



The Rev. Jennifer Bailey

I Am A Prisoner of Hope for Civil Rights

Video (14:44): The Rev. Jennifer Bailey, founder, Faith Matters Network and Activist-in-Residence, Scarritt-Bennett Center

The Rev. Jennifer Bailey is an ordained, itinerant elder in the African Methodist Episcopal Church and is founding executive director of the Faith Matters Network (building community and taking action). She was named among 15 Faith Leaders to Watch by the Center for American Progress and writes regularly for Sojourners and the Huffington Post. Her first book, tentatively titled *Confessions of a #Millennial #Minister*, is under contract with Chalice Press. She is an activist-in-residence at Scarritt-Bennett Center, Nashville, Tenn.

I Am A Prisoner of Hope for Civil Rights

Preparation

Select a room or location to offer the study. Every session needs a room with Internet access so that you may show and project each video. Do a run-through to make sure the Internet and computer equipment are working properly. Preview the video. Read through the lesson plan. Draft a covenant of care for the session. Review the life and work of civil rights activist Ella Baker (www.ellabakercenter.org). *This video can be found at www.gcorr.org/series/vc3.*

Gather the following materials:

- At least two translations of the Holy Bible for reading the Scriptures – Joshua 4:1-7; Joshua 6:1-5
- Listening and Looking Guide (one for each person or project on a screen)
- Construction paper in assorted colors – a sheet for each person
- Pens, pencils, and markers in assorted colors
- Blue painter's tape

THE STUDY SESSION

Get Started [10 minutes]

Welcome everyone to the session and invite people to share their first name and what draws them to participate in this *Vital Conversations* group. Share why you have accepted the role of facilitator and your visions for the time together. Take care of housekeeping matters at this time.

Read statement of purpose: “The General Commission on Religion and Race presents *Vital Conversations* to help start the dialogue on subjects that may sometimes be difficult to approach. We are all part of the beloved community, and we welcome perspectives that bring enlightenment and understanding.”

Ask someone to read aloud Joshua 4:1-7 and Joshua 6:1-5. Have a time for prayer; invite someone to lead the group in prayer; if no one volunteers, open with a prayer of your choice. Share the need for establishing a covenant for working together. Read (post) a sample covenant that you have created and highlight the key components: confidentiality; everyone’s voice matters; disagree with care and do not “attack” anyone. Invite the group to add their ideas and agree to honor the final version of your covenant.

Distribute the Listening and Looking Guide. Explain that this is a resource to help them capture thoughts and ideas from the video presentation as well as a place to make note of visions they have for ministry. Allow time for group members to scan the questions to help focus the viewing and listening process.

Play the Video [25-30 minutes]

Introduce the video by reading the following information about the presenter. Encourage participants to jot down short notes on their guide but as much as possible remain attentive to listening to and experiencing the presentation.

The Rev. Jennifer Bailey is founder of the Faith Matters Network, a nonprofit social justice collective that is committed to building leadership in marginalized communities to challenge structural inequalities. In this video, she discusses how current contemporary human rights movements such as Black Lives Matter are part of the tradition of protest and organizing as much as efforts in the Civil Rights Era. An ordained elder in the African Methodist Episcopal Church, she is currently the activist-in-residence at Scarritt-Bennett Center in Nashville, Tenn.

At the conclusion of the video, allow five to ten minutes for the group to add more information and answer questions on the Listening and Looking Guide. Tell the group that there will be opportunities to add more information to the sheet and to reflect upon their notes. (Show the video again if the group desires and time permits.)

Group Discussion No. 1 [15 minutes]

1. Invite people to share their key reflection or image/story that stands out for them from the video.
2. Refer the group to the second question on the guide (the sacredness that Ms. Bailey found at Brown Chapel AME Church). Encourage group members to “pair ’n share” with each other, discussing experiences of sacred places and spaces that nudge them to doing the “right things.” Return to the full group and share your comments.

Research or Share History [10 minutes]

Option A: Ms. Bailey referenced the work of Ella Baker, a lesser-known leader in the Civil Rights Movement. Invite group members with smartphones to do a quick search about Ella Baker and share information that they find. (Information can be found at www.ellabakercenter.org.) Invite persons to share their information. If time permits, allow someone to share the nature of the work of the Ella Baker Center. **Option B:** Read aloud this summary statement about Ella Baker then invite group members to identify traits that they most admire.

“Ella Baker was an activist in the Civil Rights Movement whose goal was to ‘get people to understand that they had something within their power that they could use’ to help counter violence and injustice. She played a role in the leading organizations such as the NAACP, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. She began speaking against injustice as a college student. After moving to New York, she joined the Young Negroes Cooperative League whose goal was to develop black economic power. She served as a field secretary with the NAACP and, later, as director of branches between 1940 and 1946. Later, she moved to Atlanta to help with the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and ran a voter registration campaign called Crusade for Citizenship. She then went to Greensboro, N.C., to help organize the student sit-ins. She continued her advocacy for human rights until her death in 1986.”

Reenact History [5 minutes]

Invite those who are able to reenact the “die-in” that took place at Walgreens in Nashville, an experience that builds on the sit-ins at lunch counters during the early days of the U.S. Civil Rights Movement. Lie down in protest. Lie down to disrupt and interrupt everyday business so that voices for justice can be heard. Lie down in commemoration of those who were forced to lie down through death. Feel the pain and discomfort in your body. Lie down. Allow time for sharing feelings and ideas of how the protesters may have felt.

Group Discussion No. 2 [10 minutes]

3. Share stories in the group about their own experiences in observing or experiencing institutional racism. Ask members to limit their remarks to one to two minutes so that everyone may share.
4. Distribute construction paper and markers to the group. Ask them to think about the statement: “Our democracy is an unfinished building with each new generation contributing to its construction.” Invite members to write down the contributions to democracy that they have seen or have made in the last two years. Invite members to share their responses and tape their papers to the wall.

Reflect and Share [10 minutes]

Ask members to review the information recorded on the guide sheet. Add additional thoughts, complete their vision, their commitment, and begin to draft their social media share. Invite anyone who wishes to share their commitment to do so after a time of individual reflection.

Closing Prayer [1 minute]

God, make us compost. Help us nurture and support and participate in the work of the young activists we heard about today who as Ms. Bailey said, “Are not seeking to destroy or kill, but who strive to take the best and most nourishing from the institutions around us and to cultivate a new vision.” She asked us: which path will we choose? Help us to choose the justice path even though it may be rocky. Help us to choose the path to ensure freedom and justice for all. Amen.

Listening and Looking Guide: The Rev. Jennifer Bailey

Reflection: Name two primary images or ideas from the video.

Ms. Bailey discusses her connection with Brown Chapel AME, identifying with their “sacred halls.” Name spaces with which you connect justice or places where you go to feel empowered:

Name any connections you have with the foot soldiers of the Selma movement or prophets of progress in other (even newer) civil rights movements:

Ms. Bailey describes experiencing the “sting” of racism. Make note about your experience with or knowledge of racism:

Recall the “die-in.” What specific thing can you do to take a stand for justice?

Cultivate a new vision: Ms. Bailey advises us to not “submit to the seduction of hopelessness,” but rather be a prisoner of hope and to believe in the possibility of transformation. Think about how you can avoid hopelessness and despair. Jot your thoughts here:

Make a commitment: _____

Tweet This/Post on your social media: _____

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