Pursuing Excellence in Religion Journalism

Stories That Might Otherwise Go Untold
These last few tumultuous years have shown us the role that faith and religious institutions play in mitigating – and, let’s be honest, magnifying – the overlapping political and health crises we’re living through. We’ve also seen the crucial role journalism plays in telling stories of joys and sorrows amid this upheaval. Lately, I’ve delved into Religion News Service’s history to learn more about Louis Minsky, who founded RNS during a similarly tumultuous time. A century ago, antisemitism was ascendant, and the presidential campaign of Al Smith, the first Catholic to run for the office on a major-party ticket, heightened anti-immigrant and anti-Catholic sentiment – all of which helped give rise to the modern Ku Klux Klan. Overseas, war was brewing.

Meanwhile, a group of activists and religious and political leaders organized to resist these forces and bring people of different faiths, races and ethnicities together. The group, called the National Council of Christians and Jews, recognized the best way to reach the public was through media. Minsky helped NCCJ achieve this goal by forming Religious News Service, independently operated but affiliated with NCCJ.

Throughout the 20th century, RNS covered domestic and global events, including World War II and its repercussions, and the civil rights, women’s rights and gay rights movements – all through the lens of religion and faith. In the 21st century, RNS has continued its mission, covering 9/11 and its aftermath, growing American religious diversity, political struggles arising out of religious nationalism and increasing secularism.

Every day, we help make sense of the world by reporting on the role of faith and religion – one of the most underresourced news specialties. This, even though 48% of U.S. adults say they pray daily and 45% say religion is “very important” in their lives, according to a 2020 Pew Research/NPORS study.

At nearly 90 years old, our nonprofit newsroom is the only one of its kind in the nation. It is also one of the very few news outlets covering religion at all. Today, in the entire United States, only a few dozen reporters, editors and producers cover religion for newspapers, radio and TV on a regional or national level.

But we are still here. And we will be here for a long time because of you, our readers and donors. Thank you. We are honored to do this work.

“AT A TIME WHEN THE WORLD IS GRAPPLING WITH DEEP ANXIETY, WE KNOW JOURNALISM PLAYS AN IMPORTANT ROLE PROVIDING CLARITY, INSIGHT AND CONNECTION.”

Deborah Caldwell
CEO & Publisher, Religion News Foundation/Religion News Service
How Your Generosity Supports Our Work

WITH THE SUPPORT of donors like you, RNS continues to drive the conversation about how religion and beliefs shape us and our world.

As you will see in this annual report, your support this year not only helped RNS tell the stories of people and faith that might otherwise go untold, but it also helped us reach new heights with our coverage: None of these accomplishments would be possible without your generosity. Thank you for investing in our high-quality, independent journalism.

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<td>On our “Saved by the City” podcast, which also won the 2022 Wilbur Award, Best Podcast Series</td>
<td>257 articles per month (vs. 203 per month in Q1 2020)</td>
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OUR WORK WAS CITED, QUOTED AND/OR REPUBLISHED IN A WIDE VARIETY OF PUBLICATIONS, INCLUDING:

- New York
- The New York Times
- Rolling Stone
- Politico
- CNN
- Forward
- The Salt Lake Tribune
- Smithsonian Magazine
- VOA
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- The Atlantic
- Nieman Foundation Reporter
- Al Jazeera
- Daily News Media Group
- The Dallas Morning News
- People
- The Washington Post
- Vox
- Houston Chronicle
- USA Today
- Slate
- AP

and many more...
THE BREW OF CAUSES for the Jan. 6 attack on the U.S. Capitol includes our country’s continuing political polarization and economic dislocation, supercharged by conspiracy theories and nationalist rhetoric. But the violence of that day also arose from a long-standing phenomenon in American religious and political history: white Christian nationalism.

With breaking news stories and commentaries in the days surrounding the attack, Religion News Service exposed how the insurrection was stoked by Christian “prophets” whose suspicion of government was fostered by decades-long efforts to politicize evangelical Christianity using its own apocalyptic messages.

In the months since, RNS has continued to report on how the insurgents’ faith radicalized them and how some faith leaders have championed Christian nationalism. As politicians have also embraced the label and as entire alternative social networks have emerged online, RNS documented the ways Christian nationalism became a shared language among unexpected allies.

We have also sought to understand how other faith communities, Christian or not, have pushed back with a vision of America as pluralistic, multicultural and egalitarian.

Through dozens of news stories, op-eds and multimedia efforts — including podcasts and virtual events — RNS has explored the implications of Christian nationalism for the political, social and religious institutions of American life.

At the Forefront of Covering Christian Nationalism

TRUMP supporters gather outside the Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021, in Washington. (AP Photo/John Minchillo)

CHARTING FAITH IN POLITICS

WANT A CHRISTIAN NATION
58% vs. 7%

White evangelical Protestants are eight times as likely to prefer the U.S. be a Christian nation than a religiously pluralistic nation.¹

A GROWING POLITICAL FORCE
1/4

Nearly one-quarter of Republican voters (24%) are what Pew calls “faith and flag” conservatives.²

FEARFUL OF REPLACEMENT
55%

More than half of those who see the U.S. as singled out by the divine also believe immigrants are invading the U.S. to “replace our cultural and ethnic background.”³

ELECTION DENIERS
86%

Nearly 9 out of 10 “faith and flag” conservatives believe Donald Trump at least probably won the 2020 election.⁴

¹, ² Source: PRRI
³ Source: Pew
⁴
LGBTQ+ and Christian Schism

Perhaps no issue impacts how Americans view their faith communities more deeply than LGBTQ+ affirmation, a movement creating splits in mainline and evangelical Christian denominations, faith-based colleges and other institutions and houses of worship. RNS has covered this rapidly evolving story largely overlooked by other U.S. media.

Besides its immediate importance to many LGBTQ+ individuals of faith, the tensions between traditional and progressive believers on this topic will provide a backdrop to much of the larger culture war in the next decades, and determine the shape of American religion as a more broadly affirming younger generation comes into its own.

“More and more young Americans, including students at Christian schools, identify as LGBTQ — a recent Gallup survey found that 1 in 5 Americans born between 1997 and 2003 say they are LGBTQ.”

— Bob Smietana, “Fallout over LGBTQ spouses at Calvin University captures broader evangelical divide” March 22, 2022

Expanded Hindu Coverage

In India, the Muslim minority is pushing back against Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s government, which they say is threatening India’s long-standing commitment to religious inclusion. In the global Indian diaspora, Hindus are objecting to Modi’s attempt to define Hinduism as a monolithic faith, one that is essential to Indian identity. Taking place in the world’s largest democracy with implications around the world, the story of who speaks for Hinduism is an essential one for RNS.

“RNS gives American Hindus a voice in the public sphere where we can talk about the ways we live our religion: from personal and family experiences to law and politics to living transnational lives connected to India and other diasporic sites.”

— Khyati Joshi, RNS columnist
From TikTok to YouTube, from Christian furries to a Sikh dancer in the Yukon, social media has become the playground for any number of faith communities and expressions. As social media influencers and Reddit forums play an increasingly outsized role in the lives of younger generations, RNS recognizes the need to keep a watchful eye on ever-changing internet trends. And what’s emerged is a milieu of syncretistic spirituality, watchdog activism and niche subcultures populated with characters and drama befitting any church gossip circle.

Lonely no more: Questioning Christians find belonging on TikTok
Deconstructing the faith of one’s childhood can be a lonely undertaking. For many of these church exiles, TikTok has filled the gap.

YouTube star Gurdeep Pandher draws on Sikh faith as he dances for joy
“The work I’ve been doing to make these videos, it’s not just entertainment. It’s more like a social service,” said Pandher.

A ‘Catholic’ diocese that values internet hierarchy over religious expertise
Venturing onto the Diocese of Discord server, a user is presented with discussion channels full of Pepe the Frog GIFs and Vatican flag emojis.

Fundie Fridays, the snarky critic of conservative religious zeal, faces YouTube termination
Poking fun at fundamentalists, Jennifer Sutphin and James Bryant stand symmetrically antithetical to Christian content creators — and have thousands of followers.

**OVERTURNING OF ROE V. WADE**

**CONSERVATIVE CHRISTIANS’** long-awaited and hard-fought victory at the U.S. Supreme Court in the Dobbs case is the end of an era in American religious and political history — and the beginning of a new chapter in the battle over abortion in the United States. Overturning Roe v. Wade returned abortion policy to the states as its opponents argued, but voters in the states have been unpredictable, and already legal challenges to new state laws promise to force judges to be the arbiters once again.

RNS has covered these developments and provided both sides a forum for discussing new considerations for religious liberty and governments’ and faith communities’ responsibilities in the post-Roe world.

Anti-abortion advocates celebrate outside the Supreme Court on June 24, 2022, in Washington. (AP Photo/Jose Luis Magana)
The Complicated Orthodox Tensions Behind the Russia-Ukraine War

On Feb. 24, 2022, Russia began its attack on neighboring Ukraine. While ostensibly not a religious war, religion lay at the heart of the national mythologies animating each side. Tensions between the Russian Orthodox Church and the newly independent Ukrainian Orthodox Church quickly escalated as Patriarch Kirill in Moscow issued a call for unity under a Russian brotherhood. RNS mobilized to cover the war both domestically and abroad and in the week that followed the invasion, published more than a dozen news stories and commentaries, including the experiences of Ukrainian Americans, interviews with Orthodox clergy and analysis of evangelical ties to Russia.

**RNS COVERAGE IN THE DAYS AFTER THE RUSSIAN INVASION OF UKRAINE**

- **Feb. 24**: Moscow and Ukrainian Orthodox leaders call for peace—but define it differently
- **Feb. 25**: ‘A religious politician’: Head of US Ukrainian Orthodox Church slams Moscow Patriarch Kirill, Putin
- **Feb. 26**: Residents of Chicago’s Ukrainian Village rally on steps of church as Russia invades Ukraine
- **Feb. 28**: Let’s save Ukrainian lives
- **March 2**: Religious nationalism and the invasion of Ukraine
- **March 4**: Among Russian Orthodox, glimmers of dissent against the invasion of Ukraine

**NEWS:**
- Next year in Kyiv?
- Moscow and Ukrainian Orthodox leaders call for peace—but define it differently
- Putin is after more than land — he wants the religious soul of Ukraine

**COMMENTARY:**
- In Los Angeles, a Ukrainian Catholic Church serves as respite amid Russian invasion
- Franklin Graham sends disaster response teams to Europe; says he opposes war
- How to help Ukrainians today: Organizations providing aid
- Across US, worshippers seek solidarity at Ukrainian churches, pray for peace
- Ukraine Orthodox leader likens Putin to the Antichrist
- War at Lent: How Ukraine could reshape how we think about Christian unity

A Ukrainian soldier prays during Orthodox Easter in Kyiv, Ukraine, on April 24, 2022. (AP Photo/Efrem Lukatsky)
Thank You to Our Donors

RNS is primarily supported by our generous donors, who understand the importance of high-quality journalism. We wish to extend our sincere gratitude to these contributors who have made significant gifts to support our work this year.

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(July 1, 2021 – June 30, 2022)

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A Proof Text for Democracy

If the past year has taught us anything, it’s that religion doesn’t tend to stay private or keep to the pews

Dear Readers,

Pre-COVID-19, I was in an elevator in a Midwestern hotel where I was attending a journalists’ conference when one of my fellow passengers examined my ID badge and asked, “Religion News Service. What do you cover, churches?” My mind flashed through a dozen topics we at RNS cover week to week that would help him understand: Power and politics? Sexuality and gender? Culture wars? Immigration and assimilation?

When many of us think of religion, we’re prone to think first of personal faith and the mostly silent and often empty places where we and our neighbors work it out.

But if the past years and months have taught us anything, it’s that religion doesn’t tend to stay private or keep to the pews:

The religious symbols brandished at the Jan. 6 attack on the U.S. Capitol, the alienation of Muslims by the governing Hindu nationalist party in India, lawsuits filed to keep churches open against the orders of state health commissioners during the pandemic, the fight to raise awareness about rising antisemitism, faith organizations demonstrating outside the Supreme Court for and against legal abortion — these are not personal devotions but the proof tests of democracy, in which faith has always played a role.

This is what makes Religion News Service unlike any other enterprise in the media world: A secular, independent news and opinion outlet, we are dedicated to giving religion its due in world and national affairs, reminding leaders that they ignore faith at their own peril.

“We’re dedicated to giving religion its due and reminding leaders that they ignore faith at their own peril.”

ignore faith at their own peril and giving voice to those whose faith-based approach to politics and social concerns is often unfairly and ignorantly dismissed.

In the coming year, we know that religion will continue to be essential to understanding the coming elections, debates over how to raise and educate children, even the health of our planet. With the help of all our supporters, we’ll provide clear-eyed reporting on breaking news and bring you analysis of the larger themes — finding the truth and drawing the big picture, beyond the headlines and the elevator talk.
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