Awakening

to God’s Love in times of

Anxiety and

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breathe

Our identity is found in God’s love
during times of anxiety and change

BY ELAINE A. HEATH

Bethesda United Methodist Church in Haw Creek, N.C., is a small, semi-rural church in the midst of staggering change. That change is happening at Bethesda does not distinguish it from churches both large and small, rural and urban, across the nation. What is noteworthy at Bethesda is the direction of this change and the response from leaders, congregants, and the community.
A few years ago, a visitor to Bethesda UMC would have seen a nondescript patch of grass and a parking lot with a sign discouraging anyone other than church members from parking there. Founded in 1844, the church was on the verge of being closed. What options did a small church in a small community have to reverse what appeared to be the inevitable trend toward decline and then disappearance?

A GOSPEL-SHAPED CHURCH

In my work I have exhorted the church to move away from staid traditionalism into dynamic, spiritually deep yet nimble expressions of the church. I believe we must now take up the gospel-shaped movement of Jesus that finds solidarity with “the least of these” and is accessible to and largely led by laypeople. It is imperative that the institutional church that is collapsing beneath bureaucratic top heaviness, clergy-centric practice, and ecclesiastic loss of soul live forward into the original vision of Jesus. Indeed, the gospel-shaped church is the only kind that will birth Jesus-followers in the years ahead. What I see emerging in myriad ways and places is precisely that—a gospel-shaped movement.

Today at Bethesda UMC, a new playground filled with laughing preschoolers occupies the patch of grass. The sign on the parking lot invites parents to park there while waiting to pick up their children from the elementary school next door. The pastor of Bethesda, the Rev. Karen Doucette, makes sure that a bowl of fresh fruit is on the picnic tables for parents and children to enjoy.

The changes at Bethesda go far beyond a welcoming parking lot and playground. Transformation began when the dozen or so members decided to change rather than close. With the help of their district superintendent, congregational leaders began meeting with leaders from the Missional Wisdom Foundation and the Western North Carolina Conference of the UMC to discuss possibilities. Over the course of three years, a mutually agreeable plan was put into action to repurpose the building and parsonage in ways that would create a neighborhood hub and contribute to the flourishing of the village of Haw Creek. The congregation hoped that, by giving itself away to Haw Creek in the manner of Philippians 2:6–10, they would be able to renew the missional vocation of the church. Private donations and grants provided funds for the project.

CHANGE AND ANXIETY

Such change, however, inevitably causes anxiety. Everyone can feel it. There is a growing sense of descent into chaos, and because people cannot see “exactly where all of this is going,” the tendency is to regress to behaviors that are familiar but counterproductive. These behaviors are meant to stop the anxiety rather than address the underlying issue. Usually the behaviors...
include attempts to scapegoat agents of change. (This is why prophets are without honor in their home town, as Jesus says in Luke 4:24!) Rare is the leader who is centered enough and integrated enough to withstand this anxiety, refuse to participate in scapegoating, attend to people within the system who are not going to change, protect necessary space for change to happen, nurture the pioneers who are leading the way forward, and do all of this in ways that are loving and wise. The chaos of change is not the enemy.

Most of us when experiencing anxiety want to simply make it go away. Our earliest experiences of anxiety are connected to needing our caregivers to hold us, feed us, or in some other way tend to a basic human need. These survival connections with anxiety are multiplied exponentially when we have experienced trauma, abandonment, or other painful events. It is not uncommon for our “unfinished business” from long ago to surface when anxiety enters the systems in which we live, work, and worship. In spiritual direction or therapy we may discover that a good deal of our anxiety during systems change is more about our family of origin than about the situation at hand. The exponential character of anxiety can make us feel as if anxiety is the urgent problem that must be fixed. So we hurriedly make choices out of fear and discomfort, not to address the real situation, but to make anxiety stop. Since change seems to be causing the anxiety, the knee-jerk response is to stop change so the anxiety will end.

For Bethesda UMC, some of the most stressful and anxiety-provoking changes involved the plans to remodel the church building. The sanctuary was emptied and remodeled into a community room; it is now ready to serve as worship space on weekends but is also available for neighborhood gatherings. The pews were removed and remade into Shaker-style tables.

For more about systems change and anxiety, see A Failure of Nerve: Leadership in the Age of the Quick Fix by Edwin Friedman (Seabury Press).
for the new co-working space in the church basement. The kitchen is being renovated into a commercial kitchen, which will become part of the co-working area as well as be accessible for church dinners.

It was important for leaders to honor the history of the church and to be patient and loving as congregants grieved over the loss of pews and other structural changes. To help with this difficult part of change, a Sunday school classroom was repurposed as a heritage center with historic photographs and documents from the founding of the church up until the present. The heritage center has helped the congregation honor its own history while helping to write the new chapter in their church’s story.

**ANXIETY AND IDENTITY**
Anxiety is not really the problem. Therapists encourage anxious clients to “sit with their anxiety” so as to make decisions out of freedom rather than fear. A big part of the therapeutic task is to help clients recognize what triggers their anxiety, and why. Our conviction that we are deeply loved and that God will not abandon us provides a path for us to move through anxiety. We need to know at an emotional level that God is with us in the anxiety-producing change. The capacity to respond instead of react to anxiety-provoking change has much to do with our general sense of security and our ability to “own” the change through participation.

So much of our anxiety during change comes back to our sense of identity, need for security, and need to belong. Whether consciously or unconsciously, most of us wonder where we will fit into the new picture. Will we still be “us” corporately if we sit in chairs instead of pews, if we have chickens in the back yard of the parsonage, if our school adopts a new curriculum, if we take seriously the call to become more diverse? Questions about identity and belonging are central to anxiety in the system.

From a stance of belovedness we can recognize when these legitimate human needs feel threatened by change, and we can trace out the root cause of old anxiety that has surfaced. We can choose life-giving responses that are based on trust in God and openness to God’s work in the world. We can become compassionate toward others who are stuck, and we can become courageous to make necessary change.

At Bethesda, leadership from the congregation, district, conference, and the Missional Wisdom Foundation committed to a transparent and patient process that would enable as many people as possible to participate in the process of change. For each step of the process the small congregation was involved in discussion, development, and interpreting the project to neighbors. Challenges arose, including the seemingly endless red tape of obtaining building permits. Church members and leaders had to be willing to meet often with neighbors and the city council in order to move forward and remember why this project was important. Failures happened, and the congregation learned to ask, “What can we learn from this experience that will help us as we move forward?”

During the renovation of the sanctuary, the church met in the

To explore how the disciplines of spiritual direction can help us address anxiety and change, read Jesus Our Spiritual Director: A Pilgrimage through the Gospels by Wendy J. Miller (Upper Room Books).
parsonage for worship services. They grew to love the intimacy and warmth of the house church, and new people began to attend Bethesda. The new initiatives to use the resources of the church to meet needs in the community coalesced into **Haw Creek Commons**, a community development organization supported by the Missional Wisdom Foundation.

**TRANSFORMING ANXIETY INTO GROWTH**
Bethesda UMC continues to change, but now instead of declining they are growing in their missional ecclesiology, recognizing that as they give themselves away they not only bring Jesus but also encounter Jesus in their neighbors. Haw Creek Commons continues to evolve, developed from the strengths of the neighborhood. To use a favorite Wesleyan term, the prevenient grace of God is at work within and beyond the boundaries of Haw Creek Commons. The congregation has multiplied substantially. Neighbors are finding at Haw Creek Commons and Bethesda UMC a spiritual home as well as a community of friends who like to work, play, sew, garden, cook, build, and have fun together. Bethesda UMC is thriving as it lives its missional identity as beloved by God in a new day.

I know it’s hard to play and be creative when we feel fearful. Anxiety takes the spring out of our step. It can trigger a vast array of responses: hunker down, raise fists, run and hide. But we don’t have to be afraid. That is the wonderful news. God’s love casts out fear. God is with us! God orchestrates change. Change happens all the time so that every generation, every community, every person can experience God in their world, their context, their time.

All around us are signs of change, from the tiny cedar tree growing from a pine stump to the notification on my computer that a systems update is ready. Without change life is not possible. Breath itself is a constant exchange of air, without which we would die. During times of congregational and institutional change, the temptation is to resist change out of anxiety that we will lose our identity. Instead, what we need to do is breathe—opening ourselves intentionally to wonder, curiosity, playfulness, creativity, and hope. As we do so we discover that God is with us, leading us to a new day.

“It is imperative that **Haw Creek Commons is a field education placement next summer.** The lessons I learned there, the experiences I had, and the people I met have truly changed my life and the life of my families in a beneficial way. My understanding of ministry and outreach is forever changed for the better, and I cannot stress enough the importance of this place as an educational hub for seminary students going through field education.”

—Patrick Neitzey M.Div.’18

Read about the many ways that Haw Creek Commons is providing space for education, entrepreneurship, the arts, spiritual retreat, gardening, and more for the Haw Creek area: [www.hawcreekcommons.com](http://www.hawcreekcommons.com).
CONFLICT and the SCHOOL of LOVE:
PAUL AND THE CORINTHIANS

BY SUSAN EASTMAN
Throughout large geographical areas in the United States today, one might never meet a Democrat; in densely populated cities, one might never meet a Republican. Those holding minority political views learn to keep their mouths shut. For example, ask a politically conservative student what it’s like studying at an elite university; ask a politically liberal person what it’s like living in some small towns in the South or the Midwest.

Unfortunately, churches and other Christian institutions, which should be places where we stay connected with those different from ourselves, are often just the opposite: comfortable clubs full of PLUs—People Like Us. The social, racial, cultural, economic, and educational divides in society run right through the churches as well. Any church or Christian institution that attempts to embody the radical inclusivity of the gospel will come up against these deep gulfs. They are ingrained sets of expectations, projections, fears, presumptions, and blind spots that issue from personal and social histories—histories of pain, betrayal, guilt, confusion, and so on. And that means that conflict is inevitable and necessary on the way to genuine love. Conversely, it means that conflict need not be the opposite of love but rather a part of learning to love more truthfully. The health and hopefulness of any given fellowship at any given time may well be gauged not by the absence of conflict but by the presence of genuine concern for one another’s flourishing.

Churches are also torn apart by division and conflict among Christians can be particularly bitter. Our worst selves are put on display in the midst of internecine squabbles. The muttered refrain goes like this: “And we call ourselves Christians”; or worse, “And they call themselves Christians!” Furthermore, the stakes are higher when we are speaking of the things of God and even claiming to speak in God’s name.

A Quarreling Church

None of this is new. Scripture records for us that the very earliest churches had their share of quarrels. Indeed, one of the wonderful things about the Bible is how frank it is regarding the failures and foibles of the heroes of the faith.

Take Paul, in his exasperated attempts to guide the churches he had founded, as they struggled with the social fault lines running through their communities. Take Corinth in particular, that most fractured yet beloved group of believers, trying to find their way as they navigated their diverse social identities and their new identity in Christ. Here’s Paul’s opening salvo in 1 Corinthians:

“I appeal to you, brothers and sisters,” by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree and that there be no dissensions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment. For it has been reported to me by Chloe’s people that there is quarreling among you, my brothers and sisters (1 Corinthians 1:10–11).

“There is quarreling among you!” The Greek word translated
“dissensions” is schismata, from which we get our word schisms—a word drearily familiar through the long history of the church. The word translated “quarreling” has the sense of strife, contention, rivalry, and war. In other words, the Corinthians are at each other’s throats, divided into camps, taking sides against one another. Not only this, but along the way they are endorsing and even boasting about destructive sexual behavior, taking one another to court in the notoriously corrupt Roman judicial system, indulging in food and drink at the Lord’s Supper while other believers go hungry, using public worship as the chance to showcase particular spiritual gifts—the list goes on.

Paul fights for two things that at first may seem opposed but in fact are deeply connected. First is the singular and exclusive sufficiency and lordship of Christ—that’s nonnegotiable and the crucial source of any lasting unity. Second is the radical inclusivity that comes from following a crucified and resurrected master and Lord, who is immanent within the diverse gathering of believers but not defined or constrained by the things that divide them.

The outworking of this dual focus, and the goal of Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians, is a mature moral discernment grounded in love and directed toward the flourishing of one’s fellow Christians and the strengthening of the community. Such mature discernment will mark their growth from childish infighting (3:1–4) to fitting the description in Paul’s closing exhortation: “Let all that you do be done in love” (16:14).

**GIFTED SAINTS**

That’s what Paul fights for. What about how he fights? The how is as crucial to the struggle as the what. Their calling as “saints”—those sanctified in and for Jesus Christ—is something they share with all who call on the name of Jesus. He turns their attention from their little backwater storms to the oceanic horizon of the people of God, with all the immense diversity of the ways in which together they call on the name of Jesus as Lord. This horizon is as limitless as the grace of God in its wide embrace; it also has a specific center, the name and calling and lordship of Christ.

Any pastor, when confronted with a congregation like Corinth, might well mutter, “And they call themselves Christians!” But Paul effusively affirms the abundance of gifts they have received from God: “I give thanks to God always for you,” he exclaims, “because of the grace of God which was given you in Christ Jesus, that in every way you were enriched in him with all speech and all knowledge, even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed among you, so that you are not lacking in any gift.” (1:4–7). In English, it is difficult to recognize the language of gift; “grace” (charis) is cognate with “gift” (charisma), so that we might say, “the gift of God was given you . . . you were made wealthy . . . you are not lacking in any gift.”

Paul locates their common calling and mutual relations in this realm of divine grace/gift rather than human capacities or achievements. This grace is precisely, dynamically given through the living person of Jesus Christ. It is not given to isolated, individual believers but interpersonally mediated through their shared fellowship under the lordship of Christ. Apparently they have forgotten that foundation in their current quarrels. This shared reception of divine grace is all that they need for their mutual life. As Paul says later in the letter, “Who sees anything different in you? What have you that you did not receive? And if you received it, why do you boast as if it were not a gift?” (4:7).

**THE WISDOM OF THE CROSS**

When confronted with the divisions in the Corinthian congregation, Paul’s strategy is to preach the cross: “When I came to you, brothers and sisters, I did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God in lofty words or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified” (2:1–2). Does Paul think preaching about the cross is a magic bullet that will fix the Corinthians’ problems? I think not. He is both addressing particular issues in Corinth and underscoring the peculiar nature...
of God’s power and wisdom through the crucifixion of the Messiah.

In the context of the letter, Paul is contrasting human pretensions of wisdom with the utter folly of worshiping a crucified man. To educated people around the Roman Empire, Christian worship of Jesus must have verged on obscenity, because crucifixion was indeed obscene, something planted in a garbage dump, the place of everything and everyone who has been cast off, rejected, and destined for oblivion. Paul’s insistence on the cross aims to unite the Corinthians in a shared gaze in one utterly countercultural direction, and he emphasizes the weakness and implausibility of his own speech, humanly speaking, in order to magnify God’s counterintuitive power: “And I was with you in weakness and in much fear and trembling; and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God” (2:3–5).

We can hear echoes of an emphasis on human wisdom and eloquence among at least some of the Corinthian believers, even when it comes to particular spiritual gifts. Some prided themselves on their superior knowledge, their higher cognitive capacities, and their eloquence. Paul’s emphasis on the cross of Christ pulls the rug out from under any such pretensions and completely destabilizes any hierarchy of gifts or capacities. How paltry are our attempts at defending our integrity or protecting our reputations in the face of the divine condescension of Christ on the cross! How petty our impatience with one another and our rush to mutual judgment! The central focus and saving event of the crucifixion of Jesus requires and generates a new kind of communication in which truthful speech is laced with the acknowledgement of our own shortcomings and blind spots and where blame games have no place.

The central event of Christ’s death for and with all humanity reframes human cognition and communication, two key issues both in Corinth and in any conflict among Christians, and they are intertwined with issues of power. Divisive power oppresses and silences opposing voices. Such power may be effective in the short term, but it plays a zero-sum game and can work no lasting transformation of individuals or societies. The cruciform power of God, however, operates out of divine abundance and loving gift; it can indeed transform individuals and communities, because it gets under our skin and behind our defenses, undoing our pride and fear. That is Paul’s confidence as he writes to his beloved converts in Corinth.

**A FUTURE RESURRECTION**

Finally, such confidence should not lead to a premature and mistaken triumphalism. Paul reminds the Corinthians that they live between the cross and the resurrection. First Corinthians 15, that great chapter on resurrection, affirms the resurrection of the body against ideas of a disembodied resurrection or immortality. This future hope also affirms that what we do in our embodied lives here and now matters. And in this embodied life we are connected to one another, such that our suffering and our flourishing are bound up in each other’s good: “If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together” (12:26).

Nonetheless, the future hope of resurrection is still future. Living between cross and resurrection tells us we are still waiting, just as Paul tells the Corinthians at the beginning of the letter: “You are not lacking in any gift as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1:7–8).

The waiting is important. We have not yet arrived. We are incomplete in our communities, not to mention our selves, all our claims and struggles and squabbles await the divine judgment and mercy, and thus all our own judgments are provisional. In the meantime, in and through and because of conflict, not simply in spite of it, Christian fellowship may become the school of love, teaching us to wait for one another, to listen, and to welcome one another as Christ has welcomed us (Romans 15:7).
RESTORING BROKEN TRUST

Congregations and communities no longer trust clergy and ministers

BY NATHAN KIRKPATRICK
While waiting for a plane in the Atlanta airport, I first glimpsed a significant change in the landscape for ministers. I was traveling early in the morning on a day that would later be filled with meetings, so I was wearing my clerical collar. In the gate area with me, a young mother was traveling with a child who was full of energy. He toddled in my direction, and I knelt down on the floor to play with him. As soon as I did, his mother looked at my collar, then into my eyes, and said firmly, “Don’t touch my boy.” I apologized quickly as she scooped up her son and moved to the opposite side of the gate area.

I stood up and walked away from the gate, unsure of what to make of the encounter. But the newspaper headlines in the airport newsstand offered context. They heralded the pervasiveness of sexual abuse of children by clergy and the further abuse by church systems that had denied their stories while shielding their abusers.

The collar that I was wearing, in the belief that it reflected an availability, an openness, a vulnerability to be with people in all the complexities of their lives, was no longer a sign of trustworthiness but a source for suspicion. Not knowing me from any other person in a collar (not knowing me at all, for that matter), that mother perceived me as a threat to her child and instinctively protected her son. I cannot fault her in the least.

**A CRISIS OF TRUST**

There is something disorienting, though, for all of us who are clergy in this experience of being distrusted. Early on in ministry, we discover that trust is our authority. Say what we want about a theology of ordination or an ecclesial blessing or an episcopal appointment, but a congregation and a community grant us authority because they trust us.

We feel this, and we ask for it.

We stand before our congregations weekly and invite the people of God to put their trust in us—to trust our faithful proclamation of the gospel, our interpretation of the tradition, and our faithful administration of the sacraments. “Trust me,” goes the implicit invitation, and “I will not lead you astray. I will deliver to you the faith of the apostles. I will guard and shepherd your souls. I will speak to you of God and speak to God of you, and somehow, I promise that you are not alone or abandoned. Trust me on it.”

In support of this invitation to the people of God, we take vows committing ourselves to live according to the highest ideals of the faith, and when we fail, as we surely will, we commit ourselves to confess, to amend our lives, and to make amends to those whom we have hurt. Across a lifetime in ministry, most of us do our best to live lives that are consonant with the gospel we proclaim, to be trustworthy to those we encounter either professionally or personally.

Yet, at the same time, we read the polls and hear that public trust and confidence in religious leaders, in folks like us, has declined significantly. According to both Gallup and Pew polls, public trust in clergy has reached its lowest point since researchers started asking the question almost four decades ago. Now seven other professions are more trusted than clergy by the American public. Nothing against any of those seven, but our own vocational identity feels increasingly fraught when we consider those numbers.

**DISTRUST AND THE GOSPEL**

Why are more Americans distrustful of the clergy now than they were in the 1970s? Psychological research tells us that trust is extended to a professional because of the perception of ability, integrity, and benevolence. In other words, for others to trust us, they must believe that we are capable of doing what we say we will do, that we have the character to follow through on what we have promised to them, and that we have their best interests at heart in our relationship with them.

In the case of the distrust of clergy, polling data suggests that many in the general public have developed suspicions about our integrity and our benevolence. Most still believe that we can preach a sermon, lead a Bible study, celebrate the sacraments, and pray with the sick, but many have lost confidence in our inherent goodness as we do those things.
Simply put, that young mother in the Atlanta airport reflects a significant number of people in the country as a whole. Researchers tell us that the most dramatic reductions in public trust coincide with each new round of revelations about the sexual abuse of children by church leaders. In one year alone, a year replete with such news, trust in clergy fell more than 25 percent from the previous year. This increasing distrust was accelerated by several other scandals involving financial misconduct and exploitative practices by congregational leaders across denominational traditions. Then came video interviews with clergy—faces blurred and voices altered—confessing that they had never, in fact, believed anything that they had preached over the course of their ministries. Add to this the shrill contributions of Christian voices to public and political discourse, and it is little wonder that, for many Americans, clergy now seem to lack the integrity and goodness to be what we promise.

For congregational leaders, this increasing distrust brings with it challenges on several fronts. Distrust is an evangelical and theological concern, for if people outside the walls of the church don’t perceive clergy as trustworthy, then how trustworthy is this gospel message or the God we proclaim? Distrust is a leadership concern that threatens to undermine the relationships that support and sustain ministries over time, relationships both inside and beyond the church. Furthermore, distrust raises concerns for pastoral care by introducing a nagging suspicion into some of the most tender conversations a human being can have with another. *Does this minister really care about me and want what is best for me?* Finally, distrust is a spiritual concern for the congregational leader: being distrusted is not only disorienting and confusing but taxing to the spirit.

**WHAT CAN RESTORE TRUST IS A COMMITMENT TO THE LONG, SLOW, AND OFTEN PAINFUL WORK OF SEEKING OUT AND NURTURING RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE VERY PEOPLE WHO HAVE COME TO DISTRUST US.**

*Trust researchers here at Duke, along with colleagues at other institutions, offer some helpful guidance in knowing how to respond. One thing their research helps us understand is the critical distinction between situations of low trust and situations of distrust. In times and places where some trust is still present in a relationship, even if very little, that trust can be nurtured and deepened over time. In these situations, logic and rational argumentation can play a significant role. People can, it turns out, be persuaded to believe in another’s abilities, integrity, and benevolent motives.*

*This is good news for us. A significant number of people outside the church still hope that the faith we preach is true, and passionate and persuasive preaching rooted in our own experience of the trustworthiness of God can help restore confidence and trust in the church’s witness. Our willingness to be vulnerable about our faith, our doubt, and our failings matters. (There is a reason why authenticity remains all the rage right now.) Consistent, dependable, and predictable behavior in our public relationships matters. Our transparency about the business of being church nurtures and supports trust.*

*But when low trust has eroded to a point of outright distrust, which is where the church is with many people, it is much harder to regain trust. Part of the reason may be explained by new studies which suggest that in situations of distrust our brains operate in a different way than they are in situations of low trust. When we distrust someone (or an institution), our brains produce primal, self-protective responses of fight, flight, or freeze. This distrust becomes further entrenched because of what researchers call a self-amplifying cycle, in which any negative experience (or headline) confirms and deepens whatever suspicions we already have, while any positive experience is viewed as an aberration.*

*Appeals to logic will not overcome a distrust fed on instinctual fears. Winsome sermons will not restore confidence. Releasing the minutes of the finance committee meeting will not do it. Instead, what can restore trust is a commitment to the long, slow, and often painful work of seeking out and nurturing relationships with the very people who have come to distrust us. To renew trust with them, we must engage in the practices of spiritual friendship—to listen to their stories without judgment, to acknowledge the ways that their distrust is justified, to care for them for their own sake as children of God and not for any other purpose (such as gaining a new church member). And in front of them, we*
have to live according to the values we preach, behaving in consistent, compassionate, life-giving ways.

Renewing the public’s trust will not be accomplished quickly. This will be the work beneath and behind our ministries for decades to come. It will require intentional and sustained effort. But as we steward the trust the public still has in us and as we work to regain it where it has been lost, we may be surprisingly renewed and refreshed by the Christ we meet in the friendships we find.

WHEN TRUST in clergy is at record low levels, preaching is a particular challenge, but preaching can also be a means by which some trust is renewed. For that to happen, the preacher must demonstrate that she or he can speak a word that is credible in the life of a congregation.

Years ago, a short film was produced by the United Methodist Church in which teenagers reflected on their experience of the church. One African American woman made this haunting observation: “The preacher at my church talks about joy and hope and peace, but he doesn’t live in my neighborhood.” This kind of disconnect makes the preacher—and the gospel that is proclaimed—suspect to both those in our pews and those beyond our walls. Joy, hope, and peace can sound like otherworldly abstractions unless they are evident in the lives and stories of the people we serve. To renew our credibility from the pulpit, we must consider the illustrations we use in preaching.

• First, is the story true, and not an exaggeration or product of our imagination to make the point? We undercut the truth of the gospel if the stories we use to illustrate it are not also true.

• Second, is the illustration true to these people and to this place? Can people find themselves in a story we share, or do the stories belong to a sentimental or romantic kind of faith where everything turns out just fine?

• Third, what assumptions are operating in the illustration? Whose voices, lives, and lifestyles are privileged or silenced by the sermon or story? Who are the heroes to emulate, and who are cautionary tales? What social problems are discussed, and which are the subject of our silence?

• Fourth, do we have permission to share the story? By asking permission of the people involved and sharing with the congregation that we have received it, we invite deeper trust and candor.

If the stories we tell from the pulpit are honest stories of life in the neighborhood with our people, we demonstrate that we are with them as God is with them, for them as God is for them, and attentive to them as God attends to them. We demonstrate that we are trustworthy with the things of their lives—their faith and doubt, certainties and questions, longings and losses. And in so doing, the incredible gospel becomes a more credible word for them.

A CREDIBLE WORD
A MINISTER
OF THE
MIRACULOUS

ADAPTED FROM THE SERMON
DELIVERED AT THE
DUKE DIVINITY SCHOOL
BACCALAUREATE SERVICE,
MAY 13, 2017

BY J. KAMERON CARTER
I want to take you back to when I was a little boy growing up in Philadelphia. Like many kids, I had superheroes in my life. They captured my young and impressionable imagination. First, there was every kid’s superhero, Superman, also known as the Man of Steel. There was Aquaman, the amphibious hero of the sea. There was the Flash, the fastest person in the world. But more than anybody else, the superhero that held me spellbound was none other than Batman.

By day he was called Bruce Wayne; by night Batman. By day he was uptown; by night he was underground. By day he was a mover and a shaker; by night he was the caped crusader. He was committed to stopping those villains who were plaguing the fictitious city of Gotham.

Remember some of the villains he had to contend with. First of all, there was the joke-telling Joker. There was the riddle-asking Riddler. The villainous feline, Catwoman. And finally there was that corpulent, tuxedo-wearing, portly bird of a man, the Penguin. All of these villains were arrayed against the superhero who was the love of my life, Batman. And in one episode they almost did him in.

Batman was tricked, trapped, and troubled. His hands were bound, his feet were shackled, and his mouth was gagged. He could say no words; a time bomb was strapped to his chest, and it was ticking. He was about to go kaboom. What was Batman going to do? He couldn’t reach for his bat utility belt and cut himself out of his situation. He couldn’t call on the Batmobile. He could not call in the Bat Chopper to transport him out of his situation. What was Batman going to do? He could not signal back to Alfred back at the bat cave, call for a bat tutor, get some bat help.

As a little boy, my little mind could not handle this stress. I was scared, I was nervous, because as far as I was concerned, Batman found himself fixed into a fix that he could not unfix. The bomb was ticking, and worst of all, the episode was just about over. Unbeknownst to me, something was about to happen. With less than a second or two before the bomb was about to explode, and just a minute or two before 4:00—because 4:00 was when the show was over—Robin showed up with nothing more than a little lasso in his hands, and he saved the day. Robin, my queer, leotard-wearing, hooded homey swung into action, got Batman, dismantled the bomb, unbound him, and saved the day.

I want to propose that here is a serious lesson for ministry, for service, for social transformation, for social change, for what some of us want to call revolution, for uprising, for imagining another world of possibilities for how we might be together, get together, and belong with each other together. There are other-worldly possibilities of what that carpenter and social justice warrior from Galilee named Jesus called the kingdom of heaven. I want to propose that there’s a serious lesson inside of all of this, inside of the Batman story, inside of the story of the minister called Robin.

As you take the next steps of your lives into ministry and into service, some of you within various churches and denominations, some of you beyond the church and in the world, I want to leave you with this other story about what it means to serve, what it means to care, to uphold, what it means to minister, to be a minister of the miraculous.
A MINISTER OF THE MIRACULOUS

What we learn from John 6:1–14 is that Robin was not the first minister of the miraculous, not the first minister to show up on the scene of devastation and difficulty, when time is running out on peoples’ lives. He was not the first to show up to serve and to, as it were, be a vehicle to save the day.

John 6:9 says, *There’s a lad here.* By the time we get to the end of this passage, we discover that the service that this boy renders kept multiplying and overflowing. If you allow me just a little bit of poetic license around this text, I want to scratch and remix the text and read it like this. There is a wonderworker, a strange minister in leotards right here in the good book. The text gives us neither his name nor his background, gives us no insight into his lineage. Search all you will, but you won’t find him on Ancestry.com. For we know nothing of his parents; he’s without degree and pedigree; without GED or Th.D.

Our story’s protagonist speaks not a word. He’s a minister, but he exists in silent namelessness, in nondescript facelessness. But out of his silence, out of his inaudibility, this mute minister, without so much as lifting up his voice, emerges in the biblical text right here as a bugler, as a drum major, as a chorister, as the choir director and the choirmaster, for what it means to be a minister of God, to serve the Eucharist, as the choir director and the choirmaster, as a bugler, as a drum major, as a chorister, as the choir director and the choirmaster, as the choirmaster, as the choir director and the choirmaster, as the choirmaster, as the choir director and the choirmaster.

Once you’re a carrier of the master of divinity degree from Duke Divinity School, the question that you still shall have to face, the test you still shall have to take out there in the classroom of life, is this: what does it mean to be a minister? What does it mean to give ourselves in a broken world? How do we live into our calling and be ministers of the possible? What is Christian ministry? An answer can be found in the Gospel narrative as a crowd of 5,000 hungry and needy folk congregate on a hillside.

If I can use my sanctified imagination, all this boy had was a McDonald’s Happy Meal, nothing more than five loaves and two small fishes. The illogical and the impossible, the inexplicable and the incrutable, happened. This crowd, who had been deemed forgotten, had been fed. The Eucharist was their meal. And we get a message about what it means to be a minister.

THE RIGHT PLACE

The first lesson we discover is that if you’re going to be a minister in the world, an instigator of the miraculous, if you’re going to be Christ’s wonderworker, the first thing you’ve got to do is be in the right place: *There’s a lad here.*

I recall from grammar school that my teacher told me that this was an adverb, this little word here. The job of the adverb is to tell something about the action of the story. This young lad, this nameless boy was in the right place, even though the right place was the place of crisis. The right place is the place of the manifestation of the sacred, the place of crisis, the place of trauma and difficulty, the place of trial and tribulation, of grief and pain, the place of agony and struggle. Even sometimes defeat is the place where you show up and find the divine and the sacred.

In John 6, Jesus had decided to cross over the Sea of Galilee to Tiberius. Archeologists and historians tell us that Tiberius was a town no bigger than three miles all the way around. It was small, easy to overlook, and seemingly insignificant. Many Jews refused even to live in that town because it was a small, backwater town that had a deep and significant problem. At the founding of Tiberius, tombs of the dead had been found there. The dead from various wars had been interred underneath the town. It was a place of the dead and those who had been discarded.

The Roman emperor Tiberius decided to convert the town into a ghetto, to put everybody there he did not want to deal with. He decided to make the town a town of disposable bodies and disposable people. A town of the living dead, a town filled with social misfits, social outcasts, and those deemed menaces to society. When folk graduated from the Hebrew seminaries of the day, they did not want to go to Tiberius and do ministry.

When the Bible says that Jesus crossed the Sea of Galilee and went into the dead zone—the places where there are no bars for your cellphone, the areas where there are no jobs, the zones of incarceration—when the Bible says that Jesus went into this place, he crossed what one scholar has called the zone of social death. Not only that, Jesus set up a tent, pulled out the communion table, and said, *I’m going to break bread right here, right now.*

In other words, Jesus went into the crisis, and he found hurting people. They were hungry and desperate. These were not folk who wanted bottled water; they just wanted water. They didn’t want a Benz, they didn’t want a Bentley, they didn’t want a BMW; they just wanted some basic transportation. They didn’t want lobster, they didn’t want crab cakes, they didn’t want calamari; they just wanted some dried-out sardines. This was the place of crisis.

But the place of crisis is where the presence of Christ is. Christ is in the crisis. Often we go to divinity school...
and think we’ll get educated away from the crisis. We want to run from the crisis. But if you want to find God, if you want to encounter the Spirit, if you want to see the sacred, show up in the crisis—because Christ is at the crisis.

THE RIGHT STUFF

The second lesson grows right out of this one. When you show up in the right place, make sure you got the right stuff. We think that the right stuff is our M.Div. degree. We think the right stuff is the knowledge between our ears.

Now, I relish that stuff—that’s why I do what I do. But let’s not get it twisted. It’s not necessarily the right stuff. This little boy in the text shows up with five barley loaves and two small fish. This is the food of the poor. Those barley loaves were five round, small, dried-out pieces of bread. And those two fish were the size of little sardines, dried out to last as long as possible. This was food of imperfect quality. But God can take your imperfections and use them for God’s glory.

God didn’t send you to this place because you’re perfect; God didn’t send you to this place because you’re better than somebody else. God sent you to this place so that you can live into your call, step out into the world, and serve God in serving others.

It takes me back to when I was growing up in Philadelphia with my single mother, now gone on to glory. I never shall forget one time my mama had some hotdogs and some baked beans, and we were about to have dinner—and we had no ketchup. That was close to Batman getting blown up.

My mama went to the kitchen, grabbed that almost-empty bottle, and took it over to the kitchen sink. She took that bottle of imperfection and ran a little water of the Holy Spirit in that bottle, put that cap on that bottle, started to shake that bottle. And all I got to say is that ketchup came out, pressed down, shaken together, and running over.

You don’t have to be perfect to serve God, you just have to have an open and willing spirit. Let the Holy Ghost fall fresh on you, let the anointing of God fall fresh on you, and God will raise you up to do great and mighty things in the world.

DO THE RIGHT THING

This third and final lesson is crucially important. This will make or break you in the examination of life. You’ve got to do the right thing.

This little boy did not do the wrong thing. The wrong thing is to abrogate your responsibility and your duty to go into the world now armed with a divinity degree to make a difference of good in this world. If you hoard your gifts and don’t step into the responsibility, that’s the wrong thing. God did not bring you here to divinity school so you can just sit down now that you’ve got this degree. God didn’t give you this degree so that you can cash it in, become great and mighty. God didn’t grant you this opportunity, this time, so that you can stand up and testify, stand up and do God’s work to make this world just a little bit better.

This young lad did the right thing. He took his life, his responsibilities, his possibilities, his potential, his purpose, his future prospects, and he placed it all in Jesus’s hands. This little boy understood something that we need to pay attention to. He took the little stuff that he had, the stuff that the world said was worth nothing, and that was the material of the Eucharist. Put that stuff in Jesus’ hands.

If you take a basketball and you put it in my hands, it’s not worth much. But if you take that same basketball and put it in Lebron James’ hands, you can get NBA championships. You put a tennis ball in my hands and you might get a broken window or two. But take that same tennis ball and put it in Serena Williams’ hands, and you get Wimbledon trophies.

You take an ink pen and put it in my hand, and you might get some journal articles; you might get a book or two or three or four. But if you take that same ink pen and you put it in Maya Angelou’s hands, you get I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings. Take a nail and put it in my hand, and you might get a picture hung on your wall. But take a nail and put it in Jesus’ hands, and you get him going to the depths of hell, rising up with all power in his hands.

And he commissions you and you with that nail in his hands to go out in this world and to make this place just a little bit better, not because you’re so wonderful, but because we serve a living Savior who’s in the world today. He lives; Christ Jesus lives today.

To watch the full Baccalaureate service online, visit http://divinity.duke.edu/bacc2017.
When I signed up to do pulpit supply, I hadn’t realized I would be preaching the first Sunday after the election in November. It was my fault. Of the available slots, I chose November 13 without considering the possible weight of this date. The church lacked a pastor and was relying on a steady stream of guest preachers, including seminary students. It was located just south of Durham, and I didn’t know a single person there.

I found myself tasked with preaching in front of a mostly white congregation that had been evenly divided in their support for the two candidates, something I learned when—trying to calm my nerves a few days after the election—I asked a pastor familiar with the church’s members for his best estimate of their political leanings. The Gospel lesson was Luke 21:5–19, which is about the end of the world and Jesus’ followers being persecuted, imprisoned, and betrayed even by family and friends to the point of death, felt appropriate.
In the sermon, I talked about how far we seemed to be from the new heavens and new earth described in Isaiah 65. Instead, we found ourselves in a Luke 21 scenario in which we had the responsibility to bear witness. I acknowledged the election, the fact that there were deep divisions in our nation, and told the congregation that our current moment transcended partisan politics. The essence of our faith was being tested, and we needed to return to the basics. What does it mean to be a follower of Jesus Christ? What does it mean to love your neighbor? Who is your neighbor? These questions needed to be answered today, in our context, with actions and not just words, because the vulnerable were under assault. To do nothing would be to turn away from Jesus.

The congregants gave me a generally warm reception. They were nice and did not say much about my sermon. Surprisingly, I felt comfortable. Maybe it was because guest preachers have the luxury of an easy escape route. But there was one experience I did not escape. After my sermon, as I was shaking people’s hands, a man approached me. He put his hand on my shoulder and said: “You don’t have to worry. The big man upstairs is in charge.” His words felt as comforting as ice down my back.

This comment continued to claw its way under my skin. It was not just what was said but how it was said and who said it. It came from a place of security, from someone far removed and with little to lose from the potential fallout of a hateful political platform come to power. It also carried an air of passivity right after I had delivered a call to action. Don’t worry because God is in charge? How was this supposed to reassure the millions of vulnerable people across various groups targeted by the policies of the incoming administration? What does it mean to tell people who face deportation, travel bans, and losing health coverage that God is in charge?

**“GOD IS IN CONTROL”**

Theologian Willie Jennings has said that four of the most dangerous words in Christian theology are “God is in control.” This political season accentuates the danger. Nevertheless, the danger has always been there. The tragic irony of saying “the big man upstairs is in charge” is that this kind of language has often been used to justify and advance white propertied men over others.

This language has also provided a national script. From Manifest Destiny to the notion of the United States as a “City upon a Hill,” the belief that God is somehow guiding this particular nation toward greatness has been used to justify actions such as the genocide of Native Americans and military interventions. The “City upon a Hill” phrase, which was coined by John Winthrop, has been adopted by presidents such as John F. Kennedy, Ronald Reagan, George W. Bush, and Barack Obama. In recent months, the script has been slightly modified. According to a zealous religious base, God is using our newest president to restore the nation’s declining greatness.

Those words—“You don’t have to worry. The big man upstairs is in charge”—also disturbed me because a part of me thought maybe that man was right. The big man upstairs was in charge — and he was white. I would not be the first person to come to this conclusion. Anthea Butler rekindled Bill Jones’ question, “Is God a White Racist?”, after George Zimmerman was acquitted after shooting Trayvon Martin.

James Baldwin recounts in *The Fire Next Time* the sudden epiphany he had while lying on a church floor that God is white. Duke Divinity School professor of theology J. Kameron Carter has advocated for a Christian atheism which rejects America’s reining god of white supremacy.

The election — and life after it — has highlighted the link between theology and action. What good is it to talk about God’s power if we let those in power oppress God’s children? Questions about God being in control run deeper than debates about Augustinianism versus Pelagianism, Calvinism versus Arminianism, or process theology. We must ask how theological language concerning God’s power functions inside of power relations, alongside material realities, and explore how this language is wielded to justify the status quo. Just as political theorist Hannah Arendt once said that the only valid argument under certain conditions is to promptly rescue the person whose death is predicted, so the only valid theological argument under certain conditions is to protect those under attack. Otherwise, any claims about God’s control are like a clanging cymbal.

**THE KINGDOM OF GOD**

After November, there was no time to wait. I was part of a group of students that pressured the Divinity School to support sanctuary efforts for undocumented immigrants. It was a small step but reflected the powerful ways in which church leaders can respond.

I see this power at work in people like the Rev. Traci Blackmon, who, standing alongside the Rev. William Barber outside Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell’s office
in protest of inhumane healthcare proposals, proclaimed: “It is time to stop calling God by other names when you really want to call God ‘capitalism.’ It is time to stop cloaking your greed in religious language. I’m here to tell you that there is nothing right about the religion that is happening in these halls.”

We should not confuse God’s rule for the rule of wealthy elites. In that sermon I preached after the election, I recalled one of my field education experiences in a community west of Asheville, N.C. A factory in the area used to employ a large percentage of the town’s residents. Years before, the factory had left, and many in the community had not recovered economically. Part of my summer involved working with churches that distributed food and other forms of aid to trailer-park communities. In these settings, I witnessed a kind of poverty that I had never seen before. These people were often forgotten by both major political parties. The people themselves often blamed their problems on immigrants and foreigners. I wondered why. Latino migrant workers had not taken the factory away. Trade agreements and corporate power had not only destroyed many jobs in that community but also destroyed jobs on the other side of the border. It’s true that racism had deep roots in the community, but racism was also a politically expedient tool. If the problems were not conveniently blamed on immigrants and Muslims and African Americans, then the blame would rest on the ruling classes and on the systems that exploit and divide the majority of us.

THE FAITHFULNESS OF GOD

Faith without works is dead, and theology without action is empty. This is how I have learned to deal with my own anxieties about our future in this nation and the wider world. By ourselves, we cannot change the course of the world. But the course of the world cannot change without people taking action. Describing the ways in which God is present in the midst of inequalities is good, but changing those inequalities is even better. This is what it means to seek the kingdom.

Confronting the challenges presented by our nation’s politics and the threats to our survival on this planet will require a wide net of solidarity and a truly social gospel. The Latino liberation theologian Gustavo Gutiérrez reminded us that theology is a critical reflection on praxis. Theology should not stop with reflecting on the world but should participate in the world’s transformation. Likewise, theologian Emilie Townes has argued that a womanist ethic is never content merely to react to the situation; it seeks to change the situation. Dealing with the changes in our society will also require us to process the various forms of suffering taking place in this moment.

Poet Audre Lorde describes a helpful distinction between suffering and pain. Suffering is unmetabolized and unscrutinized pain. Pain, on the other hand, is an experience that is named and recognized and then used in some way for strength, knowledge, or action. To say blithely that God is in control in this political season is to leave God’s people in their suffering.

It is probably better to think about God’s faithfulness than God “being in control.” Even still, I remain agnostic about describing God’s control in relationship to our unfolding political events. What I do know is what God calls us to do and that Jesus is present with us in our acts of solidarity. I was taught, “La teología sana sana y la teología enferma enferma”—theology that is whole brings wholeness, and theology that is sick brings sickness. For me, the litmus test for all theology is whether it brings life or death.

Who is in charge? The thing about false gods is that they eventually fall. Who we imagine upstairs has everything to do with how we relate to those locked downstairs.
Spirited Life Intervention Program Reduces Health Risk Factors for Clergy

The Spirited Life intervention program of the Clergy Health Initiative for more than 1,100 United Methodist clergy in North Carolina led to improvements in weight, cholesterol, and blood pressure that were sustained over 24 months. The findings were published in the June 19 issue of the *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* as the culmination of this portion of the 10-year, $17 million clergy health project funded by The Duke Endowment.

“Pastors feel great internal pressure to care for others non-stop,” said lead researcher Rae Jean Proeschold-Bell, an associate research professor in the Duke Global Health Institute. “The sacred nature of their work combined with the many roles they play makes pastors reluctant to take breaks, especially if there is no co-pastor in their church to provide back-up.”

This stress and the availability of food at so many church meetings have created a situation in which 78 percent of pastors are overweight or obese, which then makes them vulnerable to chronic diseases. The Duke team’s research has documented above-average rates of depression, obesity, and several chronic diseases for clergy.

Unlike in most studies, participants were recruited based on being a clergy member, as opposed to having a particular health diagnosis. Engagement in the intervention was high, possibly because pastors saw their peers were similarly involved. They also were able to set their own health goals—with health defined as mind, body, and spirit—instead of being required to focus on a single diagnosis or a specific behavior.

This study also was unique in its length, said co-author Gary Bennett, the Bishop-MacDermott Family Professor of Psychology & Neuroscience, Global Health and Medicine at Duke.

“Few interventions last two years,” said Bennett. “The long duration enabled participants to practice new health behaviors, slip up, and then re-engage in healthy habits with support such as health coaching still in place.”

Participating clergy members began the study with a three-day workshop that challenged the idea that self-care is selfish. It reframed health in theologically relevant terms, thereby making health behaviors important to this group.

Pastors underwent health screenings at the beginning of the study and at the 12-, 18- and 24-month marks. Many checked in with a health coach once a month. Pastors could view online weight-loss videos that focused on portion size and sugar reduction. To maintain engagement, overnight workshops were held in the middle and end of the study, and small grants of $500 toward health goals were also offered at the midpoint.

“Spirited Life encouraged pastors to develop their own holistic health goals and offered support through a variety of resources as they worked toward them,” said Carl Weisner, senior director of the Duke Clergy Health Initiative.

Along with depression and stress, the study measured metabolic syndrome (a cluster of conditions—including abnormal cholesterol levels, high blood pressure, large waist circumference, and diabetes indicators—that can lead to heart disease, stroke, and diabetes). Results showed a marked benefit on metabolic syndrome but no significant effect on depression or stress measures.

“This study indicates that you can offer a less-intense, longer term intervention and still achieve clinically meaningful results,” said Proeschold-Bell. “We believe these findings have broad applications for other population groups, including regular churchgoers and non-clergy caregivers.”

Adapted from *Duke Today*, https://today.duke.edu/2017/06/clergy-intervention-program-reduces-health-risk-factors. The full research study can be found here: https://divinity.duke.edu/initiatives/clergy-health-initiative/learning#research.
Divinity School Receives Grant to Develop Leadership for the Black Church

Duke Divinity School has received an $80,000 grant from the General Board of Higher Education & Ministry’s Young Clergy Initiative (YCI) to help develop new leaders for the church.

The goal of the YCI is to increase the number of young clergy in the United Methodist Church by preparing and nurturing clergy for lifelong transformational ministry. The Divinity School’s grant is intended to help develop leadership for the black church within the UMC.

The grant will help identify candidates and support them through a variety of formational opportunities, including mentorships and funded field education. Field education opportunities will include placements across the U.S. with gifted, experienced black pastors in order to forge strong mentoring relationships and community.

“This grant will help identify and prepare young black clergy who are committed to a lifetime of ministry in the United Methodist Church in response to the gospel’s ongoing work of reconciliation,” said the Rev. Rhonda Parker, senior director of ministerial formation and student life. “It will connect our student body with resources within and beyond the Divinity School by drawing on the strengths of our connectional church and our common mission to transform the world with the love of Jesus Christ.”

The grant will also support the attendance of each seminarian and their mentoring pastor at the Convocation for Pastors of Black Churches. Internships funded by this program will begin during the 2017–18 academic year.
Divinity Students Discover Contemporary Lessons from Italian History Tour

As part of the Divinity School course “The Church in Italy: Early and Medieval Christianity,” 11 students toured sites of historical and theological importance in Italy. The course, which is co-taught by Beth Sheppard, director of Divinity Library and associate professor of the practice of theological bibliography, and Meredith Riedel, assistant professor of the history of Christianity, included studying archaeological remains of Mediterranean daily life in the early church period, the art and sacred architecture of the medieval period, and modern aspects of a Roman Catholic country. The itinerary included Portus, Ostia Antica, Naples, Capri, Pompeii and Herculaneum, Ravenna, Venice, and Milan.

“The pagan wealth and lavish lifestyles of Pompeii and Herculaneum punctuated by human remains recorded a society frighteningly close to our own,” said one Divinity student. “It gave me pause to consider how our own pursuits of pleasure, desire and acquisition, as well as our quest for security and secure livelihood, might distract us from seeing catastrophic disaster before it ends our own way of life. I wondered how we might live if we understood just how fragile and temporary our lives are.”

Students noted the juxtaposition of the beauty of Capri with the violence of the emperor Tiberius, the extensive wealth and culture that existed alongside the poverty in the ancient world—and today, and the art and architecture inspired by Christian worship. “In St. Cecilia’s I became aware of the stark contrast of the awe and encouragement the veneration of the saints was meant to inspire yet how opposite the character of lives and society seemed to be outside the walls of the church,” said another student. “How effective were the stories, really? And by extension, how effective are ours, as American Christians, affecting the society outside the walls of our churches?”

In a final reflection, a tour participant noted: “My most profoundly spiritual experience during our visit to Rome was walking through the catacombs. Even through my claustrophobic moments of panic I was impressed by a sense of walking where faithful believers had been laid to rest and felt a sense of connection to the longer, broader, historical, global believers. I could see why chapels were made within the tombs—not because of the popes, per se, but because of the martyrs and children and poor. I felt honored to be counted among those who cared for the lowly and were willing to give even their lives to be faithful. I felt a part of something bigger than I’ve ever felt a part of before.”

Above: Mosaics in the Basilica of San Vitale, Ravenna, Italy

Left: Divinity students outside the Colosseum, Rome, Italy. Pictured left-right kneeling: Juan Turcios, David Blankenberg, Joyce Waterbury, Beth M. Sheppard (tour leader). Row 2, left-right: Lynn Holmes, Nichole Cella, David Joyner, LaDonna Farrish, James Stanley, Shanae Jones (guest traveler), Carla Green, and Meredith Riedel (tour leader). Row 3, left-right: Orlander Thomas, Sonja Adams.
Tenth President of Duke University Inaugurated

Vincent E. Price, the tenth president of Duke University, was inaugurated into office Oct. 5 in a ceremony held on the Abele Quad. Price joined Duke after serving as provost of the University of Pennsylvania. He is a widely respected scholar of public opinion, social influence, and political communication, and has numerous publications in addition to his experience in university leadership. Ellen Davis, Amos Ragan Kearns Distinguished Professor of Bible and Practical Theology at the Divinity School, co-led the presidential search committee.

To read a Q&A in which President Price answers questions from Duke University employees, see https://today.duke.edu/2017/08/conversation-dukes-new-president.

Divinity Library Announces Archives and Collections

The papers and photographs donated to the Divinity Library by the estate of Susan Keefe, associate professor of church history at Duke Divinity School from 1981 until her death in 2012, have been digitized and are now available at http://divinityarchive.com/handle/11258/17363. Additional materials, such as items sent to Professor Keefe rather than authored by her, are available in print format in the new archive space. Please contact the library to view them.

With the generous support of Thelma and the late Harold Crowder of South Boston, Va., three museum-quality display cases have been installed in the Jordan Reading Room. They feature items from the extensive collection of Wesleyana that was also donated by the Crowders. Digital images of items from that collection may be viewed at: http://divinityarchive.com/handle/11258/33130.

Work continues on long-term initiatives, including the Tom Oden Collection; the archival collections of Trinity Avenue Presbyterian Church and Duke Memorial United Methodist Church; digitization of pre-1923 items presently in the collection; transcription of the William Wilberforce letters; and, with the aid of the Center for Studies in the Wesleyan Tradition, a project that involves matching existing transcripts of the Wesley family letters.

Divinity School Inaugurates RISE Program

A new program was launched before the 2017–18 academic year to provide incoming students with support for a range of academic challenges. Fatimah Salleh, Ph.D., D’16, assistant director of academic support, is designing a preparatory program to support students who may not have a theological or religious studies background, have a significant gap of time since they were last in school, or want to prepare for their academic life before classes begin.

The first two-day workshop was held in the week before fall semester classes began, and over half of the incoming M.Div. students registered for this voluntary program. Participants examined effective ways to read, analyze, and write about theological texts; were introduced to the type of academic work expected at the Divinity School; and were given tutorials on library resources and theological research.

Annual Gardner C. Taylor Lecture Series

The annual Gardner C. Taylor Lecture Series, sponsored by the Office of Black Church Studies, was held Sept. 19–20 in Goodson Chapel at Duke Divinity School. The Divinity School also welcomed African American alumni to campus to celebrate an alumni day Sept. 19.

The Rev. Dr. John W. Kinney, senior pastor at Ebenezer Baptist Church in Beaverdam, Va., was the distinguished lecturer and preacher. The Rev. Cheryl D. Moore D’96, senior pastor at Zion Temple in Durham, N.C., opened the series with the lecture “State of the Black Church Address.”
Center for Reconciliation Hosts Conversations about Conflict Transformation

The Center for Reconciliation began a yearlong series of lunch-hour conversations to explore conflict transformation. Sessions include speakers, time for discussion, and practical resources. Conflict is a natural part of life and bound to occur, whether in the home, school, community, church, or workplace, and the ways conflict is managed has the potential to support personal, community, and institutional transformation. Leaders in all walks of life often have a responsibility to help others work through their conflicts, and yet many, if not most, leaders have not been introduced to the skills necessary to support effective conflict transformation, nor do they have a deep understanding of their own relationship to conflict.

Sessions include:
• “Your Brain on Conflict” (Aug. 31, 2017), with Dr. Len White, associate professor of neurology, associate director for integrative human biological sciences and co-director of undergraduate studies in neuroscience at Duke University
• “Understanding Implicit Bias” (Sept. 13, 2017), with the Rev. Chris Brady, pastor of Wilson Temple United Methodist Church, Raleigh, N.C.
• “White Supremacy Culture” (Oct. 4, 2017), with Tema Okun, Ph.D., Equity Fellows Program at Duke University
• “Boundaries and Relational Covenants” (Oct. 31, 2017), with the Rev. Beth M. Crissman, district superintendent and missional strategist for the Blue Ridge District in the Western North Carolina Conference of the United Methodist Church, Asheville, N.C.
• “Active Listening” (Feb. 7, 2018), with the Rev. Chris Brady, pastor of Wilson Temple United Methodist Church, Raleigh, N.C.
• “Negotiation for Christian Leaders” (March 21, 2018), with Grace J. Marsh, executive director of the Elna B. Spaulding Conflict Resolution Center, Durham, N.C.
• “Mediation for Christian Leaders” (April 11, 2018), with Grace J. Marsh, executive director of the Elna B. Spaulding Conflict Resolution Center, Durham, N.C.

The conversation series is offered in partnership with the Conflict Transformation Ministries of the North Carolina Conference of the United Methodist Church and co-sponsored by Methodist House of Studies, Hispanic House of Studies, and Thriving Rural Communities.

Exploring Reconciliation Narratives Event

David Anderson Hooker, M.Div., J.D., Ph.D., professor of the practice of conflict transformation and peace-building at the Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies within the University of Notre Dame’s Keough School of Global Affairs, led a workshop Sept. 8–9 on “Exploring Reconciliation Narratives.” Divinity students were encouraged to attend as an alternative Mentoring for Ministries session.

The workshop focused on the ways that conflict and broken relationships can be understood as a clash of narratives, specifically how injustice may be seen as a clash of worldly realities with the prophetic narrative of the realm of God and how reconciliation is encouraged when individuals and communities build and live into preferred shared narratives. In order for justice and reconciliation to take proper shape, it is imperative that alienated parties understand the source of the narratives that structure conflict.

Through a series of interactive exchanges with others and guided self-reflections, participants explored the ways that Scripture, childhood stories, and personal and family narratives shape how they think about justice and reconciliation and also guide the performance of their identities.

The event was sponsored by the Center for Reconciliation and the Office of Black Church Studies, in partnership with DurhamCares.
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NEW BOOKS FROM DUKE DIVINITY FACULTY

Five Means of Grace: Experiencing God’s Love the Wesleyan Way
By Elaine A. Heath, Dean of Duke Divinity School and Professor of Missional and Pastoral Theology
Abingdon Press, 2017
Hardcover and E-book, $9.99
Study Guide and DVD also available

**THIS NEW BOOK** and study guide by Elaine A. Heath examines the five means of grace or practices that the Methodist movement founder John Wesley considered a pathway to spiritual growth and a steady source of renewal. It includes a video series featuring Heath and Joerg Rieger, Cal Turner Chancellor’s Chair of Wesleyan Studies and Distinguished Professor of Theology at Vanderbilt Divinity School. He received a Th.M. from Duke Divinity School and a Ph.D. in religion and ethics from Duke University.

Heath leads readers through a discussion of the five means of grace that Wesley considered spiritual practices that Jesus not only participated in but encouraged his followers to do: prayer, searching Scripture, receiving the Lord’s Supper, fasting, and conferencing (communion or fellowship). *Five Means of Grace* helps readers consider how each of these five ordinary channels that God uses to draw people into a fruitful relationship can help faith communities pray more deeply and live more missionally.

Wesley observed the need for continuous renewal of relationships with God and others, so he established a recurring annual process for God’s people to make a promise of faithfulness: the Wesleyan Covenant for Renewal. One important aspect of Wesley’s theology is that spiritual practices are seamlessly integrated with the work of loving our neighbors well, which is why he stated that there is no holiness but social holiness—a life of genuine prayer inevitably leads to a life of hospitality, mercy, and justice.

A Word to Live By:
Church’s Teachings for a Changing World: Volume 7
By Lauren Winner, Associate Professor of Christian Spirituality
Church Publishing, 2017
96 pages, Paperback, $12.00

**WITH THE LAUNCH** of the Church’s Teachings for a Changing World series, visionary Episcopal thinkers and leaders have produced a new set of books that are grounded and thoughtful enough for seminarians and leaders, concise and accessible enough for newcomers, and filled with a host of discussion resources that help readers to dig deep.

In this seventh volume, bestselling author, scholar, and priest Lauren Winner introduces the story behind the Scriptures and invites readers to engage the Word of God with curiosity and confidence. Rich with content and grounded in Episcopal tradition, *A Word to Live By* is filled with Winner’s trademark combination of humor, authenticity, and rich insight.

American Religion:
Contemporary Trends, 2nd Edition
By Mark Chaves, Professor of Sociology, Religious Studies, and Divinity
Princeton University Press, 2017
160 pages, Paperback, $19.95

**MOST AMERICANS** say they believe in God, and more than a third say they attend religious services every week. Yet studies show that people do not really go to church as often as they claim, and it is not always clear what they mean when they tell pollsters they believe in God or pray. *American Religion* presents the best and most up-to-date information about religious trends in the United States in a succinct and accessible manner. Now with updated data and a new preface, this sourcebook provides essential information about key developments in American religion since 1972 and is the first major resource of its kind to appear in more than two decades.

Mark Chaves looks at trends in diversity, belief, involvement, congregational life, leadership, liberal Protestant decline, and polarization. He draws on two important surveys: the General Social Survey, an ongoing survey of Americans’ changing attitudes and behaviors, begun in 1972; and the National Congregations Study, a survey of American religious congregations across the religious spectrum. Chaves finds that American religious life has seen much continuity in recent decades, but also much change. He challenges the popular notion that religion is witnessing a resurgence in the United States—in fact, traditional belief and practice is either stable or declining. Chaves examines why the decline in liberal Protestant denominations has been accompanied by the spread of liberal Protestant attitudes about religious and social tolerance, how confidence in religious institutions has declined more than confidence in secular institutions, and a host of other crucial trends.
Undomesticated Dissent: Democracy and the Public Virtue of Religious Nonconformity
By Curtis W. Freeman, Research Professor of Theology and Baptist Studies
Baylor University Press, 2017
288 pages, Hardback, $29.95

Bunhill Fields is a burial ground originally located outside the city walls of London, signifying that the dead interred there lived and died outside the English body politic. Three monuments stand in the central courtyard: one for John Bunyan (1628–1688), a second for Daniel Defoe (1660?–1731), and a third for William Blake (1757–1827). In Undomesticated Dissent, Freeman focuses on the three classic texts by Bunyan, Defoe, and Blake—The Pilgrim’s Progress, Robinson Crusoe, and Jerusalem—as testaments of dissent. He provides a sweeping intellectual history of the public virtue of religiously motivated dissent from the 17th century to the present by carefully comparing, contrasting, and then weighing the various types of dissent—evangelical and spiritual dissent (Bunyan), economic and social dissent (Defoe), and radical and apocalyptic dissent (Blake).

The enduring literary power and prophetic influence of these texts derives from their original political and religious contexts, and Freeman traces the confluence of great literature and principled religious nonconformity in the checkered story of democratic political arrangements. Undomesticated Dissent argues that dissenting imagination is a generative source for democracy as well as a force for resistance to the coercive powers of domestication. By placing Bunyan, Defoe, and Blake within an extended argument about the nature and ends of democracy, Freeman reveals how these three men transmitted their democratic ideas across the globe within the text of their stories. He concludes that dissent, so crucial to the establishing of democracy, remains equally essential for its flourishing.

Rise Up, Shepherd!: Advent Reflections on the Spirituals
By Luke Powery, Associate Professor of Homiletics and Dean of Duke University Chapel
Westminster John Knox Press, 2017
104 pages, Paperback, $13.00

Valuable not only for their sublime musical expression, the African American spirituals offer profound insights into the human condition and the Christian life. Many focus on an essential scene of the Christian drama: the coming of God as the child in Bethlehem and as the hope of the world and the liberator of God’s oppressed people.

In these devotions for the season of Advent, Luke Powery leads the reader through the spirituals as they confront the mystery of incarnation and redemption. In Rise Up, Shepherd!, each devotion features the lyrics of the spiritual, a reflection on the spiritual’s meaning, a Scripture verse, and a brief prayer.

Paul and the Person: Reframing Paul’s Anthropology
By Susan Grove Eastman, Associate Research Professor of New Testament
Eerdmans, 2017
223 pages, Paperback, $30.00

In this book, Susan Grove Eastman presents an innovative exploration of Paul’s participatory theology in conversation with both ancient and contemporary conceptions of the self. By juxtaposing Paul, ancient philosophers, and modern theorists of the person, Eastman opens a conversation that illuminates Paul’s thought in new ways and brings his voice into current debates about personhood.

Paul and the Person devotes close attention to the Pauline letters within their first-century context, particularly the Greco-Roman fascination with questions of performance and identity. At the same time, Eastman makes connections with recent scholarship in psychology and neurobiology in order to situate Paul’s insights within the context of contemporary understandings of human identity.
**Faculty & Staff Notes**

**Jeremy Begbie** presented a paper on “The Order of Creation and the Order of Words” at the “Christian Congregational Music: Local and Global Perspectives” conference in Ripon College Cuddesdon (U.K.) and participated in a workshop in Cambridge (U.K.) for an upcoming volume entitled *Rethinking Bach*. In June he participated in the Logos Institute Conference hosted by the University of St. Andrews (Scotland), and in September he invited professional instrumentalists and scholars to Duke’s Nasher Museum of Art to take part in a lecture and performance event, “The Patience to See,” which included a benefit concert in Goodson Chapel.


**Charles Campbell** taught a weeklong course in Uppsala in June for the Swedish Preaching program, and in Copenhagen he taught a three-day class for master’s students at the University of Copenhagen and preached at the Frederiksberg Slotskirke. He hosted the board of *Societas Homiletica* at Duke Divinity School in August.

**Stephen Chapman** published “Between Text and Sermon: Daniel 7” in the journal *Interpretation* and “God’s Reconciling Work: Atonement in the Old Testament” in the *T&T Clark Companion to Atonement*, edited by Adam Johnson. In August he discussed “What Sort of Ending Is the Ending of Samuel?” at the international meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature in Berlin. His book *I Samuel as Christian Scripture* was named Reference Book of the Year for 2016 by the Academy of Parish Clergy. He was designated a Master Angler by the Sioux Lookout District of the Canadian Province of Ontario, and this fall he begins a second term as director of graduate studies in religion at Duke.


**Farr Curlin** participated in the 2017 Nancy Weaver Emerson Lecture at Duke University on April 25, arguing, in dialogue with Dr. Timothy Quill, that assisted suicide falls outside the bounds of good medicine. On April 26 he gave the lecture “Contending Conscientiously for Good Medicine with Respect to Human Reproduction” for the University of Chicago’s MacLean Center for Clinical Medical Ethics seminar series. He is the founding director of the Arete Initiative, a new venture of Duke’s Kenan Institute for Ethics focused on recovering and sustaining the virtues in contemporary life, especially in the workplace, university, and public square.

**Matthew Floding**, with several colleagues from the Presbyterian/Reformed Theological Field Education Caucus, published “Engaging the Dynamics of Pastoral Imagination for Field Education” in *Reflective Practice* (37, 2017). The project was supported by a grant from the Association for Theological Field Education.

**Curtis Freeman** published *Undomesticated Dissent: Democracy and the Public Virtue of Religious Nonconformity* (Baylor University Press).
Press) and a review of Rachel Adcock’s *Baptist Women’s Writings in Revolutionary Culture, 1640–1680* in *Renaissance Quarterly* (69.4, 2016). He gave the lecture “Dissent and Democracy” for the Roger Williams Fellowship of the American Baptist Churches USA at the Biennial Missions Summit in Portland, Ore., June 30; participated in a panel discussion of the Festschrift for William L. Portier, *Weaving the American Catholic Tapestry* (Pickwick); and gave the presentation “The Baptist Manifesto after Twenty Years” during the College Theology Society Annual Meeting at Salve Regina University, Newport, R.I., June 1–4. He was the Baptist delegation chair at the fourth meeting in a five-year bilateral dialogue between the Baptist World Alliance and the World Methodist Council in Runaway Bay, Jamaica, Feb. 1–8. He preached at the ordination services of Suzii Paynter, executive coordinator of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, at Austin Heights Baptist Church (Nacogdoches, Texas), May 7, and Mandy McMichael D’05, ‘06, G’14 at Pintlala Baptist Church (Hope Hull, Ala.), May 21.

**MARY FULKERSON** gave the presentations “Addressing Racism: Practical Theology” at the Big Tent Advocacy Committee on Women’s Concerns, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), in St. Louis, Mo., July 8, and “Colorblindness in Churches” at White Memorial Presbyterian Church (Raleigh, N.C.), July 16. She preached the sermon “Sowing the Good Seed: Race and Gender in the Church” at New Creation United Methodist Church (Durham, N.C.), July 23. During Women’s History Month, the *Englewood Review of Books* named her “One of the Ten Important Women Theologians that You Should Be Reading” for her book *Places of Redemption: Theology for a Worldly Church.*


**STEPHEN GUNTER**’s book *Arminius and His “Declaration of Sentiments”* (Baylor University Press) was published in paperback and translated into Portuguese. He spoke throughout Brazil in August on his book lecture tour.


**RICHARD LISCHER** published two review essays in *The Christian Century:* “The World Will Be Saved by Beauty” (on Dorothy Day) and “Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the Preaching Life.”

**RANDY MADDOX** published “John Wesley on ‘Patriotism’” in *Wesley and Methodist Studies* (9.2, 2017). With his assistant, he also added several volumes of John Wesley’s hymn collections to the website sponsored by the Center for Studies in the Wesleyan Tradition: http://divinity.duke.edu/initiatives/cswt/john-wesley.

**SUJIN PAK** published “Scripture, the Priesthood of All Believers, and Applications of 1 Corinthians 14” in *The People’s Book: The Reformation and the Bible*, edited by Jennifer Powell McNutt and David Lauber (IVP Academic). She attended and gave a plenary address at the Christian Forum for Reconciliation in Northeast Asia (Chejudo, South Korea), May 29–June 3.

**THOMAS PFAU** gave the paper “The Image as Eschaton” at the symposium “Image as Theology” in Rome in July. He co-edited, with Vivasvan Soni, the essay collection *Judgment and Action: Fragments toward a History* (Northwestern University Press).

**RUSSELL RICHEY** published “Formation for Ministry in American Methodism: Twenty-First Century Challenges and Two Centuries of Problem Solving” in *Unity of the Church and Human Sexuality: Toward a Faithful United Methodist Witness* (General Board of Higher Education and Ministry). He also co-directed Asbury Theological Seminary’s monthlong Wesleyan Studies Summer Seminar in June.

**MEREDITH RIEDEL** gave two conference presentations: “‘We Are All
Hussites’: Luther, Boniface VIII, and the Eastern Theology of Hus’ De ecclesia” at the international meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature (Berlin), Aug. 8–11, and “The Bones of St Andrew: Relic Migration and the Power of Holiness” at the conference “Cultures, Hopes, and Conflicts: The Mediterranean between Land and Sea” (University of Salerno, Italy), Sept. 26–28. She attended a writing workshop July 24–30 at the Collegeville Institute in Collegeville, Minn., and was named co-editor for an upcoming two-volume essay collection on Christianity in the Middle East titled Surviving Jewel: Christianity in the Middle East. With BETH SHEPPARD, in May she led a two-week Duke Divinity School study tour in Italy titled “Italy in the Life of the Church: Early and Medieval Christianity.”


LACEYE WARNER published “Advancing Home Missions: Belle Harris Bennett’s Contributions to Southern Methodism” in Methodist History (55.1–2, 2016–17); “Living Church: A Theological Practice of Evangelism” in Witness: The Journal of the Academy for Evangelism in Theological Education (30, 2016); and “Managing in the Middle … Or What Do Revelation 21:1–6a and Augustine of Hippo Have to Do with Long-Range Planning?” in Colloquy Online. She preached the sermon “Resurrection” at the Texas Youth Academy at Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary, July 10; “Pentecost: The Church’s Birthday” at First UMC (West, Texas), June 4; “Cultivating Long Obedience” at First UMC (West, Texas), May 21; and “Jonah and Mission” at the Quarry School for Pastoral Formation at Alamo Heights UMC (San Antonio, Texas), May 4. She served as visiting instructor of mission and evangelism at Seattle Pacific Seminary, June 12–16, and received the Exemplary Teacher Award for Duke Divinity School from the UMC General Board of Higher Education and Ministry.

WILL WILLIMON published a review on Michael Kinnamon’s book Fear of the Other in The Christian Century (June 8) and contributed chapters to several books: Mentoring for Ministry, edited by Jason Byassee, James Howell, and Craig Kocher (Cascade Press); Ministry in a Time When Steeples Are Falling, a Festschrift for Andrew Purves edited by Edwin Chr. van Driel (InterVarsity Press); and Text Messages, edited by John Tucker (Cascade Press). He gave the keynote lecture “Ministry in the Light of the Reformation” at the Alumni Convocation at Princeton Theological Seminary, May 16, and a lecture and sermon at the Festival of Homiletics (San Antonio, Texas), May 17–18. His preaching and speaking engagements included St. Philip’s Episcopal Church (Durham, N.C.), lectures at Tabor College and Wesley Seminary (Adelaide, Australia), Dune Church (Southampton, N.Y.), the Pastor’s School at Truett Seminary (Waco, Texas), Peachtree Christian Church (Atlanta, Ga.), and a series of lectures at Vancouver School of Theology (Vancouver, B.C.). He was interviewed May 3 on The State of Things about his book Who Lynched Willie Earle? and gave a sermon for Day One on July 31. He spoke at both the North Carolina Annual Conference and the South Carolina Conference Pastors’ School.

BRITTANY WILSON gave the paper “Placing Jesus’ Absence: Embodiment and Space in the Book of Acts” at the international meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature (Berlin), Aug. 9.

LAUREN WINNER published A Word to Live By, volume 7 in the Church’s Teachings for a Changing World series (Church Publishing).

NORMAN WIRZBA presented two lectures on “Food and Faith: A Matter for the Church” at Presbyterian College/McGill University (Montreal), May 17–18. He participated in a roundtable discussion on “Radical Hope” at the Rachel Carson Center (Munich, Germany), July 1–2. He delivered the talk, “The Spirituality of Eating” at the Chautauqua Institution (Chautauqua, N.Y.), Aug. 21, and two lectures on “Sabbath and Sustainability” at Milligan College (Elizabethtown, Tenn.), Sept. 26.
JAMES H. CHARLESWORTH D’65, G’67 has been offered the Griset Chair in Biblical Research at Chapman University in Los Angeles during his sabbatical in spring 2018 from Princeton Theological Seminary. His recent book, The Good and Evil Serpent, was named Best Biblical Book by The Christian Century, and his book Jesus Research: New Methodologies and Perceptions was named Best New Testament Book by the Biblical Archaeology Society. He received the 2017 Thomas Nelson Distinguished Scholar Award.

ROBERT SCOTT D’94 was installed as the fifth senior pastor of St. Paul Baptist Church in Charlotte, N.C.


JULIUS MCCARTER D’97 published God Is Love: The Difference Evangelical Universalism Makes. He is a minister, educator, and writer residing in Loudon, Tenn.

WARD CARVER D’98 has been named director for spiritual care with St. Thomas Health in Nashville, Tenn. He has been serving as a staff chaplain at St. Thomas for eight years.

CODY J. SHULER D’01 has been named executive director of the Fargo-Moorhead Coalition for Homeless Persons. With more than 70 partners, the coalition works to find permanent solutions to prevent, reduce, and end homelessness. He lives in Fargo, N.D.

ED DREW D’03 is a family service counselor and minister for Dignity Memorial Inc. in Greensboro, N.C., and serving as an on-call minister for Hanes-Lineberry Funeral and Cemetery Services.

JULIUS MCCARTER D’97 published God Is Love: The Difference Evangelical Universalism Makes. He is a minister, educator, and writer residing in Loudon, Tenn.

J. DANA TRENT D’06 has published Sabbath’s Sake: Embracing Your Need for Rest, Worship, and Community (Upper Room Books). She teaches world religions at Wake Tech Community College, leads retreats and workshops, and will be a featured speaker at the Apprentice Gathering at Friends University (Wichita, Kan.).

MEGHAN FLORIAN D’09 published The Middle of Things: Essays (Cascade). The book is a collection of her essays, each of which examines a different aspect of coming of age as a feminist woman within the ethos of the theological academy and the church. She lives in Durham, N.C.

DAVID WANTLAND D’15 received the 2017 Ronnie A. Yoder Scholarship from Virginia Theological Seminary and the Center for Anglican Communion Studies, awarded for his paper “Genderqueer Mothering in Hosea 11.”

SCOTT CAMERON T’92, D’16 is helping to develop plans for a Friendship House in Fayetteville, N.C., inspired by his time living in Friendship House in Durham, N.C. Friendship House provides housing for young adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities, matching them with graduate students and giving them the opportunity to live together in community. He is currently a neonatal physician at Cape Fear Valley Medical Center.
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ERNEST WILSON GLASS D’46, of Columbus, N.C., died March 19, 2017. A lifetime Baptist minister, Ernest was ordained by First Baptist Church in Sanford, N.C., on Aug. 12, 1945. He held pastorates in Chadbourn, Weldon, and Charlotte, and he served as a chaplain in the U.S. Navy. He also served with the Foreign Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention as a missionary to Singapore for nine years, where he was the treasurer of the Baptist Mission in Malaysia and started several English- and Chinese-speaking congregations. He was a graduate of Wake Forest College, Duke Divinity School, and Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, and he completed Chinese language studies at Yale University.

FRANK JOSEPH “JOE” MITCHELL D’53, G’62, of Durham, N.C., died July 25, 2017. Ordained in the Virginia Methodist Conference, he served from 1953 to 1958 as pastor at Chamberlayne Heights Methodist Church in Richmond, Va., and Tabernacle Methodist Church in Pungo, Va. He spent most of his career as a religion and philosophy professor, having served posts at Carleton College (Minn.), Union College (Ky.), Central Methodist College (Mo.), and Troy State University (Ala.). He taught the Covenant and New Covenant Sunday school classes at First UMC in Troy, Ala. After retiring from teaching, he re-entered pastoral ministry and served Covenant UMC in Chesapeake, Va., and Ensley First UMC in Birmingham, Ala. In 2001, he and his wife, Norma, returned to Durham, N.C., and were active in community groups, including Epworth UMC.

RICHARD A. BEAUCHAMP G’70 died Dec. 23, 2016. He was a professor of philosophy and religion at Christopher Newport University in Newport News, Va., until his retirement in 2010. He was especially interested in personalist philosophy and produced many publications throughout his career. He is survived by his wife, Mary Meekins Beauchamp, a son, a daughter, and three stepsons.

CARLTON RUTHERFORD D’05 died July 15, 2017. He earned degrees from Hampton University, East Carolina University, and Duke University, and he was employed by Durham County Social Services and Duke University Medical Center as a social worker. He was a member of Saint John’s Metropolitan Community Church in Raleigh, N.C., and served there as pastor of congregational care for several years. He is survived by his sisters, brother, and stepmother.

Giving forward

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As we settled into retirement, Christa and I decided we could “give forward” and, in our small way, help to make the financial burden of Divinity School less stressful for students. Through charitable gift annuities, which provide income for our lifetimes, we have established The J. Stanley and Christa Langenwalter Brown Scholarship Fund which, after we are gone, will provide financial assistance for Divinity students over generations to come.

J. STANLEY BROWN D’89
Charitable gift annuity to support student financial aid at Duke Divinity School
IS COURAGE A VIRTUE, and what does it mean to be properly courageous? In *Summa theologiae* II-II.123.1, St. Thomas Aquinas begins to answer these questions by distinguishing among three kinds of virtue. First are the intellectual virtues that enable us to reason rightly. Second is the virtue of justice, by which we set things right in human affairs. And third are the virtues of courage and temperance that enable us to work for justice by removing obstacles to it. While temperance makes it possible for us to pursue justice without being lured by pleasures that would distract us from justice, courage is the virtue by which we overcome difficulties and dangers inherent in the pursuit of justice. Courage renders the will capable of justice.

But there is no courage without fear. Fear, for Aquinas, is the natural and healthy passion that we experience when we perceive the threat of separation from what we most deeply love: “All fear arises from love, since no one fears save what is contrary to something he loves” (*STh* II-II.125.2). Healthy fear is important, indeed essential, for a rightly formed life. In fact, Aquinas argues that when people do not experience fear, either because of a lack of love for themselves or for others or due to reckless disregard of danger, they cannot be said to be courageous, even if they act in daring and audacious ways. Courage names not the absence of fear but the disposition in our fear to confront obstacles to justice and then to endure the pain and hardship that this confrontation brings.

In the past several months, racialized violence has again exposed the ever-present wound of American slavery and white supremacy. Black men continue to die years earlier, and to be incarcerated far more often, than any other segment of the American population. Headlines describe credible threats of climate change and nuclear war as well as chronicles of despair displayed in the opioid epidemic, rising suicide rates, and campaigns to legalize assisted suicide. All of these threats to justice, and more, are appropriate to fear.

We at Duke Divinity School are not immune to fear. Theological schools everywhere are fighting to adjust to the decline of established denominations, to the rise of the religiously unaffiliated, and to rising operational costs. Seminaries are critically assessing both the content and the process of theological education. Precisely because seminaries and what they stand for are loved so deeply, and because their mission is so important in this time and age, those who love them feel fear in times of uncertainty and change. We know well what it means to be, as the hymn goes, “tossed about / with many a conflict, many a doubt; / fightings within, and fears without.”

But there is wisdom and grace in the hymn’s next words: “O Lamb of God, I come, I come.” Aquinas recognized that ordinary courage will always fail, simply because some obstacles—especially death—are so formidable. But in Jesus Christ, we bear witness to life beyond death and to the triumph of justice beyond our present experience. In light of this, we are granted courage that comes not from our own effort but from the work of the Holy Spirit in us. In Jesus and through the power of the Holy Spirit, we find strength to challenge, to persevere, and to be patient.

Abiding in Jesus in times of fear is neither a quick fix nor a way to avoid engaging pain and injustice. On the contrary, in the hope of Jesus we are able to address pain and injustice directly without being overcome by fear or despair. We say with Peter: “Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life” (John 6:68). And we hear him say to us, “Take courage; I have conquered the world” (John 16:33).

What does it mean to be courageous in our time? It means we take full account of our fears without denying them. It means we honestly examine not only our fears but also the loves that give rise to our fears. It means we work to confront threats to justice and to rightly ordered loves, and we do so with patience and with hope. And it means, above all else, that we renounce any idolatrous presumption that the work is ours alone. We lean into Jesus, in whose life we participate and who alone makes faithful courage possible.

Courage means we honestly examine not only our fears but also the loves that give rise to our fears.
So let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest time, if we do not give up.

— Galatians 6:9
Convocation & Pastors’ School will focus on the timely and important question of how the church can confront and heal the bias, hate, fear, and division in our families, congregations, and communities.

FEATURED PRESENTERS: Lecia Brooks, outreach director at the Southern Poverty Law Center; Amy Butler, senior minister at The Riverside Church of New York City; Michael-Ray Mathews, director of clergy organizing for PICO National Network; Valerie Cooper, associate professor of religion and society and black church studies at Duke Divinity School; and William H. Lamar IV, pastor of Metropolitan African Methodist Episcopal Church.