

Transforming
FAITH

CELEBRATING THE POWER
OF ROOTED WISDOM

AUGUST 16-17, 2024

OZ ARTS, NASHVILLE, TN



FAITH MATTERS
NETWORK

CELEBRATION

WEEKEND

10
year

Celebrating the Power of Rooted Wisdom

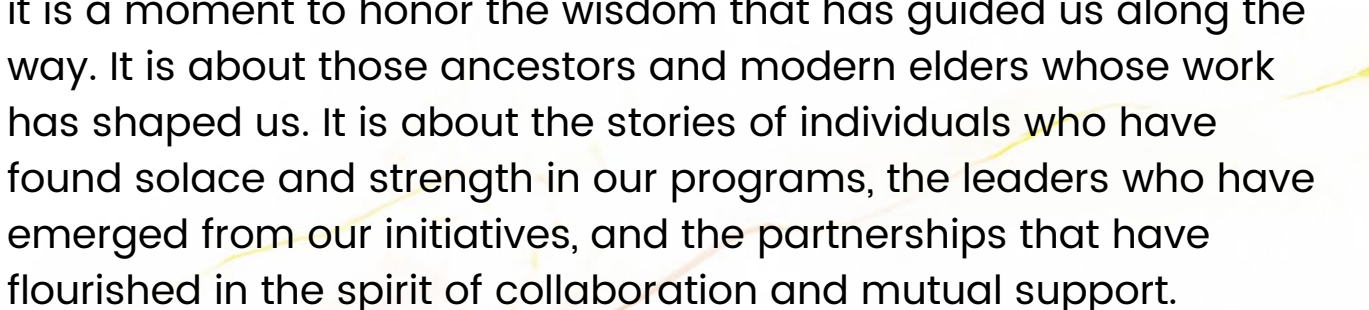
Dear Beloved Ones,

Welcome to the 10th Anniversary Celebration of Faith Matters Network!

As I sit down to write this letter, I am filled with immense gratitude and awe reflecting on the journey we have embarked upon together over the past decade. It feels like only yesterday when Faith Matters Network was just a vision—a dream nurtured by a small group of committed people who believed in the transformative power of faith, community, and justice to heal our world.

This weekend, as we gather to celebrate this significant milestone, we honor the countless moments of courage, compassion, and resilience that have defined our collective journey. Over the past ten years, Faith Matters Network has grown from a seedling into a vibrant blossoming flower that has touched the lives of many, fostering healing and hope in communities across the nation.

This celebration is not just about looking back at our achievements; it is a moment to honor the wisdom that has guided us along the way. It is about those ancestors and modern elders whose work has shaped us. It is about the stories of individuals who have found solace and strength in our programs, the leaders who have emerged from our initiatives, and the partnerships that have flourished in the spirit of collaboration and mutual support.



As we move forward, let us continue to embrace the values that have guided us thus far—connection, spiritual sustainability, and accompaniment. Let us envision a future where the work we do together continues to inspire and empower communities to create a more just and loving world.

I extend my heartfelt thanks to each of you—our supporters, partners, and friends—who have walked this path with us. Your unwavering support and belief in our mission have been the fertile ground from which our success has grown. We could not have reached this moment without your generosity and dedication.

As we celebrate this special occasion, let us recommit ourselves to the work that lies ahead. Together, we can continue to build a world that heals the healers and where every individual can thrive in a community that cherishes and uplifts them.

With gratitude and hope,



REV. JEN BAILEY

Founder and Executive Director
Faith Matters Network



**FAITH MATTERS
NETWORK**

Schedule of Events

Womanist Wisdom Live — Friday, August 16th

Event Schedule

- 3:30 PM — Doors Open
- 4:00 PM — Welcome by Ristina Gooden, Associate Director of Spiritual Innovation
- 4:05 PM — Introduction of Emcee, Chelsea Yarborough
- 4:10 PM — Womanist Wisdom Live Talks Begin
- 5:45 PM — “The Group Chat” moderated by Melanie Jones Quarles, Director of the Katie Geneva Cannon Center for Womanist Leadership
- 6:30 PM — Dessert Reception
- 7:30 PM — End of Event

Gala & Wisdom Keeper Awards Ceremony — Saturday, August 17th

Event Schedule

- 6:00 PM — Cocktail Hour
- 7:00 PM — Welcome by Gala Host, Dawn-Lyen Gardner
- 7:30 PM — Dinner Served
- 8:15 PM — Program Resumes
- 9:00 PM — Celebration Closing
- 9:30 PM — End of Event

Quick Links

[ABOUT FMN](#)[WHAT IS WOMANISM?](#)[OUR TEAM & BOARD](#)[FRIDAY EVENTS](#)[SATURDAY EVENTS](#)[THANK YOU'S](#)

About Faith Matters Network



Since our founding in 2014, Faith Matters Network has accompanied more than 25,000 spiritually grounded leaders in their journey to heal themselves and their communities. We've resourced community organizers, activists, and faith leaders with resources focused on personal and social transformation.

Our philosophy is to support social movements and the people leading them from a place of spirit, creativity, and courage. By partnering with organizations of all sizes that align with our values of connection, spiritual sustainability, and accompaniment, we are building a vast network of people who share our passion for spiritually centered leadership.



Faith Matters Network is advancing womanist frameworks of learning and leadership — creating communal spaces to tackle issues of justice and belonging facing our communities.

Mission

To nurture a thriving network of spiritually grounded leaders towards healing

Vision

A world where communities are rooted in spiritual wisdom, connection, healing justice

Values



Connection



Accompaniment



Spiritual Sustainability

Our Programs

Faith Matters Network offers three distinct programs aimed at nurturing spiritually grounded leaders at their unique stage of growth and learning. These programs collectively create a dynamic environment for participants to thrive in their spiritual and leadership journey-- fostering connections, and providing resources for transformative impact.



LEARNING JOURNEYS

Uniting cohorts of spiritual leaders to address localized issues, fostering collaboration and reshaping narratives with in-person and online gatherings



MOVEMENT CHAPLAINCY

Ancient wisdom meets modern healing justice practices to equip frontline activists & leaders with spiritual care skills via webinars, training courses, and a national support network of movement chaplains



SPIRITUAL INNOVATION

Centering BIPOC voices, we offer coaching, mentorship, and capital investment for emerging leaders spearheading systemic change through spirituality

Faith Matters Network Milestones

August 2014

Rev. Jen Bailey founds Faith Matters Network with support from the Nathan Cummings Foundation

January 2017

#100days100dinners initiative launches, evolving into The People's Supper

August 2019

Disciples of Welcome launches in North Carolina with support from Duke Endowment

October 2019

Movement Chaplaincy pilot course launches

September 2020

Faith Matters Network receives \$1M grant from Lilly Endowment Inc through their Thriving Congregations Initiative

September 2022

Rooted in Resilience brings together an international cohort of spiritual care practitioners

What is Womanism?

(Heavily) revised from Alice Walker's definition of womanism as articulated in her 1983 work: *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose*

Acting Womanish

A womanist is a Black feminist or feminist of color who is serious, responsible, and shows audacious, courageous behavior, wanting to know more deeply than what is traditionally deemed appropriate.

Loving Women

A womanist loves women both sexually and non-sexually, appreciates women's culture and emotional flexibility, and is committed to the survival and wholeness of all people, both male and female, without being a separatist except for health reasons.

Loving Life and the Folk

A womanist loves music, dance, the moon, the Spirit, love, food, roundness, struggle, the Folk, and herself regardless of circumstances.

Connection to Feminism

Walker describes womanism as being to feminism what purple is to lavender, indicating a deeper and more comprehensive approach.



Four Tenets of Womanism

Stacey Floyd-Thomas, the E. Rhodes and Leona B. Carpenter Chair and Associate Professor of Ethics and Society at Vanderbilt University, outlines four tenets in her book, *Mining the Motherlode: Methods in Womanist Ethics*.

Paralleling the four-part definition provided by Alice Walker, Stacey Floyd-Thomas names four tenets of Womanist ethics: Radical Subjectivity, Traditional Communalism, Redemptive Self-Love, and Critical Engagement. These tenets explore the connection between Womanists' use of Walker's definition and the various methodologies employed within Womanist ethics.

Stacey Floyd-Thomas' four tenets of Womanist ethics each delve into different aspects of Womanist philosophy:

1

Radical Subjectivity

Emphasizes the importance of personal experience and individual perspectives, affirming the unique voices and lived realities of Black women.

2

Traditional Communalism

Highlights the value of community and collective well-being, rooted in shared cultural traditions and communal support systems.

3

Redemptive Self-Love

Encourages self-acceptance and love as a means of healing and empowerment, promoting the idea that loving oneself is essential for personal and communal redemption.

4

Critical Engagement

Involves actively challenging and transforming oppressive structures through critical analysis and proactive involvement, seeking social justice and systemic change.



A womanist is one who values the soul and the well-being of the Black community.

At Faith Matters Network, we prioritize the soul and well-being of our national and global diasporic community.

Our approach to leadership is transformative and innovative, rooted in womanist values that highlight the experiences and perspectives of Black women. Womanist leadership aims to dismantle intersecting systems of oppression such as racism, sexism, and classism, while amplifying the voices and needs of marginalized and silenced individuals.

Our three core values—connection, spiritual sustainability, and accompaniment—are inspired by these womanist principles. These values drive us to create spaces centered on social justice and community building.

Our Team & Board



Rev. Jen Bailey
Founder & Executive
Director



Ristina Gooden
Associate Director of
Spiritual Innovation



**Rev. Dr. Sushama
Austin-Connor**
Chief Program Officer



Brittney Jackson
Chief Operating Officer



Victoria Litardo
Director of Storytelling &
Strategic Communications



Rev. Margaret Ernst
Director of Learning &
Integration



Rev. Dr. Gloria A. Winston
Director of Spiritual Formation
& Learning Journeys



Tyler Owens
Operations & Grant
Manager



Danyelle Duckett
Administrative
Coordinator



Casey Overton
Program Coordinator



Patricia L. Hunter
Board Treasurer



**Rev. Dr. Emma
Jordan-Simpson**
Board Secretary

Weekend of Events

Womanist Wisdom Live — Friday, August 17th

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About Womanist Wisdom Live Theme: Spiritual Innovation

As we celebrate what has been, we look towards what will be. Spiritual innovation is Faith Matters Network’s newest programming area.

While there is no singular definition of spiritual innovation, we recognize that many religious institutions, funders, and organizations are interested in the question of “What’s next?” in the world of faith and spirituality.

We know Black women, non-binary people, and women of color have always been spiritual innovators. Black women have a legacy of spiritual innovation that is communally minded, rooted in lineage and lived experience, and responsive to the present moment. We think of those women who say, “I’m trying to do something new...” starting from a place of faith or spirit. Black women who make a way out of no way and who say, “My tradition can also do this.” Yet, while Black women have always offered innovative spiritual leadership in healing themselves and their communities, too many have historically not been recognized, compensated, or celebrated for their work.

Womanist Wisdom Live — Friday, August 17th (continued)

As our founder, Rev. Jen Bailey said,

There is something about the womanist tradition that can help us define spiritual innovation in a way that it's not just about what is sparkly and new but that we are a continuation of a long lineage of work that has been grounded. This moves us away from the definition of spiritual innovator that is focused on the single charismatic unicorn and orients us back to a vision of innovation that is more community-based, that is more holistic, that takes into account the multitude of people who pour into spaces and places, and broadens our definition of who we think of as a spiritual innovator.

Special thank you to Katie Cannon Center

We would like to extend a special thank you to The Katie Geneva Cannon Center for Womanist Leadership for partnering with us on this event.



About our Emcee Chelsea Yarborough

Rev. Dr. Chelsea Brooke Yarborough (she/her) is a friend, daughter, sister, professor, preacher, wonderer, ordained minister, poet, scholar, Enneagram teacher and leadership coach. She is a graduate of Elon University (B.A. '08), Wake Forest University (M.Div '15) and Vanderbilt University (PhD '21). Her research reimagines preaching and worship by exploring the methodologies that emerge from the rhetorical and ritual practices of Black women throughout history.



Chelsea is currently the Associate Director of Leadership Programming at The Association of Theological Schools. Her deepest hope is that anywhere she goes, her work guides others to reconnect with themselves through love and creativity, empowering them to share their unique spark with the world.

About our Moderator Melanie Jones-Quarles

The Reverend Melanie Jones Quarles, Ph.D. is a womanist ethicist, millennial preacher, and intellectual activist. Melanie is an Assistant Professor of Ethics, Theology, and Culture and the Inaugural Director of the Katie Geneva Cannon Center for Womanist Leadership at Union Presbyterian Seminary. unique spark with the world.



Melanie is a thinking woman of faith embodying radical love and revolutionary justice in the academy, Church, and global community. Melanie earned a B.A. in Economics and Political Science from Howard University, a Master of Divinity with a certificate in Black Church Studies from Vanderbilt University Divinity School, and a Doctor of Philosophy degree in Ethics, Theology, and Culture with a concentration in Black Faith & Life at Chicago Theological Seminary.

Committed to enlivening a world where Black women and girls are whole and free, Melanie serves professional societies and international boards as a global leader in Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Incorporated (former International Second Vice President 2008 – 2010), Black Religious Scholars Group, Society of Christian Ethics, and Daughters of the African Atlantic Fund. Melanie is the Co-Founder of The Millennial Womanism Project (TMWP) and Co-host of The Womanist Salon (TWS) podcast— an intergenerational, woke, womanist podcast that integrates the hair salon as site, source, and sanctuary for authentic Black sisterhood.

Melanie is the youngest ordained woman minister at South Suburban Missionary Baptist Church in Harvey, IL. Melanie is newly married to The Reverend DeQuon A. Quarles, M.Div. A third-generation ordained Baptist preacher and sought-after lecturer, Melanie is an emerging millennial voice with noted academic and popular publications and features on television, radio, and news outlets. Follow Melanie at www.revmelanie.com and @[revmelaniej](https://www.instagram.com/revmelaniej) on social media.

Speaker Information

Yolanda Pierce

Yolanda Pierce is Dean and the Cornelius Vanderbilt Chair & Professor of Religion and Literature at Vanderbilt Divinity School. Her scholarly research specialties include African American religious history; womanist theology; and race and religion.

An accomplished administrator in higher education and a widely published writer, Pierce is a native New Yorker, public theologian, community activist, and ordained minister. She is the author of the books *Hell Without Fires*, *In My Grandmother's House*, and *The Wounds Are the Witness*.



TALK TITLE

Ordinary Stories, Extraordinary Witness

Speaker Information

Rev. Dr. Gabby Cudjoe Wilkes


Rev. Dr. Gabby Cudjoe Wilkes is the co-founding, lead pastor of The Double Love Experience Church in Brooklyn, New York. She is an ordained baptist minister, a writer, board member, innovation strategist, and entrepreneur. At the age of 27, Pastor Gabby was hired as the Co-Young Adult Pastor at the 18,000 member congregation, The Greater Allen Cathedral of New York under the senior leadership of Reverends Floyd & Elaine Flake. She served in that capacity for five years. While there, she received The Guy R. Brewer Religious Leader Award and received a Senatorial Citation from New York Senator LeRoy Comrie.



In Pastor Gabby's role as co-lead pastor at Double Love, she was appointed to NYC Mayor BillDeBlasio's COVID-19 Clergy Task Force in March 2020. At the height of both a global pandemic and a contentious presidential election season, Pastor Gabby served as an Eastern Region Convener of the Black Church PAC, from April - August 2020, where she trained hundreds of clergy across the eastern region of the nation on matters of faith & voter engagement strategies.

Pastor Gabby is a sought after voice in the public square. She was a featured contributor on The 2023 Oprah Winfrey Network's documentary series: Time of Essence (HBO MAX), a contributor to The Smithsonian National Museum of African American History's new film, gODTALK (2023) and was a featured contributor to Dr. Henry Lewis Gates' documentary, GOSPEL (2025) on PBS. Since 2022, Pastor Gabby has been a recurring on-air correspondent to the nationally syndicated radio show: Get Up Mornings with Erica Campbell since 2022 where Pastor Gabby does a segment entitled: Make It Make Sense. In 2022 she released her first book: Psalms for Black Lives, Reflections for the Work of Liberation. The book has sold more than 10,000 copies worldwide.

In addition to her work as a pastor, Pastor Gabby is also an innovation strategist. She is the inaugural director of The Technology, Innovation & Digital Engagement Lab Fellowship at Union Theological Seminary. In that role, she leads a 44 person fellowship cohort of senior leaders and an 8 person staff.



Pastor Gabby's work and voice has been featured in publications such as The New York Times, Essence Magazine, Forbes, Yahoo News, CBS News and more for her work on love and ministry. She is a graduate of Duke University, Yale University Divinity School where she serves as the Vice President of the alumni board, Hampton University, and New York University. She is a member of the Morehouse College Martin Luther King Jr Board of Preachers and a proud member of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Incorporated. Pastor Gabby serves as Chaplain to her chapter, Delta Rho Omega. She resides in New York City with her husband, Rev. Dr. Andrew Wilkes.

TALK TITLE

In(ner)vation: unlocking womanist knowing to prepare the way for fearless trying

DESCRIPTION

The only thing constant is change. Though the word, innovation, might scare some, the reality is that if we are to keep ourselves and the organizations we represent from getting stagnant, we have to summon the courage to try new things. While this sounds good in theory, it can be terrifying in practice. The work of innovation isn't just external, it requires inner work as well. Something must be cultivated internally to withstand the ebbs and flows that the work of innovation requires. This work takes both strategy and inner fortitude to stay the course even when the course has some unexpected bends and turns.



Speaker Information

Amber Starks

Amber Starks (aka Melanin Mvskoke) is an Afro Indigenous (African-American and Native American) advocate, organizer, cultural critic, decolonial theorist, and budding abolitionist. She is an enrolled citizen of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation and is also of Shawnee, Yuchi, Quapaw, and Cherokee descent.



Her passion is the intersection of Black and Native American identity. Her activism seeks to normalize, affirm, and uplift the multidimensional identities of Black and Native peoples through discourse and advocacy around anti-Blackness, abolishing blood quantum, Black liberation, and Indigenous sovereignty.

She hopes to encourage Black and Indigenous peoples to prioritize one another and divest from compartmentalizing struggles. She ultimately believes the partnerships between Black and Indigenous peoples (and all POC) will aid in the dismantling of anti-blackness, white supremacy, and settler colonialism, globally.

She earned a Bachelor's of Science in General Science (emphasis in Biology and Anthropology) from the University of Oregon.

Her pronouns are she/her.

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Speaker Information

D. Danyelle Thomas

D. Danyelle Thomas, MPP is a Black faith and spirituality speaker, author, public theologian, spiritualist, and activist.

Danyelle's work centers on the intersection of faith and social justice, particularly with regards to issues of race, gender, and sexuality. She passionately highlights the experiences and perspectives of Black religious experience and is committed to uplifting the voices of marginalized communities within it.



Founder of Unfit Christian, her approach is deeply grounded in the Christian tradition and reclamation of integrative African spiritual practices. She emphasizes the importance of actively working towards social change and liberation for all people. Through her speaking, writing, and teaching, Danyelle challenges her audiences to engage with difficult questions around our faith and the dynamics of power, oppression, and resistance.

Danyelle holds both a Bachelor of Arts in Africana Studies and a Master of Public Policy with a specialization in Social Policy. Her blend of urban flair and intellectual prowess makes her the divine truth to tune into during this upcoming season of faithful rebellion to conventional belief systems. As a public theologian, she continues to push the boundaries of what it means to live out a faith that is committed to justice and liberation for all.

Danyelle proves to know the word on the street and the language of the canon as well. Her words and work have reached audiences across the world in Rolling Stone, Essence, the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History & Culture, Rewire.News, Splinter, & NBC News. Her book, *The Day God Saw Me as Black* (Row House Publishing), debuts September 24, 2024.

Speaker Information (continued)

TALK TITLE

Who Are We Calling Down?

DESCRIPTION

The call and response tradition of the Black church is an experience unmatched that lives well beyond our sanctuaries. When we hear, “God is good, all da time!” we do not hesitate to respond “And all da time, God is good!” The power in “praise the Lord everybody” raises Spirit in the same way the rhythmic “aye” powers twerk circles that feel equal parts dance and prayer. These intonations meet us in the kitchens of our grandmothers and our auntie’s living rooms. Our mamas and their mamas kept the call and response ready in times of joy, grief, and wise counsel imparted during impromptu couches-turned-hair salon sessions. The power of calling down Spirit has always been in the hands of women — even absent acknowledgement by our most sacred spaces. What if I told you they weren’t just call and response but rather chant and incantation because the practices of Black Christians and those of African Spirituality are more first cousins than anything? From Mary meeting a resurrected Christ to Toni Morrison’s Baby Suggs in *Beloved* and every encounter of the Divine Feminine in between, the womanist spirit has remained connected to the divine, always asserting its dignity in love while living in a world endarkened by misogyny.

Speaker Information

Beulah Osueke

Beulah Osueke is a coach, strategist, and organizer. She currently serves as the Executive Director for New Voices for Reproductive Justice, an organization dedicated to building power for and alongside Black women, Black queer folks, and Black marginalized people in Pennsylvania and Ohio. Her work centers the needs, desires, and experiences of those most marginalized by society. In addition to working with New Voices, Beulah is a leadership member of ReFrame and the Radical Communicators Network, two innovative, narrative-focused organizations resourcing social justice communicators.



TALK TITLE

Justice is Inherently Queer: Building the Worlds We Desire and Deserve

DESCRIPTION

“Justice is Inherently Queer” highlights the immense impact that queer politics, people, and practice(s) have on the ongoing fight for collective liberation. The talk centers queer liberation as a disruptive framework, practice, and key component to the fight for building an equitable world. The talk will be based in personal stories and reflections, and include expertise and historical context linking various justice movements to Queer and Trans liberatory efforts.

About the Artwork

Our beloveds at Sacred Design Lab recently published a report titled *Illuminating Spiritual Innovation: How innovators from Tokyo to Nairobi are responding to the spiritual longings of our time—and what they need from us now*. The report highlights the need for spiritual innovation and aims to identify innovations that contribute directly to spiritual well-being, with a focus on qualities such as spiritual integrity, project sustainability, and community support. One of the features of the report is illustrations by artists from around the world that explore their perspectives on spiritual innovation. The artwork showcased in the report reflects the richness and creativity inherent in various cultures and communities, representing what spiritual innovation means to them: connectedness and the transformation of the present into the future.

We are grateful to Angie Thurston and the Sacred Design team for allowing us to share this beautiful work with you.

Kirsten McColl — Art Director

Kirsten McColl (she/her) is a Filipino American designer and creative director living in Atlanta, GA. She values creative storytelling and impactful design, with a focus on brand strategy and development. She loves working with other creatives to communicate complex ideas in fresh ways. Outside of her design work, she is also a certified yoga instructor and appreciator of the natural world.

Illustrators



Calebe Celeste

Brazil

@ilustralebe

FIELD OF SILENCE

“It’s a viewpoint brimming with possibilities, where the spirituality of the future reserves an individual universe through technologies, where the uniqueness and particularity of each individual are expanded, sharpening all senses and sensations.”

Illustrators

Alexandra Dzhiganskaya

Ukraine / Austria
@alexandradzh

UNTITLED

“In my own journey, I have found that spiritual innovation involves the dynamic connection of the past and future, blending the wisdom of ancient traditions with emergent technologies to create new pathways for spiritual growth.”

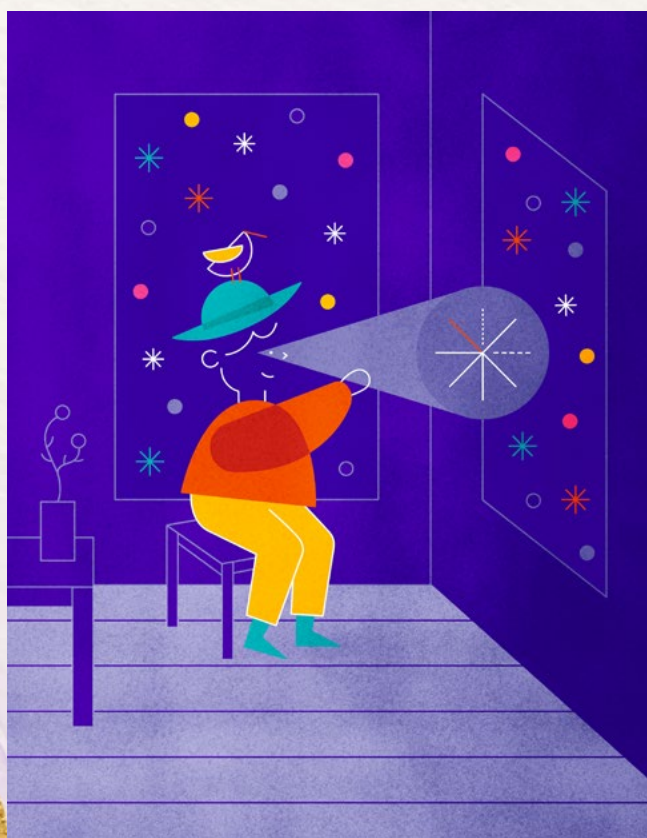


Hatiye Garip

Turkey
@hatiyegarip

BEYOND THE STARS

“This scene emphasizes that we can be close to the cosmos within us from our ordinary rooms, with the help of our ideas and vision, and that we can reach it in a moment as short as the movement of our eyelashes.”



Illustrators



Onyinye Iwu

Nigeria / United Kingdom
@onichum

UNTITLED

“This illustration is based around Odinani/Odinala cosmology, the indigenous traditional belief system practiced by the Igbo community in southeastern Nigeria of which I am part. It depicts connection to the natural elements, ‘chi’ or a personal God, ‘ndichie’ or ancestors, and ‘Chukwu’ the supreme God.”



Rosa Kusabbi

United Kingdom
@rosa_illustration_

UNTITLED

“This piece focuses on connection and growth as well as the cycle of life and death. I nod to technological advances with the circuit board mirroring the roots of the plant.”

Illustrators



Anaf Mujeeb

India / Kuwait

IQRA'A (READ)

“Spirituality in us is an entity that must be nurtured. Being a Muslim, the first word revealed in the Quran is ‘Iqra’ which means to Read! This artwork explores the importance of nurturing our spiritual side through knowledge and critical thought, which will in turn reinforce our morality.”



Enrico Nagel

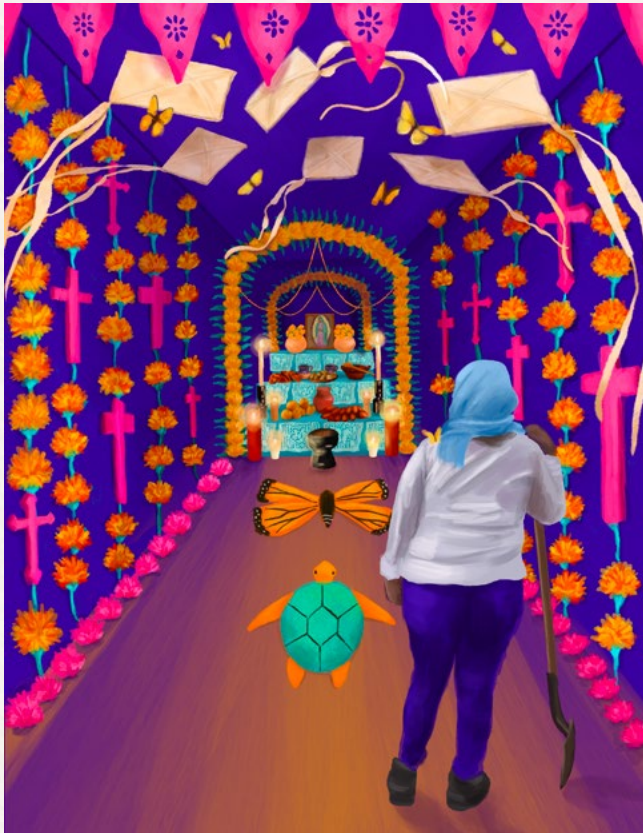
Germany / France

@enriconagel

UNTITLED COLLAGE

“For me, spiritual innovation means the creative combination of traditional wisdom and modern technologies, the dialogue between past and future.”

Illustrators



Sitalin Sanchez

Mexico

@sitalin.sanchez

PARA TODOS NUESTROS MUERTOS

“This artwork explores how rampant violence in Mexico has transformed Day of the Dead. Altars are bestowed with new symbols, icons, and images amidst constant brutality. This festivity, traditionally oriented to commemorating the dead, has been reconfigured as a space to collectively grieve and devise survival strategies.”

Weekend of Events

Gala & Wisdom Keeper Awards Ceremony — Saturday, August 18th

Event Schedule

- 6:00 PM — Cocktail Hour
- 7:00 PM — Welcome by Gala Host, Dawn-Lyen Gardner
- 7:30 PM — Dinner Served
- 8:15 PM — Program Resumes
- 9:00 PM — Celebration Closing
- 9:30 PM — End of Event

About our Gala Host Dawn-Lyen Gardner

Dawn-Lyen Gardner has left an indelible mark on viewers as Charley Bordelon in the critically-acclaimed QUEEN SUGAR. Gardner, who Andrew Cristi of HUFFINGTON POST noted had “swiftly become” ... “one of the hottest stars on television,” starred as powerhouse Charley Bordelon, for which she received an NAACP Image Award nomination in 2022.



Gardner has been acting professionally since the age of nine. In her youth, she appeared on such shows as ER, VIPER, and THE SINBAD SHOW. She went on to pursue formal training at the prestigious Juilliard School, where she was awarded the Elizabeth Smith prize, and where she first met and worked with her QUEEN SUGAR co-star, Rutina Wesley. Since graduating from Juilliard, her TV and film work has included roles on GOD FRIENDED ME, UNFORGETTABLE, HEROES, THE MYSTERIES OF LAURA, CASTLE, I LOVE YOU BUT I LIED, CROSSING JORDAN, BONES, and Marvel’s LUKE CAGE. As a voiceover artist, she has been featured in numerous commercials, video games and animated series, most notably in STAR WARS’ acclaimed hit, THE CLONE WARS.

About our emcee Dawn-Lyen Gardner (continued)

An accomplished theater actor, Gardner has originated roles in several world premiere plays across the country, including Richard Greenberg's *A NAKED GIRL ON THE APPIAN WAY*, Nathan Louis Jackson's *STICKY TRAPS*, and Rattlestick Theater's Off-Broadway production of *A FABLE*. In 2010, she worked alongside Helen Hunt, Grace Gummer and Lyle Lovett in a production of *MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING* at the Kirk Douglas Theatre in Los Angeles, CA. She spent two seasons at the Tony-award winning Oregon Shakespeare Festival, garnering praise as Sophie in Liesl Tommy's critically acclaimed production of *RUINED*, and as Imogen in Bill Rauch's sweepingly epic *CYMBELINE*.

Gardner's creative work has long intersected with her advocacy, ranging from racial justice and immigrant rights, to gender equity and climate justice. She became an ambassador for Women for Women International in 2018; and in 2020, she founded *BELONG*, an election support campaign and public conversation about belonging and political engagement. Currently, she is honored to serve on the advisory board for *HARNESS*, a culture and narrative change collective founded in response to the 2016 election by America Ferrera, Ryan Piers Williams and Wilmer Valderrama – and where she first met FMN's own Rev Jen Bailey.

What is a wisdom keeper?

As we celebrate the 10th anniversary of Faith Matters Network, we are honored to introduce the Wisdom Keeper awards. These awards recognize women whose extraordinary contributions and unwavering commitment to justice, healing, and community-building have profoundly impacted our collective journey. By honoring these Wisdom Keepers, we celebrate the legacy of those who have paved the way for transformative change and inspire future generations to continue this vital work. This milestone is an opportunity to uplift and acknowledge the remarkable leaders who embody the values and mission of Faith Matters Network.

About the Awards

Felicia Wheeler

Felicia Wheeler is a Memphis native and visual artist. Wheeler's artistic background consists of a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Studio Arts with an emphasis in Ceramics from UofM and a body of work (which has meandered and grown over the years) that now explores abstract mixed media paintings that are an homage of her matriarchal upbringing. Felicia is passionate about art equity especially and particularly when it comes to historically underrepresented individuals, magnifying the importance of the work that she engages in and represents.



ARTIST STATEMENT

When coming up with the design of these awards, the word 'eternal' was a constant in my mind from the initial brainstorming sessions. From there, 'eternal flame' became the inspiration. A familiar tradition across cultures and religions, I wanted to convey and magnify the importance of what being a Wisdom Keeper means through my interpretation of an eternal flame by shining a light on the caliber of dedication it takes of each individual that receives this award, highlighting their commitment that they keep to their communities and being a beacon to others.



Honorees Bios

Valarie Kaur

VALARIE KAUR is a renowned civil rights leader, lawyer, award-winning filmmaker, educator, innovator, and best-selling author of *SEE NO STRANGER*. She is the founder of the Revolutionary Love Project, where she leads a movement to reclaim love as a force for justice. Valarie burst into global consciousness when her Watch Night Service address went viral with 40 million views worldwide. Her question — “Is this the darkness of the tomb — or the darkness of the womb?” is a beacon for people fighting for our future.



Valarie became an activist when a Sikh father and family friend Balbir Singh Sodhi was the first person murdered in hate violence in the aftermath of 9/11. Since then, she has led visionary campaigns to tell untold stories and change policy on issues ranging from hate crimes to solitary confinement to digital freedom. In 2021, she led the People’s Inauguration, inspiring millions of Americans to renew their role in building a healthy, multiracial democracy. Today, the Revolutionary Love Project equips communities with practical tools to transform the nation from inside out. In Fall 2022, Valarie was honored at the White House in the first-ever Uniters Ceremony, recognizing her as a prophetic leader whose work is healing America.

Valarie earned degrees at Stanford University, Harvard Divinity School, and Yale Law School, and holds several honorary doctorates. She has created groundbreaking initiatives at the intersection of spirituality, storytelling, and social justice, including Groundswell Movement, Faithful Internet, and the Yale Visual Law Project. She speaks widely and has been a regular TV commentator on MSNBC and contributor to CNN, NPR, PBS, the Hill, and the Washington Post. Her debut book *SEE NO STRANGER* became a #1 LA Times bestseller and expands on her “blockbuster” TED talk.

Valarie’s vision is deeply inspired by her Sikh faith. A daughter of Punjabi farmers, Valarie grew up on the farmlands of California, where her family has lived for more than a century. Her grandfather gave her Sikh wisdom through stories and songs that showed the way of the sant-sipahi, sage-warrior. The sage loves; the warrior fights — it is a path of revolutionary love.

We are thrilled to announce that Valarie’s new book *Sage Warrior* will be released this September and is now available for pre-order at [sagewarrior.us](https://www.sagewarrior.us)

Honorees Bios

Dr. Emilie M. Townes

Dr. Emilie M. Townes, an American Baptist clergywoman, is a native of Durham, North Carolina. She holds a Doctor of Ministry degree from the University of Chicago Divinity School and a Ph.D. in Religion in Society and Personality from Northwestern University. Dr. Townes is the Dean and University Distinguished Professor of Womanist Ethics and Society (Divinity) and University Distinguished Professor of Gender and Sexuality Studies (College of Arts and Science) at Vanderbilt University, becoming the first African American to serve as Dean of the Divinity School in 2013. She is the former Andrew W. Mellon Professor of African American Religion and Theology at Yale University Divinity School and in the fall of 2005, she was the first African American woman elected to the presidential line of the American Academy of Religion (AAR) and served as president in 2008. She was the first African American and first woman to serve as Associate Dean for Academic Affairs in the Yale Divinity School. She is the former Carolyn Williams Beard Professor of Christian Ethics at Union Theological Seminary and Professor of Social Ethics at Saint Paul School of Theology. Editor of two collection of essays, *A Troubling in My Soul: Womanist Perspectives on Evil and Suffering and Embracing the Spirit: Womanist Perspectives on Hope, Salvation, and Transformation*; she has also authored *Womanist Ethics, Womanist Hope, In a Blaze of Glory: Womanist Spirituality as Social Witness, Breaking the Fine Rain of Death: African American Health Issues and a Womanist Ethic of Care*, and her groundbreaking book, *Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil*. She is co-editor with Stephanie Y. Mitchem of the *Faith, Health, and Healing in African American Life* and co-editor with the late Katie Geneva Cannon and Angela Sims for the *Womanist Theological Ethics: A Reader* done with was published in November 2011. Her most recent co-editorship is with Stacey Floyd-Thomas, Alison Gise Johnson, and Angela Sims for *Walking Through the Valley: Essays: Womanist Explorations in the Spirit of Katie Geneva Cannon* (2022). Townes was elected a Fellow in the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in 2009. She was the first Black woman to serve as president of the American Academy of Religion in 2008 and served a four-year term as president of the Society for the Study of Black Religion from 2012 to 2016. In 2022, Townes was elected to the presidential line of the Society of Christian Ethics. Her presidential year will be 2024-2025. At that time, she will be the first Black woman to hold this office. (she, her, hers)



Honorees Bios

Cara Page

Cara Page is a Black Queer Feminist cultural/memory worker, curator & producer. For the past 30+ years, she has organized with Black, Indigenous and People of Color, Queer/Trans/Lesbian/Gay/Bi/Intersex/Gender Non-Conforming liberation movements in the US & Global South at the intersections of racial, gender & economic justice, reproductive justice, healing justice and transformative justice. She is founder of Changing Frequencies; an abolitionist organizing project that designs cultural memory work to amplify and honor communal stories towards healing and transformative futures. She is also co-founder of the Healing Histories Project and co-founder of the Kindred Southern Healing Justice Collective. Cara is co-editor with Erica Woodland of, "Healing Justice Lineages: Dreaming at the Crossroads of Liberation, Collective Care & Safety" (Available now at North Atlantic Books). To learn more about the book and tour go to [Healingjusticelineages.com](https://healingjusticelineages.com). Or follow Cara on IG @ [changingfrequencies.com](https://www.instagram.com/changingfrequencies.com).



Krista Tippett

Krista Tippett is a Peabody-award winning broadcaster, National Humanities Medalist, and *New York Times* bestselling author. She created and hosts *On Being*, which has won the highest honors in broadcast, Internet and podcasting. She leads The On Being Project, which produces a second successful podcast, *Poetry Unbound*, and is evolving to meet the callings of the post-2020 world. Emergent in 2024 is the Lab for the Art of Living, alongside gatherings and "quiet conversations" to accompany the generative people and possibilities within this tender, tumultuous time to be alive. Krista grew up in a small town in Oklahoma, attended Brown University, worked as a young journalist and diplomat in Cold War Berlin, and later received a Master of Divinity from Yale. Her books are *Speaking of Faith*, *Einstein's God* and, most recently, *Becoming Wise: An Inquiry into the Mystery and Art of Living*.



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