

# Eileen Flanagan What is Mine to Do

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## SPEAKERS

Nicole Diroff, Peterson Toscano, Allen Ewing-Merrill, Dr. Keisha McKenzie, Eileen Flanagan

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Nicole Diroff 00:02

You are listening to Climate Changed, a podcast about pursuing faith, life, and love in a climate-changed world. Hosted by me, Nicole Diroff today with a special guest host, Dr. Keisha McKenzie. The Climate Changed podcast features guests who deepen the conversation, while also stirring the waters. Climate Changed is a project of The BTS Center.



Peterson Toscano 00:36

Hello and welcome, I'm Peterson Toscano, the producer of the show. We're very excited to have Dr. Keisha McKenzie on the show today co hosting with Nicole, it's going to be great. And I wanted to remind you that we have a discussion guide to go with this very episode. As you're listening or after you're listening on your own or with a group, visit [theBTScenter.org](https://theBTScenter.org) and go to our show page and there you will find the discussion guide. Now Nicole will share with you a little bit about Dr. Mackenzie and then they'll begin their conversation. Enjoy!



Nicole Diroff 01:18

Keisha McKenzie is a strategist who interprets communication, religion, spirituality, and politics as social change technologies. She has worked in communication and development strategy, faith organizing research, facilitation and management, with nonprofit and educational organizations across the US since 2004. Keisha believes that all people have inherent worth and dignity. We deserve a world of connection and flourishing for all. And people of faith have a duty to help make that world real. Keisha is a member of the Aspen Institute Religion and Society Programs, Powering Pluralism Network, a Rooted and Resilience Fellow at Faith Matters Network, author at the newsletter On Tomorrow's Edge, and co host of the new PRX podcast Moral Repair: A Black Exploration of Tech Keisha, this is lovely to gather with you in this particular way. Welcome to the Climate Changed podcast. Thank you so much. Lovely to connect with you too. And quite different from planning our gatherings for emerging leaders and or planning how to kayak or yoga by the waterside. Good to be in conversation. I love working with you. You're someone who I really connect with on both kind of the planning and

how do we do our work level. So thanks for being part of this adventure today. Thanks again for bringing me in. During this episode of Climate Changed, Nicole and I will talk about a conversation that she had with Eileen Flanagan, who is a Quaker author, activist and organizer. It is a rich conversation. Also, as in every episode, we will provide you with a grounding reflection and concrete next steps you can take. I love that touch for this podcast. For this episode's grounding. I'm pleased to introduce The BTS Center's Executive Director, Reverend Dr. Allen Ewing-Merrill. Allen is someone who keeps our staff and leadership team grounded, so I thought it would be appropriate to have him offer something to all of you, our podcast listeners.

A

#### Allen Ewing-Merrill 04:05

Artist and poet Laurie Hetteen has written a simple poem called "I Wish." I wish we'd been handed something tidier, something easier to sort out. This cannot be sorted. Here despair and joy breathe the same air. While beauty and horror occupy a single seat and dread dances with hope. That's just the way it is. So listen, the whole world might be burning. But if we give up cake, if we abandon singing, we are certainly done for. These words resonate for me maybe they do for you too. Maybe you're a parent or a grandparent, or maybe you're an aunt or an uncle or a neighbor to young children, and you feel the heaviness as you wonder and worry about what their future will be like. Maybe you're a faith leader or a caregiver. And you're attuned to the collective anxiety and fear that is thick in the air we breathe. Maybe you're an activist, and you're doing the work you're showing up, you're, you're speaking truth to power, and you encounter one obstacle after another, and you're tired. As we live and lead and love in a climate-changed world, we often find we wish we'd been handed something tidier, something easier to sort out. We know what it means to say that despair and joy breathe the same air, that beauty and horror occupy a single seat, that dread dances with hope. Today, remember the words of this poet. And take them to heart. The whole world might be burning. But if we give up cake, if we abandon singing, we are certainly done for. What is it that brings you joy? Is it cake? Is it singing? Is it a long walk along the water's edge or hanging out with the trees? Is it lunch with a friend who who always makes you laugh with abandon? What brings you joy? What renews your spirit? I invite you to pause for a moment to ask yourself that question. Really ask yourself and then give yourself permission to pursue that thing. Take time for it, prioritize it, because the whole world may be burning. But if we give up cake, if we abandon singing, we are certainly done for. Peace be with you.

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#### Nicole Diroff 07:18

Thank you, Allen. And now on to my conversation with Eileen Flanagan. A graduate of Duke and Yale, Eileen Flanagan is the award winning author of three books and scores of articles. In addition to helping people to make their activism more effective through her online courses, she speaks to international audiences on how to build a spiritually grounded and effective climate justice movement. For five years, she served as board chair of Earth Quaker Action Team, Equate, a scrappy little group, which successfully pressured one of the largest banks in the US to stop financing mountaintop removal coal mining. I hope you find my conversation with Eileen, meaningful and insightful. If you and I met somewhere in the community, and we were chatting about whatever was going on in front of us, and then I turned and said, Oh, what work do you do? How would you answer that question?

E

Eileen Flanagan 08:23

I would say I'm an author, and climate activist. And then I would watch your face very carefully because people have wildly different responses to that second one. I'm working for a world where all beings can thrive, that we appreciate the interconnectedness in a way that harming the earth or harming our neighbors would be unconscionable. I'm a Quaker. My Quaker belief in the sacredness of all life definitely informs my climate work. It informs the way I go about that work, feeling part of a tradition that feels called to challenge authority when authority is not doing what it should do.

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Nicole Diroff 09:10

Equate, your organization, and The BTS Center where I work are both engaging with climate and the role of spiritual leaders in these times. We have talked quite a bit about separation as one of those root causes of climate crisis. And I know this is a topic that you have looked at really deeply.

E

Eileen Flanagan 09:38

I first started thinking about separation in terms of racial separation, and organizing. It partly came through hearing these encouraging stories. One of the first ones was around the Keystone XL Pipeline. There was an organization formed called the Cowboy Indian Alliance the new CIA. And around the same time there was a group in South Africa fighting fracking. Shell was trying to frack the fragile Karoo desert. The white landowners and the landless people's movement, who would be the equivalent of indigenous people, you know, in the United States. So people who are landless because of colonialism, they were working together to protect the desert with vastly different means. History that you would think would prohibit people from collaborating, right. And in fact, I don't want to sugar coat, you know, when you drill down, these collaborations are difficult. It's not easy. If people all love the land, and they love clean water, and they love their children, their stake to build relationship on. So that's what got me thinking about separation. And so I started researching a book. Saw again, and again how industry uses our divisions to get what it wants. One community in Louisiana that I visited Norco was named after the New Orleans Refining Company, which was then bought by Shell. And you know, there's lots of companies that now own this industrial area along the Mississippi River. But in Norco there was a black community, separated from the white community with a line of trees, kind of end of the black community, and an oil refinery on the side of the white community. The black community started organizing because there was an accident, there were health problems, there were all these things. And yet the white community insisted that they weren't affected by the same things that the black community was. Part of it was that the white people were more likely to get the jobs. But you could see all these different ways that the company benefited from that from having the community divided. That's one of the forms of separation. Then I started realizing there's so many other levels to this. I had taken four trips to Louisiana doing this research, before someone pointed out to me that that stretch of the Mississippi River is also a major migratory path for birds. Of course it is. And the BP oil spill off the coast of Louisiana in the Gulf of Mexico. A year later, they found toxins from both the spill and then the cleanup afterward, they put toxins in the water, not to get rid of the oil, but to sink it. So it would look like it was clean. Those chemicals were you know, in some cases worse than the oil. A year later, they were finding all these chemicals in bird eggs in Minnesota. There was

one study that speculated that they were being carried to Africa through turtles. We forget we're part of the natural world, that we're just one of many species and that what we are doing, human beings are doing to the Earth affects us. And it affects all these other species. There's a global dimension. If people are dying in floods in Pakistan, are Americans really getting it? We are also affected by this. The risk is shared but unequal. We really have to say that it's both we have to acknowledge the inequality. But sometimes people talk about the inequality as if like, Well, I'm not affected by climate change. It's shared and unequal both.

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Nicole Diroff 13:36

I really appreciate the way you unpacked many levels of separation, and named the ways in which those who are in positions who are abusing power, actually love those divisions and work them to their advantage. That's really insightful. And for me, I actually hear a vocational call to faith communities to counter the divisions and work to know our neighbors, our communities, our watersheds, both human and more than human. I was fascinated to read about your love of the Serenity Prayer. It really touched me the way in which you are so actively engaging that prayer and effective activism.

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Eileen Flanagan 14:31

I speak about this less these days because I wrote this book, *The Wisdom to Know the Difference* many years ago now. And I started because I was interested on a personal level in the idea of the most common version of the Serenity Prayer, which is, God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can change and wisdom to know the difference. As I started digging into it, I learned that the author Reinhold Niebuhr wrote several different versions early on, he was a preacher, you know, preachers often recycle the same ideas till they hit on the one that ends up on coffee mugs. But the earlier version is in the plural. Also, it didn't say what I can change give me courage to change what I can change. It was about what should be changed. He's writing during World War Two. He's like thinking about the Holocaust, right? There are things that it might seem impossible to change, but we still need the courage to try to change them. We have to act together. If there's one thing I would say for people to do is to find a group to take action with. I love Bill McKibben, the environmental writer and organizer's answer to this, he says, If you're going to do one thing, stop asking what can I do and ask what can we do? One of the biggest challenges is feeling despair, and feeling ineffective as long as we see ourselves as doing it alone. Right, amen. And so that could look different ways. There's a concept that I often teach called the Four Rules of Social Change. That is based on research into what makes movements effective. One step is for people to figure out what kind of realm they want to work in, but also who they want to work with. The four roles are the helper, the advocate, the organizer, and the rebel. And just to give some practical examples, the helper is trying to make a difference without changing the system, they don't want to go to the meeting or the protest or take things on, they just want to make effective change right now. If the issue is homelessness, they're the person making soup in the soup kitchen. For climate change, it might be getting your church to put solar panels up, or getting your kids school to start composting food waste, those things that don't really require paying attention to what the US Congress is doing. Right? But like, what can we just do right here right now. And so there's tons of things like that, that people can do. But if you think not just my household, but my community, my organization that will make it more impactful? Yes. The second category is called the advocate. So the advocate is trying to

change the system, but using the tools of the system. So for example, there's a Quaker organization, Friends Committee on National Legislation that does letter writing. Every month, Quaker congregations across the country will pause on their way to coffee hour to write a letter to their senator or their congressperson. Citizens Climate Lobby is a group that is focused on climate change, using advocacy and lobbying. And so again, don't just call your Senator, find out what group is doing a mass phone call to the senator, right, you know, and reinforce those talking points. And advocacy takes a long time often, but it's so important, we need those systems to change. The role that I play is the rebel. And I was not frankly, born and raised to be a rebel, really, but that's the organization that I felt called to. Rebels are also trying to change the system. But instead of using tools of the system, like letter writing or phone calls, they shake up the system. Yeah, civil disobedience is sort of the most disruptive example most people think of, but it's also like, if you're gonna go to a meeting channel a little of King's energy. We're not taking nonsense here. You know, we're challenging. We're not being stuck in decorum. A big part of why the Inflation Reduction Act got passed, was youth really challenging politicians in a forceful way, in a rebel kind of way. And then the last category is the organizer. And the organizer is really focused on galvanizing constituencies. And so their question is, what can we do and then they kind of fall into different tactics. We should at least consider some of those other roles we haven't played before, because most of us were socially trained to do the helper or to do the advocate role. Yeah. And while those are very important, helpful roles, they're not the only ones. Many years ago, I was living in a Quaker spiritual study center, and someone started a choir. And there was just a huge percentage of middle aged women who were altos. The choir director was like, Okay, we need more parts than this. You know, we got a couple sopranos we had a couple of bases. And she said, you know, we have no tenors, if you have the capacity to sing tenor, even if that's not your first choice, the group needs you to try something else. And that's how I think about civil disobedience. Actually, I'm not going to ask a soprano to ever sing tenor. But if it's possibly in your range, we need more over here. There are many ways we can use that voice. Paired with the moral messaging that people of faith bring, we can have a disproportionate influence on the very institutions that are financing the climate crisis. congregations have funds, diocese, have funds, depending on the structure of a religious institution that can add up to quite a bit of money, if taking on corporations could possibly be a growth edge for you. So it's a time where we really need that.

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Nicole Diroff 21:04

There's an accusation often we're quote unquote, just preaching to the choir, I think it's so important that we are constantly continuing to diversify our choir, and get that choir from inside a building outside into the public sphere. And what you just shared about stretching into different roles, especially a role that is requiring more courage these days, feels really right, as we understand that, yes, sometimes the work is engaging the choir, but there's so much to do with that choir. I'm really feeling energized by this conversation, because of the ways we've been pulling towards the collective from the individual and towards the collective. One of The BTS Center's places of work at this moment is actually engaging theologically with the Christian community, around moving from ideas of individual salvation, to collective salvation, that what we are working for what we're praying for, is for the common good for all for the collective, the threads of this conversation have have all been pulling towards a different way of relating to one another, and to God, and perhaps to our more than human kin, as we kind of continue to expand those circles.



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Eileen Hanagan 22:48

I really agree with that. And I would add our also our connection to history. So when I started writing about separation, I wasn't thinking about the ways that we think we're somehow separate from our history. But that just came up again and again. It was flagrant in Louisiana, where most of these petrochemical facilities are built on former plantations. The people fighting these petrochemical facilities are descended from people who worked the same land as slaves in many cases. But it's true everywhere. We're recording this right after a big announcement about the Doctrine of Discovery. And the role that the Christian church played in justifying using twisting up theology is how I would put it twisting of theology to justify colonialism. There's a lot of repair to do, and repentance, but also solidarity opportunities. So you asked me earlier about seeing connections made and one of the places I really felt that was in the fight against the Line Three Pipeline through northern Minnesota at the other end of the Mississippi River. And I got to spend about a month out there camping at a camp led by Ojibwe women, with people from all over. There were people from all kinds of backgrounds who came to the camp, different ages, different faiths, no faith. It was a beautiful experience of building community while taking action. You think a lot about the needs of community when someone's got to clean the pit latrine. And somebody's got to make all three meals a day and someone's got to do the dishes and many rules, many roles are needed. There's something I think beautiful about that kind of encampment of people trying to live into the future that we want. Yeah, right. It's practice. It's not like we just went off to be on a commune somewhere and talk about the world we want to see We're also trying to stop a pipeline company from violating indigenous rights poisoning the water and they did have spills, you know, immediately of the fluid they use to install the pipeline spilled in the headwaters of the Mississippi River. The whole thing is going to contribute to climate change of pumping tar sands oil. And meanwhile, here we are in northern Minnesota. And the sky just got weirder and weirder, until someone finally listened to the news and realized it was smoke from wildfires in the northwest. The river that we were camping by there were all these dead clam shells in the bottom because it was so hot and the water was so low. That felt like a real experience of like, it's all right here. It's so much interconnection. So much interconnection, so much, you know, repair that needs to be done, to the earth and to community. The Ojibwe people who I met, they're modelled in this beautiful way for me how to be fierce proponents of justice, while holding on to a worldview that says we are all relations, they use that language, a lot of relatives, we're all relations, all the people, but also the spiders that we get in your tent. But that doesn't mean we're going to sugarcoat when white people are annoying all the people of color in the camp or, or those kinds of things are coming up. We can be relations and grapple with each other and speak of harm and things like that.

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Nicole Diroff 26:39

I'm interested to talk with you about nonviolent direct action. This is another course offering that you have put into the world. I have been with people recently who have been saying this is potentially the most important role for churches and people of faith in the coming years to really be champions of nonviolent direct action. Throughout our conversation, we're talking about collective: collective honesty about the situation that we're in a collective commitment to engage and push back. Even this concept of collective discernment within the context of a collective serenity prayer. What has always struck me around nonviolent direct action is staying together in that commitment, when those of you committed to that methodology start to experience violence towards you to stay in that posture collectively, that's perhaps where the Divine is most necessary, because it takes a capacity that feels larger than any individual. How is nonviolent direct action so central to what you're trying to move in these times?

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Eileen Flanagan 28:15

I so appreciate that question. Let me first explain for your listeners what I mean by nonviolent direct action. The easiest way I explain it is the kind of strategies that the Civil Rights movement, you know, Dr. King's branch of the Civil Rights movement, or the Freedom Movement, as they call it used, the kinds of strategies that Gandhi used, obviously, both of those are leaders who are grounded in spirituality, seeking love with their opponents while also challenging them. But to me, the real ingredients are that that there is a direct challenge to decision makers. So that's the direct part. So just by contrast, I have been to many silent vigils and ended up feeling a lot of despair. You know, we're now 20 years past the invasion of Iraq. I dragged my kids to so many protests that they just like, my daughter was very young when she looked up at me and she was like five or six and she said, Mom, this is not going to change George Bush's mind. Can we go get ice cream? And here it was, like a bunch of hippies in front of Independence Hall in Philadelphia. I was like, Oh, my gosh, you are so your political analysis is astute. This is not going to change George Bush's mind. Direct action means acting in a way that those decision makers will feel the weight of the moral message that you're bringing. In hindsight, what I would have done is go stand in the driveway, the army recruiting center, or stop paying taxes or Like there's lots of ways you can directly affect decision makers. A silent vigil can be lovely. Equate had one recently where we went to the home of the CEO of Vanguard, which we're pushing because they are one of the top two investors in the world in fossil fuels, as well as companies violating indigenous rights, as well as companies engaging in environmental racism. So we brought like 50 people in folding chairs, and we set up across the street from his house and had a silent meeting for worship. Yeah, if you do that at the CEOs house, it's direct action, if you just pray that he'll change his mind in your own congregation. It's not. Yep. Right. Yeah. And the non violent part. In some ways, it's obvious that it's not violent. But I think it is more than that. It's also what I would call seeing that of God in the person you're trying to change, which doesn't mean you have to sugar coat your denunciation of them. But it is different, when you're not saying that they're inhuman, or they're monsters, or you know, we have so much scapegoating in our political discourse now. But we talked about the CEO, he's a human being with kids who's managing a very destructive system. And he needs to use his power, because he has quite a lot of it, he needs to use his power for the common good. And not just his shareholders who also are going to be affected by climate change. You know, the people who invest in Vanguard, that thing about shared but unequal, they are also going to be hurt by climate change, including their investments, if they're still investing in coal mining. That's a terrible long term investment, right. But the circle of who's affected by that company's actions is so much wider. So being willing to show up and really challenge in a very direct way that takes us out of our comfort zone is part of direct action. There are times when it means breaking the law. But I think sometimes people think it's only that. And it's not only that, right? Well, in our first campaign, Equate pushed PNC Bank to stop investing in mountaintop removal, coal mining. And one of our most common tactics was we sent people to go sit down in a bank lobby and have silent prayer. And we would leave when the police arrived and told us to more times than not most cases we would so we weren't breaking the law. But we were challenging social norms. We were shaking things up, the manager had to call up the chain and record of those people are here doing that. That's the other thing about acting collectively, it's also persistently, because we didn't just go do that once we actually had 125 actions like that. And then we won. yeah, that number 100, that looked like we wouldn't.

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Nicole Diroff 33:15

So thank you. And I want to give a pitch right now. Because if you're listening to this and wanting to know more and do some more discernment in this space around roles of social change, Eileen Flanagan offers courses that are asynchronous that you can participate in and do further exploration for yourself, and for your community. You can find more information about that course at [eileenflanagan.com](http://eileenflanagan.com). Eileen, I want to thank you for this time. It's lovely to get to know you in this sort of special and intimate but shared way. And I offer many blessings on the work of Equate and on your own stepping into leadership. As you help people and communities discern their role in these really tricky times. May your writing and speaking continue to inspire.

E

Eileen Flanagan 34:24

Thank you so much. It's been great being with you.

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Nicole Diroff 34:46

I was touched by how Eileen talked about her core vision of a world in which all can thrive. That language has also been really meaningful to me individually over the last decade and a half. Largely I came to it by wrangling theology in my church communities around LGBT organizing and the role of women, but it kind of ballooned out from there, and has been one of my core organizing words as in the principle around which I tend to organize my life. Does this advance my sense of groundedness integratedness? Does it help me equip me for challenges and make me more resilient? Are my relationships strong, Eileen touches each one of those things, as communities as people, forming connections with others as people working with others to create change how all of that supports our flourishing and thriving, I really resonated with that. You might not know about me also that I spent, like about three years in exile with Quakers in West Texas. I was in grad. Yes, I was in grad school there. Ooh. And during a time when I was trying to understand my own heritage, I was raised Seventh Day Adventist, what the limitations of that tradition were what the possibilities of that tradition were. I went on several several Sundays over those three years to a small unprogrammed meeting. And so while I didn't have a lot of contact with Friends who had a call to serve the environment, I do have a lot of resonance with any tradition that inspires people to dissent for justices sake, which Quakers definitely are that I resonated with hearing her story about that. Mm hmm. Beautiful. I love that you unpacked a bit of what thriving means for you. And I wonder if there's a time that you would speak to when, when you like, recognized a lack of that, or were able to move towards knowing what thriving is when we use sometimes I think we use these words without actually unpacking what they mean for us. Yes. And that's true, even of a term like justice, where anybody can use that term. And you don't really know what they mean by it until you ask them. What do you mean by this? And what are the implications on that for you, and or for me, because I've been in conversations with church administrators, for example, who have a sense of what family is, and it doesn't necessarily include my family. Or what it means to be a loyal community member, that loyalty might require certain kinds of people to be silent in common space. And so like us understanding what each other means when we're using these key terms, is, I think, an essential part of understanding each other. Yeah, it makes me think of the point that Eileen was sharing around collaboration, the way in which collaboration can be quite difficult. It's a really like, lovely positive word that we use all the time. And there are amazing joys I've experienced in collaborations. But usually, to get to that moment of joy, there's some sort of



risky vulnerability, putting yourself out there in terms of what you really think that may not be received all that well and needs to be worked through and honored and stuck with. There's just really something about staying at the table through challenging collaborations that then leads to the joy. It can, yes. I've been listening, for example to Esther Perel, who works on emotional intelligence and relational intelligence. I love Esther Perel. One of the things I love about it is when people come up to her after lecture and ask her, How can I be safe when I'm going to ask somebody out? She's she always says you will not be safe, it is a risk you're taking and honestly about the risk. And the vulnerability and the cost of intimacy, I think is part of what helps us be more honest about collaboration and what it takes. Also often say, society is a group project. And I remember how group projects were when I was in high school. I hated them, because they often meant the person who was willing to do the least dragged the group down. And the person who felt for whatever reason, more responsible had to over overextend themselves. I feel like sometimes that's the same in our adult collaborations, whether in the workplace or in a faith community congregation to a ministry in the community, or what have you. I want to bring up a related point, which is this question of if you're in a collaboration like the ones that Eileen mentioned, the Cowboy Indian Alliance, or the landless, versus the estate owners in South Africa, there's a moment where the people who have historically had levels of privilege have to figure out what it means to live out solidarity. And the solidarity is not just oh, let me do this good thing for those poor people over there. But it's about understanding how they have been negatively impacted by this structure that privileged them, which is really hard. Really another thing Esther says is women's advantage and progress is not secure until men also do their work. Because each of us has work to do to figure out a new dynamic. And in collaboration, that's also true. I will probably quote you in the future on society being a group project. That's really helpful. I was really struck with the way Eileen unpacked the Serenity Prayer, and the way in which the version that's on a coffee mug is the I, the I language of, you know, how do I discern where I can make change, referencing the way in which really many times when that was being brought forward and public it was we language to that prayer, I have been super eager to chat with you about this. Because in our nonprofit organization world, we spend a lot of time reflecting on what we should be doing, what actions we should take, what Eileen was saying made me want to kind of flip that and say, instead, who should we be working with? And have as extended brainstorming sessions on who should we be working with and then allow the what we're doing, actually to flow from the people and the organizations that feel the most important for us to companion accompany have difficult collaborations with? I like the shift from I to we. I like the shift from what are we doing to Who are we doing it with? I wonder if the stage beyond that is how are we together? There's a tendency in this culture to do the individualizing. Part of that is marketing. Part of that is capitalism to be frank, for always individuating and always isolating and always protecting the isolated I. But I wonder about this question of what it means to flourish, if we're recognizing our context is inherently relational. It's an ecosystem. So there's always going to be in the old days, they used to say It's turtles all the way down. But I think it's relationship all the way down. And it's not just about what we're doing with each other in this ecosystem. But how are we in relation? And how are we being with each other? The quality of the being the choosing to not be conflictual all the time, changes the dynamic even of what we might choose to do together, striving for an environment where the individual I in this we can flourish, changes the conditions for everybody in that space. The future that I can imagine for people like me, opens up a world for people who are not like me too. Part of the reason I was curious about what you thought about this, because you you have a rev that you don't always use in the front of your name. Rev Diroff. And so I was curious what you thought about what role faith communities have in helping us learn how to be the kinds of people that will live well in the future that we're dreaming about? Why do you think faith communities have something to offer on this question of moving from I to we? Taking risks together or being and not just on an endless activity treadmill? I think it points exactly to the

work that I feel really committed to at The BTS Center, which is really imagining faith communities as places that champion how to be in a climate-changed world where change is coming quickly. And it's really hard. How do we hold on to being the kind of humans we want the world to hold? A couple of the things I would say about faith communities. One is commitment. Our society today can be kind of flaky, faith communities and being in commitment with one another. It's, it's often referred to kind of as an extended family, another family. Yeah, there are people there that you don't really get along with or don't make that much sense to you. But there's a level of which I'm not shopping here and just like throwing away something that's unsatisfying to me. I'm going to stick with this. I'm committed to this relationship that may be lived out within a house of worship, but it's a way of being that our society needs to have flow in and out of these houses of worship. Yeah, the way in which faith communities invite conversation about things that are bigger than one's own self is super critical. And there are other places in society where you can access that, like, maybe therapy, and some really good friends. But I think the way faith communities do that is really important. We're asked to bring what we're longing for, to the divine. We're asked to listen to someone who has been trained to preach to share a message that's about something bigger than ourselves, and to stretch and take that in that way of thinking about who we are in these times, and how we got there, and holding the really tricky, culpability and justice issues associated with that. We need those spaces to be reflective and prayerful. When we come together. There's a few other things I mean, the way in which congregations are grounded in one location and committed to that place, and yet also connected across history and across the planet, through organizational structures and liturgy. Think that matters to you and coming back to a liturgy. I find the liturgical connections, even more of a tie than denominational affiliation or place, because I think the liturgy is beyond time and place. And that's part of why we come back to it why we love it so much. I really love what you said about congregations being spaced to practice, persistence in relationship and commitment to a people, not just to ideas. We hear all the time from the sociologists of religion about people disaffiliating and we also hear from a sociologist, the secular ones about the losses of third spaces, so people being trapped in home trapped in work, and not having spaces to build this sort of persistence and facility with diversity and other things that you will get in a third space where people from different classes and backgrounds, people of different wealth levels and cultures are mixing for coffee, or they're mixing in a library or they're mixing in a Lyceum or educational space or in an activism space, like Eileen talks about people coming together to letter write or to do nonviolent social disruption or whatever they desire to do together. Yeah. At any point, you can be tempted to think that what you do is the only thing that matters. And you can also be tempted to think that what you do does not matter at all, because the systems that you're trying to move are so big and so complicated. And it is a balancing navigation act to surf the waves, the messages and feedback that the system is giving you and to recognize that messages that your body is giving you, perhaps you're tired, and it's somebody's somebody else's role to pick up while you step back and rest. But to think about what can I influence? What is my contribution? What is my best gift to the collective that I care about? How can we grow? Those are all the things that I want people who are at the early stage of their career, particularly before you get overwhelmed by committee logistics and Robert's Rules of Order to be active in what can I bring? How can we move forward? And how am I value and service? Really important. Thank you. So Eileen, in the conversation she had with you shared four roles that I thought were really helpful framework for people to understand what they might do in an organization or in a community. So she mentioned a helper, an advocate, a rebel and an organizer. If I were to map where Auburn is in those roles, I think we began as advocates and have drifted into organizing in the sense that our president, Reverend Dr. Emma Jordan Simpson, is really clear that the world that we have inherited is not the world that we are working for. The world that we're in will not always teach us how to get there. So we can't only rely on the skills of taking up positions in Congress or

being conventionally respected to get us to that world because this world asks us to disempower and to take take take To only craft out that space of flourishing for people like me. I wonder about how we might, over the course of our lives take up different roles, like, yeah, there was a time where I was definitely doing helper work to ameliorate the conditions that this world imposed on people. Yeah. And I spent a good the early part of my career focused in on advocacy and helping people to navigate within the structures. And these days, I think I'm more inclined to dream and more inclined to help people remember how to dream and imagine and I think that is what this moment requires. So maybe we should invite people into next steps. Thank you so much for being a guest co-host with me today, Keisha, this has been really lovely to have this special time together. Thinking about next steps, Eileen talks about the disproportionate influence people of faith can have in taking on corporations responsible for climate change. She shares about the powerful act of divestment from fossil fuels and retirement funds and other investments. Earthquaker action team or Equate, is currently running a campaign to convince Vanguard to create more ethical investment options. You can learn more about this campaign at [equate.org](http://equate.org) That's [equate.org](http://equate.org). And many denominations have divestment campaigns or strategies. These include the United Church of Christ, my denomination, The United Methodist Church, and the Roman Catholic Church. If you are part of a church denomination, do some research to see if there's an existing divestment program you can join up with. Learn how your local church can engage in the effort. We have links in our show notes for many of these. We also will link to a helpful fossil fuel divestment guide for Presbyterians, that provides lots of practical information that can apply to almost anyone. I really love those options. This is a way of thinking about at the institutional level, what is our role? And how can we practice the world that we are working towards? So Eileen outlined four roles that changemakers can take, when creating change in the world, rebel, advocate, helper, or organizer. For yourself, consider journaling about the following questions. What role or roles have you taken on in the past? And in regards to climate change and sustainability, how might you take on a similar role? Or a new one? How about an institution that you're part of a church or school or community group? What role or roles does this group play? Are they a rebel, an organizer, an advocate or a helper? How can you contribute to the mission of this institution through the role or roles that most appealed to you? Thank you, Keisha for that invitation to reflect not only individually but also organizationally on these potential roles. And thank you all so much for listening today. A link to Eileen's reading of the Serenity Prayer, as well as my full conversation with her, and as we've referenced, much more, are available in the show notes. Thank you so much for joining us today for this episode of the Climate Changed podcast. We would love to hear your thoughts and responses to our conversation. We would also welcome any suggestions you have for this show. Feel free to email us at [podcast@theBTSCenter.org](mailto:podcast@theBTSCenter.org). That's [podcast@theBTSCenter.org](mailto:podcast@theBTSCenter.org).

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Dr. Keisha McKenzie 53:54

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Nicole Diroff 53:55

Learn more about our many program offerings and online resources by visiting [theBTSCenter.org](http://theBTSCenter.org). That's [theBTSCenter.org](http://theBTSCenter.org) Keisha, I wish you many blessings upon your day and lots of gratitude for co-hosting today. Everyone listening, blessings, gratitude and peace to

you my friends.