



# We Will Continue to Save Ourselves Until Others Show Up

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I spent last night, like many other nights over the last number of years, ministering with a loved one who had experienced an overdose, communing with other cherished ones who had loved this person back to life. I spent last night holding space in the presence of kindness, compassion, selfless love, showing up and sticking around even when it was really scary and heartbreaking. We show up over and over, no questions asked. We show up because our lives and loves are sacred.

[Trauma, stigma, criminalization, and dehumanization is what is killing our beloved. 72,000 beloved people died last year of drug overdose](#), and early data suggests that we will see an even more staggering loss of life in 2020. [The overdose crisis is growing in intensity, fueled by COVID-19](#), revealing a shared root system of trauma, social isolation, stigma, and other structural barriers. Not surprisingly, [Black people continue to suffer a disproportionate burden of overdose fatalities due to systemic racism](#).

Opioid overdose fatalities are largely preventable and the factor which consistently predicts the highest probability of survival is the presence of another person who can administer compassionate care, [including rescue breathing and naloxone](#). Congregations of healing shepherded by spiritual leaders - people with lived experience of drug use and overdose and their loved ones - have long been convening in the many margins of our society. Challenged to find spiritual community which calls us by name and welcomes us fully, we have grown our own community, often among the shadows, finding creative ways to stretch limbs to the light, to stimulate growth, to keep hope and one another alive.

Like most congregations, we have been a valuable source of mutual aid, ensuring that all among us have what we need to live with dignity, safety, and a sense of connection. Barriers to access to naloxone and other life-giving, life-saving supplies, such as sterile syringes and fentanyl test strips, have necessitated our utmost resourcefulness and creativity; our most reliable resource has always been

one another. Ours, a ministry of faithful resistance, of presence.

My presence in these congregations is not one I take for granted. I am clear that I have been ordained by this community, by my God, to participate in this beautiful ministry of showing up with and for people who use drugs. I am a person with lived experience of opioid/substance use disorder and overdose.

I am also an artist, the mother of a magical seven-year old girl, a minister in discernment with the United Church of Christ, and a ministry innovator at a fabulous church in New York City. In short, I am a ministry professional notwithstanding my lived experience, but precisely because of my lived experience.

In listening to folks last night, it became ever clear it is not law enforcement that will save us. It is not public health that will save us. It is not even naloxone that will save us.

It is the community which will save us. Connection will save us. Hope and opportunity will save us. Being heard, being seen, being loved, without judgment, will save us. Being embraced for our full humanity will save us. People who use drugs will save us. People who have experienced overdose will save us. People who use drugs and people who have experienced overdose have long been saving us, and one another.

**We will keep saving us until others show up.**

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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