

Information for Spring Pastor's Study

Bio statement for Resource Person:

Rebecca Barrett-Fox is assistant professor of sociology at Arkansas State, though thanks to the miracle of telecommuting, she lives in the Wasatch Mountains in northeastern Utah with her husband Jason (Bethel '01), a professor of rhetoric and writing, and their three school-aged children.

A native of rural Lancaster County, Rebecca grew up heavily influenced by evangelical Christianity and Pentecostalism but was drawn to the peace witness of the Mennonite church and the kindness of Mennonite elders in her community. After earning her undergraduate degree at Juniata College, she attended the University of Kansas to pursue a PhD in American studies, where her faith was deepened at Peace Mennonite Church in Lawrence. After graduation she taught sociology, history, and anthropology at Hesston College and Bethel College and was a member of New Creation Mennonite Fellowship. She has been fortunate to have been pastored by some of the most generous and insightful pastors in MCUSA.

Rebecca's scholarship focuses on religion, hate, sexuality, gender, race, class, and rightwing social movements ranging from conservative politics to terrorism. She is the author of *God Hates: Westboro Baptist Church, American Nationalism, and the Religious Right* (University Press of Kansas 2016), an ethnographic study based on years of research with America's most infamous anti-gay church. She recently served as guest editor of the *Journal of Hate Studies*. She is currently a features editor for the Religious Studies Project, a digital endeavor that produces podcasts about religious scholarship, and a board member of Reading Religion, a book review website. Her scholarly writing has appeared in *Contention*, *Humanity & Society*, *Journal of Religion and Popular Culture*, *Radical Teacher*, the NEA's *Thought & Action*, and elsewhere. You can find links to her scholarly writing at AnyGoodThing.com, and those interested in her commentary on current events can find her blogging at Sixoh6, "a (mostly) Mennonite" take on politics, culture, and family.

Seminar Title: Unsustainable: Why Churches Must Counter Hate and How They Can Do It Now

Seminar Abstract: "There is no power out of the church," 19th century theologian and minister Albert Barnes wrote to white ante-bellum America, "that could sustain slavery an hour, if it were not sustained in it." Though Christian abolitionists were instrumental in fighting slavery, it was ended through warfare, and the American church missed its calling to enact Jesus's radical call to peace, justice, and love. Likewise, today, privileged Christians deny their mandate and their power to address hate and oppression. In this seminar, we will examine historical and sociological data to understand hate in the US and the role that churches play in promulgating or countering it. Praying, meditating, and reading Scriptures together, we will trust the Spirit to help us see how we can make hate unsustainable today.

Tentative Schedule

Session 1: The State of American Churches

Abstract: Many Christians are concerned about the apparent decline of church participation, religious belief, and influence of Christianity in public life, and some Anabaptist groups share this concern. In this session, we will examine the demographic changes that give rise to those fears and consider what changes in the contemporary American church tell us about the needs of our communities.

Sources: Mark Chaves' [American Religion: Contemporary Trends](#), Robert P. Jones' [Then End of White Christian America](#)

Guiding scripture: [John 21:1-17](#) & [2 Chronicles 7:14](#)

Central point: Americans have never been as faithful as we claimed, but we can be faithful now.

Preparatory prayer: God, make our hearts tender to the needs before us. Help us join with Jesus in solidarity with the vulnerable. Give us joy in pursuing the good of our neighbor and rid us of the temptation of self-satisfaction. Let the Spirit open our eyes to the needs we are called to meet, and provide us with the creativity and boldness to meet them. Help us not to be discouraged but to be renewed by your love for your world.

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Session 2: American Hate: A History and a Sociological Snapshot

Abstract: In this session, we will learn the history of hate in America; define terms like “hate,” “hate groups,” and “hate speech” and discuss opposition to these definitions, particularly from religious conservatives; discuss whether hate is an anomaly or foundational to our society; consider how forms of hate and oppression interlock; and review the current state of hate activity in the US.

Sources: Southern Poverty Law Center [Hate Map](#), Humboldt State University's [Geography of Hate](#)

Guiding scripture: [John 20:21-29](#) & [Micah 6:8](#)

Central Point: American Christians have too often been complicit in hate.

Preparatory prayer: God, open our ears to hard-to-hear stories. Open our hearts to the suffering of others. Open our consciences to our complicity in injustice. Open our hands to do your work. Thank you for the clarity of Jesus' demand that we love and care for each other. We trust the Spirit to comfort us and to teach us to comfort each other.

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Session 3: The Uses of Hate

Abstract: In this session, we will focus our attention to the story of the Levite concubine introduced in Judges 19. We will read her body—as a victim of domestic violence, as a sacrifice to masculine honor and a defense against masculine shame, as a rape victim, as a call to arms—to understand how the protection of female purity is used to justify hate and political violence.

Guiding scripture: [Judges 19-21](#)

Sources: [Tough on Hate? The Cultural Politics of Hate Crime](#) by Clara S. Lewis, *Birth of a Nation*, art about the Emmett Till murder

Central Point: Hate functions to justify violence in defense of patriarchy and nationalism.

Preparatory prayer: God, give us unending love for victims of violence. Give us courage to protect the vulnerable, boldness to seek justice for victims, endurance to bear witness to their pain, hearts to hold them, mouths to amplify their voices, and hope that allows us to hold those who hate accountable for their actions.

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Session 4: Why Addressing Hate is Central to the Church’s Survival—But Why We Don’t Do IT

Abstract: Nineteenth century theologian and Presbyterian pastor Albert Barnes argued that slavery couldn’t exist without the support of the church—and that if the church opposed slavery, the institution would be unable to survive. Today, hate in America thrives because churches support it, either actively or through inaction against it. In this session, we will examine how churches benefit from hate and why they fear resisting it. We will also consider why churches must address hate in order to serve the communities before them.

Sources: “[On the Anti-Gospel of Alt-Right White Supremacy](#),” *The Emerging Church, Millennials and Religion: Prospects and Definitions, Vol. 1*; the [Dallas Statement](#), [Believe Me: The Evangelical Road to Donald Trump](#) by John Fea, “[A King Cyrus President: How Donald Trump’s Presidency Reasserts Conservative Christians’ Right to Hegemony](#)”

Guiding scripture: [Judges 9:7-21](#) & [Matthew 25:33-40](#)

Central Point: Churches that do not address hate are not meeting the need of their communities and so are thus useless to God. Just as trees that do not bear fruit are cut down, so, too, are churches that fail to address hate unsustainable.

Preparatory prayer: God, make our hearts tender to the needs before us. Help us join with Jesus in solidarity with the vulnerable. Give us joy in pursuing the good of our neighbor and rid us of the temptation of self-satisfaction. Let the Spirit open our eyes to the needs we are called to meet, and provide us with the creativity and boldness to meet them. Help us not to be discouraged but to be renewed by your love for your world.

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Session 5: Re-reading the Samaritan Story

Abstract: The story of the Good Samaritan illustrates Jesus' radical call to love people across lines of difference—even those we have been told are our enemies. When we read this story, we often imagine that we are the Good Samaritan, the one making the right and brave choice to care for someone we've been told to hate. In this session, we will seek new insight into this story by imagining it from the perspectives of other characters: the priest, the Levite, the Jew, the innkeeper, and Jesus as the storyteller and the lawyer who asks Jesus the question that prompts the parable.

Guiding scripture: [Luke 10:25-37](#) & [Leviticus 19:33-34](#)

Central Point: Each of us has a role to play in combatting hate.

Preparatory prayer: God, thank you for the models of compassion and courage that Scripture provides. Help us follow Jesus' model of obedience to your call to love, and help us hear the Spirit when it calls us away from enmification toward generosity.

Session 6: Who is My Enemy?

Abstract: This session will provide an overview of theories of hate from psychology, sociology, anthropology, and biology to understand why people so often—so often as to consider it “natural”—turn others into enemies. We will also consider what theology and our faith says about this process. Finally, we will consider how we can flip the term “de-humanization” to mean not a process of speaking and thinking about our enemies as sub-human or non-human but as a process of making our enemy something other than “flesh and blood” and seeing the structures that lock everyone into a system of oppression that injures everyone involved in it.

Guiding Scripture: Galatians 6:10-11 & [Jonah 4:1-11](#)

Central Point: A focus on structures, rather than individuals, can help us see our real enemies: not people, but “powers and principalities”—not supernatural forces but structures and social forces that we've come to assume as natural rather than sinful.

Preparatory prayer: God, give us an excess of love to share with those who would do evil against people created in your image; connect us to the source of love, because we probably won't have enough on our own. Thank you for the way that the Spirit will carry each other in this journey of reconciliation and also give us rest when we need it. Thank you for Jesus' example of a reconciling ministry, for his creativity, courage, and kindness in addressing oppression, and for his victory over violence.

Session 7: But What About Hate in the Bible?

Abstract: In this session, we will make sense of hate in the Bible by using the concepts we have discussed so far in relationship to Scripture.

Guiding scripture: Participants will select a scripture to work through individually in this workshop.

Central Point: When we read the Bible with a heart for those who have been harmed by hurt, we may gain new insights into Scriptures.

Preparatory prayer: God, thank you for the gift of community to discern together and for the Spirit's push to greater insights. Help us read together with more care for the vulnerable in our stories. Guide us toward those who yearn to hear the good news of the faith you've given to us and give us the words they need to hear. May our words about our faith always align with Jesus' model of it and our practice of it.

