

CHURCH TOMORROW?

Resource, Reflection and Action Guide

By Stephanie Spellers

Church Tomorrow? is published by Morehouse Publishing,
an imprint of Church Publishing, Inc.

<https://churchpublishing.org/collections/new-releases/products/9781640658608-church-tomorrow>

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A WORD FROM THE AUTHOR

Welcome friends! Thank you not only for reading *Church Tomorrow?* but for now taking the conversation even deeper. Whether you're in a small group, part of a regional body of churches, or on your own, I hope this guide will help you to feel you're part of a community that's learning and making change together.

Guide Contents

This guide provides a set of tools for reflection and action, corresponding to each of the parts of the book (Introduction, Parts I through IV, and Conclusion). Each set includes some combination of the following elements. Note: not every set has all four of the offerings described below, so it's alright if you don't see one of these headings in the materials for a particular part.

- **Entering In:** A few questions meant to stir your initial reflections on the material
- **Dwelling with Scripture:** Select scripture passages, cited in full from the New Revised Standard Version (you're warmly encouraged to explore other translations). I've adapted the Dwelling in the Word¹ process for bible study, which recommends reading a passage three times and considering simple questions about God and God's activity.
- **Reflecting Together:** Key concepts and ideas in the chapter, along with reflection questions
- **Taking Action (only Part IV):** Concrete ways to practically explore or apply material from the chapter, often with links to related resources. Please note that all links were accurate at the time this guide was completed.

The final section of this guide is “**LISTEN**,” a step-by-step process for conducting your own listening campaign with Nones and Dones in your community and life. As important as it is to read and reflect on the wisdom of the conversation partners I met, my great hope is that you will be inspired to go out, be curious and brave, and listen in your own community.

As you move through this guide, you will notice that I've provided page numbers from *Church Tomorrow?*, so you can toggle between the guide and the book. This will also help you to track down citations, which I've generally only provided here for material not cited in the book. If you're using an e-reader, I've also provided relevant text to ease your search.

Ways to Engage

Now that you know the guide's content, here are some strategies for how, when, and with whom to engage the material:

¹ Dwelling in the Word was created by Patrick Keifert and Pat Taylor Ellison. Learn more in their book *Dwelling in the Word: A Pocket Handbook* (Church. Innovations, 2011).

Who?

- **Individual**

If you're alone, feel free to pull out your journal – maybe even get a new one just for this journey. You might read a chapter and then use the guide to reflect and act as you go. Or if you'd like to finish the book first, this guide will help you to review some of the most important material, this time with help going deeper in your learning and exploration.

- **Small Group/Congregation/Regional Body**

Read the “How?” outline below and decide as a group or as a facilitation team what strategy works best for you. If you need help organizing a small group, managing facilitation, or dealing with other elements of getting started and moving forward, check out The Episcopal Church's resource for “Building Intentional Small Groups” at www.episcopalchurch.org/way-of-love/building-intentional-small-groups.

How?

Feel free to use as much or as little of this material as you wish. Your choice depends on your focus (or that of your group) and how much time you have. For instance ...

- **Intuitive and personal journey:** You may choose to focus on the “Entering In” and “Dwelling with Scripture” content.
- **Relevant ideas:** You might focus on the “Reflecting Together” sections of the guide.
- **Practical action:** You'll especially appreciate the “Taking Action” prompts for Part IV, all of which help to respond to the Nones and Dones' prophecies.
- **Holistic journey:** You can take more time to work with the full suite of guide content for each part, engaging heart and head, personal and institutional, societal and spiritual.
- **Go with the Spirit:** Feel free to engage the reflections and prompts that most resonate.

When?

The answer entirely depends on your schedule, group size, hopes, and expectations. Please take care to narrow your reflection focus (see “How?” above). *If you're meeting for a shorter time or with a larger group that changes over time, please don't attempt to get through all the companion material and reflection questions for each part. You will only feel rushed, and no one will have the chance to share meaningfully.*

Here are a few suggestions for groups discerning the ideal pace for their journey:

- **Seasonal Book Study** (45 minutes-1 hour, across 7 sessions):

If you're gathering for a season, have less than an hour, and the group composition is more porous, I would recommend focusing on the “Reflecting Together” and “Taking Action” elements of the guide. You might organize your journey this way:

1. Introduction – establishing the group
2. Part I (Chapters 1-2)
3. Part II (Chapters 3-5)
4. Part IIIa (Chapters 6-7)
5. Part IIIb (Chapters 8-9)
6. Part IVa (Chapters 10-11)
7. Part IVb (Chapters 12-13) and Conclusion

- **Dedicated Book Study Group** (90 minutes, across 10 sessions):
With more time and deeper commitment within the group, you can build relationships, learn together, and move toward action.
 - Opening Prayer (3 minutes)
 - Check-ins: Brief check-ins using the “Entering In” question(s) (15 minutes)
 - Scripture: Using the “Dwelling with Scripture” passage, share in pairs for the first two questions, and engage as a group for the final question (20 minutes)
 - Reflection and/or Action: Reflect together as a group using the questions under “Reflecting Together.” When you come to the “Taking Action” prompts for Part IV, if you’re with a group from one church or community, develop plans for shared action that could have a real impact in your context. (45 minutes)
 - Closing Prayer (2 minutes)

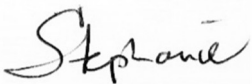
With these 10 sessions, you can add more time to reflect on Part IV, and you can spend your final session organizing a listening campaign of your own.

1. Introduction – establishing the group
2. Part I (Chapters 1-2)
3. Part II (Chapters 3-5)
4. Part III (Chapters 6-7)
5. Part III (Chapters 8-9)
6. Part IVa (opener, Chapter 10; focus on “Reflecting” queries and “Taking Action” resources #1-3)
7. Part IVa (Chapter 11; focus on “Taking Action” resources #4-7)
8. Part IVb (Chapter 12; focus “Taking Action” resources #1-3)
9. Part IVb (Chapter 13; focus on “Taking Action” resources #)
10. Conclusion and Listening Campaign

- **Reflection as Part of Ongoing Group Meeting** (25 minutes, 5 sessions):
If you’re in a group that meets regularly for another purpose (like a vestry or other committee or leadership team), you could start or end your meetings by reflecting on “Dwelling with Scripture” and the “Entering In” queries over five sessions:
 1. Introduction and Part I (Chapters 1-2) (pick one of the scripture options associated with Introduction and Part I)
 2. Part II (Chapters 3-5)
 3. Part III (Chapters 6-9) (pick one of the scriptures from guide Part IIIa and IIIb)
 4. Part IV (Chapters 10-13) and Conclusion (pick one of the scriptures from guide Parts IVa and IVb)
 5. Listening Campaign

Feel free to share stories and images about how you’re engaging using this hashtag: #churchtomorrow. And stay tuned to www.stephaniespellers.com/church-tomorrow for additional resources, conversations, and whatever else the Spirit might just bring to life.

Grateful to walk with you,



INTRODUCTION: Can These Bones Live?

Entering In

- What word, image, or phrase stands out for you in this opening chapter?
- How does what you've read relate to your personal journey? To your ministry?

Dwelling with Scripture

Read the following passage three times. After each reading, reflect on one of the following questions. Note: If you're in a group, you might reflect on the first two questions in pairs or (if online) by sharing brief responses in the chat; for the final question, share as a group.

1. What phrase or image grabs your attention?
2. What is God doing and saying here?
3. What do you feel called to be or to do, given your encounter with God here?

Ezekiel 37:1-6

The hand of the Lord came upon me, and he brought me out by the spirit of the Lord and set me down in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. He led me all around them; there were very many lying in the valley, and they were very dry. He said to me, "Mortal, can these bones live?" I answered, "O Lord God, you know." Then he said to me, "Prophecy to these bones and say to them: O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. Thus says the Lord God to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. I will lay sinews on you and will cause flesh to come upon you and cover you with skin and put breath in you, and you shall live, and you shall know that I am the Lord."

Reflecting Together

1. pg. 1: Spellers opens by sharing that, in 1971, 90 percent of Americans identified as Christian and 4 percent claimed no religion at all. By 1998, 87 percent of Americans still said they were Christian, and 6 percent reported no preference. And in 2024, reports say 62 percent of Americans are Christian, and at least 28 percent identify as Nones (which means, given a survey of religious preference, they would check the box for "None").

Reflect: What feelings do these statistics evoke in you, if any?

2. pgs. 1-2: From 1990 to 2020, the mainline Protestant churches have suffered dramatic losses: Presbyterians Church USA (58 percent); United Church of Christ (Congregationalists) (52 percent); The Episcopal Church (36 percent*); Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (41 percent*); The United Methodists (31 percent; 52 percent after the 2023 split).

Reflect: What denomination do you claim, if any? What evidence of decline have you witnessed in your own church over your lifetime?

** Note: Figures here for Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) and The Episcopal Church (TEC) are correct and match Figure 3 on pg. 27. Figures for these two churches were switched on pg. 1.*

3. pgs. 3-7: Spellers suggests the traditional Christian denominations are currently walking through a valley of dry bones. She later expresses faith that God can raise the churches up.

Reflect: Would you agree with the comparison of the current landscape to a valley of dry bones? And do you share the author's hope for the future? Why or why not?

4. pg. 12: "If your institution has the power, you have the privilege and the opportunity to listen to people on the margins, to dream together, and to create a space where The Other can flourish."

Reflect: What do you think of this core principle of radical welcome? Have you ever had the opportunity to listen with people who would otherwise not be heard? What did that experience reveal to you?

PART I: The Great Disaffiliation

CHAPTER 1: The Rise and Fall of Christian America

CHAPTER 2: Where Did Everybody Go?: Why the Pews Emptied and the Nones Grew

Entering In

- What words, images, or phrases stand out for you in these chapters?
- How does what you've read relate to your personal journey? To your ministry?

Dwelling with Scripture

Read the following passage three times. After each reading, reflect on one of the following questions. Note: If you're in a group, you might reflect on the first two questions in pairs or (if online) by sharing brief responses in the chat; for the final question, share as a group.

1. What phrase or image grabs your attention?
2. What is God saying and doing here?
3. What do you feel called to be or to do, given what you witness here?

Matthew 5:1-10

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness,
for they shall be satisfied.*

Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God.

*Blessed are those who suffer persecution for righteousness' sake,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

Reflecting Together

1. pg. 19: "The popular version of American history claims we have always been a faithful, church-going, Christian nation, and people have only recently rejected that identity and opted out of faith."

Reflect: Do you or have you ever assumed this to be true about America? What would support this conclusion?

2. pg. 20: **Social capital:** the set of social networks, norms, and trust that enable cooperation and collective action.

Reflect: What role do religious institutions play in building social capital? What else contributes to social capital? What would you expect to occur in the absence of that capital?

3. pgs. 20-22: Why did the 1950s represent such a heyday for American Christianity?
4. pg. 22: How did the Baby Boomers generation change American culture? What was their impact on religion and institutions?
5. pg. 23: **White Christo-nationalism:** often known as White Christian Nationalism, which Jemar Tisby says is “an ethnocultural ideology that uses Christian symbolism to create a permission structure for the acquisition of white political power and social control.”²

Reflect: What signs of White Christo-nationalism do you recognize in your community, in America, and beyond?
6. pgs. 30-34: If you had to describe the typical “None,” what age, race, gender, political party, educational level, religious identity (atheist, agnostic or nothing in particular), religious belief, and practices would you expect? How do the figures in these pages correspond with what you imagined?
7. pg. 38: Reflect on the “Religious Composition of Each Generation in 2024” chart (Figure 4), which tracks religious affiliation for five generations of Americans. What trends stand out to you? Why do you imagine affiliation has decreased so significantly from generation to generation? What is the role of family? Do you expect the trend to shift? Why or why not?
8. pg. 40: **Age of Mobilization:** Philosopher Charles Taylor’s term describing the period of Western civilization from 1800 to 1960, during which people tended to derive identity, truth, and authority from institutions and group associations.

Reflect: What kind of religious engagement would thrive in this age?
9. pg. 41: **Age of Authenticity:** Taylor’s term for the period of Western civilization from 1961 to present, marked by expressive individualism, which asserts the highest entity is the self, and each person’s highest work is to discover, express, and actualize their true, authentic self. “Anything that forces you to conform or to be inauthentic—especially external authorities and institutions—should be cast aside in favor of your personal experience and inner wisdom.”

Reflect: What kind of religious engagement would thrive in this age?

² See Jemar Tisby, “The ‘White’ in White Christian Nationalism,” <https://jemartisby.substack.com/p/the-white-in-white-christian-nationalism>, February 22, 2024.

10. pg. 43: **Millennial zeitgeist:** The prevailing mood of the period from the late 1990s to present day, which bears these marks (here quoting Christian Smith³):

- *Individualistic: Envisioning society as a collection of atomistic, choice-making selves*
- *Anti-institutional: Avoiding structured social groups and institutions*
- *Relativist: Viewing knowledge, truth, and ethics as opinions dependent on perspectives*
- *Subjectivist: Assuming interior feelings and experience to be the best guides for living*
- *Anti-authority: Hostile to structured social roles of influence and power*
- *Fluid: Expecting change, instability, revision, mobility*
- *Multicultural: Comfortable with sociocultural diversity, dubious of homogenous groups*

Reflect: How do you imagine traditional religion sounds to people who are deeply embedded in this zeitgeist?

11. pgs. 45-48: **Privatization:** The cultural force that creates a chasm “between the public and the private spheres of life, and spiritual things are increasingly placed within the private arena.”⁴

Reflect: Where do you see privatization in your own life and in the wider society? What is the impact?

12. pgs. 48-50: **Secularization:** The process of moving sectors of society and culture out “from the domination of religious institutions and symbols.”⁵

Reflect: Where do you see secularization in your own life and in the wider society? What is the impact?

13. pgs. 50-52: **Pluralization:** The force that presents myriad and equally valued ideologies and options for every element of life, including faith life.

Reflect: Where do you see pluralization in your own life and in the wider society? What is the impact?

³ Christian Smith, *Why Religion Went Obsolete: The Demise of Traditional Faith in America* (Oxford University Press, 2025) 148.

⁴ James Emery White, *Rise of the Nones* (Baker Books, 2014), 48.

⁵ Peter Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (Open Road Media, 2011), originally published 1967, 107.

PART II: The Nones and Dones Speak

CHAPTER 3: Becoming None and Done

CHAPTER 4: Seeking the Sacred

CHAPTER 5: Building Community While Bowling Alone

Entering In

- What word, image, or phrase stands out for you in this chapter?
- How would you respond to the first three listening prompts:
 - Share about your spiritual journey. What led to where you are now?
 - How and where do you encounter the sacred?
 - How and where do you experience community and belonging?
- How does what you've read relate to your personal journey? To your ministry?

Dwelling with Scripture

Read the following passage three times. After each reading, reflect on one of the following questions. Note: If you're in a group, you might reflect on the first two questions in pairs or (if online) by sharing brief responses in the chat; for the final question, share as a group.

1. What phrase or image grabs your attention?
2. What do you hear the author declaring here?
3. What do you feel called to do or to see differently, given what you hear in this passage?

1 John 4:7, 12

Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. . . . No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.

Reflecting Together

1. Who among the conversation partners in "Part II: The Nones and Dones Speak" most caught your attention? Who would you most want to meet? What would you ask them? What story from your own life might you share with them?
2. In "Chapter 3: Becoming None and Done," Spellers groups the conversation partners' stories about their spiritual journeys under five headings. Which one most caught your imagination and why?
 - No, because I don't believe
 - No, because churches hurt people
 - No, because church isn't worth the trouble
 - No, because I can't be labeled or pinned down
 - No, because I was never religious anyway

3. pg. 66: **Spiritual but not religious:** People who opt out of the structure, dogma, and rules of religion, but maintain some personal connection with a spiritual reality.

Reflect: How did so many of the conversation partners end up being spiritual but not religious?

4. pg. 66: **Spiritual:** Unmediated, personal, and experiential connection with the divine, the ultimate, the sacred; the realm where we explore life’s deepest meaning and pursue our true purpose.

Reflect: According to the conversation partners, what is attractive (and unattractive) about being “spiritual”?

5. pg. 66: **Religious:** Presumes assent to and membership in a particular group with a specific set of beliefs; anchored to a particular history, tradition, institution, and doctrine.

Reflect: According to the conversation partners, what is attractive (and unattractive) about being “religious”?

6. pg. 76: In *Strange Rites: New Religions for a Godless World*, Tara Isabella Burton notes:

Today’s Nones have grown up seeing religion as a social or communal institution—a “nice to have” teaching “good values” or solidifying family bonds—but not necessarily as a core part of their meaning or purpose. They’re the kids who saw their parents attend church, or who went to Sunday school, but were nevertheless acutely conscious that their parents didn’t actually believe all that stuff.⁶

Reflect: When and how have you noticed this pattern in your own family or religious community, or in the wider culture?

7. pg. 80: **Religious hybrids⁷:** People who hold together beliefs and practices of more than one spiritual tradition, freely adding or subtracting spiritual elements, rituals, and even beliefs that advance their personal faith.

Reflect: In what ways do you incorporate hybridity into your own lived faith?

8. In “Chapter 4: Seeking the Sacred,” Spellors groups the conversation partners’ stories about their experiences of the sacred under seven headings. Which one most caught your imagination and why?

- Connecting intimately with family, friends, and lovers
- Being creative and embodied, especially in music, dance, and art
- Engaging the natural world
- Reflecting in silence, especially through prayer, breathing, meditation, and journaling

⁶ Tara Isabella Burton, *Strange Rites: New Religions for a Godless World* (PublicAffairs, 2020), 69.

⁷ Burton, 32.

- Meaning-making, as in reflection and reading
- Engaging expansive spiritual traditions
- Paying attention in a distracted world

9. pg. 89: **Sacred**: “Those things, places, or moments that feel special and set apart from others—experiences that evoke a sense of wonder, awe, gratitude, deep truth, and/or interconnectedness”⁸ [to humanity, the universe or a higher power].

Reflect: What do you consider “sacred,” given Springtide’s definition?

10. pgs. 102-103: **Attention economy**⁹: The way businesses and digital platforms vie for attention in order to increase engagement, revenue, and influence.

Reflect: Have you ever struggled to resist or reduce your consumption of media or to put down your cell phone? What do you imagine makes it so hard?

11. pg. 111: In “Chapter 5: Building Community While Bowling Alone,” Spellers groups the conversation partners’ stories about their experiences of community and belonging under five headings. Which one most caught your imagination and why?

- Belonging with chosen family
- Belonging around music and the arts
- Belonging in fitness and yoga groups
- Belonging at work
- Belonging in alternative worship communities

12. pgs. 107-108: Stephanie in San Francisco admitted: “I don't feel there's a place where I could say, ‘This is home, and these are my people.’ The older I get, and another year has passed where I'm not a part of something, I wonder, do I even still know how to go about this?”

Reflect: What is your experience forming community today? To what degree do you feel impacted by the Millennial zeitgeist and the forces of privatization, secularization, and pluralization?

13. pgs. 115: **Collective effervescence**¹⁰: When a group of people gather for some activity—anything from a religious ritual to a concert, a drag show to a street protest—and together enter into a shared emotional, energetic state and forge a common identity.

Reflect: Have you ever experienced collective effervescence in a religious setting? In a secular setting? What was happening each time and how did it impact you?

⁸ Springtide Research Institute, *State of Religion & Young People: Exploring the Sacred* (Springtide, 2023), 6.

⁹ Jenny Odell, *How to Do Nothing: Resisting the Attention Economy* (Melville House, 2019).

¹⁰ Emile Durkheim, trans. by Joseph W. Swain, *The Elements of Religious Life* (Ruskin House, 1912), 245-251.

PART IIIa: Prophecy to the Bones (opener and 1st two chapters in Part III)

CHAPTER 6: Will the Real Christians Please Stand Up?

CHAPTER 7: Stop Making Idols of Your Institutions, Buildings, Rules, and Dogma

Entering In

- What words, images, or phrases stand out for you in these chapters?
- How would you respond to the fourth listening prompt:
 - What would you tell churches/institutional religion, if they were listening? What does the institution not grasp about your life and culture and deep longings?
- How does what you've read here relate to your personal journey? To your ministry?

Dwelling with Scripture

Read the following passage three times. After each reading, reflect on one of the following questions. Note: If you're in a group, you might reflect on the first two questions in pairs or (if online) by sharing brief responses in the chat; for the final question, share as a group.

1. What phrase or image grabs your attention?
2. What is God saying and doing here?
3. What do you feel called to do or to be, given God's activity in this passage?

Joel 2:28–29

*I will pour out my spirit on all flesh;
your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
your old men shall dream dreams,
and your young men shall see visions.
Even on the male and female slaves,
in those days I will pour out my spirit.*

Reflecting Together

1. Which of the many prophetic messages from conversation partners in Chapters 6 and 7 most caught your attention? What resonated with your own experience and wisdom? What presented the greatest challenge? Why?
2. pgs. 131-136: Consider the four spiritual capacities recommended in the Part III opener and listed below. Which one would you most need to develop in order to enter into conversation with Nones and Dones? What steps could you take to grow that spiritual capacity?

- ***Cultivate Curiosity:*** Carve out mental and heart space to truly hear others and be curious about what God will do next.
- ***Cultivate Humility:*** Admit we don't have all the answers; sometimes we've been wrong.

- **Cultivate Mutuality:** Go to accompany and learn from others and welcome them to accompany and learn from us.
- **Cultivate Love:** Believe you are beloved, and that there is enough love to go around.

3. pgs. 133-4: **Accompaniment:** A “walking together that practices interdependence and mutuality.”¹¹ Instead of my group carrying the gospel across to your group, accompaniment assumes God’s story is already present everywhere. It invites my group to walk alongside, to learn from and with your group, to share what God has given my group, *and* to discover together how God might be calling our groups to join God’s future activity.

Reflect: Have you ever seen your faith community practicing accompaniment? Describe what was happening.

4. pg. 134: **Radical welcome**¹²: The spiritual practice of embracing the gifts, voices, power and presence of groups traditionally on the margins, so that those inside and those outside might be changed, and we all taste more of the fullness of God.

Reflect: Where and how have you experienced radical welcome?

5. pg. 141: “Chapter 6: Will the Real Christians Please Stand Up” features data from an Episcopal Church-commissioned survey that reveals Americans’ opinions about Jesus.¹³

- Nearly 85 percent of Americans think Jesus is a significant spiritual leader, and three in four think he actually lived (as opposed to calling him a mythical figure).
- Americans identified Jesus’s top teachings as follows:
 - Love your neighbor
 - Love God
 - Don’t judge others without first judging yourself

Reflect: In what ways do these figures and messages surprise you or match your expectations and experiences?

6. pg. 142: The same nationwide survey also captured opinions about Christians.

- One in four Americans said Christians do not represent the values and teachings of Jesus. More than half of nonreligious people said they don’t see Jesus in Christians.
- Christians most often chose these words to describe themselves: “giving,” “compassionate,” “loving,” and “respectful.”
Non-Christians most often chose these words to describe Christians: “hypocrisy,” “judgmental,” “self-righteousness,” and “arrogance.”

¹¹ Global Mission Staff of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, “[The Accompaniment Model of Mission](#),” *Word & World* 25, no. 1 (Spring 2005), 203.

¹² Stephanie Spellers, *Radical Welcome: Embracing God, The Other and the Spirit of Transformation—15th Anniversary Edition* (Church Publishing, 2021).

¹³ “Jesus in America Survey,” Episcopal Church and Ipsos Research, 2022, <https://www.episcopalchurch.org/home-3>.

Reflect: In what ways do these findings surprise you or match your expectations and experiences?

7. pg. 143: Several Nones and Dones wondered why Christians and churches aren't more vocal in speaking against White Christo-nationalists and reclaiming Jesus's message of love. How would you respond?

8. pg. 149-150: In "Chapter 7: Stop Making Idols of Your Institutions, Buildings, Rules, and Dogma," the conversation partners expressed special concern about the amount of money and energy churches expend on their buildings. Casper suggests, "Those buildings are like a representation of respectability, power, and influence, even though churches don't really have that anymore. You have a lot to offer, but it's just probably not in the way you think."

Reflect: What is your own experience of churches' relationships to their buildings? How accurate is Casper's observation? In what ways do you agree or disagree with him?

9. pg. 152: Spellers concludes Chapter 7 with this observation: "Churches have historically leaned into maintenance and preservation. Our nonreligious friends remind us that now it's time to cross-train for flexibility, generosity, and letting go."

Reflect: Around what element of church life is your faith community most protective and resistant to change: Worship? Behavior? Doctrine? Building and décor? What else? What's the story behind these protective or resistant behaviors?

PART IIIb: Prophecy to the Bones (2nd two chapters in Part III)

CHAPTER 8: Go Meet the God Who Is Waiting Outside

CHAPTER 9: Form Loving, Embodied Communities That Welcome Our Whole, Authentic Selves

Entering In

- What words, images, or phrases stand out for you in these chapters?
- How does what you've read relate to your personal journey? To your ministry?

Dwelling with Scripture

Read the following passage three times. After each reading, reflect on one of the following questions. Note: If you're in a group, you might reflect on the first two questions in pairs or (if online) by sharing brief responses in the chat; for the final question, share as a group.

1. What phrase or image grabs your attention?
2. What is God saying and doing here?
3. What do you feel called to do or to see differently, given what you see and hear in this passage?

Isaiah 43:16-21

This is what the Lord says—

he who made a way through the sea,

a path through the mighty waters,

who drew out the chariots and horses,

the army and reinforcements together,

and they lay there, never to rise again,

extinguished, snuffed out like a wick:

“Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past.

See, I am doing a new thing!

Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?

I am making a way in the wilderness

and streams in the wasteland.

The wild animals honor me, the jackals and the owls,

because I provide water in the wilderness

and streams in the wasteland,

to give drink to my people, my chosen,

the people I formed for myself that they may proclaim my praise.

Reflecting Together

1. Which of the many prophetic messages from conversation partners in Chapters 8 and 9 most caught your attention? What resonated with your own experience and wisdom? What presented the greatest challenge? Why?

2. pg. 153: In “Chapter 8: Go Meet the God Who Is Waiting Outside (Third Prophecy),” we read the words of Meister Eckhart:

Apprehend God in all things, for God is in all things. Every single creature is full of God and a book about God. Every creature is a word of God. If I spent enough time with the tiniest creature – even a caterpillar – I would never have to prepare a sermon. So full of God is every creature.¹⁴

Reflect: How do his words connect with your own experience of nature and faith?

3. pg. 154: Spellers poses this question, inspired by the Nones and Dones:

If we know God meets us, speaks to us, and heals us outside of church, especially in nature but also in ordinary life, why doesn't the church honor and prioritize these outside meetings with God?

Reflect: How would you answer?

4. pg. 156: Would you describe your community of faith as monocultural/monoracial or multicultural/multiracial? How does your church's cultural and racial composition compare with the community around you? How do you imagine emerging generations who are accustomed to multicultural engagement experience your faith community?

5. pg. 159: In “Chapter 9: Form Loving, Embodied Communities That Welcome Our Whole, Authentic Selves (Fourth Prophecy),” Flor shares about struggling with elements of church culture, including remaining seated, being indoors, dressing and behaving in a formal manner, etc. Flor concludes:

That's the church's character, and it's allowed to have that. But it's not paying attention to a whole generation. We're out here saying, “Well that's fine for you but not for us.”

Reflect: How would you respond to Flor? How do you effect the balance between welcoming and celebrating groups with different cultures and sustaining your church's culture? What elements of church life can change and which should remain untouched?

6. pg. 162-3: Rev. Shannon Kelly works extensively with Gen Zers and younger generations. She explains:

There's no room for the fake or the easy answer. They want to really delve in and show up and have conversations and talk across differences. And if we're not willing to do that, or if we're inauthentic about it, they see right through it, and they're not interested.

Reflect: What elements of your church's life might appear “inauthentic” or “fake” to younger observers (and perhaps to you, as well)?

¹⁴ Meister Eckhart (1260–1328) in *Earth Prayers: 365 Prayers, Poems, and Invocations from Around the World*, eds. Elizabeth Roberts and Elias Amidon (HarperOne, 1991), 251

PART IVa: The Future of Faith (opener and 1st two chapters of Part IV)

CHAPTER 10: We Are the Jesus Movement (Response to the First Prophecy)

CHAPTER 11: Our Institutions Can Innovate and Liberate (Response to the Second Prophecy)

Entering In

- What words, images, or phrases stand out for you in these chapters?
- How does what you've read relate to your personal journey? To your ministry?
- Which of the opportunities described in these chapters could you or your ministry pursue?

Dwelling with Scripture

Read the following passage three times. After each reading, reflect on one of the following questions. Note: If you're in a group, you might reflect on the first two questions in pairs or (if online) by sharing brief responses in the chat; for the final question, share as a group.

1. What phrase or image grabs your attention?
2. What do you hear Jesus saying and doing here?
3. What do you feel called to do or to see differently, given what you hear in this passage?

Mark 8:34-37

He called the crowd with his disciples and said to them, "If any wish to come after me, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? Indeed, what can they give in return for their life?"

Reflecting Together

1. pgs. 171-172: Spellers describes three ways churches might respond to increasing disaffiliation and decline:
 - **Option A:** Keep doing what we're doing
 - **Option B:** Become secular community organizations
 - **Option C:** Discern a faithful way forward in partnership with emerging generations

Reflect: Which of these options is most visible in your ministry?

2. pg. 175: **Jesus Movement:** The ongoing community of people who center their lives on Jesus and follow him into loving, liberating, and life-giving relationship with God, each other and creation.¹⁵

Reflect: Which of these words and images resonates for you? How would you describe the "Jesus Movement"?

¹⁵ www.episcopalchurch.org/jesus-movement

Taking Action

1. pg. 178: In “Chapter 10: We Are the Jesus Movement,” you’re invited to imagine ways to go public with Jesus-centered faith in the face of White Christo-nationalism:

- write an op-ed for the local newspaper/news outlet
- speak up at school board meetings
- provide legal support or accompaniment to accompany undocumented neighbors (including unaccompanied children) to court
- provide sanctuary to students and protesters resisting illegal police and ICE activity

Spellers also heard from leaders who advocate for a well-resourced, cross-denominational Christian media campaign – imagine a progressive, storytelling take on “He Gets Us”¹⁶, the conservative evangelical-inspired campaign launched in 2023 to reintroduce the story and produce a “joyful disruption of our preconceived notions of Jesus.”

Take Action: How could you and your community of faith go public as the Jesus Movement?

2. pg. 180: Spellers describes the following challenge for followers of Jesus in our time:

[T]here’s no easy solution to the question of how to stay above politics, keep the pews happy, and speak the gospel truth. I return to what we’ve learned from Bishops Curry and Budde: stay close to Jesus and the Gospels, never engage in gratuitous name-calling and point-scoring, but when you have the opportunity to speak and make God’s love known, take a risk and speak.

Take Action: How have you navigated this challenge in your ministry and life? What would you like to do more often or do differently?

3. pg. 181-182: Many churches regularly recite the Nicene or Apostles Creed, both of which state what the community of faith believes. What about affirming how we seek to live as followers of Jesus? Most every church has a Baptismal Covenant like this one from the Episcopal Book of Common Prayer, which the congregation to respond, “I will, with God’s help.”

- *Will you continue in the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers?*
- *Will you persevere in resisting evil, and, whenever you fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord?*
- *Will you proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ?*
- *Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself?*
- *Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?*

Take Action: Consider far more regularly incorporating discipleship-focused elements like these into worship, preaching and community formation.

¹⁶ <https://hegetsus.com>.

4. pgs. 185-7: In response to the second prophecy of the Nones and Dones, Chapter 11 reminds us that “Our Institutions Can Innovate and Liberate.” The first way: **embrace fresh approaches to institutional structure**, particularly by expanding the definition of what is “church.” Dwight Zscheile and Blair Pogue suggest embracing a “mixed ecology” that includes these three forms in lively, mutually supporting and mutually sustaining relationship:¹⁷

- *Temples*: “where people connect with the larger body of Christ—conferences, retreats, celebrations, pilgrimages, and websites.”
- *Synagogues*: “conventional local churches as a primary focus of spiritual connection and engagement.”
- *Tents*: “small worshiping communities within the spaces of daily life.”

The last form, tents, may be the least familiar form for most institutional churches. Among the group of leaders Spellers convened, members suggested these small communities might thrive as weekly gatherings in homes or with folks gathering for shared activities or practices (hiking, yoga, dancing, dinner groups). On major holy days or even for Holy Communion, tent communities could convene in more traditional or consistent spaces – including churches and cathedrals with whom they are already in relationship, but also in hybrid spaces like camps and conference centers.

Another example of tent ministry is Neighbor’s Table. This secular effort provides handcrafted tables for gathering neighbors in backyards. The results are stunning. Learn more at www.neighborstable.com/about. Learn lots more with the Fresh Expressions North America crew; their resource page is a gem: www.freshexpressions.com/resources.

Take Action: Explore ways for your congregation or institution to spark new tent-style ministries or support and encourage an existing small worship community.

5. pgs. 187-188: Spellers also points out a little-practiced Episcopal rule that opens the door for people in authority to become permission-givers and encourage innovative, contextual worship.

Take Action: Intentionally identify and amplify rules and policies in your institution that would unleash, support, and – yes! – finance innovation.

6. pgs. 188-190: Institutions can reduce institutional idolatry by **embracing fresh approaches to buildings**. As Spellers notes, “we’ve got to find compassionate, just, and missional ways to reduce the number of buildings in our care and—in the process—to increase energy and resources for ministry.” How? ...

¹⁷ *Embracing the Mixed Ecology: Inherited and New Forms of Christian Community Flourishing Together* (Seabury Books, 2025), 67, drawing on Michael Moynagh, *Church for Every Context* (SCM Press, 2012).

Take Action in these ways:

- Host truth-telling and healing sessions with dwindling congregations
- Direct funds from building closures to new ministry development, multicultural ministry, and/or vocations among emerging generations
- Form community partnerships that prioritize social enterprise and local community leadership, gifts, and needs
- Take advantage of Trinity Church-Wall Street’s programs helping faith communities to link real estate and mission: <https://trinitychurchnyc.org/community/how-we-partner/mission-real-estate-development>
- In addition, consider these fresh approaches to building use, offered by Katie Nakamura Rengers and Zack Nyein:
 - Open the front doors more often to encourage people to enter for individualized prayer and expression
 - Install creative, seasonal and even permanent prayer stations
 - Host open clergy office hours in the sanctuary

7. pgs. 190-194: Finally, if we really want to increase institutional capacity to innovate and liberate, we’ll need to **embrace fresh approaches to leadership**. Explore these options:

- *Prepare the laity to serve as chaplains, evangelists, and ministry activators in their workplaces and ordinary lives:*
 - See Lindsey Hardegree’s “Spirituality in Secular Spaces: Constructing a Practical Missional Ecclesiology (available at <https://etd.library.emory.edu/concern/etds/kd17cv22k?locale=en>), which includes a pilot adult ed forum for lay leaders claiming ministry where they live and work.
 - The leaders’ group Spellers convened was convinced churches need “a radical de-professionalization of ministry,” including more lay chaplains – that is, ministers out in the world, serving alongside people, blessing and nourishing in place – and smaller communities dedicated to spiritual exploration.
- *Build up a cadre of lay catechists:* You might also know this ministry as lay pastoral associate, lay pastor, or lay preacher. The Methodists have a long tradition of deploying lay preachers and teachers for mission on the frontier. These leaders can take on several roles: “conduct public worship, care for the congregation, assist in program leadership, develop new and existing faith communities, preach the Word, lead small groups, or establish community outreach ministries as part of a ministry team with the supervision and support of a clergy person.” Learn more at www.umcdiscipleship.org/articles/clm-faqs.

In 2021, Pope Francis authorized the order of lay catechists in the Roman Catholic Church. Read and imagine how such a ministry might play out in your context:

www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/motu_proprio/documents/papa-francesco-motu-proprio-20210510_antiquum-ministerium.html?_gl=1*t8zjjg*_gcl_au*MTI3NDI0NTIxNi4xNzY0MDE1MzA5

The Anglican Church in North America, a controversial breakaway from The Episcopal Church with close ties to churches across Africa, leans into the ministry of lay catechists: www.ccagbg.org/Content/Documents/FAQ%20Lay%20Catechist.pdf

- *Provide formation that responds to needs and cultures in actual ministry contexts.* Ensure that today's lay and ordained ministry leaders are trained in small group leadership, community building, social engagement and activism, asset-based community development. Formation programs should also value skills like yoga certification, arts ministries, mental wellness chaplaincy, forest therapy, paperless music, dance, and more.
- *Recruit and promote younger leaders:*
 - Sit and ask younger faith leaders what obstacles to leadership the church has thrown up ... and then work with people in authority to remove the barriers.
 - Learn from examples where young leaders have taken the helm and thrived. One prime example is the Episcopal Congregation in Tbilisi, Georgia. Also called "St. Nino's Chapel," this church plant was founded largely by young adult converts to Christianity. It is LGBTQ+ led and welcoming in one of the most challenging mission contexts possible: www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100079117406437#.

Take Action: If they could take these steps in their context, what risks could you take for the gospel in your context?

Take Action: Which of the opportunities you've just explored could you or your ministry pursue?

PART IV: The Future of Faith (2nd two chapters and Conclusion)

Chapter 12: We Can Seek God Beyond the Walls (Response to the Third Prophecy)

Chapter 13: Let's Dance (Response to the Fourth Prophecy)

Conclusion: And You Shall Live

Entering In

- What words, images, or phrases stand out for you in these chapters?
- How does what you've read relate to your personal journey? To your ministry?
- Which of the opportunities described in these chapters could you or your ministry pursue?

Dwelling with Scripture

Read the following passage three times. After each reading, reflect on one of the following questions. Note: If you're in a group, you might reflect on the first two questions in pairs or (if online) by sharing brief responses in the chat; for the final question, share as a group.

1. What phrase or image grabs your attention?
2. What is God saying and doing here?
3. What do you feel called to do or to see differently, given what you hear in this passage?

Ezekiel 37:7-14

I prophesied as I had been commanded, and as I prophesied, suddenly there was a noise, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone. I looked, and there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them, but there was no breath in them. Then he said to me, "Prophesy to the breath, prophesy, mortal, and say to the breath: Thus says the Lord God: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live." I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived and stood on their feet, a vast multitude.

Then he said to me, "Mortal, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, 'Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are cut off completely.' Therefore prophesy and say to them: Thus says the Lord God: I am going to open your graves and bring you up from your graves, O my people, and I will bring you back to the land of Israel. And you shall know that I am the Lord when I open your graves and bring you up from your graves, O my people. I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you on your own soil; then you shall know that I, the Lord, have spoken and will act, says the Lord."

Taking Action

Discuss the resources and reflection opportunities that follow. Which is relevant and actionable for you and your community?

1. pgs. 196-7: In response to the third prophecy of the Nones and Dones, Chapter 12 affirms "We Can Seek God Beyond the Walls." The first recommendation is to **voice our experiences of God in the natural world**. These resources will help:

- Learn to share your story of love for God’s creation and to listen for others’ stories with this Creation Care StorySharing Resource, available at www.episcopalchurch.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/creation_storysharing_handout.pdf. Start simple: in a sermon or at the opening of a meeting, invite people to pair off and share a story of when they noticed the presence / spirit of God in nature.
 - Observe the Season of Creation, technically September 1 to October 4 (St. Francis Day), at your church. Find ecumenical resources for personal and corporate action, prayer and worship at <https://seasonofcreation.org>.
 - Father Richard Rohr offers this reflection on the way nature reveals the wisdom and presence of the Divine: <https://cac.org/daily-meditations/listening-to-natures-sermons>
 - The Episcopal Church has produced a film-based, small group curriculum called “Love God, Love God’s World.” The first sessions focus on sharing your story of love for creation: www.episcopalchurch.org/ministries/creation-care/love-god-love-gods-world-curriculum.
 - ecoAmerica’s Blessed Tomorrow program helps faith communities to find their voice around creation care. “Let’s Talk Faith and Climate: Communication Guidance for Faith Leaders” is a bilingual resource available at <https://blessedtomorrow.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/ea-lets-talk-faith-and-climate-web-2.pdf>.
2. pgs. 197-200: Another important move for getting beyond the walls is to literally **prioritize ministries that get us outside**. Check out these resources and strategies:
- *Camps and conference centers*
 - Connect with Christian camps and conferences: www.christiancamps.net
 - List your camp or conference center on Retreat Finder: <https://www.retreatfinder.com>
 - *Outdoor worship*
 - As we learned during the pandemic, worship can happen almost anywhere, especially in parks, wooded areas, church porches, soccer fields, and parking lots.
 - The Church of England offers principles for taking activities outside: www.churchofengland.org/resources/churchcare/advice-and-guidance-church-buildings/outdoor-worship
 - Methodists in England created this “Forest Church” guide: https://media.methodist.org.uk/media/documents/Forest_Church_Low_Res_Proof-compressed.pdf
 - The Wild Church Movement is full of grassroots communities passionate about nature and spiritual practice: www.wildchurchnetwork.com.
 - *Garden ministries*
 - Good News Gardens: www.episcopalchurch.org/good-news-gardens
 - Agrarian Ministries www.facebook.com/groups/2564507933827285
 - Author and activist Brian Sellers Petersen maintains <https://faithfulagrarian.com>, a lively site that equips people to grow their own agrarian ministries, turning gardens and farms into spiritual centers. He also hosts the “Spade, Spoon, Soul” podcast with Jennifer Baskerville Burrows: <https://spadespoonsoulpodcast.podbean.com>.

- *Labyrinth and walking meditation*

Labyrinths are ancient, and they're also hot these days. Churches of all kinds have installed them in their front yards, parking lots, courtyards and interiors. People come at all hours to walk, meditate, discern, listen, and get centered.

Episcopal chaplain Rev. Stacy Alan works with her University of Chicago students to construct an outdoor labyrinth during Orientation Week. The Late-Nite Labyrinth is made of cornmeal (so it's biodegradable and will slowly blow away or get eaten by squirrels over a few days) and is illuminated with battery-powered tealights. At a time of high anxiety and big questions, students take their troubles to the labyrinth.¹⁸

- *Pet-friendly worship*

- *Church Tomorrow?* features the story of Dog Church (aka, "Sundays at the Shore"). Hosted by St. John's Episcopal Cathedral in Knoxville, Tennessee, it's a summer, outdoor, bluegrass, dog-friendly worship experience: <https://dogchurchknox.com>.
- St. Clement Episcopal Church in Tampa, Florida, is a truly pet-centered church and they have been for decades. Their People & Pets Ministry includes "Bring Your People to Church" every third Sunday, a pet food bank, pet-friendly weddings, and the St. Francis Remembrance Garden, final resting place for pets. Learn more at <https://stclement.net/people-pets>.

Take Action: Which of the opportunities you've just explored could you or your ministry pursue?

3. pg. 201: Move beyond talking about nature and **commit to addressing the climate crisis**, with help from these resources and groups:

- *Gen Z and Millennial leaders* are often on the frontlines struggling for climate justice. Reach out to those in your community and offer to follow their lead on climate justice.
- *Blessed Tomorrow* also helps faith communities to mobilize, learn, preach and respond to the climate crisis: <https://blessedtomorrow.org/resources> (most in English and Spanish)
- *GreenFaith* specializes in grassroots, spiritually-grounded climate activism: <https://greenfaith.org>.
- *Interfaith Power and Light* state affiliates inspire and mobilize people of faith and conscience to take bold and just action. The flagship California branch is at www.interfaithpower.org; search the internet for your state.
- *Creation Justice Ministries* is a Washington, D.C.-based network that does advocacy and theological training around creation care and environmental justice.
- In addition, nearly every denomination has an office dedicated to climate justice, and they're often begging to partner with congregations. Here are a few:
 - Episcopal Church: www.episcopalchurch.org/ministries/creation-care
 - Evangelical Environmental Network: <https://creationcare.org>
 - Methodist Church: <https://umcreationjustice.org>
 - Lutherans Restoring Creation: <https://lutheransrestoringcreation.org>

¹⁸ Carrie Golus, "How to Make a Labyrinth," UChicago magazine, Winter 2022. <https://mag.uchicago.edu/university-news/how-make-labyrinth>.

4. pgs. 204-208: The final chapter, “Let’s Dance” suggests ways to respond to the fourth prophecy: “Form loving, embodied communities that welcome our whole, authentic selves.” The first move is to **prioritize the formation of authentic communities of love.**

- *Nurture participation and personal transformation*
 - Put simply, as Father Ricardo Bailey likes to say, “No more pray, pay and obey.” People want more from Christian community than worship, stewardship and obedience. They want a changed life, and they’re not wrong to ask for it.
 - The Anglican Communion organized a Season of Intentional Discipleship with efforts across the globe. Learn from their examples here: www.anglicancommunion.org/mission/intentional-discipleship/discipleship-path/discipleship.
- *Form small groups*
 - Call them small groups, cell groups, or house church gatherings – just get into them. This is where we best nurture transformation, community, and intimacy with God and one another.
 - Small group ministry resources are available at www.episcopalchurch.org/way-of-love/building-intentional-small-groups. Don’t miss the short training for facilitators.
- *Get rooted in our stories*
 - Practice narrative preaching and open leadership meetings and small groups with one-to-one conversations where people share around meaningful questions. Spellers developed this outline for lay preachers at her congregation in Boston, based on the Public Narrative process created by Marshall Ganz.¹⁹
 1. What is the *story of God* and God’s people unfolding in this scripture?
 2. What is your *story of self*? What story from your own life relates to what you hear in the story of God?
 3. What is the *story of us*? How does this particular community’s story and experience connect to the story of God and your story of self? What have we faced and/or what are we facing together?
 4. What is the *story of now*? Given all that you’ve shared so far, what question or action do we need to consider?
- Welcome greater participation by all the people by replacing traditional sermons with *Lectio Divina* (or “Holy Reading,” similar to the “Dwelling with Scripture” practice in this guide) or *Visio Divina* (“Holy Seeing,” meditating on an image) or *Terra Divina* (“Holy Reading of the Earth,” meditating on the natural world).

These resources will deepen your grasp on each practice:

www.upperroom.org/resources/lectio-divina-praying-the-scriptures

www.upperroom.org/resources/visio-divina

www.unforcedrhythms.org/contemplative-spirituality/terra-divina/#_ftn1

Take Action: Which of the opportunities you’ve just explored could you or your ministry pursue?

¹⁹ https://leadingchangenetwork.org/resource_center/guide-to-public-narrative-resources

5. pgs. 208-211: Loving, embodied, authentic communities will inevitably **encourage authentic, embodied, Spirit-filled worship**. They welcome people to bring their whole body, mind, and spirit before the God, especially via storytelling, outdoor worship, pet-friendly church, lay preaching, dance, community art, and a wide range of cultural expressions – all the practices featured in this part so far. In particular, consider this wisdom:

- *Gear to the children*

- Secure a copy of Caroline Fairless’s classic *Children at Worship: Congregations in Bloom* (Church Publishing, 2000).
- Rev. Katie Ernst at the Breck School in Minneapolis offered a host of practical insights gleaned from her work with young people in grades K-12:
 - *Welcome embodied wisdom*. “At the beginning of chapel, I have them touch their feet to the ground and put their backs on the pews. I tell them, ‘We do this every time because, when we feel swept up by the currents of our days, all we need to do is place our feet on the ground and know that the earth always has our backs, and this community is always supporting us.’”
 - *Use images and visuals in combination with written messages*. “They need to hear it but also see it. Visual learning is part of how humans process life.”
 - *Form community through group singing*. “We teach about the power of communal singing and the science behind it. It’s a natural antidepressant; it increases energy; it helps with memory; and it gives you a sense of community.” She chooses simple songs that are consistent with their values.
 - *Decode churchy language*. “When I offer the Eucharist and the words of institution, ‘Do this in remembrance of me,’ I don’t stop there. I say why it matters. ‘Do this for the remembrance of me, so remember what we’re doing here, because where you’re going, you’re going to need to remember what you’ve witnessed and who you are and whose you are. So remember.’ That way the ritual has more meaning and helps them to make meaning.”
 - *Offer an authentic welcome*. “Every service starts with a litany of belonging. No matter your faith background, or if you have no faith, or if you have doubts, you’re welcome here. ... It’s whatever they need to hear to feel they’re being seen. They can bring all of who they are into this space.”

- *Worship in conjunction with community activities*

You can enhance participation and root worship in the life of the community by worshipping during community activities.

- Make a meal together and, when it has been prepared, gather folks to pray, read a holy word and reflect together or to share a simple Eucharist or agape meal. Learn about the Dinner Church movement from one of the pioneers, St. Lydia’s in Brooklyn: www.stlydias.org/dinner-church.
- Jerusalem Greer suggests this outline for organizing a “holy hike,” incorporating elements of worship throughout:
 - Welcome, prayer and a song before setting out
 - Provide readings for people to contemplate as they walk
 - At the summit or halfway point, invite reflections from the group
 - On the way back, gather everyone close for Holy Communion
 - When you finish the journey, sing and pray.

- *Acknowledge that church is scary*
It's hard to notice the insider language and obstacles to welcome when it's your church. Try this Hospitality Audit from The Episcopal Church: www.episcopalchurch.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/evangelism_hospitality_101_and_assessment.pdf.

Take Action: Which of the opportunities you've just explored could you or your ministry pursue?

6. pgs. 211-213: The book ends with a true conundrum: how can we expect to **form and grow communities of love in a culture that shuns membership, attendance, and commitment?** Below is a more comprehensive exploration of this challenge and ways some ministries are tackling it.

- *Expand the definition of who is inside and who is outside*
 - Leaders suggest we'll need to rethink the concept of membership, possibly borrowing from the Shakers, who have concentric circles of participation from the "gathering" order all the way to the fully committed.
 - Convene cohorts of key people from the different circles in your church's life: those who attend once a year, once a quarter, or monthly/weekly; plus neighbors who love the church's artistic, intellectual or architectural offerings. Work with each to develop concrete ways they can belong and grow in faith, appropriate to their level.

- *Study the Alcoholics Anonymous model*
People in AA develop a close relationship with a sponsor, attend meetings regularly, share stories, and understand that – as they grow – they can volunteer and help others to maintain sobriety and experience transformation. What could religious communities learn from their depth of belonging and impact?

This article by Rebekah Simon-Peter lays out 15 lessons we can learn from Alcoholics Anonymous: https://ministrymatters.com/2015-06-15_15_things_alcoholics_anonymous_can_teach_the_church.

- *Collaboratively craft a community rule of life*
A rule or covenant describes how people can live close to God and community, outside of the primary worship gathering. Weekly Sunday attendance wouldn't necessarily be the mark of membership; the real mark might be dedication to the shared rule of life and participation in a small group or house church.

For rule resources, feel free to start with The Way of Love, the seven practices that shape us as followers of Jesus: www.episcopalchurch.org/way-of-love.

- *Learn from communities that excel at flexible belonging*
 - Grace Cathedral in San Francisco is a hub for just this kind of belonging. Their dean, The Very Rev. Malcolm Young, described the church as a "community of communities" – the Sunday morning congregation say Grace is their home, but so do people who've been attending Yoga on the Labyrinth for a decade, as well as the people who come for Thursday's transcendent Evensong worship, and even those who attend lectures on a regular basis.

How do all those people belong? In addition to traditional church membership, Grace created a separate organization called *GraceArts*, a cultural membership program that provides special access to yoga classes, arts performances, lectures, sightseeing tours and other members-only gatherings. You don't have to be Christian or ever attend worship on a Sunday, but you are consciously part of the Grace circle. Learn more at <https://gracecathedral.org/gracearts>.

- Some churches have created new centers to meet their community's spiritual needs without the weight of church doctrine and membership. Both the Center for Wellbeing and Care at Christ Episcopal Church in Charlotte, North Carolina (<https://christchurchcharlotte.org/wellbeing>) and the Threshold Center at St. Stephen's Episcopal Church in Birmingham, Alabama (www.thethresholdcenter.org) offer spiritual counseling, yoga, labyrinth walks, small groups, forest bathing and more – all open to the public. Neighbors or visitors are able to join, receive, and contribute, and the churches are able to serve God's mission in expanded ways.
- Bishop David Walker in the Church of England surveyed hundreds of people who attend special church services and events but don't do Sunday worship.²⁰ The majority identified as Christian and believe in God, but regular church attendance just doesn't match their spiritual "type." Instead of trying to convert them all into churchgoers, Walker suggests churches nurture their faith journey through other modes of engagement and help them to still contribute to God's mission of healing, teaching, sharing good news, and caring for the earth.

Take Action: Which of the opportunities you've just explored could you or your ministry pursue?

7. pg. 217: In the "Conclusion," Spellers writes:

I trust the God who rolled away the stone and made life flourish at the grave. We know the same God who led the Israelites through the Red Sea on dry land. We belong to the God who breathed into a valley of dry bones and declared, "You shall live!" It would seem that our endings are God's beginning.

Take Action: Where is the God who brings life to the valley of dry bones leading you and your ministry to go next? How will you take those steps? What support – and what partners – do you need?

²⁰ David Walker, *God's Belongers: How People Engage with God Today and How the Church Can Help Them* (Oxford, England: The Bible Reading Fellowship, 2017).

LISTEN: Conducting a Listening Campaign with Nones and Dones

Will there be church tomorrow? Only if we listen to the Nones and Dones today. The good news is that, whoever you are and wherever you live, whatever your age or religion, you are no more than one or two degrees of separation from a Millennial or Gen Z None or Done. So start listening! Here's how:

- **Keep it simple and clear:** Use the four tried-and-true questions Spellers developed:
 1. Tell me about your spiritual journey, from childhood to this point.
 2. How and where do you experience or connect with the sacred (depending on the partner's affinity, you might opt for words like the Ultimate, the divine, the holy, God, meaning and mystery)?
 3. How and where do you experience community and belonging?
 4. What would you tell the church/organized religion, if it was really listening? (Again, depending on how people respond to this open question, you might add: "What do you wish churches understood better about your generation, the culture you inhabit, and the challenges you face?" or "What are churches missing about life and spirituality today?")
- **Get grounded in the spiritual capacities for engaging Nones and Dones** (to refresh, see pgs. 131-136):
 - **Cultivate Curiosity:** Carve out mental and heart space to truly hear others and be curious about what God will do next.
 - **Cultivate Humility:** Admit we don't have all the answers; sometimes we've been wrong.
 - **Cultivate Mutuality:** Go to accompany and learn from others and welcome them to accompany and learn from us.
 - **Cultivate Love:** Believe you are beloved, and that there is enough love to go around.
- **Do it as a church:** Make this a congregational or even regional listening campaign, so there's a context for asking people to engage in these conversations. Members will definitely find it easier to go out if they're not embarking on their own. Use an invitation like this:

"My church is trying to listen and learn from people who don't do church. We see spirituality and meaning-making happening out in the world, and we want to listen more and preach less. I'd love to hear from you. Could we set a time to talk?"

If it's a church campaign, you can also set goals together (30 conversations = 15 members conducting two conversations each), encourage each other ("Here's language that worked for me" or "Here's a conversational pothole the rest of you should avoid"), and celebrate each other (gather at church to share the wisdom, testify around the experience, and decide together what's next).

And don't forget: you can use the four questions with groups within the church first. Listen to each others' stories, and you'll be even more inspired about widening the circle.

- **Ask around:** Ask your children, grandchildren, school friends, work friends. Ask your massage therapist, yoga teacher, favorite barista. Many of our neighbors love these kinds of conversations but have few spaces where they can engage them.
- **Be intentional:** Dedicate time and space to talk. Most of the conversations that informed *Church Tomorrow?* were one-on-one sessions lasting forty-five minutes to one hour. They happened in cafes or in public meeting spaces, and in a few cases, in people's homes. Meeting in public helps to set a boundary.

If you want to convene a small group, that could work, but make sure it's not more than three people and that you have at least an hour. You want time to welcome everyone's stories.

Feel free to share the questions with your conversation partner in advance – it could help to reduce anxiety – but make sure they know they don't need to write or perfect their answers ahead of time.

- **Release ulterior motives:** Partners need to know you aren't trying to convince them they should believe anything or attend your church. A bait-and-switch will only backfire.
- **Share your story if it's appropriate:** The focus should be on your nonreligious partner. You could share about your journey or thoughts if it helps them to understand your interest or to trust your genuine compassion and curiosity, but the point is to create a space to hear Nones and Dones's stories and insights. The spiritual capacities above will help to place you in the right mental-space and heart-space.
- **Leave the door open:** While these are not evangelistic conversations, don't be surprised if someone is so grateful to talk that they want more. Be ready to pray or offer a blessing. If you hear an idea that's truly compelling or you discover a shared passion, ask if your conversation partner might want to meet again or work with you on a project where their wisdom would be essential.

And if you hear God alive in any part of what they shared, name it and thank them. It may be the first time a Christian has recognized God in their lives. This could be the start of a beautiful relationship – between you and your partner *and* between your partner and God.