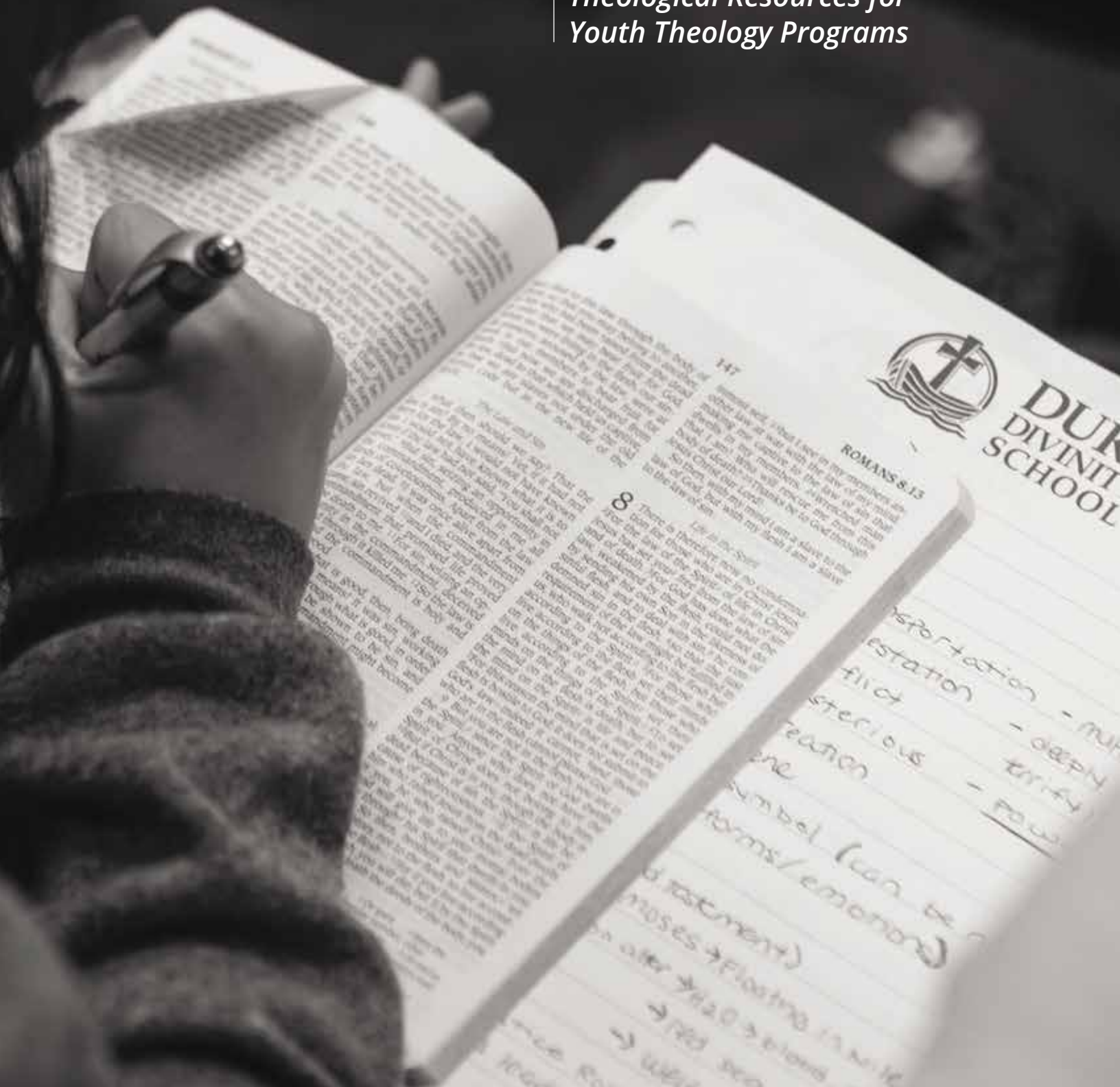


THE GRATITUDE PROJECT

THE DUKE YOUTH ACADEMY TOOLKIT

*Theological Resources for
Youth Theology Programs*



DUKE
DIVINITY
SCHOOL

ROMANS 8:13

8

reformation - multi
estation - deeply
flict - trify
sterious - Paul
reation
ne
symbel (can be
forms/emoions)

d testament)
moses → floating in water
over → had → island
→ red sea
→ well

Dear reader,

For 20 years, the Duke Youth Academy for Christian Formation (DYA) welcomed young people to a bountiful feast of Christian practice that featured the breadth and depth of the Christian tradition. Young people experienced a renewed thankfulness and wonder for familiar practices and a curiosity for unfamiliar spiritual practices. Alongside these students, mentors and Duke Divinity faculty feasted, too, and reimagined their primary work as seminarians, professors, and researchers. DYA was a dislocated, wholly other space that invited all into a neo-monastic order. We all witnessed new possibilities: The kingdom of God is an expansive and radical place that wholly accepts all.

DYA invited not only young people to this radical witness, but also youth theology administrators and practitioners. DYA encouraged the development of the Master of Arts in Christian Practice degree at Duke Divinity School, partnered with the Hispanic/Latinx Ministries of the North Carolina United Methodist Conference to birth a Hispanic/Latinx youth theology program for middle and high school students, served as a consultant to domestic and international youth theology programs, and hosted several youth theology colloquia for youth ministry practitioners.

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, the DYA team has been working on archiving DYA's stories and practices. More than 50 alumni, students, and staff participated in interviews and submitted photos and stories to what we have named *The Gratitude Project*.

In this DYA toolkit, you will find pieces that distill the core learnings and practices of DYA. We have assembled a wide range of articles on topics such as DYA theology, technology at DYA, and Beloved Community.

We hope that the DYA toolkit will aid and challenge your work as a youth theology practitioner.

Kind regards,



ELIZABETH DEGAYNOR //
*Assistant Professor of Practical Theology and
Christian Formation at Virginia Theological
Seminary, Academic Ministry Coordinator at DYA*



MILTON GILDER //
DYA Director

THE GRATITUDE PROJECT

THE DUKE YOUTH ACADEMY TOOLKIT

CONTENTS

2 INTRODUCTION TO DYA THEOLOGY

Elizabeth DeGaynor

4 LIVING THEOLOGY: A FULL-BODY EXPERIENCE

Sarah E. Seibert

6 MENTORING

Elizabeth DeGaynor

8 THEOLOGY OF TECHNOLOGY AND ONLINE LEARNING

Elizabeth DeGaynor

10 MOVING BEYOND DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION TOWARD BELOVED COMMUNITY: FOSTERING BELOVED COMMUNITY AT DYA

Milton Gilder

EDITOR:

Milton Gilder

EDITOR:

Elizabeth DeGaynor

GRAPHIC DESIGNER:

bdesign-studio.com

COPY EDITOR:

Brandy Patton

COMMUNICATIONS SPECIALIST:

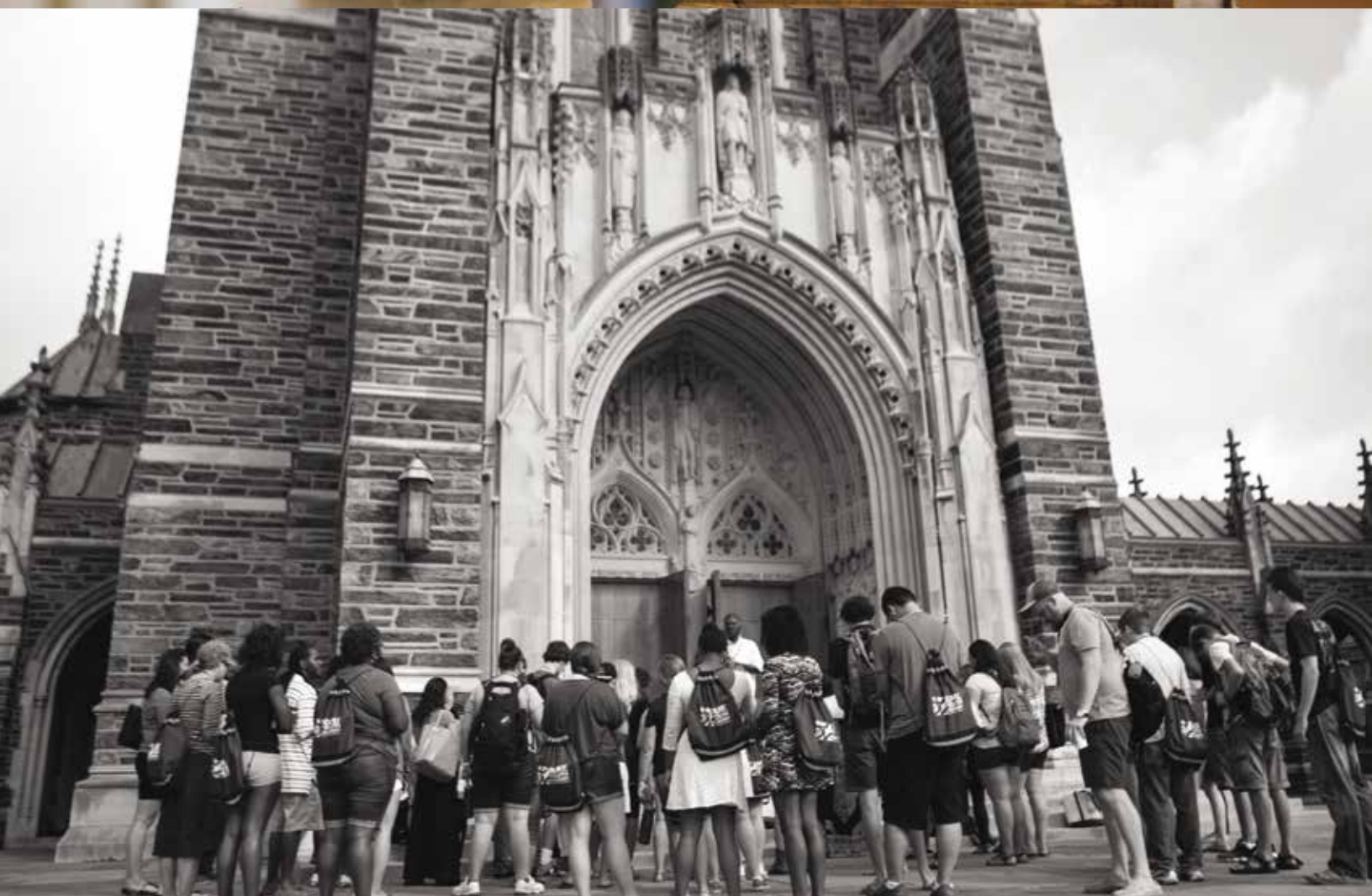
Emily Lund

CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHERS:

Justin Cook

Megan Hoffman

Matt Elia



INTRODUCTION TO DYA THEOLOGY

By Elizabeth DeGaynor

Over the two decades that DYA lived and moved and had its being, the operative theology was rooted in the vision of Fred Edie. His *Book, Bath, Table, and Time* offers a full account, and we commend it to you. For this toolkit, we'll give you a brief overview.

When we consider formation, we do not begin with activities that are fun or entertaining for the sake of being such. We start with our sense of God's identity and how we might experience relationship with God more fully. The *ordo* is a generic name for the worship instructions used in Christian communities, but it is more complex than a mere list:

The *ordo* constitutes a living communal ecology: one that includes initiating persons into Christian faith through baptism (bath), then continues to nurture them in faithfulness to their baptismal callings through sustained participation in the book (Bible), table (Eucharist) and Christian timekeeping... [the *ordo*] orders not only worship life on Sundays but the entirety of the church's life before God... To get involved with the liturgical *ordo* is to become part and parcel of God's work of salvation... [It is] a generative source for and an overlapping practice with a wider liturgy of living beyond the sanctuary.¹

The practices that constitute the *ordo* ecology strengthen, clarify, and interpret one another. Lived liturgy is one way to describe DYA. The ordering of daily hours included morning prayer, theological study, rest, artistic expressions, acts of service, and engaging in worship. We hoped these rhythms would continue long after the actual time spent together, when participants return home. We take what we have learned and how we have been formed out into the world.

Fred Edie explains: "I see the experience of God as made possible through the person of Jesus by the power of the Spirit. Jesus' humanity is essential to communicating Good News to our own. God's identity is revealed primarily through

Jesus by the power of the Spirit who grafts us into God's story of salvation beginning with Israel. Our Christian identities are derived from God's."² Our time together at DYA was ordered by that story.

Day one of DYA waded into the biblical waters, including the waters of baptism, "the ever-flowing river of living water upon which the other holy things of the *ordo* float."³ We remembered our baptism (whether this occurred as infants or as adults) and the ways it knits us to one another and gives us a vocation—unique ways each of us are gifted to embody the fullness of Christian identity—to love God and neighbor ("neighbor" includes everyone). We made our way through what we called the "Alliterative Cs," a collection of one-word themes that display the overarching biblical narrative: Creation, Crisis, Covenant, Christ, Church, Calling, Coming Reign of God. We hoped that by entering into God's story with imaginative wonder, we would be increasingly able to meet God in Christ who seeks us at every turn.

The *telos* of DYA was to constitute one limb of the multifaceted Body of Christ. We aimed for a diverse "Beloved Community"⁴ with a range of constituents from various social locations (denomination, geography, socioeconomic status, race, age). With a low ratio of staff members to students, we encouraged intergenerational relationships that are deep and lasting. Each person brought particular gifts to the community, and we sought to honor the *imago Dei* of every human being. Equipping and empowering young people for ministry included honoring their questions and listening to their prophetic visions and testimonies. It also entailed giving them agency to plan and lead worship. Each day, students were introduced to various forms of worship (some familiar, some new): organization of ritual space, music, art, dancing, prayer, proclamation, and communion. Through DYA, we were invited to participate in God's mission to redeem the world with the help of the Holy Spirit and as a response to God's sustaining grace.

¹ Fred Edie, *Book, Bath, Table, and Time: Christian Worship as Source and Resource for Youth Ministry* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2007), 7–8, 188.

² Email exchange between author (Liz DeGaynor) and Fred Edie: July 28, 2020.

³ Edie, *Book*, 132.

⁴ "The Beloved Community" is a term that was first coined in the early days of the 20th Century by the philosopher-theologian Josiah Royce, who founded the Fellowship of Reconciliation. [See: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/royce/#Com>] However, it was Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., also a member of the Fellowship of Reconciliation, who popularized the term and invested it with a deeper meaning, which has captured the imagination of people of goodwill all over the world. [See: <https://thekingcenter.org/about-tkc/the-king-philosophy/>] It has since been adopted and adapted by various groups.

LIVING THEOLOGY: A FULL-BODY EXPERIENCE

By Sarah Seibert

I first met Hannah one early Sunday morning in April. While most teenagers would still be fast asleep in their beds, Hannah was just finishing rehearsing the morning's worship set before her church's contemporary service. She attends a small, rural church in the western part of North Carolina and uses her beautiful voice in leading her congregation to worship through song. I was visiting her church because one aspect of my work with DYA was focused on learning about rural congregations and reflecting on how we could better reach their young people. Hannah was one of a handful of youth from rural churches who applied to that summer's DYA cohort. Visiting her, her family, and her sending congregation was a chance for me to learn about the rural church and for Hannah and her community to meet a representative from DYA before she moved into a Duke University dorm that summer.

As we talked, it became clear that Hannah was very close to her family. Her whole family made the early morning trek to the church each Sunday and used their diverse musical gifts to serve as the one-family-band praise team. Hannah was close in age with her younger sister; in fact, before this summer, they had gone on every regional youth trip together. This year DYA conflicted with the regional youth trip, and her sister was still too young to attend DYA. Deciding to attend DYA alone had not been an easy choice for Hannah, but she would later say that the decision changed her life.

At DYA, Hannah had the opportunity to experience a series of Living Theology Workshops.¹ The rhythm of our days at DYA offered young people an opportunity to encounter God with their whole person—heart, mind, body, and soul. The Living Theology Workshops were designed to expand the ways youth imagine connecting with God by offering opportunities to learn about and experience various embodied spiritual practices. During the week, a young person attended six workshops led by their residential mentors, who shared a spiritual practice that had been important in their lives. The workshops sprung from the unique spiritual journeys of the

program's staff and, as a result, varied widely each year. In any given year, topics might have included connecting with God through our bodies through dance or exercise, learning to pray through ancient contemplative practices like *lectio divina* or through art or music, expressing who we are to God through spoken word or journaling practices, or experiencing God in community by sharing a common cup of maté, the national beverage of Argentina that is traditionally shared among family and friends. In each of these workshops, young people not only engaged with a specific spiritual practice but also heard part of their mentor's story and why this practice had been meaningful in her or his own life. These spiritual practices were enlivened both by the mentors who led them and by the young people as they participated in them. Through this experience, young people deepened their understanding of how they might connect with God through tangible examples rooted in the stories of their mentors' lives; they were also invited to consider what practices or variations they might like to incorporate into their own faith lives.

When young people returned home, they possessed a more robust understanding of how they might relate to God. To be sure, most youth would not resonate with every practice they encountered. However, the hope was that one or two of these practices would help them continue to deepen their spiritual lives in the present; the others would remain as resources they could return to in other seasons of life.

For Hannah and many others, these workshops not only enriched their own spiritual lives but also equipped them to lead in their home churches. Hannah reflected with her community mentor, who was also her pastor, on her experience at DYA and how she might share part of her experience with her home congregation. As they reflected together, two Living Theology workshops—both the practices and the mentors' stories that accompanied them—remained with Hannah. She knew she wanted to provide an opportunity for her congregation to have some of the same experiences she had enjoyed in those workshops. Through

¹ DYA was originally designed as a two-week program and included something called the Arts Village. Every day youth would have studio time as they worked to develop the creative expression that came from their insight of scriptural truth. They would work with Artists in Residence to proclaim their faith through media, drama, journaling, poetry, visual arts, pottery, creative writing (and publishing), dance, and music (vocal and instrumental). This work was then incorporated into the community's nightly worship services. Retiring the Arts Village portion of DYA was one of the most difficult changes to make when DYA was redesigned as a one-week program. Living Theology Workshops were intended to capture the same value for the arts and imagination and empower students to think creatively about their own Christian practices. The one-week model of DYA added a Practices Project component, where students were encouraged to take something they found meaningful from the DYA experience and share it with their home community. Many youth chose to draw on their experiences in Living Theology Workshops as the starting point for their project. While the absence of the Arts Village was something the community grieved deeply, the addition of the Living Theology Workshops in connection with the Practices Projects created a tangible way for a young person to connect their DYA experience with their own lives and home communities.



conversation with her community mentor, Hannah decided to offer a nine-week intergenerational prayer group as part of her church's Wednesday evening programming. Adapting several DYA Living Theology workshops for her congregation's context and adding her unique spin on the topics, Hannah shared these prayer practices with her congregation. The sessions were well-received and served to deepen the congregation's connection with God and one another. Looking back on her experience at DYA and the year-long practices project that followed, Hannah writes:

I sometimes think about the Hannah McGuire who first came to Duke last June. That Hannah was still unsatisfied with herself, and with the anxious way she communicated with God and other people...The Hannah who is sitting here

today writing this paper is more aware, connected, and okay with who she is than she ever was before. She also is less afraid of getting up in front of people to share ideas or pray or just talk in general. She is a new person, thanks to her experience with DYA and her practices project. And, I have to say, I kind of like her the way she is.

Theology is not just something we believe with our minds. It trickles down into our hands and feet and forms the habits of our hearts and the rhythms of our days. Theology is a full-body experience. These workshops gave young people a picture of what is possible and invited them to wonder what living out their theology in their daily lives and home communities might look like, wherever their passions lie.





MENTORING

By Elizabeth DeGaynor

From the outset, DYA prioritized intergenerational relationships and a small ratio of adults to young people. These values were embodied in hiring of staff and in the time given to mentoring (formally and informally). DYA hoped to build and nurture Christian community in small groups (with respect, trust, and vulnerability), to discern the presence and activity of God in the world, and to cultivate theological reflection aimed at our vocation of joining in God's holy work. As the DYA Staff Manual states, "Each mentor's primary responsibility is to journey through the DYA year in direct contact with the students, making him-/herself available for personal and spiritual support to students and other staff."¹ Mentors were asked to offer a living theology workshop on a personal spiritual practice to introduce young people to creative, embodied ways to be faithful. Mentors also guided students in planning and leading components of the Friday evening worship service during residency.

The center of DYA mentoring occurred as pairs of mentors met each evening during residency with 8-10 students and a ministry apprentice (M.A.s were in charge of logistics, rule-enforcement, and general support during residency. People in this role were usually college students who were interested in ministry, and many of our M.A.s were DYA alumni). Throughout the year, mentors also met with students online (approximately every two months), sometimes in their mentor groups and sometimes in full community gatherings. Mentor pairs were selected with attention to diversity of age, race, and denominational affiliation. We hoped that students would notice the breadth and depth found within the Body of Christ. Mentor training included reading and activities related to theology, pedagogy, and group process. Power dynamics, boundary-keeping, and various forms of leadership were explored. Personal reflection was also encouraged, as it leads to self-awareness, which is crucial for this kind of engaged ministry with others. Case studies and scenarios (most gleaned from real-life situations from previous years) helped to ground the preparation. During the residency, mentors met regularly with the Director and the Academic Ministry Coordinator for debriefing and problem-solving.

Each day of DYA had a theme that was infused throughout the day, from morning prayer to academic lecture to evening worship. Here is a sample outline of the week:

SUNDAY: Coming to the Table

(Exodus 16:1-5, 31; Psalm 51:1-17; John 6:24-35; Ephesians 4:1-16)

MONDAY: Baptismal Covenant

(Genesis 8:6-22; Psalm 119:1-8, 33-48, 129-144; Mark 1:1-13; Romans 6:3-11)

TUESDAY: Creation

(Genesis 1-2:4a; Psalm 65; Romans 8:18-25; 2 Corinthians 5:16-21)

WEDNESDAY: Christ

(Isaiah 52:13-53:12; Matthew 16:13-23; Philippians 2:1-11)

THURSDAY: Church

(Genesis 11:1-9; Psalm 84; Acts 2; 1 Corinthians 12:12-27)

FRIDAY: Coming Reign of God

(Ezekiel 47:6-12; Psalm 147; Proverbs 3:13-18; Matthew 25:31-46; Revelation 21:1-7, 22:20-21)

Once mentors had been introduced to the structure of DYA's daily schedule, we focused on their particular roles for lectures, living theology workshops, worship, and evening mentor group gatherings. The mentor group curriculum was rooted in the schedule; careful attention was given to the themes, scripture passages, and activities for each day, with room for structured flexibility. In its most recent revision,² creativity—art, journaling, singing, movement, etc.—was encouraged to balance the intellectual inquiry. The curriculum for each session had three parts: discernment of God's presence and action, guided questions for theological reflection, and evening prayer in various forms (including poetry and Ignatian Examen). We hoped that DYA mentors and students would find engagement with scripture, prayer, and one another to be fruitful practices worth continuing long after the year they attended.

¹ 2019 Duke Youth Academy Staff Manual, page 4.

² 2018, authors: Elizabeth DeGaynor and Alaina Kleinbeck.

THEOLOGY OF TECHNOLOGY AND ONLINE LEARNING

By Elizabeth DeGaynor

When DYA started in 2001, cellular phones were not ubiquitous. According to data collected by the Pew Internet & American Life Project, 45% of teenagers (ages 12-17) had a cell phone in 2004. The percentage rose to 63% in 2006 and to 71% by 2008.¹ By 2019, 99% of young Americans owned a cell phone.² As such, our policies surrounding use of technology shifted over time.

Initially, DYA students were told not to bring any technology with them, including laptops and iPods. Concerning phones, the 2002 DYA Student Manual explained: "Participants will not have private phone lines in their rooms. Phones are available in residence hall common rooms. Calls may be placed using a prepaid phone card, calling card or by dialing direct. An office phone line will be set up for parents to call in case of emergency." However, this policy became increasingly difficult to enforce, both because cell phones became more prevalent and because parents had grown used to having immediate access to their children. The Student Manuals for 2005–2007 laid out the following standards: "Cell phone use is not permitted at the Duke Youth Academy. If a student must bring a cell phone to campus in order to alert parents/guardians of her/his safe arrival, the cell phone must be turned off and left in the student's dorm room for the duration of the Duke Youth Academy." For the years 2014–2017, the policy expanded to include prohibitions against recording sessions (residential or subsequent online gatherings) without the full knowledge of all participants and the permission of the DYA Director. We aimed for a "technology fast" throughout the majority of our residency, and we suggested students leave all their devices at home. In 2018 and 2019, we allowed students to use their phones to participate in online forum conversation during free times and to communicate with others in the evenings.

These policies were established at the intersection of our hopes for establishing intentional community and our recognition of social realities. In February 2018, Alaina Kleinbeck (DYA Director at the time) and Liz DeGaynor (DYA Academic Ministry Coordinator) attended a Lilly Youth Theology Network consultation titled "Christian Community

& Communication: The Role of Cell Phones in Youth Theology Programs." We read and discussed material by Andrew Zirschky (*Beyond the Screen: Youth Ministry for the Connected but Alone Generation*) and Jean Twenge (*iGen: Why Today's Super-Connected Kids are Growing Up Less Rebellious, More Tolerant, Less Happy—and Completely Unprepared for Adulthood—and What That Means for the Rest of Us*). Each of the 21 programs represented had a slightly different vision for and policies regarding the usage of technology. These ranged from being completely unplugged for the duration of the program/camp to selected times of "technology Sabbath" or prohibitions during designated times (lectures, worship) to active encouragement to carry and use devices at all times (posting on multiple platforms like Instagram and Twitter).

As we re-visioned our policy for DYA, we began with our theological presuppositions:

- **The Trinity is relational, therefore we are relational.** The Body of Christ is a community of people who are knit together by the waters of baptism and by the blood of Jesus Christ; we are not meant to be alone; nor are we self-sufficient (we need God and each other). To be created *imago Dei* is to be built for love, relationships, and creativity. We pattern our time and our lives in order to create space for God, others, and ourselves.
- **Jesus' life and ministry were marked by careful, attentive, face-to-face engagement.** As disciples of Jesus, we aim to imitate Christ's life and ministry. We are mindful of the ways technology can distort and disrupt our ability to do this. We are also aware of the capacities of technology to help us reach persons who cannot be or who are not physically present.
- **Lived and living faith is enacted through a set of embodied practices, both individual and collective.** We are shaped by the things we do (and the things that are happening around us). We can be habituated into behaviors first and only later realize their significance. To be intentional about our actions may require some initial confusion and discomfort.

¹ Amanda Lenhart, "Teens and Mobile Phones Over the Past Five Years: Pew Internet Looks Back," *Pew Research Center*, August 19, 2009, <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2009/08/19/teens-and-mobile-phones-over-the-past-five-years-pew-internet-looks-back/>.

² "Mobile Fact Sheet," *Pew Research Center*, June 12, 2019, <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/fact-sheet/mobile/>.



We then derived standards and policies from these presuppositions:

- Face-to-face communication was preferable, even if it took a bit longer than using technology. We chose to prioritize engagement with the person in front of us over the screen in front of us. We sought to be affirming more than we were critical.
- Our days had a rhythm, and one component of that would be times with technology (rest time? free time?) and times without technology (morning prayer, lectures, evening worship, meals).
- We came up with daily challenges to help us reform our relationship with technology:
 - > Use your phone only as a phone for a day
 - > No social media for a day
 - > Post an image of DYA to our Instagram page
 - > No tech usage during rest and free time
 - > No tech usage from evening until 7:30 a.m.

The DYA leadership team and staff also set limits for ourselves, knowing that we might need technology to communicate logistics, but that we were also prone to overdependence. We considered carefully how best to engage with students via social media platforms (e.g., not using disappearing modes like Snapchat and avoiding private one-on-one meetings with students, virtually or in person). What we found over the years was that after the initial resistance, many DYA participants (both students and staff) felt freed to engage more fully in activities, with one another, and in personal reflection when they were not tethered to their phones.

We encourage you to use a similar method. Start with theological and sociological assumptions, set a policy, reflect on the results, and revise the policy if needed.

MOVING BEYOND DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION TOWARD BELOVED COMMUNITY: FOSTERING BELOVED COMMUNITY AT DYA

By Milton Gilder

On the evening of Wednesday, June 17, 2015, congregants of Mother Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina, gathered for their Wednesday night Bible study. A stranger joined their fellowship. Given the proximity to historic downtown Charleston, it was not uncommon for strangers to stop in to view the landmark church.¹ An hour later, this stranger massacred nine parishioners, including the senior pastor. Grief and shock gripped Charleston and spread across the United States. DYA felt the reverberations of this trauma, since they were gathered at the same time (albeit in a different place: Durham, North Carolina). In a moment of improvisation, the Thursday night worship service the following evening took on a mournful tone. Brandon Williams, a local hip-hop lyricist and organizer, sung a special musical selection: “What you gonna do about all of this killin’ of my people, Lord?”² In a newly rewritten sermon, the service’s preacher, Cleve May—founding pastor of Durham’s CityWell United Methodist Church—asked white students to unite in the suffering of Black brothers and sisters by unmasking their racist collective identity. The subsequent days were palpably raw at DYA.

While the DYA community grappled with the impact of the Charleston massacre, an impending racialized crisis was unfolding in the backdrop at our institutional home, Duke Divinity School (DDS). In April 2015, a few months before the DYA residency, a noose was discovered hanging in a plaza on Duke University’s campus. University officials decried it as a hateful act while launching an investigation into the matter. In February 2017, as part of the DDS commitment “to build diversity and increase equity,” faculty were invited to attend a racial equity training.³ *United Methodist News Service* reported that “an email brawl broke out between some professors. One professor urged his colleagues to ignore the training because it would be a *waste of time*.”⁴ This training-invitation-turned-email-brawl cast a light, as reported by national media outlets, on ongoing institutional challenges at DDS: the departure of Black faculty, students of color experiencing racial discrimination and microaggressions from some faculty and students, and multiple changes in leadership—from 2015 to 2020, DDS had three deans and one interim dean.⁵ The school has worked to address its challenges, including significant hiring of faculty of color, a listening process to attend to stories of institutional racism and injustice, and a report from

¹ Mother Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church was founded in 1816 as one of the first Black congregations in the South. For a discussion on the historical significance of Mother Emanuel AME, please see: Jamelle Bouie, “A Living Landmark: Charleston’s Emanuel AME Church isn’t just a church. It is a historic symbol of Black resistance to slavery and racism,” *Slate*, last modified June 18, 2015, <https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2015/06/emanuel-ame-church-has-long-history-of-resistance-to-racism-the-charleston-church-is-the-oldest-black-congregation-in-the-south.html>.

² To listen to this musical selection by Brandon Williams and the sermon delivered by Cleve May, those with a Duke NetID can view the entire service here: “Duke Youth Academy Worship Service,” Duke Youth Academy, June 18, 2015, video, 1:08:33, <https://divinity.capture.duke.edu/Panopto/Pages/Viewer.aspx?id=2716e155-1494-4b8c-8419-c41e1a6c1d98>.

³ Duke Today Staff, “Duke Investigating Incident Involving a Noose on the Bryan Center,” *Duke Today*, April 1, 2015, <https://today.duke.edu/2015/04/nooseincident>.

⁴ Kathy L. Gilbert, “Duke Divinity School striving for diversity,” *United Methodist News Service*, June 13, 2017, <https://www.umnews.org/en/news/duke-divinity-school-striving-for-diversity>.

⁵ Nick Chiles, “Black Ministry Students At Duke Say They Face Unequal Treatment And Racism,” *National Public Radio*, May 24, 2017, <https://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2017/05/24/467233031/Black-ministry-students-at-duke-say-they-face-unequal-treatment-and-racism>.



multiple working groups across the school with recommendations for action in the areas of classroom culture, mentoring, admissions and financial aid, field education, and witness.⁶

Given the previously depicted context and the recent national spotlight on racial injustice in the United States, I wonder: How might a predominantly white theological institution address its deeply rooted institutional racism? How might theological institutions narrate an alternate vision to white supremacy? And how are youth and youth theology institutes prophetically witnessing to their larger institutions?

There are no superficial answers to these questions, yet they invite theological institutions to self-examine and to look for wisdom from what are often the most ignored members of their body: youth.

I would like to offer up the vision of “Beloved Community” championed by civil rights leaders as a vision and direction for theological institutions to move beyond superficial diversity and inclusion initiatives toward deep introspection and solidarity. In this discussion, I will broadly summarize diversity and inclusion initiatives at theological institutions of higher learning and youth theology institutes, and I will narrate the origins of Beloved Community and DYA’s narration of Beloved Community. In sum, I will provide examples of how DYA has embraced the Beloved Community in our ongoing work.

DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION IN THE ACADEMY AND YOUTH THEOLOGY INSTITUTES

Through much of the latter half of the 20th century, higher education has been experimenting and grappling with this question: How do institutions of higher learning create a diverse, equitable, and inclusive learning community? The legacies of the Civil Rights and Immigration Acts of the 1960s, Title IX in the 1970s, the expansion of the community college through much of the 20th century, and the Americans with Disability Act of 1990 “have combined to make higher education accessible to the broadest spectrum of our citizens.”⁷ As higher education has educated an increasingly

diverse population, it has experimented with its curricula, recruitment efforts, and institutional policies to create more inclusive learning communities. For this discussion, we will primarily focus on the efforts of Lilly Endowment Inc.’s Youth Theology Network (YTN) and the Association of Theological Schools (ATS) to address issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI).⁸

The first youth theology institute began at the Candler School of Theology in 1993 as an experimental alternative to the game-centric and theologically superficial programming that has often dominated youth ministry since the 1960s. The pilot program was the brainchild of Lilly Endowment religion director Craig Dykstra.⁹ The Lilly Endowment has since extended funding to nearly 120 youth theology institutes. More recently, the Lilly Endowment granted funding to the Forum for Theological Exploration (FTE) to coordinate and facilitate workshops and annual gatherings in support of the work of constituent youth theology programs in YTN.¹⁰

As convener of YTN, FTE has been attentive in facilitating peer learning and dialogue with subject matter experts who reflect the geographical, denominational, and racial diversity of the youth theology programs. For individual programs, issues of DEI are not uncommon questions; many YTN programs are grappling with questions of how to create a diverse and inclusive community rooted in their institute’s ecclesial tradition and geographic and demographic context. Some programs have been able to make progress in recruiting diverse leadership and student participants. Some programs are uncertain how to recruit students and how to lead in a potentially diverse context. Other programs situated in predominantly white denominations have fostered diversity and inclusion in the particularities of diverse gendered, racialized, and theological voices. Jodi Porter, a consultant at FTE and coordinator for YTN, remarks: “My sense is that FTE hopes to encourage every YTN program to welcome diverse voices. And there isn’t a one-size-fits-all sort of path for this work.”¹¹

⁶ “New Faculty Appointments Announced at Duke Divinity School,” *Duke Divinity School*, April 28, 2020, <https://divinity.duke.edu/news/new-faculty-appointments-announced-duke-divinity-school>. Further details of the school’s response were highlighted in a June 11, 2020 email sent to DDS faculty and staff entitled “Message from the Dean: A Call for Witness, Study, and Self-Examination to Address Systemic Racism and Injustice.”

⁷ Caryn McTighe Musil, “The maturing of diversity initiatives on American campuses,” *American Behavioral Scientist* 40, no. 2 (1996): 222, accessed August 10, 2020.

⁸ Organizational literature and human resources officers use a variety of definitions and attributes to describe diversity, equity, and inclusion. For the purpose of this discussion, diversity, equity, and inclusion refers to managing a process to recruit diverse individuals across various categories of diversity (for example: race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and age) to promote equitable justice by addressing root causes of disparity, and to include all individuals in existing organizational structures. To see more about diversity and inclusion nomenclature and attributes, see: Quinetta M. Roberson, “Disentangling the meanings of diversity and inclusion in organizations,” *Group & Organization Management* 31, no. 2 (2006): 212-236.

⁹ Amy Frykholm, “Seminary for teens: Lilly’s Youth Theological Initiative,” *The Christian Century*, November 16, 2010, <https://www.christiancentury.org/article/2010-11/seminary-teens>.

¹⁰ To learn more about FTE’s broader mission and work to cultivate next generation church leaders, see: <https://fteleaders.org/>.

¹¹ Jodi Porter interview with the author (Milton Gilder), August 11, 2020.

Nearly 30% of YTN programs, including DYA, are or were hosted at an ATS-accredited institution or at a college or university¹² with an ATS-accredited theological school. ATS has been a key inter-institutional facilitator, publishing multiple articles and dossiers on DEI. ATS first began its work with minoritized constituents in 1978, with the efforts of its Committee on Underrepresented Constituencies (URC).¹³ More recently, ATS's Committee on Race and Ethnicity has administered multiple consultations and colloquies amongst deans, faculty, and students by "nurturing of individual faculty and administrators and strengthening institutional capacity to address diversity."¹⁴ While these efforts contributed to the overall diversity at theological institutions, they have been limited in scope and fail to affect underlying institutional racism and racialized histories at predominately white theological institutions.

In "The Change We Need: Race and Ethnicity in Theological Education,"¹⁵ Willie James Jennings elucidates how institutional racism functions in theological institutions:

Theological institutions count on a reality of assimilation in order to sustain their theological and pedagogical traditions. That assimilation, however, when embedded in historical trajectories of white male subject formation, works against the healthy cultivation of a faculty and tempts some toward racial and gender mimicry.

Jennings explains that students are unduly burdened to adapting white theological formation for the BIPOC¹⁶ communities they will form. Faculty of color experience similar burdens of nurturing BIPOC students, advocating for multicultural and inclusive curricula, and serving on diversity committees. Jennings further states that too few theological institutions have "developed a strategic vision of collaboration that pulls the burden off the bodies of minority students [and faculty] and returns it to the shared work of the entire community."¹⁷

BELOVED COMMUNITY: AN ALTERNATE VISION FOR RADICAL COMMUNITY

Jennings challenges theological institutions to deconstruct white male mimicry and move beyond their "colonialist groundings" and "segregationalist habits" toward a collaborative, embodied, and common life.¹⁸ While Jennings does not explicitly employ the language of Beloved Community, he does offer a starting place for our discussion on Beloved Community. I want to offer a theological vision of how "the shared work of the entire community" might take shape in a context like DYA.

In his theory of community, Josiah Royce, the originator of Beloved Community, postulated that it is the community that establishes norms and expectations and defines what truth, knowledge, and purpose are.¹⁹ Members of the Beloved Community participate in authentic mutual communication and shared collective memory. Howard Thurman explains that Beloved Community ostensibly appears to be a tranquil utopia, yet disagreement is necessary to a "vast undertaking of man becoming at home in his world." Thurman observed, in planting The Church for the Fellowship of All Peoples in the 1940s, "that the mere presence of people of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds" did not indicate that its members were integrated.²⁰ Martin Luther King, Jr.'s construction of Beloved Community hinges on *agape* love. This love expects nothing in return and attributes its love to "the love of God working in the lives of men." For King, Beloved Community was the fruit and *telos* of nonviolent action as it fostered "committed empathy with all the oppressed and a divine dissatisfaction with all forms of injustice." Finally, King warned, "if love is not operative, then community is impossible."²¹ While Royce, Thurman, and King vary in their depictions of Beloved Community, together their depictions illustrate the expansive vision of Beloved Community to hold in tension a theological educational community grounded in love, earnest communication, and shared memory.

Grounding the work of DYA, Beloved Community challenged and invited DYA into a radical witness of God's grace and

¹² To learn more broadly about DEI in higher education, please see: Rachele Winkle-Wagner and Angela M. Locks, *Diversity and Inclusion on Campus: Supporting Racially and Ethnically Underrepresented Students* (New York: Routledge, 2014).

¹³ Deborah H. C. Gin, "Embracing Diversity: Two Models of Faculty Engagement," *Theological Education* 52, no. 1 (2018): 79-96.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Willie James Jennings, "The Change We Need: Race and Ethnicity in Theological Education," *Theological Education* 49, no. 1 (2004): 35-42.

¹⁶ Black, Indigenous, and People of Color

¹⁷ Jennings, "The Change We Need."

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Parker, Kelly A., "Josiah Royce," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2020 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2020/entries/royce>.

²⁰ Kipton Jensen and Preston King, "Beloved Community: Martin Luther King, Howard Thurman, and Josiah Royce," *Amity: The Journal of Friendship Studies* 4, no. 1 (2017), <https://amityjournal.leeds.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/127/2017/10/jensen-and-king-2017.pdf>.

²¹ Martin Luther King, Jr., "Nonviolence and Racial Justice," The Martin Luther King, Jr. Research and Education Institute, Stanford University, February 6, 1957, <https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/nonviolence-and-racial-justice>.

provision in which everyone is radically and wholly accepted. Amid the injustice and inequitable distribution of resources, Black and brown students disproportionately and systematically experience these inequalities while white students are “formed to willfully ignore these inequalities.”²² DYA subverted the ways that racial, gendered, and bodily categories interact with inequality through an intentional creation of an ecumenical, multicultural, and diverse theological community. This community sought to hold in tension the joy of its collective identities and the lament of the injustice experienced by its constituent members.

All too often, diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives focus on managing strategic diversity recruitment processes and, once hires are made, including these individuals in existing organizational structures. Beloved Community, however, grounds discussions of diversity and inclusion in theological language. Moreover, the expansive vision of Beloved Community challenges institutions to move beyond the individual particulars of how to increase diversity to consider the histories, theologies, and policies that have shaped our institutions and how they are forming or ill-forming students to share in a radical communal witness of *agape* love.

MOVING TOWARD BELOVED COMMUNITY AT DYA

In the 20 years of DYA, there were both joys and discomfort as we committed to fostering Beloved Community. In DYA's earlier years, nearly 70–80% of our students were white and Methodist, and many of our staff came from a pool of white mainline denominations. In our archival files, I stumbled upon a recruiting strategy document setting a goal to “improve the diversity of student body with regards to gender, ethnicity, and denomination.” Regardless of the goals we set, however, for years we struggled to create the diversity we hoped for. While the seeds of theological and racial diversity were present in DYA's conception, in 2007 these seeds began to germinate, and a shift in the demographic landscape at DYA began, first by intentionally recruiting staff of color.²³ Seeing the changes we hoped for in our student population required us to reflect on and transform our organizational and theological practices.

In the following section, I distill some of the core learnings and practical steps DYA has made to help bring about Beloved Community.

1. A radical witness of the kingdom of God

“In the Lord I'll be ever thankful,” DYA students would sing as they ascended the steps of Duke Chapel for Morning Prayer. The DYA community was ordered by monastic rhythms of common celebration at the Eucharistic table, common work of theological reflection and learning, and common prayer.²⁴ The monastic ordering of DYA was a dislocated and disruptive space in which students engaged with liturgical practices and voices that were unfamiliar to their home context. This was a feast of carefully curated liturgical practices and voices that spoke to denominational and cultural traditions and racial and gendered diversity, but that also embodied practice of mixed abilities. Students experienced a renewed thankfulness and wonder at familiar practices and a curiosity for unfamiliar spiritual practices. It was a space that was wholly other. In this dislocation and invitation to monastic DYA orders, students and staff were witnesses to new possibilities: the kingdom of God is an expansive and radical place that wholly accepts all.

2. Sharing power and wisdom

Fostering Beloved Community at DYA was not incumbent on the voice or work of one individual leader; it was only possible by sharing power and wisdom. The Duke Youth Academy employed a director who worked in tandem with a diverse leadership team, whose members served in unique roles as ministry coordinators of particular ministry areas.²⁵

Alaina Kleinbeck assumed the role of director of DYA in 2013; to sustain the work of DYA, she needed to transition the program from two weeks to one week but also deepen DYA's commitments to racial, geographical, and denominational diversity. To guide this work, she asked these questions: “Who is already involved with DYA? Who can illuminate our way forward? What kinds of wisdom do we need to serve youth well?” What emerged was a rich collection of leaders already involved at DYA as mentors and ministry coordinators. This new leadership team centered BIPOC voices and spiritual leadership, sharing their cultural and theological wisdom but also wisdom they held unique to their professions as

²² Alaina Kleinbeck interview with the author (Milton Gilder), July 29, 2020.

²³ Fred Edie interview with the author (Milton Gilder), July 21, 2020.

²⁵ The ministry areas of the leadership team have centered around the core ministry function of the DYA community practices: academic life, hospitality, music ministry, worship and prayer, living theology, and recruitment.

parish ministers, theologians, seminarians, therapists, and educators.

3. Embracing conflict

Beloved Community, as attested by Thurman, is not merely a tranquil utopia where members sit around a warm campfire singing “Kumbaya” and eating s’mores. In the Beloved Community, the “campfire” moments of celebration and mirth are held in tension with conflict and lament. At DYA, we embraced conflict as a biblical pattern of fellowship. During their DYA residency, students discussed the tensions inherent in worship by exploring dichotomies of “freedom and order,” “word and table,” “lament and joy,” and “present and future.” On the penultimate night of DYA, students would plan the worship service in which they animated these tensions.

Along the way, there were interpersonal and intra-institutional conflicts in our bold dream of creating Beloved Community. For example, we assumed that our summer mentors had fully embraced this vision of Beloved Community and had the tools to nurture it. This assumption was a blind spot. One summer, several of the staff were embroiled in conflict, and some staff had exhibited microaggressive behaviors toward students and staff of color. This conflict led to utterly difficult conversations. I grew in my leadership as the director of DYA in managing this conflict, but more importantly, the community embraced this conflict by birthing rich reflection and practices to move forward. Because of DYA’s closing and our final residency’s cancellation, I lament that we weren’t able to fully implement our plans to change staff reflection from open dialogue to a circle process²⁶ and to institute racial equity training to equip our staff to better reflect on their complex racial identities and cultivate cultural and racial competency.

4. Liturgical reverence and play

Rich, colorful tapestries draped the Eucharistic table each night at DYA. The Eucharistic table offered students a feast of various denominational traditions: Anglican, Methodist, and uniquely cultural church traditions rooted in Black, Latinx, and Asian communities. Students came to this table experiencing sacred reverence and joyful play in the communion elements. The language of play denoted the freedom of movement in

the liturgy that provided an opportunity to explore complex themes and tensions. The relationship between reverence and play “[made] the table a complex place not just for [King’s] Hawaiian bread and Welch’s grape juice”²⁷ but also a place to explore racial and cultural identities.

For example, the Reverend Fede Apecena, a ministry coordinator, presided over the table draped in traditional Mexican cloth with loaves of bread from the global south: *tortillas*, *bolillos*, and more. On another night, Angie Hong, a Duke Divinity student, along with Reverend José-Luis Villaseñor, a UMC pastor at Iglesia Fiesta Cristiana (Apex, NC), led students in a Eucharistic feast of *Garaetteok* (가래떡), a Korean rice cake, and *Sake* (清酒), a Japanese fermented rice drink. The feasts prepared by Fede, José-Luis, and Angie challenged our Eurocentric envisioning of Christianity to include a breadth of cultural and racial categories, inviting DYA to a table that richly narrated the story of God and all of her people.

5. Accountable and relational based recruiting

DYA initially relied on strong denominational ties to the UMC and the name recognition of Duke. Our recruiting practices needed to move toward a system of accountability and prioritizing meaningful relationships with historically underrepresented racial and denominational populations. Sarah Seibert, a DDS alumna and DYA ministry coordinator, collaborated with Alaina Kleinbeck and a ministry consultant at Ministry Architects to create a system to track contacts and measure weekly goals. In tandem with systematizing our recruitment process, we focused on cultivating meaningful relationships within our existing networks. These relationships gave birth to new ministry opportunities to develop a Latinx-centric expression of DYA in conjunction with Methodist Latinx pastors, to preach and serve rural youth contexts, and to cultivate awareness of immigrant communities.

CONCLUSION

The journey to Beloved Community is a nonlinear process that tasks institutions to shift from merely chasing diversity numbers to relying on collective shared wisdom to navigate through the hard work of uprooting institutional racism and white supremacy. Theological institutions are imperfect, and the journey toward Beloved Community will be marked by

²⁶ The circle process is a restorative justice practice rooted in the North American indigenous practice of talking circles to mediate conflict. To learn more about the circle practice, see: Kay Pranis, *The Little Book of Circle Processes: A New/Old Approach to Peacemaking* (Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 2005). A brief guide on how to conduct a circle process can be found here: Mark Umbreit, “Conducting a Circle Process,” 2010, <https://www.csh.umn.edu/sites/csh.umn.edu/files/csh-restorative-dialogue-circle-process.pdf>. An additional resource is the Art of Hosting, a global collective of practitioners who curate resources and trainings on the topic of circle process and other facilitated dialogue practices. To learn more about their work, see: <https://www.artofhosting.org/>

²⁷ Alaina Kleinbeck interview with the author (Milton Gilder), July 29, 2020.

both progress and setback. DYA's progress toward Beloved Community would not have been possible without embracing practices of a radical, dissonant, and dislocated witness; sharing power and wisdom; envisioning the Eucharistic table as holy play; embracing conflict; and creating accountable recruiting structures. We, too, stumbled in our journey toward Beloved Community. We are grateful that our community, BIPOC, and other marginalized voices held us accountable in our vision of radical witness to young people and the church.

While I have outlined steps toward Beloved Community, these steps are neither exhaustive nor ranked in preferred execution or applicable to all theological institutions.²⁸ However, I will note that I intentionally placed the discussion on recruiting practices last. Too often, institutions prematurely implement recruiting strategies to boost their diversity numbers while failing to address the underlying cultural and theological dynamics that reinforce white supremacy, thus harming the very people they desired to be in solidarity with. Finally, the lasting legacy of DYA lies in its monastic orders: book, bath, table, and time. All who came were invited to hear scripture anew, remember their baptism, feast with the baptized community, and temporally be ordered by common celebration, common prayer, and common work. These monastic orders gave way for the DYA community to experience the ecclesial and theological depth and breadth of the Christian tradition. In this marvelous ecclesial and theological in-breaking, young people are the prophetic messengers who invite the whole church into radical hospitality and Beloved Community. May it be so.

Thank you to Alaina Kleinbeck, Elizabeth DeGaynor, and Jodi Porter, who were conversation partners in the development of this article, supported me with valuable feedback, and cheered me on to complete it.

²⁸ The examples offered toward Beloved Community are contextual to DYA and its location at a theological seminary. I recognize the examples given are limited in scope to youth theology programs. The practices presented can be adapted and applied to other formational contexts, such as churches, seminaries, etc. For example, the Reformed Church of America, with financial support from the Lilly Endowment, Inc., organized a colloquium of diverse leaders from a variety of denominational and geographical backgrounds to participate in a two-day gathering to reflect and reimagine the future of the church. I was among those who participated in this gathering (July 28 – 29, 2020). The collective learnings and wisdom from this gathering were used to inform strategic planning and equip diverse church leaders.

AUTHORS

MILTON GILDER was the Director of the Duke Youth Academy from 2018 to 2020, where he managed the closing of DYA. Prior to joining DYA, Milton worked at Urban Hope, a neighborhood-based youth ministry, where he re-launched a high school youth leadership program that empowered youth to address their neighborhood's pressing needs and to chart and discern their vocation. Milton has previously worked in Durham Public Schools, College Campus Ministry, and as a freelance research assistant. Milton completed a B.A. in Public Policy and International Studies and post-baccalaureate studies in Secondary Education at Duke University. Milton is an aspiring social entrepreneur and public theologian.

ELIZABETH DEGAYNOR, TH.D. is Assistant Professor of Practical Theology and Christian Formation at Virginia Theological Seminary. She previously served as Associate Director of the Master of Arts in Christian Practice degree program at Duke Divinity School. Her work with DYA began in 2007 when she served as a mentor and continued as a consultant for the mentoring component and as Academic Ministry Coordinator until DYA ended in 2020.

Her vocation is to build connections between Academy, Church, and World, particularly through teaching, which she has done at multiple levels (high school, undergraduate, and graduate). She is co-editing a revision of *Journey to Adulthood (JA)*, a youth ministry program of spiritual formation for 6th-12th grades, which will be released by Church Publishing in 2021.

SARAH E. SEIBERT served as Assistant Director and Living Theology and Recruitment Ministry Coordinator for DYA for three years while earning her Master of Divinity at Duke Divinity School. During the DYA residency week, Sarah led Living Theology Workshops on close reading of Scripture and Collect prayers, as well as the hands-on workshop introducing the yearlong Practices Project. She currently serves as the Director of Christian Education at Hillyer Memorial Christian Church in Raleigh, NC, and as a Teaching Assistant at Duke Divinity School, where she continues to reflect on how to engage individuals and communities as whole people.

