The Rev. Dr. Jacqui Lewis  
Senior Minister, Middle Collegiate Church

When The Rev. Dr. Jacqui Lewis was eight years old, she hid under her bed as bullets flew in her Chicago neighborhood following the assassination of The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. In that moment, she felt called to work for racial equality in the United States.

Despite her parents' belief that women were not to be ministers, Jacqui Lewis earned her Masters of Divinity from Princeton University and her Ph.D. in Psychology and Religion from Drew University. She is the first woman and the first African American to be called as a senior minister in the historic Collegiate Churches of New York, founded in 1628.

Lewis has taught countless congregations throughout the United States and in South Africa on how to build multiracial and multicultural congregations. Believing faith communities can lead the way to racial reconciliation, she co-founded a national conference, “Revolutionary Love,” to teach activists and faith leaders on how to advocate for racial justice in their communities and build multicultural constituencies.

Dr. Lewis leads a 1,000-member congregation, Middle Collegiate Church in New York City. Middle Church’s diversity looks like the subway, but its legendary love feels like home. Jews, Buddhists, atheists, and Christians pack the sanctuary to standing-room-only capacity. Millennials and boomers, trans and gay, singles and families all call Middle their own. On Sunday mornings, gospel, R & B, and classical music narrate God’s creativity. Congregants stop wearing mascara because worship is often a mixture of the joy and truth found in therapy or a Broadway show. Middle Church is a fierce voice for racial, LGBT, and economic equality.

Before George Zimmerman was charged in the murder of Trayvon Martin, the multiracial congregation, choirs, and clergy all wore hoodies to Sunday worship. Images of the hooded congregation in prayer were seen in the Associated Press, ABC News, MSNBC, CNN, and Los Angeles Times. The story and images heightened the national pressure that Zimmerman be charged. After Zimmerman was acquitted, the congregation wore hoodies again in the heat of July. An image of their response was published on the front page of The Washington Post. Lewis hosted “Just Faith,” an on-demand television program on MSNBC.com and is a frequent media commentator. She recently completed the six-city Together Tour with best-selling author Glennon Doyle Melton, Seane Corn, Valarie Kaur, Jennifer Randolph, and special guest Alicia Keys.