

PBS project uses faith to show ‘what it really means to be American’

by [Dawn Araujo-Hawkins](#) in the [March 11, 2020](#) issue



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As part of its 50th anniversary celebration, PBS has launched a multimedia storytelling project focused, in part, on faith and religion in the United States.

Using photo, video, and text message submissions, [“American Portrait”](#) aims to highlight the nation’s religious diversity—as well as its commonality. Participants will respond to prompts about what they were raised to believe, the religious traditions they maintain, and how they make sense of the world today.

Over the next year, producers hope to use these submissions to create an online miniseries, public art installations, live shows, and—in January 2021—a televised documentary.

In an email to the Century, Bill Margol, PBS's senior director of programming and development, said stories of faith were the best way to understand the country because faith is intrinsic to peoples' lives.

"For many Americans, faith and belief shape their families, their communities, and informs how they relate to the world around them," he said. "Our beliefs shape who we are, the way we think, the way we share and sometimes the way we disagree. They define the things we'll stand up for—and the things we'll fight against."

According to the most recent data from the Pew Research Center, more than 70 percent of adults in the US identify as Christian. Almost 23 percent say they are religiously unaffiliated, making the so-called nones the second-largest faith group in the nation.

Recent surveys, however, suggest that the nones are leveling off.

In February, political scientist Melissa Deckman told Religion News Service that after interviewing 2,200 people age 18–23, she found the percentage of religiously unaffiliated members of Generation Z (those born between 1997 and 2012) almost identical to the percentage of religiously unaffiliated millennials (those born between 1981 and 1996).

"Up to this point there's been a very fast drop-off, especially among younger people," Deckman told RNS. "It seems to have slowed somewhat."