

## BOOK REVIEW

### ***THE CHURCH CRACKED OPEN: Disruption, Decline, and New Hope for Beloved Community***

**By The Reverend Canon Stephanie Spellers**

**Reviewed by Pastor Juli Lejman-Guy, Christian Education Network of the ELCA**

These are the words The Reverend Canon Stephanie Spellers wrote to a friend on Saturday, August 1, 2020:

*God is breaking open this church and pouring us out – pouring our privilege, pouring out empire, pouring our racism and human arrogance – in order to remake us and use us to serve God’s dream for the whole world. We are the broken jars. It hurts and it sucks... and I think it’s a gift. (Spellers, p. 1)*

Spellers begins this most difficult discussion based in Scripture. Reminding the reader of the woman with the alabaster jar as a model of disruption, Spellers warns that this book is filled with hard stories and challenging questions. And it is. While *The Church Cracked Open* focuses on the Episcopal denomination, the challenges ring true for each of our Christian communities in the United States.

Chapters 1 and 2 begin with the current situation of the Protestant Christian churches in the United States. COVID-19, the George Floyd murder, White Supremacy, and people dropping away from traditional congregational communities are just a few of the disruptions since 2020. While Spellers addresses racism, establishment, privilege, and other disruptions, she does so through the lens of God’s love for God’s people, the cross and hope.

Chapters 3 and 4 lead the reader through our history. Spellers begins with a discussion on self-centrism as the root of original sin. She challenges that, because of the fallout from self-centrism, living in authentic and loving community, while God-desired, is not possible without intentional transformation. Chapter 4 narrows in on the Episcopal Church in the United States.

Chapter 5 transitions with stories of people who have lived out their faith as disrupters as *Shards of Light*.

Chapters 6,7 and 8 are applications based on:

1. *Lose Your Life – Kenosis*
2. *Gain real life – Solidarity*

### 3. *Walk in Love – Discipleship*

Spellers offers step by step actions to lead the reader through difficult process of moving from self-centrism to beloved community. She acknowledges the pain and risk while giving hope for what can be. Constantly returning to God's love and grace, readers are reminded that by cracking open our Church, we can live into the Church God wants us to be.

Spellers takes a loving approach to a most difficult conversation. The reality is many of our congregations today are not ready for such conversations. However, there is much work to do if we are going to tear down the walls that divide us. *The Church Cracked Open* acknowledges that work, the pain, the history, and our current reality in such a way that is truthful while offering a framework for those difficult conversations.

**Additional Resources** can be found at [www.churchcrackedopen.com](http://www.churchcrackedopen.com) including a Reflection & Action Guide, Stewardship of Privilege handout, and U.S. Racism Timeline.

**About the Author:** The Rev. Canon Stephanie Spellers serves as Canon to Presiding Bishop Michael B. Curry for Episcopal efforts around evangelism, reconciliation, and creation care.

Spellers has served as Chaplain to the Episcopal House of Bishops, directed and taught mission and evangelism at General Theological Seminary, and served as a canon in the Diocese of Long Island. She is the founder of *The Crossing*, a groundbreaking church within St. Paul's Cathedral in Boston, and led numerous church-wide renewal and justice efforts.

A native of Frankfort, Kentucky, and a graduate of both Episcopal Divinity School and Harvard Divinity School, she, and her husband Albert deGrasse make their home today in New York's Harlem neighborhood.

Spellers is the author of: *The Church Cracked Open: Disruption, Decline and New Hope for Beloved Community* (2021), and *Radical Welcome: Embracing God, The Other and the Spirit of Transformation* (2006).