-unity-post-election-some-christians-say-not-so-fast/>

**Fraught election puts faith leaders through a political test by The Associated Press:**

<https://www.mprnews.org/story/2020/10/27/fraught-election-puts-faith-leaders-through-a-political-test>

**Trumpism after Trump? How Fox news structures Republican attitudes. PRRI.**

<https://www.prii.org/research/trumpism-after-trump-how-fox-news-structures-republican-attitudes/>

**Trump or Biden? What's a Catholic voter to do? By Timothy Reese.**

<https://religionnews.com/2020/08/27/trump-or-biden-whats-a-catholic-voter-to-do/>

**Why we fight: The psychological ties that bind us together and tear us apart by Emile Bruneau.**

<https://www.apa.org/science/about/psa/2017/12/why-fight>

## Podcasts/Audio Resources

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**On Being with Krista Tippett: Rev. Otis Moss III. *The Sound of the Genuine: Traversing 2020 with 'the Mystic of the Movement' Howard Thurman:***

<https://onbeing.org/programs/rev-otis-moss-iii-the-sound-of-the-genuine-traversing-2020-with-the-mystic-of-the-movement-howard-thurman/>

**Rev. Jacqueline Lewis, Ph.D. six-episode podcast series: *Learning How to See* with Brian McLaren and Richard Rohr:** <https://cac.org/podcast/learning-how-to-see/>

## Video Resources

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**Emile Bruneau. *Tweaking the Empathy Gap.*** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=McrXG0g5svY>

**Noa Baum. *Beyond Labels: Bridging Differences Through Storytelling.***

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vsg7VTUjYLI&feature=emb\\_title](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vsg7VTUjYLI&feature=emb_title)

## Spiritual Care and Support for Faith Leaders

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**Faith Matters Network Community Care Office Hours:** From October 2020 - January 2021, Faith Matters Network is excited to offer Community Care Office Hours for faith leaders, community organizers, and activists. These office hours are specifically for our religious leaders, organizers, and activists who are being called to the frontlines to navigate through this crisis and could use a listening ear to check-in with individually. <https://www.faithmattersnetwork.org/communitycareofficehours>

## Conversation Guides

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**On Being's Civil Conversations and Social Healing Project. *Better Conversations: A Starter Guide.***

[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)

**The Greater Good Science Center and Bridging Differences. *Bridging Difference Playbook.***

[https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/images/uploads/Bridging\\_Differences\\_Playbook-Final.pdf](https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/images/uploads/Bridging_Differences_Playbook-Final.pdf)

## Organizations and Workshops

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

**Noam Baum. Peacebuilding Programs: Workshops.** <http://noabaum.com/peace-building/workshops/>

## Partners

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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>

**The On Being Project. For more information on On Being visit:** [onbeing.org](http://onbeing.org)

**Religion News Service. For more information on RNS visit:** <https://religionnews.com/>

## Previous Town Halls

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**For previous Town Halls supporting spiritual care providers, please visit:**

<https://healingthehealers.org/blog/#events>