



*care of
souls*

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

America needs to care for its soul.

We feel this in our loneliness, the disruption of our communal life, and the pain of our polarized society.

As more of us step away from religious identity, we don't even have common language to talk about the need we feel. Even the word 'soul' might not resonate with you.

Where, then, do we turn?

After four years of asking this question, we're writing because we've gotten to know an emerging field of responders. They all use different words to describe their work, but here we call it, the Care of Souls. These innovators are applying ancient wisdom to today's social and spiritual disconnection. You might be one of them.

This report frames seven key roles in the Care of Souls. In each of these roles, we illustrate how an individual can grow from novice to master over time. And the more skillful we become at this work, the more we contribute to our society becoming just and whole.

We offer these findings to three groups of people in particular:

- Those inhabiting the seven key roles of Gatherer, Seer, Maker, Healer, Venturer, Steward, and Elder;
- Those with the potential to fill these roles who are waiting to be called into it;
- Those ready to offer practical support to this emerging field.

Our purpose is to describe the shape of what's emerging, in hopes that we may begin to recognize ourselves within it. From there, we can imagine and create pathways for this landscape to grow. By nurturing the Care of Souls, we hope to move toward a society transformed by love and justice.

Thank you for reading,

Angie, Casper, and Sue

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A THRESHOLD MOMENT

What is our story?

By most accounts, it's bleak. We've become so isolated from one another that disconnection is killing us.¹ The dramatic rise of opioids,² gun violence,³ and suicide,⁴ are yet more evidence that our relationships of meaning are coming apart.

Searching for connection, we scroll our phones for five hours a day⁵ and end up on websites like youfeellikeshit.com to try and make it through.⁶ Ironically, it is now corporate ad campaigns that remind us to be more human.⁷

It turns out that the things we've been taught to pursue—money, status, power, fame, and sex appeal—are not only unworthy of us, but driving us to hurt ourselves, oppress each other, and damage our world. In ever-larger numbers, we see the lie and its toxicity, as we reject insufficient and untrustworthy systems, and despair at a culture of isolation and injustice.

We've not ended up here for lack of trying. We've attempted to transform all our systems—financial, political, educational, medical—from both inside and out. Indeed, our lionizing of disruptive innovation and the social entrepreneur reflects a near-desperate hope to hack every social category we inherited.⁸ But our solutions aren't working. It seems we've misunderstood the problem.

Where, then, do we turn?

THERE IS ANOTHER STORY

There was that poem you read on the subway. The beers on the roof with friends after helping them move. The first time you held your sister's baby. That feeling. I am here, we are here, we're part of this ineffable something.

There is another story. That story.

Why don't we talk about that? Because we're living in the crisis of in-between, where we don't have communities, practices, or language to help us do that. We are tipping from one paradigm to the next, coming to understand the project of being human in new ways. In the meantime, it's not enough to turn to the old institutions and traditions that used to remind us of who we are and why. Like never before, we're unbundling and remixing the elements that help us make meaning of our lives.

To explain: Unbundling is the process of separating elements of value from a single collection of offerings. Think of a local newspaper. Whereas fifty years ago it provided classifieds, personal ads, letters to the editor, a puzzle for your commute, and, of course, the actual news, today its competitors have surpassed it in each of these, making the daily paper all but obsolete. Craigslist, Tinder, Facebook, HQ Trivia, and cable news offer more personalization, deeper engagement, and perfect immediacy. The newspaper has been unbundled, and end users mix together their own preferred set of services.⁹

The same is true for meaning-making. Fifty years ago,¹⁰ most people in the United States relied on a single religious community to conduct spiritual practices, ritualize life moments, foster healing, connect to lineage, inspire morality, house transcendent experience, mark holidays, support family, serve the needy, work for justice, and—through art, song, text, and speech—tell and retell a common story to bind them together. Now, we might rely on the Insight Meditation Timer, mountain hikes, Afro-Flow Yoga, Instagram hashtags, Friday shabbatlucks, Beyoncé anthems, and protesting the Muslim Ban. But no common story.

As we've unbundled and remixed, we've also isolated and made insecure. If I write my gratitude journal alone and whisper a prayer in the shower, am I doing it right? Will I offend my friend with the text I send after her mother dies? With no collective place to share our deep sorrows and joys, they begin to feel illegitimate. And this is exactly what we have to relegitimize: binding ourselves together in our deepest experience of being human.

It's time to turn to the Care of Souls.

CARE OF SOULS

“The care of souls is the art of arts.”

- St. Gregory the Great, 590 AD¹¹

Though long bundled with religion, the Care of Souls belongs to us all. We can all learn the art of caring for the fullness of ourselves and each other. One great virtue of unbundling is that jobs once trapped in a particular form and context (think: personal ads) are liberated to entirely new platforms (think: Tinder). And as we speak, caretakers of souls are already working, quiet and largely unrecognized, in our midst.

These are the new interpreters of ancient wisdom, sanctifiers of daily life, and speakers to the deepest ground of our being. They do the project of being human in a different way. They solve for social and spiritual disconnection, and provide others with permission and resources to do the same. To know them is to know courage and imagination.

Perhaps you know them. Perhaps you are one of them.

If you can't see them, it's because they belong to a future that is only just emerging. The categories they belong to don't yet exist.¹² Consider that Google was founded only two decades ago, and Facebook and Twitter just after that. The now-coveted careers of startup entrepreneur, programmer, developer, social media manager, and digital content creator did not exist at the turn of this century, nor were there categories, pathways, or training to imagine oneself into.

The field of soul care is akin to Silicon Valley in the 1980s: full of innovation and little money. It is fledgling now, but has the potential to grow into the beating heart of a new cultural paradigm characterized by:

- Moving beyond the so-called secular/religious divide, to find the sacred in the everyday;
- Communities bound by shared practices and goals, more than identity or belief;
- Individuals unbundling wisdom and practices from ancient traditions, and remixing them into a personalized spiritual life that they deepen in community.

The purpose of this report is to describe the shape of what's emerging, in hopes that we may begin to recognize ourselves and each other as part of this bigger story.

SEVEN JOBS TO BE DONE

We have chosen to describe seven jobs in the Care of Souls. These are far from the only roles, and any one person may inhabit more than one of them. But we name these seven because the need for them is particularly acute—and becoming more so. We've reached this conclusion after four years of working amongst innovators in the field, learning from their experience and striving to support their visions.¹³

These jobs in their essence are not new. They descend from ancient archetypes, and humanity holds a wealth of wisdom about them. Our task now is to bridge the ancient and the emergent, discovering how to apply this wisdom to new generations. How do we care for souls in the 21st century and beyond?



THE GATHERER

WHOLEHEARTED | INNOVATIVE | CALLED | VISIONARY | PASTORAL



In the Field

Ahmane' Glover
The Sanctuaries DC

Lennon Flowers
The Dinner Party

Nada Zohdy
Neighborhood Halaqas

Jesse Israel
The Big Quiet

Scott Heiferman
MeetUp

Helen Bennett
Moishe Kavod House

Scott Shigeoka
OpenIDEO

Cicia Lee
Momentum

The Gatherer brings people together to form communities of meaning and depth. In the face of loneliness, suffering, and oppression, the Gatherer fosters personal and social transformation.

MISSION

The Gatherer binds community, casting a vision of who we are and could be together. Their sense of internal calling sets them apart. Whether or not they use this language, the Gatherer is a spiritual leader. Spiritual because they care for the souls of their community. Leader because people seek them out, lift them up, and follow their vision. They help others go deep, providing comfort and resilience through the inevitable messiness of human life.

WHY NOW

Our dominant culture has commodified existence, isolating us from one another and evicting the sacred from our communal life. At the same time, religious institutions meant to support human flourishing have struggled to keep up with change. Yet, from between the cracks, new light is shining through. People are re-sacralizing spaces previously defined as “secular.” Spin instructors are performing weddings. Office managers are leading meditation practices. And ordained clergy are leaving behind their buildings to lead communities in laundromats and breweries.¹⁴

RISKS

Gatherers can only lead others as far as they have traveled themselves. In this time of transition, much wisdom about spiritual community leadership is locked up in religious institutions. How do we equip Gatherers to deepen their own spiritual lives, so they may take their communities farther? How do we hold them accountable, so they are trusted and seen in their leadership? And without a traditional support structure like a denomination, how does their community become financially and organizationally sustainable?

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The title and role of a pastor is way too weighty, but there's an aching inside of me that yearns to see other young lives changed by the very thing that saved my own. I want people to see that spoken word or cultural dance or instrumentation is ever-expansive, that it is inherently communal, spiritual, and intentional. I see young artists activated in brave discourse with those around them in the pursuit of love, beauty, and togetherness. I see depression being fought with piano chords and pirouettes. All of us responding to a call to go and teach God's love.

- Nick George, Founder, *The Listening*

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THE SEER

INSIGHTFUL | DEVOTED | UPLIFTING | HUMBLE | COMPELLING

The Seer helps us perceive and approach the sacred. They give us language to make sense of our lives and pass on the teachings of our ancestors. They help us understand the divine around us and our inner divinity.

MISSION

The Seer translates spiritual experience to a world hungry for meaning. They apply ancient wisdom to the everyday. The Seer sees beyond the binary of secular and sacred, pointing us toward the holy in the mundane. They come from all walks of life, not just paths called “religious.” Most importantly, the Seer embodies the wisdom they describe, translating spiritual insight into practical action. If you seek them out, you are likely looking to inhabit that different way of being.

WHY NOW

We’re living in a meaning-making void, with almost no common language to affirm the human inquiry into life’s deepest questions. As many of us become alienated from organized religion, we often end up isolated in such inquiry—cut off from both community and lineage. Without the Seer, we may skim the surface of spiritual experience or get lost in individualistic seeking. This can lead to spiritual narcissism, which ultimately deifies the self, and spiritual tourism, which takes practices (think ayahuasca ceremonies) out of context, reifying a colonial paradigm. In such a moment, the Seer helps point the way toward a spiritual life of integrity and depth.

RISKS

The greatest risk for Seers is guru-syndrome, or becoming too much associated with the divinity they see. Second is the conviction that they’ve found the only path to the divine. Lastly, the Seer can get tangled in the distinction between their own thoughts and what they feel led by, not to mention overwhelmed by the power of spiritual experience. All of these risks point to the need for Seers, like all of us, to be held in communities that keep them humble, grounded, and reminded of their humanity, even as they continue to remind us of our divinity.



In the Field

Carol Zinn
Sisters of St. Joseph

William J. Barber II
Repairers of the Breach

Krista Tippett
On Being

Christian Peele
The Riverside Church

Thomas McConkie
Lower Lights

Beatrice Anderson
Awake Youth Project

John Helmiere
Valley and Mountain

Stephanie Paulsell
Harvard Divinity School

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Remaining connected to the divine is critical because it helps ensure that the racial justice and healing work I do comes through me and not from me. That means I have to surrender and remember that I am not perfect, and that no one is. My devotional practices of prayer, meditation, and Bible study help me to cultivate the intimacy with Spirit which keeps me rooted and centered in these unsettling times.

- Melissa Bartholomew, *Racial Justice & Healing Practitioner, MDiv, MSW, JD, PhD student*

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THE MAKER

ARTISTIC | REFLECTIVE | PROPHETIC | PLAYFUL | INGENIOUS



In the Field

Kursat Ozenc
Ritual Design Lab

Rabbi Elan Babchuck
Glean Incubator

Adam Horowitz
*U.S. Department of Arts
& Culture*

Hansa Bergwall and
Ian Thomas
WeCroak

Sarah Waxman
At The Well

Yo-Yo Ma
Silkroad

Rupi Paur
Milk and Honey

Tracy Fullerton
Walden, A Game

The Maker reminds us to be human. They bear witness to our humanity through art, song, ritual, and myth. They are a human mirror, reflecting us back to ourselves and spurring our prophetic imagination.¹⁵

MISSION

The Maker is a minister of imagination. They take the ancient spiritual technologies of our traditions—from ritual baths, to sabbath time, to sacred reading practices—and put them in service of today’s questions, challenges, and transitions. They also activate our imaginations to create new rituals for the life moments our ancestors never had. A giant bell made by artist Kirstine Roepstorff rings whenever a baby is born in her town.¹⁶ Sara Luria’s ImmerseNYC repurposes the Jewish mikveh for everything from gender transitions to divorce.¹⁷ As artificial intelligence and virtual reality become ubiquitous, the Maker is the poet in our midst, helping us remember who we have been, notice who we are, and discover who we might become.

WHY NOW

Our chronic isolation and phone addiction are only going to get worse. Add to this the imminent pressures of emerging technology—namely, the breakdown of many current conceptions of what it means to do a human job—and the economic and existential foundations of our society begin to shake. As more and more robots not only drive cars but express empathy,¹⁸ we yearn for someone to help us distinguish ourselves. Against this backdrop, the Maker reminds us that we are different from Alexa because we have a soul.¹⁹

RISKS

The Maker’s creative nature can be blocked by despair. Their capacity to see potential is enormous, and life’s inevitable disappointments can crush their optimism. Further, the desire to create can blind the Maker to the depths of treasure to be found in tradition. The most masterful Makers know how to trace echoes of the old in the new.

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We train ritual artists. No matter their level of Jewish knowledge, we break down the elements of ritual—music, quiet, light, dark, traditional and creative prayers, movement, stillness, taste, smell, alone, accompanied—and the leaders co-create something beautiful and relevant for each person going into the mikveh (Jewish ritual bath). They always do. Because the way we help people remember who they truly are is simply by asking them.

- Rabbi Sara Luria, Founder and Executive Director, ImmerseNYC

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THE HEALER

ROOTED | WHOLE | SHAMANIC | EMBODIED | BRAVE

The Healer breaks cycles of violence. They teach the tools of resilience, courage, and pleasure for individuals and communities. They change culture by making the means of our work the ends, namely, to show up healed and whole in the world.

MISSION

The Healer calls upon ancient wisdom and practices of bodies and earth—working with song, sound, touch, stillness, movement, medicine, words, and energy—to root us to the ground of our being. Unafraid of suffering, the Healer does not shield pain. Rather, they help us move through it, knowing it contains the seeds for transformation. Whether it is palliative care or radical reconciliation, the Healer is a balm for the wounds both within us and among us. They heal the individual to heal the collective.

WHY NOW

We all have trauma. The wounds we carry are soul-deep. Trauma lives in our bodies, having been carried across oceans, into gas-chambers, and through continued police brutality. Other pain is due to abuse, addiction, and overwork. We call out for Healers, and they are beginning to step into their roles publicly as doulas, pleasure activists, movement chaplains, and somatics coaches. In a world where some bodies have no safe spaces to exist, the work of healing is not only a matter of individual survival, but communal justice.

RISKS

This work cannot be done alone—for the sake of the Healer and those in their care. Self-taught Healers abound as ancient arts are rediscovered and new ones invented. Without communities of learning and accountability, they risk doing harm in the effort to heal. Healers are also at risk of over-identifying with their work, forgetting that they are the conduit, not the source, of healing. Finally, being confronted with pain necessitates extraordinary personal spiritual resources. The Healer must have done their own work, and still be doing it.



In the Field

Artie Wu
Preside Meditation

Leslie Salmon-Jones and
Jeff Jones
Afro-Flow Yoga

Kate Werning
Healing Justice Podcast

Gino Pastori-Ng
Youth Impact Hub Oakland

Gibrán Rivera

Adrienne Maree Brown

Micky ScottBey Jones
Faith Matters Network

Marsha Foster Boyd and
Matthew Abrams
Bridge Collective

“

Healing takes a constant listening for what lies beneath the spoken words so that the real longing can be revealed. When we are able to connect with our emotions, sensations, and physical knowing, then healing becomes more than just a good idea that only lives in our minds. Through embodied practices—looking at the moon, singing along to that favorite gospel hymn—we can truly restore our felt sense of dignity, safety and belonging.

- LaWanda Thompson, President, Sustainable Outcomes

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THE VENTURER

NIMBLE | CURIOUS | EMPOWERING | RECEPTIVE | JUDICIOUS



In the Field

Fetzer Institute
Evolve Foundation
Humanity United
Pillars Fund
Nathan Cummings Foundation
The Generosity Network
Zinc Investments
Lightspeed
Armonia

The Venturer liberates resources for spiritual innovation. They prioritize transformative work over existing assumptions. The Venturer funds new organizational structures, wise but emerging leadership, and collaborations that defy previous logic.

MISSION

The Venturer invests in creative ways to support human flourishing. They are an embedded entrepreneur, helping funders adapt to stay useful to the field. The Venturer is always learning, always in mutual relationship, and always watching for new patterns. Understanding that conditions change, they make thoughtful decisions quickly. The Venturer takes risks—not because they are incautious, but because they know that supporting new things requires working beyond their current knowledge.

WHY NOW

Though the purpose of philanthropy is to give away money, many institutions are stuck with mandates to solve yesterday's problems, along with processes that inhibit impactful funding. The barriers to entry for recipients (ten-part grant proposals, non-profit status, credentialed leadership, religious or other identity affiliation, five-years of audited financials) stand in stark contrast to the reality of spiritual innovation. Not only that, but the philanthropic tradition reinforces a patronage model that disempowers the very recipients it exists to serve. A structural and philosophic mismatch between funders and practitioners threatens to hinder new growth in this landscape.

RISKS

Supporting “emergence” does not mean chasing each new idea and abandoning the previous hot new thing. An ecosystemic approach necessitates investment over time, focusing on depth before breadth. In fact, through enthusiastic investment, the Venturer risks getting caught in the limitations of the existing philanthropic paradigm, when we have an opportunity to reimagine relationships among funders and practitioners. For instance, how might the rise of cryptocurrencies and ICOs apply to the spiritual landscape?

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I start from the assumption that we don't have the answers. This is equally humbling and liberating because it means our job is to hold far-out aspirations and find partners doing good work at the edge of learning. Then we work to create trust, and then more trust. When deep trust is in place, there is a mutual understanding that failure is not just tolerated but actually desired—because risk and failure live in the same ecosystem! So we're taking risks, too, finding new ways to structure our partnerships so we can step boldly into the unknown together.

- Barry Finestone, President and CEO, Jim Joseph Foundation

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THE STEWARD

PRACTICAL | SAVVY | ANALYTICAL | CONSCIENTIOUS | HOSPITABLE

The Steward creates the infrastructure for spiritual life to thrive. They work at an ecosystem level, providing the services that make innovation sustainable. The Steward models servant leadership, often working behind the scenes to support new growth.

MISSION

The Steward provides backend services to the field of the Care of Souls. This includes everything from tracking impact, to accounting, legal, and fundraising support, to convening leaders from across the field. The Steward weaves together new relationships, sparking collaboration because loyalty is at the systemic, rather than organizational, level. Their spiritual maturity places outcomes above their own personal visibility. The Steward draws on nurse log²⁰ organizations to support fledgling efforts, and creates entirely new legal categories.

WHY NOW

Most Gatherers, Healers, and Makers are unpaid. Fewer still have health insurance. Leaders run at full pace for a few years and burn out. New ventures struggle to thrive because operational questions absorb precious time and avoidable crises are mismanaged. Further, existing models lionize impossible goals, consume hefty resources, and frame change as organization-led rather than ecosystemic. Thousands of small efforts replicate easily outsourced tasks and miss out on collective impact, in part because no shared metrics are mobilized to track it.

RISKS

The Steward has to find the tricky balance between contextual relevance and standardized operations. Consistent tensions live between the practical need to use established categories and processes (to abide by the law and attract resources) while also imagining and testing new ones. The gravitational pull to older, unfit structures must be resisted at every turn, because operational defaults can shift programmatic priorities in unhealthy directions.



In the Field²¹

Faith Matters Network

100 Million Healthier Lives

Leadership Conference of Women Religious

Santa Cruz Mountain Stewardship Network

Highlander Research and Education Center

Church of the Saviour

Generation to Generation

Transformational Index

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When we began to organize for United We DREAM, we didn't have any funding, so we had to get hella creative. We studied each other, finding each other's strengths and putting them to use. Processing DACA renewals after work is stressful and exhausting—but I love every bit of it. When I get that random text message at 11 pm from a kid saying, 'Hey! I just wanted to let you know that I finally got my DACA in,' then my body is no longer tired, and I begin to thank God for allowing me to do this work.

- Rosa Velázquez, Co-Founder, Arkansas Coalition for DREAM

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THE ELDER

WISE | INVITING | TRUSTWORTHY | PERCEPTIVE | PRESENT



In the Field

Laura Geller
Chai Village LA

Estela Ortega
El Centro de la Raza

Joseph Deck
*Institute for Radical
Reconciliation*

John Dorhauer
*The United Church
of Christ*

Donna Bivens
*Women's Theological
Center*

Grace Lee Boggs
The Boggs Center

Richard Rohr
*Center for Action and
Contemplation*

Benay Lappe
Svara

Sharon Day
*Indigenous Peoples
Task Force*

The Elder is an orienter. They help us to find our path and stay on it. The Elder calls forth our gifts, and grounds those gifts in history and community. They provide perspective when we think our problems are new.

MISSION

As a keeper of wisdom, the Elder connects us to lineage and tradition, carrying the authority of our ancestors and embodying it in their way of being. The Elder helps a new generation of leaders to recognize themselves, be recognized by their communities, and stay accountable to those they serve. They teach, guide, and bless, often recognizing our own potential before we've seen it ourselves. The Elder comforts and discomfords us in exactly the way we need.

WHY NOW

How can Elders call forth gifts in community, without community? Once rooted in extended families and religious congregations, Elders have been largely displaced by geographic mobility and religious disaffiliation. In white culture especially, the disease of disconnection devalues people as they age. But even in communities with stronger legacies of eldering, erosion is underway. Thousands of potential Elders are isolated, unable to bestow their wisdom to emerging leaders and communities in dire need of it.

RISKS

Older people are not necessarily Elders. An Elder must be identified and called into the role. In this time of transition, we are losing many of the traditional rituals and structures that authorized Elders and, in turn, empowered them to authorize those coming up behind. Elders risk becoming self-important, so they need a community of other Elders to keep them humble and nourished. As a new field emerges in the Care of Souls, today's Elders must summon the maturity to give their gifts in new and unfamiliar contexts.

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Each elder in my life has loved me and was present to me—both when I was doing well, and when I was a basket case! This was the key. They knew me in both phases, so they weren't scandalized by my too-high aspirations, nor did they stay away from me when I was nowhere close to realizing anything. Everything began with trust and love, and resulted in presence through thick and thin. All of them were brave enough to 'call' me to accountability when they knew things weren't good, and when I wasn't wanting to talk about it.

- Sue Mosteller, *Sisters of St. Joseph*

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LEVELING UP

We mark leveling up in mixed martial arts (white to black belt), math class (Algebra I to Calculus II), and of course, World of Warcraft (1 to 110). It is implicit in organizational charts, income classes, and academic degrees. In fact, for most aspects of our lives, we have some way to measure progress. These markers exist because we value achievement in these areas, enough so to create pathways and social indicators for leveling up.

How does one level up in the Care of Souls?

First—and here is the *raison d'être* of this report!—we must recognize that this work is real and worthy of our attention. For our children to aspire to be Healers and Seers and Makers, our culture must first acknowledge that these categories exist. Mother Teresa was a Master Healer. Martin Luther King Jr. was a Master Seer. Maya Angelou was a Master Maker. How did they become skilled—even heroic—in their forms of soul care? And how might we help others to level up as they did?

To be clear: One major reason for this cultural oversight is that it's hard to measure leveling up in the Care of Souls. The path isn't linear. The hierarchies of religious institutions too often have led to abuse, and theologies of inadequacy have led to a culture of shame.

Rather than achieving power and status, to make progress in this work looks like humility and service. It's being a sponsor in Alcoholics Anonymous; an Eagle Leader at Team Red, White & Blue; or a Navigator at Homeboy Industries. As Richard Rohr writes in *Falling Upward*, it is a desire and effort to give back to the world a bit of what we have received. It is often experienced as “falling upward and onward, into a broader and deeper world, where the soul has found its fullness, is finally connected to the whole, and lives inside the Big Picture.”²²

Some call this wisdom, others depth. It's easier to recognize than describe. We like to call it spiritual maturity. In each of the seven roles we've identified—and so many more—one can mature over the course of a lifetime, from Novice to Master.

FROM NOVICE TO MASTER

NOVICE

You might recognize yourself if:

You suspect there's more to succeeding at life than what you've been taught so far, but you're not sure what to do about that.

The care of souls matters to you, though you may not have language to figure out what that means—and even the word 'soul' may rub you the wrong way.

You feel drawn to one or more of the roles in this report, and maybe you're already doing the work, but you're on your own with no community to support you.

You're seeking out wise people—or wondering how to go about it.

You wish there were a guild, or apprenticeship, or school, that would train you to become a Master in the work your soul is calling you to do.

MASTER

You might recognize yourself if:

You have lived life wholeheartedly, learned hard lessons, and are intentionally turning around to raise up the ones coming behind.

You find yourself talking less and listening more, and when you speak, it is often in questions that draw out those in your care.

You are part of a lineage, having learned from Masters, and blessed with the opportunity to teach—and learn from—a new generation of Novices.

Your wealth of hard-earned wisdom feels less like a possession and more like a gift, which you freely received and now freely pass on.

A life spent in service of others has led to a feeling of deep nourishment and satisfaction that comes from within.

TOWARD MASTERY

How does a Novice become a Master? We think this is the great design challenge of our age.

In Ancient Greece, if you were a young man of status, you could choose which philosophic school—Cynicism, Epicurianism, Stoicism, Skepticism—aligned with your particular quest to live in alignment with virtue. This was no abstract intellectual pursuit. The project of these schools was ethical formation, and you went to live in community with other Novices, sitting at the feet of a Master as you practiced living a worthy life. In the words of one, “You’re not yet Socrates, but you can still live as if you want to be him.”²³

A similar premise was true of the Gurukula residential schooling system in ancient India, as well as, of course, the many Buddhist, Catholic, and other Christian religious orders that continue to this day. In monastic contexts, the period of formation for a Novice is known as the Novitiate.²⁴

Today, Novices abound, but where is our Novitiate? This year, a Yale class on happiness became the largest in the university’s history at 1,200 students, or nearly one-fourth of undergraduates.²⁵ A Harvard class on Confucian ethics has a similar effect, cramming 750 students into the largest auditorium on campus.²⁶ Both credit their popularity to the promise that you, the student, will learn to live a better life.

At this moment, most soul care is at the scale of kitchen tables. It might look like hosting friends to make scrapbooks about your ancestors. Or creating your own Happiness Project.²⁷ Or trying Artie Wu’s 7-day healing intensive. Or having lunch dates with a coworker to discuss the latest On Being episode.

How do we help each other go deeper? Even, if we dare, to approach mastery? This is the question our work hopes to address moving forward. We’re beginning to create a formation experience for the 21st century; a container in which to take steps toward a lifetime of becoming the people we are called to be. We hope ours will be just one of many efforts to this end.

TO WHAT END

“Love and justice are not two. Without inner change, there can be no outer change; without collective change, no change matters.”

- Rev. angel Kyodo williams

As we become the people we are called to be, our inner orientation shifts. We can no longer drive toward gain at others' expense because our life is dedicated to the care of their souls. In fact, we can no longer tolerate a society that is built on the backs of our kin. Increasingly, we discover that none of us are free until all of us are free. As more of us experience this transformation, more of us call for justice.

So the invitation is before us, to build a society that actually values souls more than money. Imagine the implications, if Making or Eldering or Stewarding were treated as sacred work. How different would our culture have to look, to categorically ennoble the Care of Souls?

This is our call to creativity! Who will step up and create:

- A loneliness tax on Netflix and Amazon that goes to supporting Gatherers?
- A Care of Souls career path that leads from high school through major university programs in Healing, Making, and Venturing?
- An ICO for a Stewarding macrostructure for the Care of Souls field, which includes health insurance?
- A Spiritual Innovation Lab that incubates and finances the work of Makers and Gatherers in creating new community rituals?
- An online matching platform for Novices to connect with Masters in their roles?
- A Venturer-backed line of credit to replace the two-year grant cycle for new efforts in this field?
- A media outlet dedicated to disseminating the wisdom of Elders and Seers?

For each idea here, we invite you to list ten more. Resistance is insufficient without a better alternative. This labor of imagination is how we nurture the seeds of that alternative: a transformed way of being, and being together.

May that be our story.

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Angie Thurston is creating spiritual formation experiences for the 21st century. She is an On Being Strategist and a Ministry Innovation Fellow at Harvard Divinity School. A graduate of Brown University, Angie is a leader in the international fellowship of Urantia Book readers. She has led over 20 spiritual gatherings across the United States, and is dedicated to deepening community amidst increasing religious disaffiliation. Angie lives in Somerville, MA, with her husband Vipin.

Casper ter Kuile is building a world of joyful belonging. He's a Ministry Innovation Fellow at Harvard Divinity School and co-hosts an award-winning podcast, *Harry Potter and the Sacred Text*, which engages a modern classic through traditional sacred reading practices such as Havruta and Lectio Divina. Casper is an On Being Strategist and was previously the co-founder of Campaign Bootcamp and the UK Youth Climate Coalition. He lives in Cambridge, MA, with his husband Sean.

Rev. Sue Phillips is catalyzing spiritual community in a post-denominational world. A Ministry Innovation Fellow at Harvard Divinity School, Sue served for many years as a denominational executive, coach and consultant to hundreds of Unitarian Universalist congregations and leaders, and holds a special place in her heart for the faithful, flourishing geniuses who innovate within and beyond traditional religious communities. Sue lives in Tacoma, WA, with her wife Tandi.

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THE GATHERER

THE SEER

THE MAKER

THE HEALER

THE VENTURER

THE STEWARD

THE ELDER

