

## **Earthkeeping Summit 2016 Biographies of Speakers and Facilitators**

### **Dr. Melanie L. Harris—Keynote Speaker and Workshop Facilitator**

**Keynote: There is a Balm...Ecojustice, Hope, and Renewal**

**Workshop: Climate Change and Working as Allies with Communities of Color**

Melanie L. Harris is Associate Professor of Religion at Texas Christian University in Fort Worth, TX where she teaches and conducts research in the areas of Religious Social Ethics, African American Religion and Environmental Justice. She has served as an associate minister in congregations including Shorter Community A.M.E Church in Denver, Colorado, First Bethel A.M.E Church in Harlem, New York and Riverside Church in the city of New York. Dr. Harris is a GreenFaith Fellow and co-director of Earth Honoring Faith with Ghost Ranch Education and Conference Center. She regularly conducts workshops with Dr. Jennifer Harvey about racial justice, womanist ethics and environmental justice and has presented to audiences in the AME, United Church of Christ, and Baptist church traditions. As the Black Church Studies Environmental Justice Scholar in Residence with Green Faith she has partnered with such organizations as Green For All and teaches with the Samuel DeWitt Proctor Conference. Dr. Harris has served on the Board of Directors of the American Academy of Religion, and the Society of Christian Ethics. She is currently a member of the Board of Directors of KERA-TV/Radio in Dallas and facilitates contemplative retreats as a licensed Spiritual Director. Dr. Harris is the author of *Gifts of Virtue: Alice Walker and Womanist Ethics* (Palgrave) and co-editor of the volume *Faith, Feminism, and Scholarship: The Next Generation* (Palgrave) and editor of *Ecowomanism: Earth Honoring Faiths* (Brill).

### **Mark A. McClain—Panelist | Environmental Justice Stories from Around Ohio: Environmental Justice in Disadvantaged Urban Communities**

Mark A. McClain received his BA degree in sociology from Harvard College and his law degree from Columbia University School of Law. He spent 20 years in the law profession serving in various capacities, including Chief Prosecutor of the cities of Cleveland and East Cleveland, assistant U.S. attorney, judge, civil rights and defense attorney. In 2006 he was called to the ministry in the Primitive Baptist Church. He continued to advocate for social justice issues in the Cleveland area and environmental and health issues statewide as past chairman of Ohio Alliance of People for Environment and co-chaired an initiative to educate and mobilize the residents of five Cleveland inner city communities on environmental and health issues. He continues his advocacy on behalf of the least of us on social justice and health issues and now serves as a Community Ambassador for HIP-Cuyahoga, a health partnership between county government and Case Western Reserve University. He is presently planting a church named The Growing Church, A Christian Experience, in Cleveland.

### **Rebecca Mellino—Panelist | Environmental Justice Stories from Around Ohio: Climate Outreach and Public Health**

Rebecca Mellino graduated from Ohio State University with degrees in Environment, Economy, Development and Sustainability, and Political Science. She worked for Mayor Coleman's Office of Environmental Stewardship where she completed the City of Columbus's application to the STAR (Sustainability Tools for Assessing and rating communities) community rating system which resulted in a 4 (out of 5) Star certification. She is now working in Columbus Public Health's Office of Environmental Protection and Sustainability where she is starting a climate change outreach project focused on education with African American and Latino faith congregations in Columbus, OH."

**Sister Christine Pratt—Panelist | Environmental Justice Stories from Around Ohio: Justice for Land and People**

Sister Christine Pratt received her Master's Degree in Rural Sociology with a concentration in Community Development from the Ohio State University. She was Rural Life Director for 25 years in the Diocese of Toledo. She gave many workshops and presentations around the country on Catholic Social Teaching as it relates to food, agriculture, land use, the environment and other rural concerns. She served on the United States Catholic Conference of Bishops' committee on Food, Hunger and Land Issues. She also served as a member of the Executive Committee of the National Catholic Rural Life Board of Directors. She also served as a non-traditional partner for The Ohio State University's Vice-President's Committee for the College of Food, Agriculture and Environmental Science. Sr Christine also represented the religious (church's) voice on then Governor Ted Strickland's Food Policy Task Force. During her time in Toledo she was the lead agent in the formation of Toledo GROWS (Gardens Revitalize Our World), an urban garden project that has since expanded to now include both an education center and expanded programs within the low income neighborhoods of Toledo. She continues to serve the rural community wherever possible and is presently engaged in various groups addressing environmental and land issues. Her religious community, the Ursulines of Brown County placed their farmland in conservation easement in 2010 and their Solomon Run stream, a sub tributary of the Little Miami River, became a reclamation project restoring the original stream and wetlands in 2015.

**Elissa Yoder Mann—Panelist | Environmental Justice Stories from Around Ohio: Water and Impact on Vulnerable Communities**

Elissa Yoder Mann works as a Conservation Coordinator on the Clean Water Campaign for Central Ohio. She works at raising community awareness about Ohio waterways and increasing public participation in both policy and service activism. She earned her Bachelor of Science in Rangeland Ecology from Colorado State University. While in Colorado she worked in an environmental laboratory conducting water analysis and at an engineering firm. She received her Master of Environmental and Natural Resources from Ohio State University. Her thesis work focused on developing a comprehensive regional planning assessment, mapping a sustainable future and equitable water resources for the coastal counties of the Mississippi Gulf Coast.

**Reverend Jennifer Bailey—Workshop Facilitator | Prophetic Faith-Rooted Storytelling for Social Change**

Named one of 15 Faith Leaders to Watch in 2015, Rev. Jennifer Bailey is an ordained minister, community organizer, and emerging national leader in the multi-faith movement for justice. As Founder and Executive Director of the Faith Matters Network (FMN), Jennifer believes that people of faith can be game changers in the fight to build a more just, compassionate, and peaceful world. She comes to this work with nearly a decade of experience combatting intergenerational poverty in her hometown of Chicago and her adopted home, Nashville, Tennessee. A child of the food justice movement, Jennifer worked to increase access to public benefits for food insecure families in Middle Tennessee and organized residents of food deserts to advocate for transformational public policies in their communities. After years of listening deeply to the stories of community members living with hunger, Jennifer realized that the immediate issue of food insecurity was a symptom of much larger issue: structural economic injustice. At the same time, she noted that the regions of the country with the greatest economic disparities are also the areas with the highest rates of religious participation in the United States. A Truman Scholar, Jennifer earned degrees from Tufts University and Vanderbilt

*(continued—Rev. Jennifer Bailey)* University Divinity School where she was awarded the Wilbur F. Tillett Prize for accomplishments in the study of theology. She is an ordained itinerant elder in the African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) Church, the oldest historically-black denomination in the United States. Jennifer is currently a Nathan Cummings Foundation Fellow, an elite cohort of innovative leaders combatting issues of economic and social inequality with outside-the-box thinking.

**Amanda Hoyt—Workshop Facilitator | Prepared for Action! What is a “Ready Bench”?**

Amanda Hoyt is the Strategic Communications Director for Faith in Public Life’s Ohio office. Most recently she was the Director of Public Affairs for Finance Fund, a statewide non-profit financial intermediary committed to bridging resources with low to moderate income communities. Hoyt was also the Minority Chief of Staff at the Ohio Senate for three years where she led her legislative team in policy, communications, strategy and political maneuvering. Hoyt is seen as a high level political strategist in Ohio.

**Cheryl Johncox—Workshop Facilitator | Prepared for Action! What is a “Ready Bench”?**

Cheryl Johncox is an organizer for Sierra Club National Office, working on public policy to address the climate change impacts of methane gas released by the oil and gas industry. Johncox has a degree in Natural Resources from The Ohio State University and has been working on environmental policy for 10 years. She is an Ohio native and lives in Union Co., Ohio with her family.

**Dr. Michelle Kaiser—Workshop Facilitator | Growing Food, Creating Beauty and Building Community**

Dr. Michelle Kaiser is an Assistant Professor in OSU’s College of Social Work and part of several collaborative interdisciplinary research groups through OSU’s Food Innovation Center. Kaiser’s work related to food access, food mapping, chronic diseases in food pantry clients, community food assessments, and food coping strategies uniquely combines perspectives from such disciplines as social work, health, sustainable development, and geography.

**Michele Stanback –Workshop Facilitator | Art as Ritual: Intersections of Art, Environmental Justice and the Power of Resistance**

Michele Stanback is an artist, art therapist, and educator of ten years. Infusing the arts, she explores rituals, breathing new life into sacred spaces for meaningful reflection. While obtaining her M.Div. at Union Theological Seminary in the City of New York, she utilizes her unique lens and framework to illuminate issues in Social and Environmental Ethics, Ecofeminism and Indigenous wisdom to inform sustainable practices through the arts—seeking ethical approaches to Mother Earth. Michele has a B.A. in Individualized Studies from University of Maryland, College Park, and a MPS in Creative Arts Therapy and Creativity Development from Pratt Institute in New York City.

**Nicholas Stanich—Workshop Facilitator | Growing Food, Creating Beauty and Building Community**

Nicholas Stanich is a graduate of The Ohio State University and a member of the OSU Food Innovation Center’s Food Mapping Team. He is Executive Director of Franklinton Gardens, a nonprofit urban farm located in a historic neighborhood on the west side of Columbus, Ohio.

**Deb Steele—Workshop Facilitator | Prepared for Action! What is a “Ready Bench”?**

Deborah Steele is an Ohio Interfaith Power and Light consultant working with outreach to congregations, the OhIPL Energy Stewards program, and public policy issues. Growing up in the United Church of Christ in Minnesota she gained a deep appreciation for being connected to, and worshipping in nature. She moved to Ohio in the mid 1990’s and has chosen to stay here because there is so much important work to do in this state. Deborah earned a BA in Sociology in 2003 from Ohio State University, with a focus in Ethnic and Minority Studies.

**Luke Sulfridge—Workshop Facilitator | Solar Power Rocks!! Ohio Solar United Neighborhoods (OH SUN)**

Luke Sulfridge serves as the OH SUN Program Director. Luke is a lifelong resident of the Mid-Ohio Valley and resides in Washington County. He provides support for the expansion of solar in Ohio through co-ops and policy advocacy. His prior work includes health policy, emergency management, grassroots organizing, and advocacy. Luke holds a B.A. from Berea College in Political Science, a M.S. from Eastern Kentucky University in Safety, Security and Emergency Management, and a M.A. from Appalachian State University in Political Science with a concentration in Environmental Politics and Policy Analysis.

**Jessica K. Shimberg—Shabbat Services Spiritual Leader**

Jessica has long been associated with Jewish organizations that offer environmental education and advocacy, and assist Jews in recognizing Judaism’s sacred relationship with the environment. Jessica currently serves as the spiritual leader of The Little Minyan Kehilla, a central Ohio congregation she helped create in 2006, and is a rabbinic student with ALEPH - the Alliance for Jewish Renewal. She also serves on the Board of Ohio Interfaith Power and Life. She is a graduate of Brandeis University and The Ohio State University College of Law.