Faith & Socially Engaged Art

a case study report

by Sarah Miller
How do we build a culture of risk-taking, flexibility, resourcefulness, and creativity in our churches?

How do we go into our neighborhoods in the spirit of Luke 10—open to what is already present, offering testimony to Jesus’ proclamation that the kingdom is near?

How do we demonstrate the relevance of the gospel for those who are spiritually hungry but feel uninterested or unsafe in a standard church?

How do we go beyond talking about Jesus, gospel, kingdom, and other theological ideas, and invite people into an embodied experience of them?

The Episcopal Church is in a period of experimentation and innovation. In response to a rapidly changing world and the movement of the Spirit within it, we are discovering—and rediscovering—ways to proclaim the gospel, form disciples, and join God’s work in the world.

In reflecting on my own experience and observing the adaptive change happening throughout the church, I’ve found myself coming back to the following questions:

- How do we build a culture of risk-taking, flexibility, resourcefulness, and creativity in our churches?
- How do we go into our neighborhoods in the spirit of Luke 10—open to what is already present, offering testimony to Jesus’ proclamation that the kingdom is near?
- How do we demonstrate the relevance of the gospel for those who are spiritually hungry but feel uninterested or unsafe in a standard church?
- How do we go beyond talking about Jesus, gospel, kingdom, and other theological ideas, and invite people into an embodied experience of them?

The arts have always been a means by which the Church has worshipped God, formed disciples, and expressed theology. Traditional art forms like choral music and poetry are well-adapted for the needs of the traditional Church, but the Church of the future, one capable of addressing these questions, will need a different kind of art.

Despite a vibrant and growing theology and the arts field, large parts of contemporary art theory and practice have gone unengaged by the Church and theology, especially art focused on the social sphere.

Socially engaged art (SEA) opens up new possibilities for how the Episcopal Church lives out its mission in the 21st century. SEA could help churches learn to experiment and take risks, to find new ways to proclaim the gospel, and to build relationships of mutuality with their neighbors. Churches could, in the words of one case study site, create “collective art project[s] seeking to reconstruct the world in the image of grace.”

This report profiles three examples of socially engaged art ministries led by churches and sketches out the possibilities for how this practice could develop and mature.
As technology, globalization, changing demographics, and shifting generational preferences transform society, churches are striving, and often struggling, to adapt. In the face of these seismic cultural shifts, church leaders have recognized the necessity of adapting their structures, programs, funding, and missions to rapidly shifting contexts, and in the past decades, they have called for experimentation and engagement with new audiences and members, leading to a wide array of programs and strategies whose long-term results are largely still unfolding.

U.S. church membership and attendance have declined dramatically in the past two decades, particularly with younger generations, and increasing numbers of people report they belong to no religious group. Aging and declining membership contributes to shrinking church revenue, challenging congregations’ expectation of maintaining expensive seminary-trained clergy and aging buildings, and leading to strapped budgets and church closures.

More fundamentally, the Church, ever slow to change, is being required to adapt rapidly to postmodernism’s impact on ways of knowing, believing, learning, and relating. As Karen Ward describes, a “massive shift...has happened in how people view and navigate the world...truth is relative, diversity is normal, objectivity is mythical, science can't save us, power is distributed, hierarchy is flattened, knowledge is networked, life is chaotic, reality bites, mystery happens, and reason is highly overrated.”

Accompanying this sea change is the end of Christendom, when Christianity was the dominant religious force in Western society. In the era of Post-Christendom, churches can no longer presume their relevance to public life, nor can they rely on common culture to form people’s values, imagination, and worldview in ways conducive to Christian belief and practice. Many Christian leaders welcome the end of Christendom, but without new ways to translate and facilitate engagement with Christianity, churches will grow more irrelevant, alien, and intimidating to those who might otherwise participate.

Despite these challenges, the past decades have also seen a proliferation of models, movements, and trends that are marked by vitality and experimentation, with particular attention to addressing the challenges of relevance and engagement. These post-Christendom experiments go by various terms like emerging church, fresh expressions, missional church, and new monasticism, but regardless of their classification, they are all re-imagining Christian community through participatory and immersive worship, building communities of authenticity and radical inclusion, and service and justice work with their neighbors.
Missional theology arose in the second half of the 20th century, as signs of Christianity’s fall from its place of privilege in Western culture began to show. Mission, derived from the Latin for “sending,” had long been interpreted as an activity the church undertook, sending specialists (missionaries) to proselytize far-off people in order to make new Christians.

Over the course of the 20th century, the theology of mission underwent a revolution. Theologians like Lesslie Newbigin began to argue that mission is not an auxiliary church program. Instead, mission originates as “an action of God...who is ceaselessly at work in all creation”; the church exists as an instrument of God’s mission, called to bless and care for the world. As missiologist David Bosch put it, “There is church because there is mission, not vice versa. To participate in mission is to participate in the movement of God’s love toward people, since God is a fountain of sending love.”

Newbigin’s work was carried forward in North America by groups like the Gospel and Our Culture Network (GOCN), which in 1998 produced *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America*, edited by David Guder. This book marked the first use of the word “missional,” and its approach to missional theology continues to have widespread influence.

The shift towards missional theology began with a recognition of the primacy of God’s mission. Stephanie Spellers (2010) describes this mission and its ultimate end:

> God is the one who created all that is, cares for that creation like a parent for her children, and will do anything in order to heal and restore her creation and draw all people back into relationship with herself. This dream of restoration, liberation, justice, peace, wholeness, and flourishing—a wondrous, comprehensive vision captured in the Hebrew word *shalom*—is God’s mission.

The church is called to continue Jesus’s proclamation of the good news that “the kingdom of God has come near” (Mark 1:15). This kingdom is paradoxically “already-but-not-yet”; though the world is not yet fully set right, God’s reign of shalom can still be inhabited and glimpsed here and now. In George Hunsberger’s words, the church is sent to be a “sign and foretaste” of that reign, offering a glimpse of what God is doing and will do in the world, as well as an “agent and instrument,” acting in the world to bear the kingdom’s blessing.

For most congregations, living fully into this calling to be sign and agent of God’s reign would be a profound
shift. Edward Prebble names several characteristics found in missional churches: “concrete acts of solidarity and accompaniment,” listening to the local neighborhood or community, “cultivating a welcoming, inclusive community of transformed relationships,” focusing more on supporting people’s spiritual growth than on their participation in congregational life, and embracing “daily offices, observance of feast and fast days, rituals and liturgical vestments.”

The implications of missional theology are profound. The church goes from initiating mission work to receiving an invitation to join God’s work already taking place. Instead of happening only in distant lands, missional theologians see God’s mission as happening everywhere, at all times; all Christians are sent out in mission in their everyday lives. Because the church stands in as much need of God’s transforming presence as the rest of the world, mission work with others is a “two-way encounter,” a mutually transformative dialogue in which the “preunderstandings, prejudices, and plausibility structures of both parties become manifest.” The church is not synonymous with the gospel or the kingdom, and so must be humble and self-inquiring. Finally, in Bosch’s formulation, the church is not “a place where certain things happen” but “a body of people sent on a mission.” The emphasis is not on recruiting new members to join the club and come to the building, but rather on daily entering more deeply into God’s reign so as to allow others to experience it too.
Socially Engaged Art

Socially engaged art (SEA), also known as participatory art or social practice, seeks to create a process by which artists and participants can directly respond to social issues and impact the social environment. Often, SEA practices occur outside the institutional art world, in cross-disciplinary collaborations embedded within communities.

Rather than an individual artist producing objects or performances for viewers or audiences, a socially engaged artist might facilitate a process or create a space in which people collaborate on a project, event, or intervention. SEA pushes art past representation and into direct engagement in the world, a move captured by socially engaged artist Tania Bruguera: “I don’t want an art that points at a thing, I want an art that is the thing.” In short, SEA focuses on what art can do rather than what it can say.

Several examples of socially engaged art practices are included on this and the following pages.

Ritual Meals

Seitu Jones organized CREATE: The Community Meal (pictured right), which convened 2000 people at a half-mile-long table for a ritual meal, as part of ongoing food justice work with residents of a disinvested neighborhood in St. Paul.
**Restoration**

This is a photo of an installation by The Nap Ministry, which was founded by Tricia Hersey, a performance artist and divinity school graduate. Drawing on Black liberation theology, The Nap Ministry creates installations, performance art, and participatory art experiences designed to encourage rest, particularly for Black people and other marginalized groups.

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**Creation Care**

The World Garden Commons is part of the Fargo Project in Fargo, North Dakota. This project works with artists and local residents to turn stormwater basins into usable spaces that are both environmentally sound and beautiful spaces for building community, through a participatory community planning process.
**Neighborhood Wellbeing**

Project Row Houses is an art practice that has helped restore the built and social environment of Houston’s Third Ward. In the 1990s, artists purchased and restored historic shotgun houses, helping preserve the neighborhood’s cultural legacy. The houses host artist residencies, a program for single mothers, and art installations and cultural events for the community.

**Ending Violence**

Pedro Reyes created *Palas por Pistolas*, a project that held a gun exchange for community members in Culiacán, Mexico. The guns were publicly steamrolled, melted down, and recast into shovels. The shovels were then distributed to local institutions and schools and used by adults and children for tree planting events.
Caring for Prisoners

In 2008, artist Laurie Jo Reynolds organized *Tamms Year Ten*, which engaged incarcerated people, their families, and community members in a campaign to close Illinois’ Tamms supermax prison, which held prisoners in permanent solitary confinement. The campaign began when Reynolds organized volunteers to write to inmates and ask what they would like a photograph of. The photographs were taken and mailed back. In 2013, the prison was closed.

Spaces of Connection

For *Sanctum*, Theaster Gates organized the construction of a temporary space in Bristol, England, made of reclaimed local materials and built within the bombed ruins of Temple Church. Over 800 local musicians and performers participated in a continuous performance, 24 hours a day for 24 days, creating space for the community to reflect on its past, present, and future and for unlikely relationships to begin.
The purposes of this study were
- to learn different ways that socially engaged art is practiced in the Episcopal Church and other mainline denominations
- to explore the impacts of these practices on the congregations and the communities that they were serving
- to provide recommendations and resources for future socially engaged art ministry.

I conducted a case study of three congregations with arts programs that are oriented towards social issues and social connections:
- Semilla Center for Healing and the Arts, Minneapolis, MN
- Faith, Justice & the Arts, Indianapolis, IN
- Creators' Table, Spokane, WA

While none of them described what they did as “socially engaged art,” it’s a slippery term, so rather than trying to define it very narrowly, I looked for churches whose art programs had a goal beyond producing art objects or performances, where the art was intended for some kind of social change or community-building.

My findings are based on an analysis of interviews with leaders and participants, documents and other materials, and my own notes.

This section of the report will provide an overview of each case site along with the results I observed.
Semilla Center for Healing and the Arts was founded out of St. Paul’s Lutheran Church by Patrick and Luisa Cabello Hansel, two married Lutheran pastors who are also both artists. Semilla is located in Minneapolis’s Phillips neighborhood, the most diverse and the second poorest in the city.

St Paul’s is a historic church, founded in 1887 by Swedish immigrants, and over time, as the neighborhood changed around it, the parish found itself more disconnected with its neighbors. Semilla began out of the work the congregation did to reconnect with their neighborhood.

As St. Paul’s leaders began knocking on doors and talking with neighbors, they heard a common desire for more beauty and nature in the neighborhood, and so began to install murals, mosaics, and planters.

Since its founding, Semilla’s mosaic program has trained over 3200 people in mosaic art and produced dozens of murals and other public mosaic works, like those pictured to the right.

Overview
- Active since 2006
- Partner with St. Paul’s Lutheran Church
- Located in Phillips Neighborhood of Minneapolis
- Mission: "to energize youth and adults to use their creativity to build a healthier, safer and more beautiful community"

Their literary journal, *The Phoenix of Phillips* (bottom left), features poetry, reflections, and photography content from community members, often produced as a result of writing workshops they hold in schools and senior centers. Through their youth leadership and empowerment program, local young people build skills through planning and completing community projects (top).

And they are continually finding new ways of building community and supporting their neighbors’ wellbeing through creative expression. They do this through projects like constructing peace lanterns or *La Natividad* (bottom right).

A collaboration with local arts organization In the Heart of the Beast Puppet and Mask Theatre, *La Natividad* is a neighborhood-based Posada, a moving prayer service practiced throughout the Spanish-speaking world, reenacting Joseph and Mary’s search for shelter before Jesus’ birth.

Patrick and Luisa retired in 2020, and Semilla’s board and new Executive Director, local artist Bart Buch, are working to incorporate as a separate 501(c)(3). St. Paul’s and Semilla are moving towards working as more of a partnership and navigating how that relationship will work.
Impacts

Community

- **Neighborhood pride & beauty**: The many public artworks Semilla has co-created with residents have generated positive media attention and provide a sense of connection to place.
- **Youth leadership development**: The neighborhood will continue to benefit from nurturing a new generation of leaders who are motivated and skilled in building flourishing communities.
- **Relationship-building**: Through their events, literary journal, and other relational work, Semilla continues to provide venues for residents to share their stories and their values with one another, and to connect more deeply with their neighbors.

Congregation

- **Congregational demographics**: Since beginning Semilla’s work, St. Paul’s has shifted from majority white to majority Latino, better reflecting its neighborhood.
- **Community engagement**: St. Paul’s is now more connected to community and able to engage its neighbors in culturally relevant ways.
- **Missional shift**: Although the congregation still largely operates within a traditional institutional mindset, members are more committed to the call to participate in God’s restorative work in Phillips.

Participants

- **Artistic training**: Thousands of people have learned how to create mosaic art, murals, and other creative practices.
- **Expanded sense of one's capabilities**: Participants who did not consider themselves artistic noted that, through making art, they realized they could learn and do more than they thought.
- **Healing and peace**: Participants also reported that making art was personally restorative.
- **Leadership**: Youth involved in Semilla’s programs learned how to lead and create positive community change, gaining confidence self-efficacy, and power.
Faith, Justice and the Arts (FJA) is an initiative of St. Paul’s Episcopal Church in Indianapolis. St. Paul’s is a large, endowed parish founded in 1866. While its size and financial stability have largely insulated it from post-Christendom anxieties, rector John Denson recognizes the importance of proactive innovation and has started several experimental programs to help spur adaptive change in the congregation, including FJA. The initiative came out of a desire to address systemic injustice through the lens of faith, using the arts to draw people into a common experience that would promote conversation, reflection, and shifts in perspective.

FJA launched in 2017 by sponsoring a concert of music from the countries that were part of the travel ban (really the Muslim ban) instituted by the Trump administration. St. Paul’s partnered with a local arts organization to put on the event, the proceeds from which were donated to two local organizations that serve refugees and immigrants.

The next year, FJA worked with photographer Joe Quint to produce *It Takes Us*, an exhibition of photographs of people impacted by gun violence in the Indianapolis community. The exhibit toured six locations around Indianapolis, holding community conversations and hosting local organizations working to end gun violence. The exhibit was intended as a space for people to get beyond partisan impasse and have a conversation about gun violence rooted in a recognition of the humanity of those affected by it.

**Overview**

- Public launch in June 2017
- Initiative of St. Paul’s Episcopal Church, Indianapolis
- Mission: “Faith, Justice and the Arts uses diverse artistic collaborations to awaken, inspire and empower communities to strive for justice and peace among all peoples.”
These first two projects required much more time and funding than FJA anticipated, and in 2019, the initiative decided to try out making artist grants instead. The first recipients of these grants were Matthew Richardson, a dancer and videographer, and Kyle Ragsdale, a local visual artist. Both projects addressed themes of racism, intolerance, and racial reconciliation through videos and paintings, and provided the congregation with a way to discuss and reflect theologically on these issues.

Impacts

Community

- **Awareness of social issues and how to take action**: The gun violence exhibit in particular gave individuals and local churches a common understanding of the issue and connected them with existing efforts to address it.
- **New conversations & perspectives on social issues**: FJA projects have provided space for constructive dialogue and openness to consider new viewpoints on highly conflictual issues.
- **Art that testifies to the dignity of every human being**: FJA projects seek to expose dehumanizing systems and to challenge the vilification of the "Other."

Congregation

- **Capacity for adaptive change**: By creating this new program, St. Paul's has had to become comfortable with uncertainty, experimentation, iteration, and noticing what's emerging.
- **Connecting faith and justice**: The congregation is more willing to discuss issues that in the past they might have deemed too "political" and reflect theologically on them.
- **Shift from charity to justice**: FJA emerged out of a desire to work alongside the community in addressing root causes of suffering, rather than from a unidirectional service model.

Participants

- **Internal work**: Project leaders and artists have observed viewers engaging in the inner work described in the community impacts box above.
- **Working in the arts and with artists**: FJA leaders are learning how to work with and support artists, and how to initiate arts projects.
- **Theological reflection on art and justice**: FJA leaders have had to discuss and wrestle with how their faith is expressed in the artwork and justice work they support.
Creators' Table

Creators’ Table is the worshiping body of West Central Abbey, a missional community in the West Central neighborhood of Spokane, Washington. It began regular worship in the fall of 2018. Creators’ Table’s founders and co-pastors are Katy Shedlock, a Methodist pastor and poet, and Jonathan Myers, an Episcopal priest and visual artist. This unique arrangement is in keeping with Creators’ Table’s innovative, experimental approach to ministry. Unlike the other case sites, West Central Abbey is not a traditional parish. Missional theology, experimentation, and appealing to people not engaged by the institutional church are part of its DNA.

Creators’ Table sees creativity as a spiritual practice, incorporating creativity and participatory art into its worship in forms like spoken word poetry, storytelling, installations, and drama. They invite worshipers to participate in liturgy planning, and describe their worship as “a collective art project seeking to reconstruct the world in the image of grace.” While several worshipers are professional or amateur artists, Creators’ Table encourages everyone to recognize and express their innate creativity.

Overview

- Started regular worship in Fall 2018
- Worshipping community of West Central Abbey
- West Central Neighborhood, Spokane
- Mission: "to make meaning of God’s stories, make beautiful our lives, and make sacred our world."

Creators’ Table. Worship service. Spokane, 2019. Photo Credit: Creators’ Table.
Drawing on authentic, confessional practices like spoken word poetry and Moth-style storytelling, Creators’ Table invites worshipers to write and share their stories during worship, often in response to a theme from that day’s scripture readings or the liturgical season. They have sponsored workshops and talks from artists, as well as hosting art exhibits like *Prayer Hands*, which featured artworks that engaged with spiritual themes or were inspired by Christian artist Corita Kent.

Many Creators’ Table worshipers have been harmed by churches in the past and were surprised to find a church where they felt accepted, safe, and free. Its commitment to justice and inclusion, along with its encouragement of self-expression and experimentation, allow Creators’ Table to be a space of healing for many. As it evolves, Creators’ Table leaders hope to more deeply integrate it into West Central’s other ministries, which include community organizing, a feeding ministry, and a community garden.
Impacts

- **Connecting with other ministries**: Creators' Table worshipers have started to participate in West Central Abbey's justice and service work in the neighborhood.
- **Story as advocacy**: Creators' Table builds storytelling skills, an essential component of relational community organizing and advocacy; West Central residents have shared their experiences in justice campaigns and within worship.

- **Highly participatory**: Institutional churches tend to treat clergy as spiritual "experts" and often struggle for laypeople's full participation; Creators' Table largely avoids this dynamic.
- **Highly flexible and fluid**: Creators' Table worshipers are much more comfortable with change and trying new things, as compared with institutional churches.
- **Problem-solving and innovating**: The practice of creativity allows Creators' Table to be resourceful, to find novel ways of solving problems, and to break from institutional assumptions.
- **Unfiltered and authentic**: Worshipers feel free to share their real experiences in their own words, even in ways that might feel irreverent or improper at an institutional church.

- **An unexpected kind of church**: People unfamiliar with or harmed by churches have found freedom and belonging; "I never knew church could be like this" is a common refrain.
- **The power of stories**: Through sharing their personal story, worshipers make sense of their experience and recognize God's presence within it, and they build authentic relationships.
- **Creativity as a spiritual practice**: Creators' Table invites and equips people to incorporate creativity into their lives and their relationship with God.

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Analysis

Shared Purposes
There were three purposes that all the case sites shared, to varying degrees:

Faith
The programs are all faith-based, but they have different ways of understanding its role in their work.
- Semilla sees its work with the community as a missional act by which the church participates in God’s work of healing and restoration, regardless of whether the artwork is overtly religious.
- FJA intends the artwork it sponsors to convey a message and address social issues from a Christian perspective. Leaders are still wrestling with how to evaluate the faith content of their projects.
- Creators’ Table’s art is embedded in the context of worship and spirituality, intended to connect participants to God and each other.

Art
The sites’ approaches to art-making have different resonances with contemporary art theory and practice.
- Semilla’s work includes elements of public art, community arts, art-based pedagogy, and creative place-making.
- FJA has sponsored more traditional art objects and performances, often incorporating artistic activism into them.
- Creators’ Table’s influences include spoken word poetry, installation art, and performance art.

Justice
Each site also wanted to work with their community to respond to injustice and human need.
- Semilla works with its neighbors to create a flourishing community where people feel connected, safe, and fulfilled. Their work builds social capital and leadership capacity.
- FJA’s projects directly address issues of injustice, oppression, and suffering, with an emphasis on facilitating inner and interpersonal work.
- Creators’ Table is working to integrate its work with West Central Abbey’s justice ministries, recognizing the connection between worship, mission, and creative expression.
Shared Challenges

Integrating into Congregational Life
Each site noted the challenge of positioning their arts program as an integral part of congregational life.

- Semilla challenged many assumptions that St. Paul’s members held about the nature of the church and its mission, and some leaders disagreed on the centrality and priority of Semilla’s work. Semilla and St. Paul’s relationship is becoming more of a partnership between two entities with a shared history and purpose. This more traditional arrangement will allow Semilla’s work and connection to St. Paul’s to continue, but it potentially alleviates some productive tension around adaptive, missional change.
- FJA is considering how it can be "owned" by the congregation as a whole, as opposed to being seen as one small, specialized ministry among many.
- Creators’ Table leaders want to deepen the connection of their creativity and justice work, and to ensure that creativity is a guiding, embodied value for everyone, not relegated to "the artists."

Navigating Uncertainty
The sites are all dealing with some degree of uncertainty about what is emerging.

- FJA and Creators’ Table are newer programs; they are still evolving and figuring out their core work.
- Semilla is navigating the post-founders transition and a new relationship with St. Paul’s.

COVID-19
All of the sites were impacted by the pandemic and had to adapt their work.

- Semilla created take-home art kits for community members and later held outdoor workshops.
- FJA’s artist grant projects had to forgo their community engagement components and created short films that could be shared digitally.
- Creators’ Table worship moved to Zoom and later to outdoor services, and although leaders anticipate they will need to rebuild relationships with worshipers and neighbors, their creativity and flexibility made it easier to adapt and deal with uncertainty.

Life Cycle & Size Dynamics
Many of the challenges facing the programs are not about the arts work itself, but are typical challenges in churches of a similar size or developmental stage.

- St. Paul’s Lutheran is a smaller parish that feels the effects of post-Christendom culture change more acutely, so its work with Semilla requires confronting anxieties about decline and scarcity.
- St. Paul’s Episcopal, on the other hand, is a large endowed parish and must create a sense of urgency for adaptive change through programs like FJA.
- Creators’ Table is an emerging worshiping body focused on the hard work of establishing financial sustainability, building relationships and norms, and avoiding leader burnout.
Key Questions

Working without a set framework and experimenting with new forms of ministry means leaders and participants are wrestling with difficult questions, such as:

- How do we measure, document, and evaluate our impact?
- What is the church’s core purpose? What is essential work, and what is extraneous?
- How do we work with artists in ways that honor each party’s gifts, knowledge, and values?
- How can art be of value to people who are struggling to meet their basic needs?
Promising Practices

Each site had particular strengths and effective methods for living out their mission. These practices are described below and organized under the shared purposes of faith, art, and justice.

**Faith**

Art-making and creativity integrated into congregational life. For Creators’ Table, art that is participatory, co-created, and immersive enriches worship and formation, encouraging shared leadership and deeper engagement. Their core value of creativity helps them imagine new ways of being the church and adapt to changing circumstances.

Missional approach to art-making. Semilla recognizes art can enact healing and liberation, build community, and point to a restored creation. Through working with Semilla, St. Paul’s initiates missional art by focusing on process and outcomes rather than form and content (i.e. what art can do rather than what it can say).

**Art**

Addressing social issues and social possibilities. All three sites have artistic practices that directly address suffering and injustice, create spaces of wellbeing and wholeness, and/or shape people’s lived experience and their imagination.

Participatory and co-created. Semilla works with their community rather than for it, honoring community members’ agency, voice, and expertise. People are more invested in what they help to create, and are more likely to experience growth and transformation through the process.

Grounded in place, experience, and culture. Semilla’s work is enculturated and rooted in its neighborhood, and Creators’ Table makes space for people to express their lived experience and their authentic selves.

**Justice**

Aimed at root causes. Rather than only treating the symptoms of injustice, FJA works to expose and address the systemic causes of suffering and oppression.

Built on mutuality and trust. All three sites recognize the importance of building relationships, sharing leadership, partnering with those who have a shared vision, and participating in existing justice work.

Attending to inner work. FJA seeks to impact not only the external conditions of society, but to spark inner transformation and growth. Its projects encourage people to question their preconceptions, deepen their compassion, and put their values and beliefs into practice.
Conclusions

1. Socially engaged art has enabled adaptive change in the congregations that practice it.
   They have built new behaviors, skills, connections, and attitudes that are better adapted to their context, at both the local and societal level.

2. None of the programs has embedded itself equally in both congregational life and work with community, or explored the full range of SEA practices.
   Each site wants to be more integrated into either the congregation or the community. To do so, they can draw upon a wide variety of SEA practices, which can also inspire future projects.

3. SEA does not single-handedly negate contextual challenges.
   The dynamics of church size and parish life cycle showed up in the sites in predictable ways. SEA does not remove these dynamics, but it can be a way to manage them.
1. **Treat this work as an emerging field of practice.**

   SEA art ministry is a distinct practice that operates differently than traditional faith and arts programming, and it is at an early stage of development. Like emerging church ministry in general, it should be supported with theological study, dedicated funding, and opportunities for practitioners to learn from each other.

2. **Integrate faith, community work, and art.**

   In the future, programs should experiment with SEA practices that work on multiple levels. Secular SEA aims to be art and social intervention simultaneously. In theory, it's also possible for a practice to be at once art, social intervention, and missional act.

3. **Learn from SEA already happening.**

   The church too often operates in intellectual and artistic silos. Instead, it should engage with art theory and the practices of socially engaged artists, alert to how God is already present and at work through them. Re-enchantment, spirituality, ritual, and healing are recurring themes in contemporary art, and the Episcopal Church is equipped—and I believe called—to practice and participate in that kind of art.
Acknowledgements

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8. As cited in Hunsberger, The Story That Chooses Us, p. 34.

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