

Covering the World of Religion for

Years

Independent • Objective • Impartial News • Commentary • Community

Annual Report 2023



LETTER FROM OUR PUBLISHER

RNS at 90: A Legacy of Trustworthy Journalism

daily and served 100 newspapers

and magazines, 200 radio stations,

a dozen TV stations, and 350 church

periodicals. Its clients included The

New York Times, Time, Newsweek,

of Missouri School of Journalism.

then-managing editor Lillian Block

noted that RNS provided a specific

... know what religious groups

are doing and thinking," Block

said. "Recording what men of

religion are saying on the spiritual

implications of fast-moving

developments in the fields of

politics, science, economics, and

education ... helping to break down

the traditional hands-off policy

toward religion among secular

deep uncertainty. But the RNS North

Star remains nuanced, balanced, and authoritative journalism.

Thank you for your support. We are

honored to do this work.

As we celebrate this legacy, our nation and world again confront

newspapers."

"RNS has been responsible

and invaluable service.

In a 1960 speech at the University

N 2024, RNS CELEBRATES ITS 90TH ANNIVERSARY with a distinguished journalism legacy. During the 20th century, L that legacy included coverage of World War II and its repercussions, the Cold War, Vietnam War, anti-apartheid movement, and civil rights, women's rights, and gay rights movements. In more recent decades, RNS covered 9/11 and its

and Life.

aftermath, America's growing its height, RNS produced 75 stories religious diversity, political struggles arising out of religious nationalism, the racial reckoning, pandemic, increasing secularism, and war in the Middle East.

What many people don't realize is that RNS traces its heritage to a tumultuous time jarringly similar to today. The 1920s and '30s saw increasing American ethnic and religious diversity that caused fear and backlash; the arrival of new forms of media, including for letting great masses of people radio and film; income inequality giving rise to labor unions; and the emergence of far-right ideology as an answer to upheaval.

Journalist Louis Minsky observed the role religious leaders played in fanning hatred – but also in bringing people together. So he founded what was then called "Religious News Service" to provide impartial coverage of religion at a time when no other news organization was paying attention.

RNS began as a six-page digest sent to church periodicals, eventually growing to become the only news organization of its kind, covering religion nationally and globally. At

Keborah C. Caldwell

Deborah Caldwell CEO & Publisher, Religion News Foundation/Religion News Service

Nine Decades of Religion in the News

IN LATE 1920S AND EARLY 1930S AMERICA, antisemitism was ascendant. and the presidential campaign of AI Smith, the first Catholic to run for the office on a major-party ticket, heightened anti-immigrant and anti-Catholic sentiment. Meanwhile, the modern Ku Klux Klan reemerged.

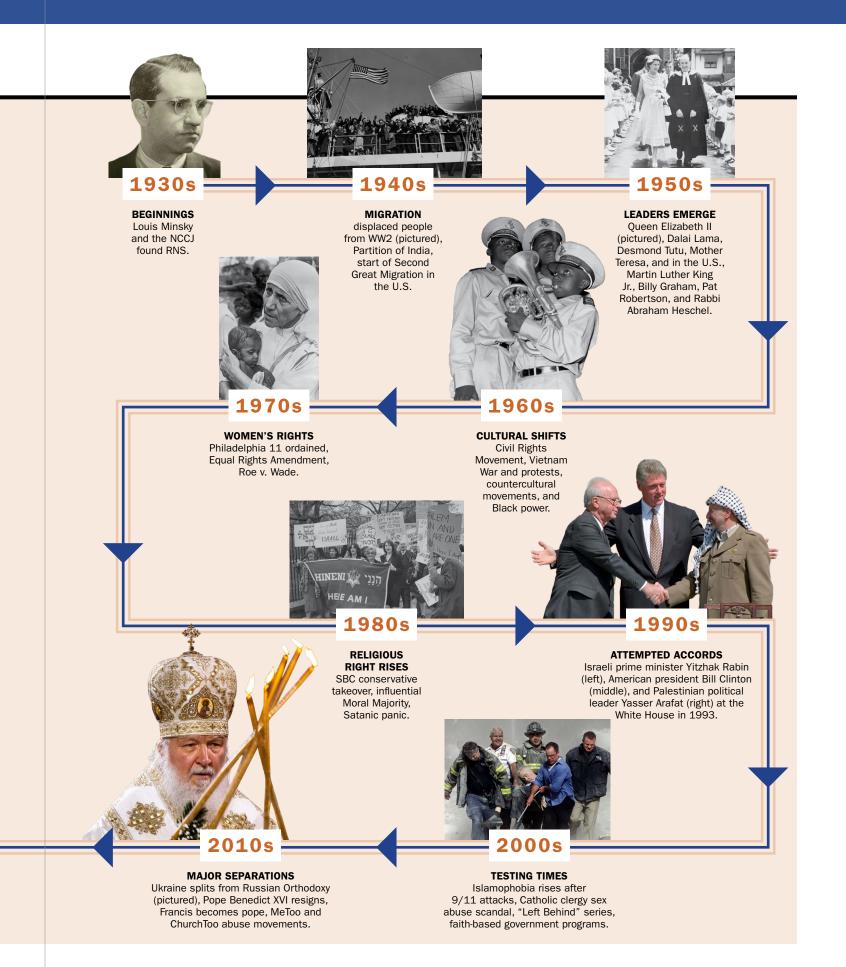
In response, the National Conference of Christians and Jews (NCCJ) -- whose advisers included activists and politicians Jane Addams, Henry Morgenthau, and Theodore Roosevelt - formed in New York with the goal of uniting a diversifying and fracturing country.

The group realized the best way to reach the public was through newly emerging mass media. So when journalist Louis Minsky approached the NCCJ in 1934 with the idea for a news service, the NCCJ backed the idea. They believed if Americans could read about people of differing faiths and ethnicities, they would understand each other and be more inclined to get along.

So began RNS: the only news service of its kind. Here is a timeline of our history.



COVID-19 PANDEMIC Remote worship, church attendance drops, continued rise of the "nones," First Amendment fights.



OUR REPORTING

LETTER FROM OUR EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Chronicling a Changing America



THE FOUNDING of Religion News Service 90 years ago reflected in part an expanding American view of the country's

religious landscape, not least to recognize the important contribution American Jews were making a half-century after the great tide of immigration from Europe had begun. Today, nearly 60 years after the Immigration Act of 1965 allowed entry into the U.S. of more people from Asia and the Middle East, among other places, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, and others are taking their own place in American society, carving their path out of first-generation immigrant communities to make a difference

in philanthropy, politics, business, culture, and other fields.

In all these efforts, these Americans have brought the values of their faiths to bear on our national life. From Muslim relief workers answering the call when disasters strike to Hindus fighting poverty through community organizing to Buddhist doctors opening free clinics for asylum-seekers, people of faith are speaking up not just for themselves but for everyone in their communities.

Just as we did 90 years ago, RNS is chronicling this essentially American, essentially spiritual story of people lifting themselves up through faith, inspired public action, and personal pilgrimage. RNS covers these movements with a staff that

is increasingly as diverse as those who appear in our articles, and with columnists and commentators who are living the story themselves. We report on the wavs longer-established faith communities are working with these groups to close the circle of need.

Detailing the changes to America's religious landscape is not only our brief as journalists, it's part of the mission RNS was born to pursue for the good of all Americans no matter their faith. It's a job we're proud to do every day.

Paul O'Donnell Editor-in-Chief **Religion News Service**

Our Most Successful Podcast Year Yet

We hit record downloads, added two new shows and made plans for three more in 2024



Saved by the City

Co-hosted by Roxanne Stone & Katelyn Beaty

In its third year, this awardwinning podcast continues its diverse array of guests and topics, punctuated with candor, humor, and insight as the co-hosts explore faith, friendship, and romance.



Martini Judaism

Hosted by Jeffrey Salkin Join one of American Judaism's most prolific thought leaders and his special guests as they talk about the current state of Judaism, American culture, politics, religion, and spirituality.



The State of Belief

BELIEF

Hosted by Paul Brandeis Raushenbush

Explore the intersection of religion with politics, culture, media, and activism with the goal of promoting diverse religious voices in a religiously pluralistic world.



Complexified (coming 2024)

Hosted by Amanda Henderson. lliff School of Theology

A podcast that dives into the places where religion and politics collide with real life, so we can get unstuck and make real change.

Five Stories that Defined a Turbulent Year



Votes on war force Washington Democrats to reckon with faith, conscience, and politics by Jack Jenkins DECEMBER 6, 2023

The Israel-Hamas war widened existing fissures in the Democratic Party and challenged religious loyalties, with members feeling caught between their conscience and political calculation as they voted on what many saw as the fate of Israel and the future of Palestinians.



Breakaway Texas UMC megachurch reveals plans for new Methodist denomination

by BeLynn Hollers and Emily McFarlan Miller $\,\,{
m MAY}\,9,\,2023$

Since 2019, thousands of churches have broken from the United Methodist Church over ordaining or marrying LGBTQ members, many joining the conservative Global Methodist Church. But White's Chapel, near Dallas, showed that a larger church may chart its own course with local networks of Methodists.



Amid threats, California lawmaker calls bill barring caste discrimination 'right thing to do' by Aleiandra Molina APRIL 25, 2023

People of South Asian descent, particularly Dalits at the caste system's lowest strata, called the bill crucial to protect them from discrimination in housing, education, and tech sectors. But other Hindu organizations objected, saving the bill unfairly singles out Hindus and Indian Americans. (The bill later was vetoed.)



When making exceptions for Ramadan is no longer the exception by Dilshad Ali MARCH 23, 2023

From high school sports practices to retailers' holiday calendars, Ramadan is at last becoming baked into American life. The shift comes after decades of efforts by American Muslim organizations and parents working at the grassroots to educate our communities.



Why students at a Kentucky Christian school are praying and singing round the clock by Bob Smietana FEBRUARY 14, 2023

For more than two weeks, students at Asbury University packed their chapel and overflow spaces, holding round-the-clock prayer and worship that defied statistics on declining religiosity among Gen Z. "Authentic revivals return the church to what it is supposed to be," said one seminary professor.



White #MAGA QAnon Jesus carried during the Jan. 6 insurrection at the Capitol. (Tyler Merbler/CC BY 2.0)

Covering Faith Amid Crisis & Change

RNS journalists cover the top issues of the day with comprehensive storytelling about important national and global issues that shape our nation and world, including:

Christian Nationalism after Jan. 6

RNS probed the ideological and theological implications of the idea that America was founded by and still belongs to Christians, and how it colored American politics and Christianity itself. We traced the phenomenon from the 15th



Pope Francis at the Vatican, March 15, 2023. (AP Photo/Alessandra Tarantino)

6 RNS ANNUAL REPORT 2023

century Doctrine of Discovery, which justified European Christian explorers' domination of "newly discovered" lands and peoples, to the 1930s version that used the fear of communism to embrace prejudice to our contemporary attempts to weaken American democracy.

Catholic Church Reforms

Pope Francis' agenda includes welcoming LGBTQ believers, expanding women's roles, and reaching out to the farthest reaches of the globe, even as he tackles corruption with a historic prosecution of financial mismanagement and fraud. It's a tall order, especially in the face of criticism from traditionalists and the draining fight against sexual abuse. RNS has covered the Catholic story in all its complexity from Rome and Washington.



Earthen lamps lit for Diwali. (Udayaditya Barua/Unsplash)

Ukraine Under Attack

Russia's invasion of Ukraine had profound implications for the Russian Orthodox Church and its fight to suppress the breakaway Orthodox Church of Ukraine. But faith was felt everywhere in the conflict, with religious groups delivering aid and resettling refugees in Poland, the U.S.,

and elsewhere, and American Jews who trace their lineage to Ukraine, conscious of the failure to save European Jews during World War II, mobilizing on behalf of the Jewish community under attack today.

War in the Holy Land

RNS has published more than 150 stories since the Oct. 7 Hamas attack and Israel's ensuing incursion into Gaza, including on-the-ground stories from Jerusalem, coverage of religious reactions globally, and reports on the rise of antisemitism and Islamophobia in the U.S. RNS also reported on the growing fissure between Israeli and American Jews that has prompted questions about the nature of Jewish identity.

Southern Baptist Divisions and Debates

RNS honed in on the turmoil in the Southern Baptist Convention over its own attempts to get a handle on sexual abuse reporting, even as it enforced its rules against women in leadership, disfellowshipping two churches with female pastors, including one founded by one of the country's most beloved and bestknown preachers, Rick Warren.



The thousand-year-old Monastery of Caves, the holiest site of Eastern Orthodox Christians, in Kyiv, Ukraine. (AP Photo/Evgeniy Maloletka)



Hindu Americans Make their Mark on American Politics

A debate in California's Legislature over a bill barring caste

discrimination exposed polarization among American Hindus. But the campaigns supporting and opposing the bill showcased Hindu American voices and their newfound influence in the public square. Combined with the candidacy of GOP presidential hopeful Vivek Ramaswamy, 2023 may be remembered as the year Hindu Americans came of age politically.

The Culture War Goes Local

Since the Dobbs decision overturned Roe v. Wade, sending the abortion issue to the states, so too have a raft of other questions that divide Americans, from transgender rights to library books, become the concern of state lawmakers, mayors, and even school boards. RNS has covered how the national culture war has turned into a series of skirmishes, with local clergy and religious groups on the front lines.

Experimental Religion

RNS has kept a watchful eye on important trends and their religious impacts, including the increase in the numbers of the religiously unaffiliated, or so-called "nones," who include atheists, agnostics, "nothing in particular," and those who hold strong spiritual beliefs; people whose lives have been transformed by, not faith, but psychedelic drugs through which they have healed and connected to the mystical and divine; and the impact of artificial intelligence as it begins to play a role in faith communities and expression.

BEHIND THE BYLINES

A Team that Covers Religion Like No One Else

RNS REPORTERS



Fiona André National Reporter



Adelle M. Banks Projects Editor and

National Reporter

RNS EDITORS



Paul O'Donnell Editor-in-Chief

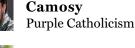
RNS COLUMNISTS



Benbow Faithfully Feminist Charles C.

Candice Marie









Khyati Joshi Living Religion



Jeffrey Salkin Martini Judaism

Jana Riess



Claire Giangravè Vatican Reporter



National Reporter &

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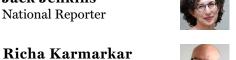
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Kathryn Post

National Reporter

Bob Smietana National Reporter



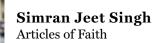


Jonathan Woodward Podcast Producer





Mark Silk Spiritual Politics

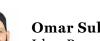


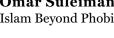


Omar Suleiman Islam Beyond Phobia



Phyllis Zagano Just Catholic







AWARD-WINNING JOURNALISM

Recognized as the Best in Religion Reporting

Associated Church Press Awards

RNS Best in Class News Service

Adelle M. Banks

Excellence for In-Depth Coverage for profile of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.'s life

Honorable mention for coverage of AME Zion bishop charged with fraud

Honorable mention for coverage of how Sunday school is different since COVID-19

"Compelling and comprehensive" coverage of the dramatic national and global events as they unfolded last year. They delivered. This year's best of the best."

-JUDGE, ASSOCIATED CHURCH PRESS AWARDS

Eppy Awards

Runner-up: Best entertainment/cultural news website (fewer than 1 million unique monthly visitors)

Wilbur Awards

Bob Smietana Award of Excellence in Books: Reorganized Religion

Jack Jenkins

Award of Excellence in News Articles: "You Wear Out: How Chronic Illness Grounds and Inspires William Barber's Activism"

RNS' WORK WAS CITED, QUOTED, AND/OR REPUBLISHED IN A WIDE ARRAY OF PUBLICATIONS, INCLUDING:						
ΑΡ	CNN	FDAILY CAL			n p r	AB NBC NEWS
POLITICO) Rolli	ingStone	THE TEXAS TRIB	BUNE	The Atlantic	The Guardian
THE W		THE WALL S	STREET JOURNAL.	The W	ashington Post	and many more

Alejandra Molina

Award of Merit in News Articles: "On Abortion, Muslim Americans Say Islamic History Is 'On the Side of Mercy'"

Rabbi Jeffrey Salkin Award of Merit in Opinion: "Martini Judaism"

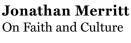
The Rev. Thomas Reese Award of Merit in Opinion: "Signs of the Times"

Woodward

Jack Jenkins

Father Tom Reese Third place in commentary: "Signs of the Times"





Karen Swallow

Signs of the Times

Flunking Sainthood

"There is simply no other religionoriented news service like Religion News Service. The list of distinguished writers and editors who have graced the print and cyber-pages of RNS over many years seems destined to grow even longer with the current staff. Congratulations! You do your peers in the religious press proud!"

-JUDGE, ASSOCIATED CHURCH PRESS AWARDS

Religion News Association

Katelyn Beaty, Roxanne Stone, J.

Second Place in Enterprise Reporting for "Saved by the City" podcast

Second Place in News Analysis

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ARTICLES

1,485

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John Kellett

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Thank you for investing in RNS' objective reporting and insightful commentary. We could not do our work without you.

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