

focus

Boston University School of Theology

2020

WHICH WAY NEXT?

*STH, the Church,
and humanity
step into a time
of uncertainty.
Alums and faculty
discuss positive
steps forward.*

*focus is made
possible by
donations from
BU STH alumni
and friends*

**BOSTON
UNIVERSITY**



Help us support *all of our* students.

Help us support *underresourced* students.



Raíces Latinas Fellowships are designed to recruit and support students who are interested in Latinx studies. The fellowship may be awarded to one or more applicants who display commitment and service to the Latinx community.

Your gift will help the growing population of underserved students to excel at STH.

Email sthdev@bu.edu, call 617-353-2349, or visit bu.edu/sth/giving

istock/Andrey Popov (top), Cristian De La Rosa (right)

focus

Boston University
School of Theology
2020

Dean
MARY ELIZABETH MOORE

Assistant Dean of Development and Alumni Relations
RAY JOYCE (Questrom'91)

Assistant Director of Alumni and Donor Relations
ANDREW KIMBLE ('19)

Communications Director and Journal Reviewer
KIMBERLY MACDONALD (CFA'04)

Editor
MARC CHALUFOUR

Contributing Writers
RICH BARLOW
MARA SASSOON
ANDREW THURSTON

Designer
BRUNO PEROSINO

Produced by Boston University
Marketing & Communications

focus is funded by donations from alumni and friends to the Boston University School of Theology Annual Fund. Learn more at bu.edu/sth/giving.

Opinions expressed in focus do not necessarily reflect the views of Boston University.

STAY CONNECTED TO THE SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY

Keep up with STH, share your latest news, and access free religious articles at bu.edu/sth/focus.

To contact the development and alumni relations team, email sthdev@bu.edu or call 617-353-2349.

COVER IMAGE:
Robert Kneschke/EyeEm



Please recycle

In keeping with Boston University's commitment to sustainability, this publication is printed on FSC-certified paper.

0520



TABLE of CONTENTS

AN INTERVIEW WITH THE DEAN 2

FEATURES

Moving Forward 12

With a traumatic schism looming, students and alums share their hopes and fears for the post-General Conference UMC

A Gospel of Reconciliation 18

At the Global Christian Forum, Casely B. Essamuah ('03) brings denominations together

A Leader Emerges 22

Patrick Reyes ('11) found his calling—now he's helping young pastoral leaders do the same

Building an Artistic Legacy 24

Faculty and staff are elevating expressions of art at STH

JOURNAL: BUILDING ON OUR HISTORY

Healthy Humility 28

Research helps religious leaders provide spiritual guidance while staying grounded
By Steven J. Sandage, Albert and Jessie Danielsen Professor of Psychology of Religion and Theology

Reclaiming the Future 32

Challenging power with dreams of hope
By Filipe Maia, assistant professor of theology

At the Bedside 36

Revisiting the imagery and rhetoric of 2 Peter
By Shively T. J. Smith, assistant professor of New Testament

Seeking the Good Life 40

Flourishing in postcolonial South Korea
By Hyebin Hong ('13)

Love Persists 44

Rereading a parable of love and justice
By Ashley Renée Johnson ('17)

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE

STH News 6

Walter Fluker retires; Raíces Latinas Program in Theology, Leadership, and Research; Howard Thurman documentary, and more

Reflection 48

Do Justice, Love Kindness, Walk Humbly
By Mary Elizabeth Moore



Cydney Scott

AN INTERVIEW WITH THE DEAN

A TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADER

BY MARC CHALUFOUR

When Mary Elizabeth Moore arrived at STH in January 2009 as the school’s first woman dean, she found a community poised for change. In the years that followed, STH established new programs and scholarships to diversify the student body, built a community center to foster conversation, and confronted societal challenges of homophobia, ableism, racism, and climate change. It was a tumultuous decade in world history and a transformative decade for STH. On the eve of her final semester, Moore spoke with *focus* about her tenure, what she accomplished—and what she didn’t—and why she felt 2020 was the right time to retire.

focus: What drew you to STH?

Moore: I asked myself what I wanted to contribute before I died. I was drawn to a vocation of reshaping theological education for the future and, when I visited BU, I found a faculty and student body who were motivated to do that very thing.

When you were hired, the provost at the time said that you impressed the search committee with an inspiring vision for STH. What was that vision?

I wanted to build on a vision that

was not just coming from me but also from students, faculty, and administrators. We all yearned to build a strong, vibrant, just, and healthy community; to expand the extraordinary academic scholarship that takes place here; and to create community opportunities for people to gather and engage in informal conversation, joyful events, and hard conversations.

How have world events impacted the school during your time here?

I came into STH right after the 2008 recession. This was a time when theological schools were struggling with questions of mission, financial sustainability, and responsiveness to the rapidly changing student population and rapidly changing church and faith communities. The school was already facing major issues related to sexual orientation and gender identity; that continued, but we had a very clear direction we wanted to go: to embrace fully all people. The same could be said of racial tensions, which have risen enormously during the last 11 years in our country—and especially in the last four years. Global warming has become increasingly disastrous and the ecological passion of the school has continued to grow. In all of these areas, every step we make awakens us to things we haven’t faced yet, ways we have not gone far enough.

Dean Mary Elizabeth Moore



In the face of so many threats, how do you tackle current challenges while also maintaining a long-term outlook?

Every immediate issue holds within it the past and the potential for the future, so they can’t be separated easily. You can’t address issues of racism if you don’t address issues in the history of slavery, immigration quotas, and discrimination. If that’s not part of addressing an issue, then you are simply digging a deeper hole. You don’t necessarily have to be optimistic about the future, but the opportunity to address an issue in the immediate moment is what draws us into the future. That requires imagination, it requires hearing multiple points of view, and being open to a point of view that hasn’t even emerged yet.

Janice Checchio

STH now uses the tagline “Make History.” What does “history” mean to you?

I understand history as a movement in which all of the past continues to influence the present and will influence a future. So engaging with the movement through history is a way of engaging with what’s already dwelling within us. And if you see the history as moving into the present, and the present as setting the way for the future, then movements continue through time, continually changing.

Thinking of this as an ongoing process is a very important perspective when you’re working toward social and personal transformation. Because, if you think that people can transform the world into a completely just, compassionate, and inclusive place, and be done with it, you’re fooling yourself. If you think of history as an ongoing movement, then new problems can awaken you to new depths, which awaken you to new possibilities. So you’re never finished.

Is that motivating or intimidating?

It’s both. When you work so hard and you think you’ve made real movement toward greater racial justice, for example, and you discover the eruption of more violent, abusive racial injustice, it’s very depressing and discouraging. At the same time, if I can accept the fact that this is a task of the

human race to the end of time, then it motivates me to recognize that I can celebrate accomplishments, but never rest in them, because the present and future are always tugging us to keep moving for the sake of bettering the world, which I would call the “*kingdom*” of God or God’s new creation.

Transformation and transformational leadership have been important themes for you. Which transformations stand out from your tenure?

The largest one is one that we’re still working on, and that is our movement toward greater diversity in the faculty and student body. This is one of those visions that you never finish, but we have an increasingly diverse faculty and many different life experiences, ethnicities, abilities, theological understandings, sexual orientations, gender identities, and approaches to research in our faculty and students. That is incredibly enriching.

When you were hired, it seemed like a lot was made of your work studying feminism, but during your time here, race became a dominant theme. Was there a point when issues of race became a bigger priority for you?

Those two have always been part of my passion, as have ecological justice and conflict transformation or peace building. Those have been

themes for me for at least 40 years. I don’t see one as more urgent than the other, but I recognize that I devote time in different measures in different time periods, and always in intersectional relationship. I was focused especially on women’s life experiences and theologies for the 10 years before I came here and it’s very influential in how I work in the normal daily life of the school. I’m conscious of gender equity and gender leadership. Race has persisted as a life-threatening issue in our country and the world, as have ecological justice and sustainability. They’ve demanded a huge amount of attention in recent years, while also foregrounding gender, sexuality, abilities, and perspectival differences.

In recent years, American society in particular has become more tribalistic. Does it feel like you’re swimming against the current by building a community that is increasingly diverse?

Yes, very intentionally. I see us trying to create a counterculture that represents compassion, justice, and honest relationships oriented toward a better future. I also think we have within our community natural worries that some issues will be attended to more than others, some people will be empowered more than others, some priorities will outweigh others. Negotiating those fears and those hopes is part of what it means to be a community.

How do you see STH fitting into the broader United Methodist Church community during this time of turmoil for the Church?

We are a theological school of the United Methodist Church; as such we bear responsibility to be faithful to that relationship. That includes critique, preparation of people for ministry, and building a robust ecumenical and interfaith community that can learn and work together. It also includes encouraging the development of people and their whole selves—their spiritual lives,

their knowledge, their relationships with other people and with all of creation, their capacities to conduct research and act in the world, and their visions. During recent years of

sharp division and harm to LGBTQ people, our role has been to create hearty conversation about the issues, practices, and people of the United Methodist Church, to encourage people who do relate with the United Methodist Church to be active in supporting and critiquing and reshaping the Church. Another part of our stewardship of that tradition is to recognize that our job as a theological school is to learn, teach, and nourish a community to be in service to God and the world.

That mission overrides any decision the United Methodist Church now makes. And therefore we try to keep focused on the deep-down spiritual and ethical issues at stake and how we can be true to those.

Is there anything that you didn't accomplish that you wanted to?

Yes, so much. I wish that we had reached a more respectful, trusting place in race relations within the school and within the school's contributions to faith communities and the larger world. The school has

"I see us trying to create a counterculture that represents compassion, justice, and honest relationships oriented toward a better future."

been affected by the fears and struggles and violence of the larger community, so I'm very glad that we're at a place where we can have hard conversations and where

people can really listen to one another, at least most of the time, and can grow from that listening. But I wish we were at a more respectful, trusting place than we are.

Do you feel like the positive trajectory is there, but you just didn't get as far as you wanted to?

Yes, definitely. We can have conversations now that we couldn't have begun to have 10 years ago, five years ago, even two. I think we have a lot of tangible movement

that you can see, in terms of student groups, scholarships, and program centers. In terms of teaching, faculty offer far more diversity in the curriculum and in individual courses, and they continually work toward greater inclusiveness in relation to their unique fields. But you have to be here for eleven and a half years to see that. If someone's coming in for their first year as a student, it's very easy to see all the problems. That's a good thing, because the new people help us see things we need to see. And also they keep us humble because we know that we haven't reached as far as we want to reach.

What makes 2020 the right time for you to step away from this job?

I want to step out of the deanship when I still have high energy for the school. More important, though, is stepping back when I think the school is on a strong trajectory of vision and excellence that can continue and change in the school's future. We are also bringing many of our shared projects and dreams to a culminating point, so they can be strong going forward. When I use the word "culminating," I don't mean finished—but we have developed faculty and student strength, curricular and cocurricular programs, scholarships and fellowships, faculty chairs, research across the disciplines, denominational communities of learning, housing support for students, and

sustainability and accessibility in our building. That momentum can continue.

After this semester you'll be taking a one-year research sabbatical—what will you be working on?

I have five research projects I'd like to work on—and that's too many. So I've been in the process of discerning which one I'll do. I have decided to focus on sacrality and social change, seeking to understand the interplay of sacred traditions and sensibilities with transformative ecological and social movements. To what extent can sacred traditions and the sense of the sacred inspire more adequate critique of the present and more full-bodied visions and actions for the future? What kinds of revolution are necessary, and how can they be fueled by a sense of the sacred?

Is there anything else you'd like to add?

I think the stakes are high and the need for deeply rooted and visionary theological education has never been stronger. Theological schools carry a huge responsibility and an even greater opportunity to contribute to faith and the common good. At the same time, challenges are growing and forces are pulling people apart rather than pulling them together in our present world. I envy and value the people who will come after me. They will take up that challenge. □

This interview has been condensed and edited for clarity.

MAKING HISTORY

From its founding in 1839 as the Newbury Biblical Institute, STH has been making history—most recently in its emphasis on inclusion and social and ecological justice. Here are a few of the school's many accomplishments during the tenure of Dean Mary Elizabeth Moore, the school's first woman dean, which began in January 2009. For an extended timeline, visit bu.edu/sth/about/our-history.

- 2009** Faculty recruitment to enhance academic range and diversity of faculty begins, leading to 18 new hires over Dean Moore's tenure
- 2010** A strategic plan, building upon a plan developed in 2007, completed
- 2011** New programs and offices for spiritual life, community life, and communications developed
- 2013** Community Center opens, providing space for meetings, recreation, and gatherings. The center receives elite LEED Gold certification.
- 2016** Denominational communities of learning initiated with creation of an Anglican–Episcopal Community of Learning. United Church of Christ, Unitarian Universalist, and Wesleyan–Methodist communities are added later.
- 2017** Faculty adopt the STH Diversity Statement, documenting and affirming their efforts to create an equitable, inclusive, and diverse community
- 2018** Faith & Ecological Justice Program established
- 2019** Raíces Latinas Program in Theology, Leadership, and Research established

COVID-19 PANDEMIC SHIFTS STH LIFE ONLINE

On March 11, BU President Robert A. Brown announced that the University would switch to remote learning in response to the COVID-19 outbreak. Classes moved online, events were canceled, and students were asked not to return from spring break.

“Discontinuing in-person instruction is a difficult decision, as it interrupts an essential element of our learning community, the interactions that occur in our classrooms,” Brown wrote. Yet within a week, STH faculty had moved their classes online and were finding ways to contribute to the broader community. Karen Westerfield Tucker, a professor

of worship, helped author a guide to Christian worship during a time of social distancing. Shelly Rambo, an associate professor of theology and an advisor for the Chaplaincy Innovation Lab, shared recommendations and resources for spiritual care providers working amid the crisis, including in healthcare and correctional settings.

“The spring semester has been full of challenges, but students, staff, and faculty have risen to them with enormous resilience, patience, and grace,” says Bryan Stone, associate dean of academic affairs.

One event that continued as scheduled—just in a virtual, not physical, form—was a retirement celebration for Dean Mary Elizabeth Moore. The event included a surprise announcement

from Brown: the renaming of STH’s Community Center after Mary Elizabeth and Allen Moore.

In an Easter message to the STH community, Moore cited the selfless efforts of those on the front lines during the pandemic, from healthcare workers to advocacy networks, adding, “The scattered School of Theology community is itself engaged in acts of compassion wherever people are suffering. . . . God is alive in the world, even in the midst of tragedy.”

For more information about STH’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and for links to the resources and messages mentioned above, visit bu.edu/sth/news-media/news-M.C. □

(Continued from facing page)

BU Today: When we first met, you mentioned your quest for “unicorns.” Can you point to any today?

Fluker: My life has been an incredible journey of encountering “unicorns,” those imaginative and creative moments in which, when you least expect it, you are elected or called to something. The lives of Martin Luther King, Jr. (GRS’55, Hon.’59) and Howard Thurman represent those kinds of callings for me. For those who are looking deeply and listening attentively, I think there are unicorns in our social and political environments that don’t quite fit into landscapes of governed and regulated cultural environments. BU has a long history of producing some of these outstanding leaders whom King called “the creatively maladjusted” and “transformed nonconformists.” I will let our imaginations identify some of those recent unicorns who carry on this BU legacy, but they are everywhere, in politics, theatre, science and technology, global environmentalism,

and so on. I hope that we will continue to give birth to and encourage the sighting of unicorns.

We’ve seen the rise of Donald Trump and politics of racial resentment during your time at BU. How would you assess the ethical state of America today?

Donald Trump represents the nostalgic wanderings of an American past that never existed. The rise of white nationalism is a global phenomenon and Trump is as much an instigator as he is a product of this phenomenon that is based on the residuals of colonial conquest and imperial power. I refer to this as an old ghost that continues to shape-shift into various apparitions and Trump is its most visible and vocal representative—but he is not alone. I am not sure that you can vote this American haunt out of office but we must at least try. The long-term solution is to reexamine what we mean by democracy and what it will take to reinvigorate a spiritual and ethical movement of presence not unlike abolition, suffrage, civil

rights, LGBTQ, environmentalism, and other forces that make real this precious and precarious experiment.

What made you decide this is the right time to retire?

I choose to think of this moment as a good time to move into another orbit, another place where I will have ownership over my time and be able to proceed with several creative projects that I have been working on from the edges of my professional life. I would like to devote more time to working in public and private venues with leaders who are wrestling with questions of ethics and leadership and helping, especially emerging leaders, to develop lifelong practices associated with character, civility, and community. A second involves some writing projects—prose, poetry, and public commentary. Third and most important, I will be able to devote time to family. □

This interview has been edited and condensed for clarity.

Walter Fluker



CHASING UNICORNS

BY RICH BARLOW

Walter Fluker rested his quest for unicorns—his metaphor for creative moments of ethical discernment—at the end of the 2019–20 academic year, when the Martin Luther King, Jr. Professor of Ethical Leadership retired.

Fluker (GRS’88, STH’88) “brought honor, teaching excellence, and critically important scholarship to the King Professorship,” says Dean Mary Elizabeth Moore. A well-known scholar of ethical leadership, Fluker oversaw the completion

of five volumes of the writings and letters of Howard Thurman (Hon.’67). “I met and studied with Thurman in the late 1970s, but had no idea that I would one day embark on this amazing journey as scholar and editor,” Fluker says.

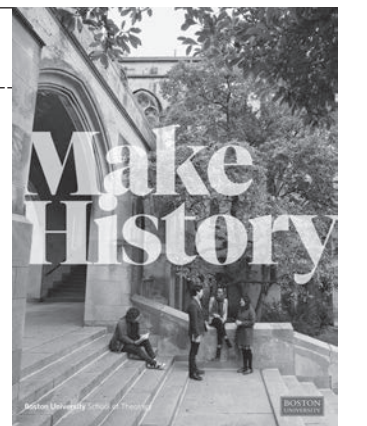
Serving as King Professor “had an aura of calling,” Fluker says. “One can never be confident that one is called and by whom, but I am fairly confident that the lots were cast in my favor on this journey and that my time at Boston University was an authentication.” Fluker spoke with *BU Today* following the announcement of his retirement.

Janice Checchio

A FRESH FACE FOR STH ONLINE, AND IN PRINT

For the first time since 2008, visitors to bu.edu/sth will find an entirely new design. The updated site, which launched in December 2019, is the culmination of a three-year process of planning and coding—all in an effort to better communicate with prospective, incoming, and current students, as well as alumni and other members of the STH community. Also getting a new look is the STH viewbook, a print publication used to recruit graduate students. —M.C. □

STH’s new viewbook (right) and website received redesigns in the past year.



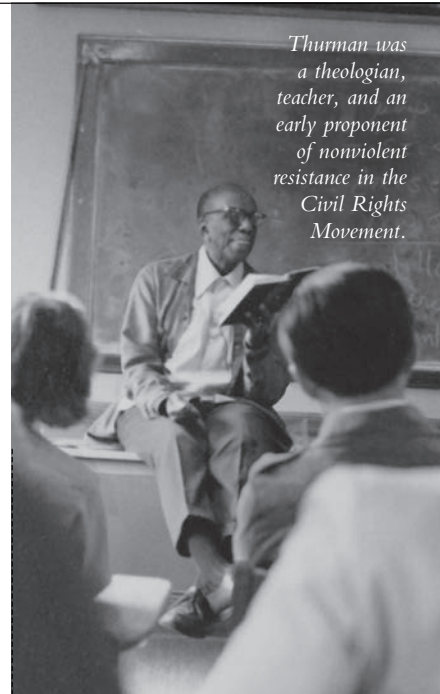
SPREADING THURMAN'S WORD

Howard Thurman's legacy continues to be celebrated at BU, from the new Howard Thurman Center for Common Ground to the Howard Thurman Papers Project, which preserves decades of documents. But the influence of Thurman (Hon.'67), the first black dean of Marsh Chapel, extends far beyond campus. Thurman was an early proponent of nonviolent resistance and a pivotal figure in the Civil Rights Movement, serving as a spiritual advisor to its leaders, including Martin Luther King, Jr. (GRS'55, Hon.'59). With *Backs Against the Wall: The Howard Thurman Story*, filmmaker Martin Doblmeier (COM'80) set out to tell that larger story.

The hour-long documentary, which premiered on PBS and was screened at BU in February 2019, has become a valuable tool for

STH faculty and administrators looking to share Thurman's story. Doblmeier joined Walter Fluker (GRS'88, STH'88), former Martin Luther King, Jr. Professor of Ethical Leadership, in a discussion after the February screening; Dean Mary Elizabeth Moore used the film in her course Transformational Leadership; the film was shown on the orientation night of a leadership development program cohosted by STH and Hebrew College; and STH alumni and religious and public leaders gathered for a screening and discussion in Philadelphia.

Fluker, editor and director of the Howard Thurman Papers Project, was an advisor on the film, as well as an interviewee. "There is a burgeoning interest in Thurman at this particular passage in US and world history," he says. "There is a 'deep hunger,' as Thurman would have described it, for something new, vital, and whole that extends beyond



the many barriers constructed by race, gender, sexuality, ability, and class, and 'waits and listens for the sound of the genuine in the other.'"

In June 2019, *Backs Against the Wall* received a regional Emmy Award for historical documentary. —M.C. □

BUILDING A FOUNDATION FOR LATINX STUDIES

When Cristian De La Rosa arrived at STH in 2012, she brought with her the Hispanic Youth Leadership Academy (HYLA), a program she'd established at Perkins School of Theology in Dallas, Tex. HYLA, a summer program focused on preparing young Latinx leaders for the transition from one stage of their education to the next, was STH's biggest commitment in

Latinx programming to date. In the eight years since, the school has prioritized the role of Latinx studies and community with curriculum expansions, faculty hirings, research investments, and community partnerships. In October 2019, these offerings—plus a new certificate in theology and Latinx studies—were united under the new Raíces Latinas Program in Theology, Leadership, and Research.

"Preexisting programs depended on individual efforts of faculty," says De La Rosa, clinical assistant professor of contextual theology and practice, and one of the faculty members responsible for designing the new program. "The next step will be to figure out how to establish some kind of ongoing financial resources. The hope and expectation is that by making this an official program, we'll be able to find individuals willing to support it for the long term." —M.C. □

Courtesy of Emory University

New funds to honor our scholarly legacy



Nancy T. Ammerman Gender Equity Leadership Fund

For many years, Ammerman served as a mentor for individuals who have historically been underrepresented in leadership positions in their areas of study and chosen vocations. She was committed to mentoring these individuals and helping them develop leadership skills. This scholarship fund will serve to honor her service as professor of sociology of religion in the sociology department of the College of Arts & Sciences and at STH. Ammerman says, "I am thrilled to endorse this effort to support future student leaders whose gender has historically been underrepresented and who pass through the halls of this amazing school."

Robert C. Neville Lectureship in Philosophical Theology and Philosophy of Religion Fund

This lectureship fund was established upon Neville's retirement from STH in 2018, to honor his unparalleled legacy after serving as dean of the school from 1988 to 2003 and professor of philosophy, religion, and theology. The annual lecture will feature both emerging and esteemed voices in these fields to edify our students, alumni/ae, and friends, and also recognize Neville's comparative research. "Philosophy of religion," Neville says, "...is multidisciplinary, multitransitional, and multisystematic. It will be grand to have new lectures on these themes."



Your gift will help provide needed funds to underrepresented scholars and prophetic voices at STH

Email sthdev@bu.edu, call 617-353-2349, or visit bu.edu/sth/giving

Jackie Ricciardi, Frank Curran

"ON A MISSION" ACCOMPLISHED

HISTORIC CAMPAIGN EXCEEDS GOAL THANKS TO OUR ALUMNI AND MANY OTHERS

When BU concluded its capital campaign in September 2019, the results were historic: \$1.85 billion raised. STH's own "On a Mission" campaign also surpassed all expectations, raising \$29.4 million—well beyond the \$15 million goal set in 2010.

Those funds reflect broad support from alumni, friends, faculty, staff, and students. And they have a far-reaching impact on STH's ability to pursue its mission.

More than 2,800 donors, including 1,927 alumni—a 50 percent alumni participation rate—contributed to the STH campaign. "They support students and faculty in vital teaching and learning, and they generate significant research and rich contributions to faith communities and the larger society. I'd like to thank every donor for making this campaign such a success," says Dean Mary Elizabeth Moore.

STH CAMPAIGN CONTRIBUTIONS

<p>ENDOWMENT</p> <p>\$8,001,034</p>	<p>CURRENT USE</p> <p>\$14,585,213</p>
<p>SPONSORED PROGRAMS</p> <p>\$5,032,676</p>	<p>BEQUEST INTENTIONS</p> <p>\$1,748,283</p>
<p>GIFTS IN KIND</p> <p>\$21,480</p>	<p>CAPITAL</p> <p>\$21,000</p>
<p>TOTAL..... \$29,409,686</p>	

CHAIRS, FUNDS, PROGRAMS, AND SCHOLARSHIPS

2 NEW CHAIRS

- Harrell F. Beck Chair in Hebrew Scripture
- Truman Collins Professor of World Christianity and History of Mission

19 NEW ENDOWED SCHOLARSHIPS

LEED GOLD CERTIFIED

Renovation of lower level

2 NEW ENDOWED CENTERS & PROGRAMS

- Center for Practical Theology
- Tom Porter Religion and Conflict Transformation Program

1 NEW ENDOWED COMMUNITY OF LEARNING

Anglican Episcopal Community of Learning

1 NEW ENDOWED HOUSING FUND

in addition to \$1.72M for the Beane Fund, which predates the campaign

- Charles K. and Elisabeth M. Kenosian Residence Fund

1 NEW NAMED SCHOLAR

Bishops Scholar in Homiletics and Preaching

6 NEW NAMED SCHOLARSHIPS

2 NEW PROGRAMS

- Faith and Ecological Justice Program
- Raíces Latinas Program in Theology, Leadership, and Research

1 NEW NAMED LECTURE

Robert C. Neville Lectureship in Philosophical Theology and Philosophy of Religion

SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY FUND

Though the "On a Mission" campaign came to a close in 2019, ongoing contributions to the STH Fund are vital, especially for unendowed programs, which include:

- Contextual opportunities**, which provide support to students engaged in projects to learn from people in other cultures or to immerse themselves in their diverse ministries through Springboard Fellowships.
- Spiritual life**, supporting our vital program of Saturday reading retreats, meditation groups, and other special activities that nourish the spiritual vibrancy of the STH community.
- Outreach to alums**, which includes livestreaming of worship services, lectures, seminars, webinars, oral histories, regular e-newsletters, and our annual issue of *focus*.

If you would like to make a gift, visit bu.edu/sth/giving.

MOVING FORWARD

WITH A TRAUMATIC SCHISM LOOMING, STUDENTS AND ALUMS SHARE THEIR HOPES AND FEARS FOR THE POST-GENERAL CONFERENCE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH



BY RICH BARLOW AND MARC CHALUFOUR

The United Methodist Church is likely to be cleaved in two when delegates at its General Conference—originally scheduled for May 5–15 before the coronavirus crisis forced its postponement—vote on a proposed split. This vote follows a long debate over human sexuality, inclusion of LGBTQIA+ members, and gay marriage ceremonies. Under the plan, anti-gay

marriage congregations will leave and form at least one new denomination, with the majority remaining in the new United Methodist Church, marrying and ordaining gay people.

STH, the country’s oldest United Methodist seminary, might be affected structurally by a schism, says Dean Mary Elizabeth Moore. “We may have to decide how STH will align with the new structures. The mission will *not* change. The school will continue to offer rigorous theological studies, spiritual and professional formation, groundbreaking

A Methodist church in Melrose, Mass., expressed its opinion of UMC policy with a sign.

Andrew Thurston
Nicole Morris (Brawner), Courtesy of Commonwealth Psychology Associates (Cho-Chang), Courtesy of the Northern Illinois Conference of the United Methodist Church (Dyck), Nathan Phillips Photography (Lockwood-Stewart), John Lee Photography (Valdes)

“We may have to decide how STH will align with the new structures. The mission will not change.”

—Dean Mary Elizabeth Moore

research, and contributions to faith communities,” she says, while continuing to “welcome all people and to build community that envisions and works toward the common good.”

Robert Allan Hill, dean of Marsh Chapel, echoes that sentiment. Speaking to *BU Today*, Hill said that whatever the outcome, even though he wasn’t certain whether the 850 conference delegates would approve the plan, he *was* certain that same-sex opponents “falsify” scripture. “How many verses [in the Bible]? Thirty-three thousand. How many of those 33,000 deal with homosexuality? Six,” said Hill, a professor of New Testament and pastoral theology. “How many of those did Jesus speak about? None. The Bible is about love and freedom.”

Focus spoke to students and alums about their concerns and hopes as the UMC moves toward its vote on the schism. Their responses have been edited for brevity and clarity. *(Continued)*

MEET THE PANEL



Bailey Brawner ('18) is a queer/asexual pastor living in San Diego, Calif., where she serves as senior pastor at Mission Hills United Methodist Church. She developed The Voyage Meetup, a digital/in-person hybrid community for queer people of faith.



Craig S. Brown ('22) is the executive director of Congregational Development for the California-Nevada Annual Conference of the UMC. He has pastored churches in Orange County, Calif., and most recently San Diego First UMC.



Yoo-Yun Cho-Chang ('94,'00, GRS'13) is an ordained clergy with full connection to the New England Conference of the UMC. She is a licensed psychologist in Massachusetts, currently doing clinical work for extension ministry at Commonwealth Psychology Associates.



Sally Dyck (CAS'76, STH'78) is bishop of the Northern Illinois Conference of the United Methodist Church. She serves as president of the General Board of Church and Society for the UMC and is a member of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches.



Odette Lockwood-Stewart ('78) is a retired United Methodist Elder who has led congregations, campus ministries, and directed community-engaged learning in a seminary in California for 41 years. In June 2020, she will become the first woman interim senior pastor at the American Church in Paris.



Phillip Valdes ('21) is a seminarian at STH, where he studies how the intersections between people of color and LGBTQIA+ communities can work to serve the local church.

What are your deepest concerns about the future of the United Methodist Church?

Odette Lockwood-Stewart: That we will forget who and whose we are. When we turn from the way of Jesus to pour human and material resources into institutional neo-legalism and institutional self-preoccupation without insight, we forget our history and God’s future. I am concerned that the radically inclusive and expansive table fellowship of Jesus will be lost in separate tables. I am concerned that fear will move us even farther from nurturing each person’s full humanity, including human sexuality.

Sally Dyck: One of my deepest concerns is that internal conflicts within the camp of full inclusion will result in a stance of all or nothing and then there will be a double-down on the traditional plan or a stalemate—both of which will be our demise. We must resolve our preoccupation with human sexuality—and that is something that most United Methodists agree on. We are stronger together in our mission and outreach in the name of Jesus.

Yoo-Yun Cho-Chang: The UMC has drifted away from the core message of Gospel due to its antiquated structure that more so resembles an imperial domination system than the true Gospel lived by Jesus Christ for full inclusion of God’s people. What I’m most afraid of is that the UMC will not wake up to the true calling to live out the life that Jesus had shown for radical love, as it continues to keep the domination system that perpetuates the status quo. If we continue to exist in the same way without taking a radical step, I’m afraid that we will continue to harm more people.

Bailey Brawner: There’s a strange image-conscious side of our denomination that is rearing an ugly head. When we care more about staying together, even when it is clear that we hurt people by doing so, we take time and energy away from the work of the Gospel, the radical, Jesus-forward justice work that we desperately need to be about. My deepest concern is that our hours and days and quadrennias would be occupied by trying to out-quote scripture, win arguments, or make statements that exclude people, rather than including, teaching, and serving.

Craig S. Brown: The looming questions are about how many Methodist movements will spring from the current United Methodist Church. Will there be two denominations, three, or even more? Meanwhile, the pressing threat to the denomination goes unheard and largely unaddressed: the precipitous decline of local churches in the United States. This convergence of crises threatens the future viability of any and all expressions of Methodism. While the General Conference in 2020 may set the stage, it will be actions and consequences following that conference that will leave an enduring wound upon the entire Church.

What is your greatest hope for the post-General Conference Church?

Phillip Valdes: That all peoples, whether straight, queer, people of color, or trans, are fully included and embraced for who God has called them to be. The new Methodism that I imagine is one that breaks down every barrier and wall and rebuilds a table and makes certain that every person is included. I hope that we are able to find a church that rallies behind those who are marginalized and oppressed and repent of its sin of exclusion for the sake of one understanding of the Bible.

Lockwood-Stewart: My greatest hope is in Christ and in the movement and work of God’s Holy Spirit both in our midst and beyond us. When I am tempted to give up because there is no way, God makes a way—whether a surprising decision of the Judicial Council, the generous service of a Jewish mediator, a conference delegate’s vote against apparent self-interest in solidarity with their brothers and sisters. The uncontrollable Spirit of the Living

God blows where it will, tumbling the illusion of control, exposing lies, empowering and liberating disciples throughout the world for God’s reconciling love and the transformation of the world. I hope there will be a Pentecostal release of mercy and justice in ministries of holy boldness across the connection.

Cho-Chang: I hope that we can arrive at the shared conclusion that an amicable split is a way to end ugliness within the Church. In the splitting process, I hope that the decisions we make are not dictated by the ugliness of greed, self-righteousness, and hatred, but rather by love and justice. For a while, I didn’t support the idea of splitting the Church because I didn’t want to lose my fellow Christians, especially the Korean American Christians who usually have more traditional views than myself regarding human sexuality. However, I think things have gotten too ugly and too painful, ultimately hurting too many people.

Brawner: That we allow God to be God. As a queer pastor, I tell my call story over and over, pleading with those who hear it to believe that I am actually called to do this work. My heart breaks for the LGBTQIA+ folx [a gender-inclusive version of folks] who are growing up believing that who they love and how they identify means that God cannot use them for the work of the Church. I am angry and sad and cynical, because we are losing the people whose faith is strong and purposeful and passionate, simply because we try to play God. I am hopeful that we get out of God’s way, allowing freedom and inclusion and love to speak louder than our fear of splitting up.

How do you hope the Church will restructure itself to hold unity with diversity?

Valdes: My deepest hope is that the Church restructures around the least of us. In other words, the Church needs to destroy the table that we have built for those who we want at the table and build a new one for those who we do not understand at all.

Cho-Chang: Under our current UMC structure and operation, holding unity with diversity is a lie. We only pretend that we are united to cover a deep and painful schism. Instead, we need *honest* unity that allows us to coexist with diversity. I hope that a new structure will ensure regional and contextual autonomy in terms of theology and polity while remaining missionally connected. This will create a space among Methodist expressions in different regions and cultures to work together under a common mission while allowing each to express their own authentic and contextual message and ministry.

Brawner: I'm not afraid of schism. In fact, I believe division, in this case, is holy. My prayer is that the UMC restructures itself so that people like me, people who doubt their place in the Church, can reclaim it, because they know that, maybe for the first time, they find a place where belonging does not come with limits. My prayer is that my queer siblings for generations to come can belong to a church family

that baptizes and confirms them, supports their faith journey, attends their weddings in the sanctuary, nurtures their calls to ministry. If we are all focused on our mission, to make disciples, to follow the life of Jesus, we will still be unified, despite our new names or ordering systems. The challenge is that we need the courage to ask ourselves what Jesus is actually calling us to be concerned about.

Dyck: My hope is that we find a way to allow the majority of UMC's members—laity and clergy—in the US and in central conferences to stay together under an umbrella of acceptance and inclusion based on the removal of prohibitive and exclusionary statements about ministry with and by LGBTQIA+ persons. Biblically and theologically, our unity is not based on human sexuality but on our faith in Jesus Christ. This may mean that there is a degree of separation—those who can live under an inclusive banner and those who can't.

Brown: Perhaps this is my greatest of griefs throughout these many decades of fighting. Our Wesleyan heritage is essentially about holding a tension. Rather than resolving our tensions (liberal versus conservative, progressive versus traditional), we are called to the harder work of holding those tensions in place. Primarily, it functions as a reminder that we are not imperial in our own thinking. As the Church structures itself for the future, it must find new ways of holding these tensions. Wesley called the capacity to hold this tension a "Catholic Spirit." While there is clearly a need for the Church to be free to be contextual, I hope that contextual does not become exclusivity. It is a quick and dangerous shift to move from, "This works here," to, "This works everywhere." If the debate on human sexuality causes us to resolve every tension we hold, then I believe that we are no longer Methodist at all.

What hard histories of the Church does the UMC need to acknowledge and address to move forward toward healing?

Valdes: Since the beginning of the UMC, the Church has conducted harm not just to queer people but also to people of color and women. By denying the ordination of Anna Howard Shaw (1878, MED 1886) and the creation of the Central Jurisdiction, queer people have been marginalized without any acknowledgment that it must be rectified. Since Stonewall, the UMC has been denying that queer people are oppressed and that the Scripture has been used against them in Methodist doctrine and polity. The UMC needs to acknowledge the pain that was caused by the Special Session of the General Conference in 2019 and seek to rectify all the oppression that brought about the need for that session.

Lockwood-Stewart: Racism as a formative original sin in the United States, and the historical and current realities of the UMC need to be acknowledged and addressed. Our economic bondage to empire as a church, and our lack of eschatological moral imagination need to be acknowledged and addressed. Selective scriptural literalism used as a weapon to

control or oppress needs to be acknowledged and addressed. Structures of community and language that hurt God's children and that reinforce racism, sexism, heterosexism, classism, and nationalism are growing here and now. Our historic and current practices that do harm to the planet and to sojourners in our lands need to be acknowledged and addressed.

Brawner: The UMC needs to acknowledge that its silence kills people. Simply and bluntly put, we as a denomination have worked so hard to keep the peace, we have destroyed relationships as a result. We've spent our history turning our heads to conflict, avoiding asking the hard questions, avoiding speaking the truth with love, all for the purpose of remaining unified. The time has come for us to see the history of harm and oppression that our inaction has caused, and will continue to cause.

Brown: The crisis about human sexuality is a crisis of prejudice and discrimination. Yet, I have been in too many meetings where persons of color or women have been told that they do not know what exclusion is in the UMC since they have not been singled out like LGBTQIA+ persons. I am concerned that we have placed so much energy and effort into this crisis of human sexuality as compared to the amount of time and energy we have invested into institutional racism and sexism. These issues have plagued us not for decades, but for centuries. Not only do we need to confess our blatant discrimination of LGBTQIA+ persons, but we must also confess our disproportionate response to systemic racism and sexism. As a straight, white, male in the Church, I have benefited far too long from the Church where we continue to allow these evil practices. Naming these issues clearly will allow us to move forward with a transformed set of practices that bless the diversity of all God's people. □

A GOSPEL OF RECONCILIATION



Casely B. Essamuah ('03)

AT THE GLOBAL CHRISTIAN FORUM, CASELY B. ESSAMUAH HELPS BRING DENOMINATIONS TOGETHER

BY ANDREW THURSTON

Christians in Pakistan face some of the highest levels of persecution in the world: a religious minority, they often fall afoul of strict blasphemy laws or are targeted by terrorist organizations like the Islamic State. Militants have struck Methodist and Catholic churches—even a park packed with families celebrating Easter.

At the third Global Christian Forum international gathering in Bogotá, Colombia, in spring 2018, church leaders from around the world discussed discrimination against people of faith, including those in Pakistan. It's an issue, the leaders were reminded, individual churches can't face alone.

"Persecution doesn't differentiate between Lutheran or Baptist or Orthodox—everyone is treated the same at the point of death," says Casely B. Essamuah, secretary of the Global Christian Forum. "He who unites us is more significant than that which divides us."

As secretary, Essamuah ('03) helps Christians celebrate what connects them and confront common challenges, from changing demographics to violence against places of worship. The forum hosts global and regional gatherings where representatives of the World Council of Churches, World Evangelical Alliance, Pentecostal World Fellowship, Roman Catholic Church, and a myriad of smaller denominations

"come together and encounter each other," says Essamuah. They pray, listen to talks on trends in Christianity, and share faith stories, whether about an important moment in one life or in the growth of a movement.

"We've realized that those stories are very significant in breaking down barriers," says Essamuah. "More often than not, people soon realize they have very similar storylines: there might have been a crisis in their life, then someone reached out to them, gave them a sense of hope. Along with the doctrinal beliefs we have, the stories are what bind us together."

He calls the forum a safe space.

"We're bringing members of diverse Christian denominations to a table to see what is it that we have in common and whether that's enough of a foundation for us to do something together," says Essamuah, who's keen to note that the forum doesn't think of itself as an organization or institution, but as a networking platform. The goal, he says, is to encourage denominations to look beyond "the differences between us in terms of how we baptize or who we baptize, how we do missions or if we do missions, how we serve communion, who can be ordained—the issues that divide us—to get people to a practical stage of a common mission and ministry." Two churches from different denominations coming together, for instance, to serve people in need of



Essamuah (left) was inaugurated as secretary of the Global Christian Forum at its 2018 gathering in Bogotá, Colombia.

food or working together to offer community services.

"When you get to know someone, when you pray with and for someone while looking into their eyes, it's very difficult to fight that person," Essamuah says.

Prayer has always been part of Essamuah's life. As a child, he lived in a mission house—a parsonage—in Ghana. His father was a minister and, in later life, presiding bishop of the Methodist Church Ghana. There was Bible study every day and Essamuah often joined his

father as he traveled the country as an itinerant minister.

By 24, Essamuah was ordained in the Methodist Church Ghana too. At 28, he won a scholarship to study theology in the United States, at Harvard. He expected it would be a short-term assignment.

"I was thinking the best thing I could do was to get the best education that the United States had to offer and go back and train other ministers. God had a different plan altogether."

Once he arrived, he found the

classes dulled by talk of politics and church life dour compared to the vibrant charismatic worship he'd grown up with. "I was ready to bail out," he says. Then he visited the historic Park Street Church, on the edge of Boston Common. There, Essamuah discovered a home. The benches were full of other migrants and the church shared his commitments to local and global mission and to reaching out to other denominations.

At Park Street, Essamuah met his future wife—they later baptized

Photos courtesy of the Global Christian Forum



Essamuah's role brings him in contact with religious leaders from around the world, including the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople (left) and Justin Welby (opposite page), the Archbishop of Canterbury.

“Persecution doesn’t differentiate between Lutheran or Baptist or Orthodox—everyone is treated the same at the point of death.”

—Casely B. Essamuah

their children there—and served for nearly eight years as the church’s first minister of missions. He also recommitted himself to graduate education, earning a doctorate at BU. “The main attraction for me of BU was Dana Robert,” says Essamuah of STH’s Truman Collins Professor of World Christianity and History of Mission. “It was not only her teaching style and the content she taught, but the people she brought together—she and they were more in tune with what was happening around the world.”

Given his background, Essamuah had a particular interest in Christianity’s tilt away from the Western world. By 2060, six of the countries with the largest Christian populations will be in Africa, according to the Pew Research Center. As well as influencing his choice of classes at STH, the geographic shifting of Christianity has increasingly shaped Essamuah’s professional life, first at Park Street, then as global missions pastor at Bay Area Community Church in Annapolis, Md.

“When you get to know someone, when you pray with and for someone while looking into their eyes, it’s very difficult to fight that person.”
—Casely B. Essamuah

“I was working with local ministry leaders to spread the love of Jesus Christ to families living with and affected by HIV/AIDS in Uganda, with young pastors in India planting new churches across the countryside, with a youth center in El Salvador inculcating the values of Jesus Christ to these young minds,” he says. “There’s a world out there that is desperately looking for models of faith, love, and grace in the footsteps of Jesus Christ. We need to be seen sharing that with others who might look different from us, pray differently from us, or belong to a different denomination.”

When he first heard about the Global Christian Forum position, Essamuah wasn’t interested. But a call to Robert, who’d spoken at one of its gatherings, helped convince him to apply. “It’s not a job,” she told him, “it’s a calling.”

Essamuah was formally inaugurated as secretary of the Global Christian Forum at its gathering in Bogotá in 2018. He’s the only full-time employee—the organization

Photos courtesy of the Global Christian Forum



has a part-time event coordinator, finance officer, and communications officer, but any other organizational support comes from volunteers. Next on his agenda is preparing regional forums in South America and Africa—and rearranging meetings that were postponed due to the coronavirus crisis. “We are always asking ourselves, ‘Who else is not at the table?’” he says.

Essamuah has met with church leaders across the world, from the Pope to the Archbishop of Canterbury, but he says even those

leading small congregations can play a role in uniting the Christian family. He recognizes that for some, joining with old foes isn’t always easy. Throughout history, denominations have argued, fought, even killed over their doctrinal differences. “But that shouldn’t stop us from moving ahead and encountering each other and seeing what we can do together, on this side of eternity, to make our world livable and full of faith, love, and grace.

“The Gospel is forgiveness; the Gospel is reconciliation.” □

A LEADER EMERGES



Patrick Reyes ('11)

PATRICK REYES FOUND HIS CALLING—NOW HE'S HELPING YOUNG PASTORAL LEADERS DO THE SAME

BY MARC CHALUFOUR

Patrick Reyes grew up in Salinas, Calif., a predominantly Latino community that's best known for agriculture and as the setting for John Steinbeck's *East of Eden*. The Salinas Valley has been called the world's salad bowl, and Reyes ('11) spent time in its vegetable packing sheds, scooping tomatoes and broccoli florets onto party platters destined for grocery stores across the country. That was, until he couldn't keep up. "I got kicked off the line because I wasn't doing it fast enough," he says.

Those packing shed days are long behind him—though Reyes' connection to his hometown remains strong—and he now seems perfectly suited for his job. The senior director of learning design at the Forum for Theological Exploration (FTE) is responsible for supporting the next generation of pastoral leaders and theological educators.

The paths out of Salinas weren't always clear to him, but a series of encounters proved influential. As a teen, a man in Reyes' mother's life began abusing him and the principal at his Christian Brothers school took notice. He told Reyes he could spend as much time at school as he needed to. "So every day for six years, I was there from band, which started at 7 am, to whenever the last sport or yearbook finished around 8 pm." He also spent a lot of time with his grandmother. "She taught me how prayer and spiritual

life and faith life could ground me in my community," he says.

Those acts of kindness helped Reyes focus on a potential career. At first, he wanted to help his hometown's next generation by teaching history and religion, but then, after spending a post-college summer back in the packing sheds, he wondered, "Who's going to talk to my community, from my community, and with my community?" A chance encounter with a Methodist minister helped him realize that he could be that voice.

"After finding out that I had a college degree and an interest in religion, she told me about seminary," he says. "She mentioned a bunch of different schools and Boston University was one of them."

Reyes' experience in Boston was challenging and formative. He found himself surrounded by people with a passion for the sort of work he knew was vital—social work, helping marginalized people of color—and yet he didn't see himself, or his Latino culture, represented in the curriculum, faculty, or his classmates. "The way that the system is set up, there's always a cultural commute that students and scholars of color have to do," he says of academia. "We have to ask, 'Where are my people? Where is my history?'"

But he saw things beginning to change during his time at STH. Mary Elizabeth Moore had just arrived as dean and quickly became one of Reyes' mentors. "Everything that Mary Elizabeth taught

was just gold," he says. "She pulled me aside in every moment where I felt like I didn't belong, reminded me that I did, and that my work was of value." Some of the writing he developed in a class with Moore provided the foundation for his book, *Nobody Cries When We Die: God, Community, and Surviving to Adulthood* (Chalice Press, 2018). The book, which explores vocation, meaning, and purpose, and reflects Reyes' own story of surviving to adulthood, received the Hispanic Theological Initiative Book Prize.

Reyes now sits on the Dean's Advisory Board and in 2019 STH honored him with its Distinguished Alumni—Emerging Leader award. "I'm overwhelmed with joy to see the shift that BU has made in a decade," he says, referencing STH's many Latinx faculty members, diversified curriculum, and programs



Reyes' role at the Forum for Theological Exploration includes speaking at colleges and universities and organizing workshops for students and educational leaders.

like the Raíces Latinas Leadership Institute and Hispanic Youth Leadership Academy. "It's not just welcoming of Latinos, it's a completely new place."

After completing his PhD at Claremont School of Theology and working in higher education as a program director and then as an assistant dean, Reyes learned about the position at FTE. With the encouragement of Moore among others, he moved to Atlanta in 2016.

He admits his job is hard to define. He coordinates grants and scholarships, develops partnerships, and organizes workshops and conferences. But the goal is simple: giving 18-to-35-year-olds space to discern their calling. "We're helping them think through what it means to be called to ministry in the 21st century," Reyes says. "So, everything from pastoral ministry to chaplaincy,

college campus ministries, social justice ministries—basically anything that they feel called to."

Last year, Reyes' job had him speaking at colleges and mobilizing to end mass incarceration. He serves on school and nonprofit boards to close the opportunity gap for Latinx and people of color. Reyes brought deans and directors of doctoral programs together in Yosemite National Park to discuss how to call students of color to spiritual life and he gathered doctoral students of color for a writing retreat at Lake Tahoe. He's partial to the beauty of California, he admits. Now, though, he must find ways to connect with those groups remotely during the coronavirus pandemic.

"I'm in my element every day. I love it," he says. "I get to bear witness to the changes that are happening in theological education—for the better." □

Photos courtesy of Patrick Reyes

BUILDING AN ARTISTIC LEGACY

FACULTY AND STAFF ARE ELEVATING EXPRESSIONS OF ART AT STH

BY MARA SASSOON

For the last few years, STH has hosted exhibitions of artifacts you might expect to find in a big-city museum: an elaborate Tibetan religious tapestry, an ancient Egyptian canopic jar, Salvadoran embroidered textiles. The displays, in the school's library and Community Center, have been curated by Kara Jackman, archivist and preservation librarian. She's made it a goal to bring art into the everyday lives of STH community members, curating three to four art and history exhibitions each year that celebrate material from the school's archives and on-loan works from artists and museums.

"I hope that during classes, the art inspires new, fresh thought from the creative sides of students and faculty," says Jackman, who oversees a school archive containing historical records from the New England Conference of the United Methodist Church and from STH. It also includes personal papers, art, and artifacts—ancient pottery and coins, historic posters, photographs—that have been donated by prominent New England Methodists and faculty members. When we look at a drawing or painting, Jackman says, we're often inspired to think differently about issues affecting the world. "Art may be the thing that helps us all come together."

Jackman has worked closely with Dean Mary Elizabeth Moore and other members of the STH community to come up with exhibition ideas, often focusing on themes of social justice. The winter 2020 show *In Wilderness is the Preservation of the World: Photography by Dan Wells* displayed a Harvard Divinity School student's nature photography and connected them to topics in ecology and theology. *Bordados De Memoria: Embroidering Memories For Peace*, on view at the library in late 2019, featured embroidered works created by women and children from El Salvador who were displaced during the Salvadoran Civil War of the 1980s. The pieces, which were loaned by the Museo de la Palabra y la Imagen in San Salvador, were subsequently displayed at the Salvadoran consulate in East Boston.

Jackman's efforts aren't limited to temporary shows. In March 2019, she had stained glass windows from the former Tremont Street Methodist Episcopal Church in Boston, sitting in the STH archives since 2011, installed in the library. The windows memorialize the founding members of the Woman's Foreign Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church, a founding organization for today's United Methodist Women, including Harriet Merrick Warren,

wife of William Fairfield Warren, BU's first president.

"It's crucial to have great art around to not only enliven the spaces we inhabit in our school, but also to enliven creative, new ways of thinking about problems, whether in the classroom or in the world," Jackman says. And she's not the only one who believes in the importance of building an artistic legacy at the school. Around STH, staff and faculty are working to elevate the arts.

ART AS A SACRED SPACE

When Andrew Shenton started teaching at STH in 2004, he noticed a lot of students were using poetry, music, visual arts, and more in their worship. But, he says, he felt the arts were underrepresented in the curriculum. So Shenton, James R. Houghton Scholar of Sacred Music, worked with Moore to start the Theology and the Arts Initiative. The goal, he says, was to give "a more prominent role to the arts" by highlighting the number of arts courses across the University available for STH students to take as electives.

Since the initiative launched in 2014, Shenton says STH has increased the number of courses blending theology with visual art, music, and literature that students looking to go into ministry can apply



STH's library now features a stained glass window memorializing the founding members of the Woman's Foreign Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church.

Kara Jackman

to their degrees. An MDiv student can take Baroque Arts in Northern Europe or Cathedrals and Castles: The History of Art and Architecture of Medieval Europe, both offered through the College of Arts & Sciences' History of Art and Architecture department, for example.

A year after launching the initiative, Shenton began an annual arts contest, open to all BU students, faculty, staff, and alumni. The first was a poetry contest, followed by a photography contest, a hymn-writing contest, and, last year, another poetry contest. These competitions allow people from outside the STH community to engage with the school, he says. "They are not about Christianity as much as they are about God and spirituality." The photography contest, for example, had a broad theme: "Any place that you see God." Shenton was delighted to see that contest draw submissions from all over the University.

"The arts touch people in ways that mediate their relationship with their own God in some ways better than anything else," says Shenton, also an associate professor of music with a joint appointment at the College of Fine Arts. "Sometimes a painting or a sculpture can actually be a sacred space to you or a sacred thing without it coming into the confines of organized religious scriptures."

MUSIC AND MINISTRY

Chad William Kidd ('05,'05) has also seen firsthand the powerful tie between art and worship—specifically music. "I have always felt most connected to God through beauty and awe, and for me



A year after launching STH's Theology and the Arts Initiative, Andrew Shenton created an annual art contest. Rebecca Smith ('16, SSW'16) won the 2016 photography competition with this image, taken during an STH travel seminar to Israel/Palestine.

that often manifests through music," says Kidd, worship coordinator and director of the Seminary Singers, a non-audition choir comprised of STH students, faculty, and staff. Music, he says, "is transcendent of boundaries. Wordless or not, it helps us feel and emote like sometimes nothing else can."

Kidd began performing with the Seminary Singers as a student and, in 2011, was hired to direct the group. The choir typically performs every Wednesday, at a weekly worship service that Kidd also coordinates,

although he hasn't figured out how to continue their involvement during the coronavirus pandemic. "I love this job, because I really get to use the fullest and broadest set of my creative and artistic ministry gifts in a role that asks me to see a bigger picture of artistry in ministry and worship at the school," he says. Kidd has also served as the minister of music at the First Congregational Church of Reading, Mass., United Church of Christ, since 2001. He says that his involvement in the Seminary Singers has shaped

him into the minister he is today and also influences how he thinks about coordinating worship services at STH.

"Many people who worship God in a communal setting report that music is one of the most integral parts of the experience for them. That sentiment is certainly true for me and has been all my life," he says. Kidd recalls feeling called by God to be a minister while he was attending a church musical in college. After that, he switched his major from music performance to church music.



Chad William Kidd ('05, '05) (left), directs the Seminary Singers in Marsh Chapel.

Now, Kidd wants to create similarly powerful experiences for those who attend the Wednesday services. He thinks about how music can help make each service more impactful. Every time he plans a service, he asks himself questions like, "Should the choir anthem be sung directly after the Scripture is read and how might its text and music enhance how the Scripture is heard?" Or, "Should the invitation to prayer be sung by the congregation instead of spoken, and what role might that play in

the overall arc of the service?" Sometimes, he considers the effect of singing the Psalm versus reciting it or whether the organ or the worship band would make a better accompaniment for a particular song. He likes to think of each service in terms of a theme, usually driven by the sacred texts used that day. So he contemplates the role music plays in enhancing the themes and stories of the Scripture—where the choir can add levity or where the organ can add drama, for instance. And in the absence of the choir, Kidd says he

has students offering to share their musical talents in the online services. Kidd strives to show students the value of incorporating the arts into their studies. "Sometimes our artistic pursuits are the first to go when our lives get busy. We might say we don't have enough time to be in the church choir, or to keep painting, or writing poetry, or going to theater, and so we might try to cut those out as an expendable. But, to me, the arts are essential in ministry and in life and they have a core place at STH." □

Facing Page: Rebecca Smith; This page: Dave Green



JOURNAL

HEALTHY HUMILITY

Research helps religious leaders provide spiritual guidance while staying grounded

BY STEVEN J. SANDAGE

The word “humility” is related to the Latin root humus, meaning “of the earth,” and suggests a groundedness.

1. If you are interested in a review of research on these issues, see Elizabeth G. Ruffing, Nancy G. Devor, David R. Paine, and Steven J. Sandage, “Humility and Narcissism in Clergy: a Relational Spirituality Framework,” *Pastoral Psychology*, Vol. 67, No. 5, 2018, 525–545.

2. Joshua D. Miller, Jessica L. Maples, L. Buffardi, Huajian Cai, Brittany Gentile, Yasemin Kisbu-Sakarya, Virginia S.Y. Kwan, Alex LoPilato, Louise F. Pendry, Constantine Sedikides, Lane Siedor, and W. Keith Campbell, “Narcissism and United States’ culture: The view from home and around the world,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 109, No. 6, 2015, 1068–1089.

3. Steven J. Sandage, David Rupert, George S. Stavros, and Nancy G. Devor, *Relational Spirituality in Psychotherapy: Healing Suffering and Promoting Growth* (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2020).

Facing page: iStock/neiljangan

Humility has historically been considered a virtue in all the major religious traditions and an important trait among religious leaders. However, those of us who have ventured into ministry leadership roles—or work closely with those who have—likely know that (1) temptations toward pride and other forms of egocentricity abound within the terrain of leadership and (2) some leaders fall prey to those temptations, while others sustain or even grow into healthy forms of humility.¹

Religious leaders are often expected to preach and teach sacred truths, show competence in a multitude of different roles, make transformational decisions affecting complex systems, remain perpetually available for helping with both everyday and traumatic events, and embody the spiritual and moral ideals of their communities. This multifaceted job description and the stressors that come with it can generate various kinds of self-esteem and insecurity struggles, even among leaders who start out well-grounded. So, what does humility look like among contemporary religious leaders? And, is humility really still a leadership virtue in an America that our wider world considers exceedingly narcissistic?²

The field of psychology has largely overlooked the topic of humility until the past decade, but there have been hundreds of scientific studies in recent years. I have benefited from two research grants to study humility, funded by the John Templeton Foundation, including a project on humility and religious leadership with my research team at the Albert & Jessie Danielsen Institute

and Claire Wolfeich, a professor of practical theology and spirituality studies. We have studied humility using our relational spirituality model (RSM), which focuses on healthy relational development as a pathway to psychological and spiritual growth.³

DEFINING HUMILITY IN CONTEXT

People frequently equate humility with subjugation, self-abasement, and shame, but these forms of disempowerment are actually antithetical to authentic humility. Our team has utilized a multidimensional definition of humility that includes: (1) a willingness to engage in accurate self-understanding, (2) a receptive and teachable orientation toward the perspectives of others, (3) low concern for social status combined with strong solidarity with the oppressed, (4) the ability to manage self-conscious emotions, particularly pride and shame, and (5) a genuine appreciation of the value of things beyond the self. Etymologically, the word *humility* is related (Continued)

About the Author



Steven J. Sandage is Albert & Jessie Danielsen Professor of Psychology of Religion and Theology at STH with a joint appointment in the College of Arts & Sciences Department of Psychological & Brain Sciences. He is also research director and senior staff psychologist at the Albert & Jessie Danielsen Institute.

Dave Green

to the Latin root *humus* or “of the earth.”⁴ So, we view humility as a kind of groundedness that includes a constructive attitude toward human finitude and the rest of creation.

The topic of humility necessarily raises important diversity and justice questions. For example, women are often socialized toward false and oppressive forms of humility and punished for expressions of confidence or assertiveness. Sadly, males more easily gain credit for “humble” behaviors since males tend to score so much higher than females in narcissism. Cultural differences in the expressions of humility also necessitate intercultural competence to accurately practice humility in different social contexts. In fact, our research has shown seminary students who score higher in humility tend to also show higher levels of both intercultural competence and social justice commitment.⁵

HUMILITY AND WELL-BEING

We have also investigated the relationship between humility and well-being in religious leaders. In a study with 258 leaders from the Abrahamic faiths, we found humility was associated with higher levels of *eudaimonic* well-being—a holistic form of personal and communal well-being—and these effects were accounted for by (1) secure forms of attachment with God and (2) emotional and relational

maturity.⁶ These findings held up even while statistically controlling for impression management effects of respondents (an index of pressure they may have felt to appear virtuous). The results help validate our RSM idea that humility may help buffer the stressors and narcissistic temptations of ministry while also promoting spiritual and relational health.

HUMILITY CHALLENGES AND FACILITATORS

Our research with religious leaders has also explored challenges and facilitating factors for the cultivation of humility.⁷ Leaders named a variety of challenging factors, such as receiving lots of validation from congregants, holding significant power and authority, or needing to promote the success of

one’s ministry for fundraising or further employment. One minister explained, “My parishioners are gushing in praise for me, and I find it overwhelming and embarrassing—I don’t know how to handle such intense praise, and I don’t always feel I’ve done anything worthy of it.” These findings invite questions about preparation for such challenges in ministry.

Participants in our research also identified many factors that facilitate humility, such as engagement with diversity, working in collaborative teams and humble organizations, drawing on role models of humility, and a host

4. Claire E. Wolfeich, Callid Keefe-Perry, Steven J. Sandage, and David R. Paine, “Humility: Empirical Psychological Research in Dialogue with Practical Theology, Part I,” *International Journal of Practical Theology*, Vol. 20, No. 1, 2016, 143–155.

5. Chance A. Bell, Steven J. Sandage, Tranese D. Morgan, and Daniel J. Hague, “Relational Spirituality, Humility, and Commitments to Social Justice and Intercultural Competence,” *Journal of Psychology and Christianity*, Vol. 36, No. 3, 2017, 210–221. David R. Paine, Peter J. Jankowski, and Steven J. Sandage, “Humility as a Predictor of Intercultural Competence: Mediator Effects for Differentiation of Self,” *The Family Journal*, Vol. 24, No. 1, 2016, 15–22.

6. Peter J. Jankowski, Steven J. Sandage, Chance A. Bell, Elizabeth G. Ruffing, and Chris Adams, “Humility, Relational Spirituality, and Well-being among Religious Leaders: A Moderated Mediation Model,” *Journal of Religion and Health*, Vol. 58, No. 1, 2019, 132–152.

7. Elizabeth G. Ruffing, Nancy G. Devor, and Steven J. Sandage, “Humility Challenges and Facilitating Factors among Religious Leaders: A Qualitative Study,” *Journal of Spirituality in Mental Health*, 2018, doi: 10.1080/19349637.2018.1520184.

8. Claire E. Wolfeich, Elizabeth G. Ruffing, Sarah A. Crabtree, Nancy G. Devor, and Steven J. Sandage, “Humility and religious leadership: a qualitative study of theology and practice,” *Journal of Spirituality in Mental Health*, 2019, doi: 10.1080/19349637.2019.1691967.

of spiritual practices and teachings that focus on God’s role in their lives and ministries. Facilitating factors for humility included some seemingly negative experiences, such as receiving little validation for their efforts, serving alongside a narcissistic leader, or having one’s leadership overlooked as a woman or person of color. These findings raise justice-related questions about the systemic dynamics related to humility.

HUMILITY PRACTICES

Much of the recent psychological research on humility has focused on characterological traits, which resonates with certain dimensions of humility as a virtue. However, we are currently focusing some of our work on understanding religious leaders’ *practices* that can develop and sustain humility, as practices are also important for all virtues.⁸ Leaders in our studies have described many different humility practices, including traditional spiritual formation practices, but also practices to encourage self-reflection, accountability to others—such as spouses, elders, mentors, therapists, and spiritual directors—and acts of service without seeking recognition. One leader explained, “[Humility]

is not about putting myself down, it’s about elevating others and seeing their giftedness. In terms of practice, a significant thing is writing thank-you notes.” Another leader emphasized a listening posture of “being present with those I am with. Listen, listen, listen, and learn.” Others described intentional leadership practices of humility, such as encouraging committees to meet in

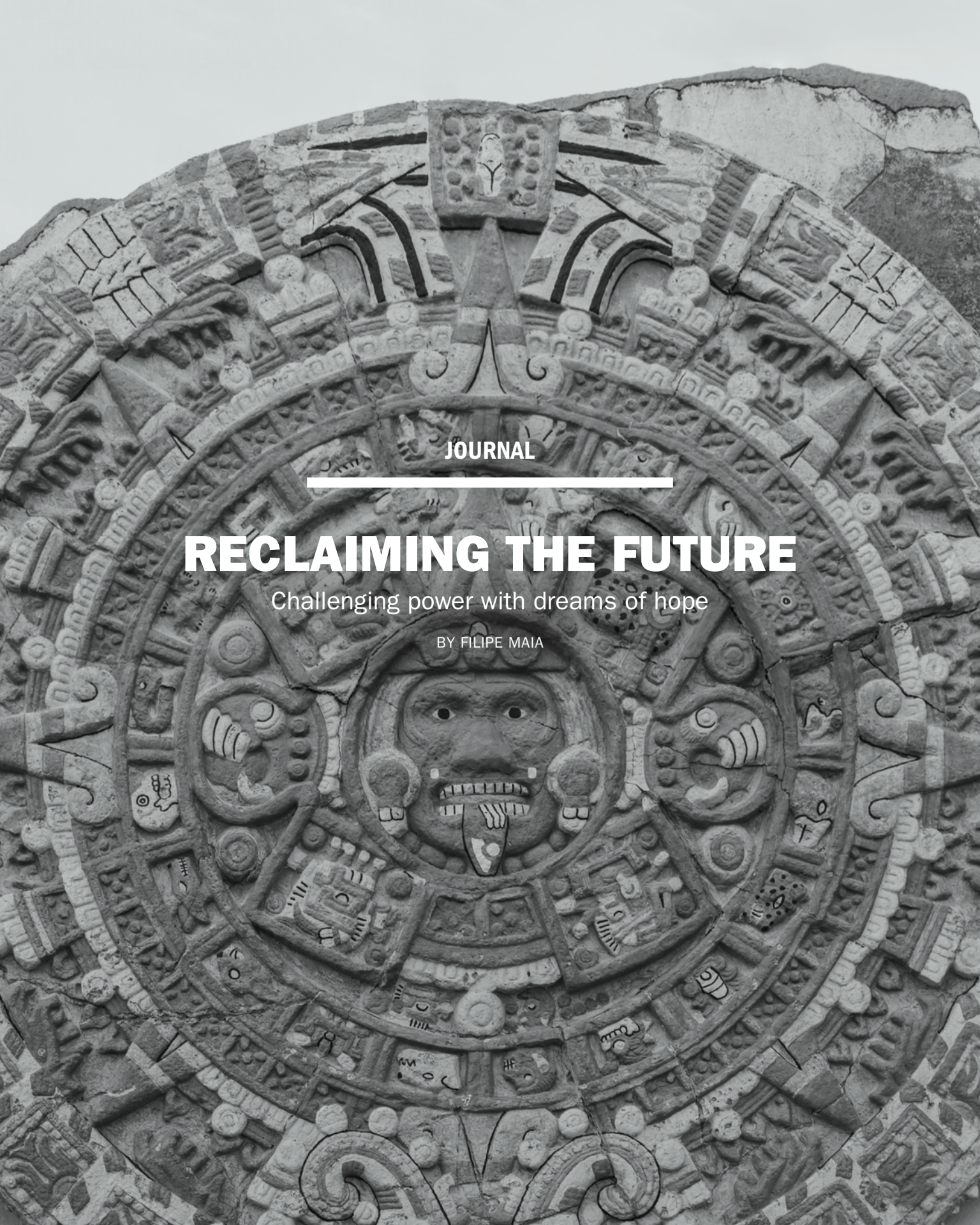
their absence or containing their voice at meetings to allow others to weigh in. We have been struck by the wide variety of humility practices, which include some that are restorative (keeping a personal Sabbath from work) and some that are stretching (inviting honest feedback).

We have used this program of research to develop a daylong humility formation workshop we

recently tested with a large group of seminary students. The workshop was evaluated very favorably, and our follow-up research with participants identified relational spirituality factors that predicted the stability of humility over time. We look forward to continuing to study this formation-based approach to humility with faith communities that seek to integrate the best of spirituality with the relational realities of embodied life. □

Facilitating factors for humility

included some seemingly negative experiences, such as receiving little validation for their efforts, serving alongside a narcissistic leader, or having one’s leadership overlooked as a woman or person of color. These findings raise justice-related questions about the systemic dynamics related to humility.



The Aztec sun stone chronicled events from the past and projected events in the future.

JOURNAL

RECLAIMING THE FUTURE

Challenging power with dreams of hope

BY FILIPE MAIA

The story is told that in the months preceding Spain’s 16th-century invasion of the Aztec Empire, Emperor Moctezuma II had dreams of the coming of pale-skinned warriors marching in from the empire’s eastern seas. The troubled emperor summoned tribal dreamers from across the land and demanded an explanation for this most inauspicious vision. Writer Clarissa Pinkola Estés recounts the legend: “These muscled travelers, old, middle aged and very young, came before Moctezuma to tell the dreams they’d been dreaming about a most mysterious thing: The Future.”¹ These dreamers did not so much predict the future as they prepared the way for the possibilities of what was to come. More than anything, they perceived the need to prepare the way for change. But, as the story goes, Moctezuma was umoved by the dreamers’ rendering of the future. Unwilling to envision a future different from his present, he demanded the killing of all dreamers. As another rendering of the legend puts it, “[from] that day there were no more forecasts, no more dreams, terror weighed upon the spirit world.”²

The massacre of dreamers, then and now, may very well be the tragedy of a futureless world. The tale exposes the long-standing imperial desire to abolish all forms of visions for a future different from the present. Naturally, empires rely upon the status quo, the existing state of affairs, and any dream or foreboding of change is a threat. I have been intrigued by the social and political force of what I refer to as future-talk. Future-talk troubles narratives—whether religious or

political—that seek to conserve that which *is* from any disturbances caused from that which *may* be.

As a Christian theologian committed to the project of liberation, I have found that the imagination of what is to come is a strong ally in challenging hegemonic power structures today. And that is because future-talk is never *just* about the future. More than mere speculation, our hope for the future signals something about the world, its suffering and expectations, its social dynamics and aspirations, its political configuration and plots for transformation. In fact, this is why controlling narratives about the future is a major concern for imperial powers.

In my current research project, I’m tracking how our hopes for the future have been shaped and policed by what may be termed the imperial force of finance. Financial markets rely heavily on the ability to predict, manage, and profit from future events. But, as some theorists have argued, managing the future is tantamount *(Continued)*

1. Clarissa Pinkola Estés, “Massacre of The Dreamers and The Imitatio Maria,” *National Catholic Reporter* (nconline.org/blogs/el-rio-debajo-del-rio/massacre-dreamers-and-imitatio-maria). March 17, 2008.

2. Laurette Séjourné, *Burning Water: Thought and Religion in Ancient Mexico* (Berkeley: Random House, 1976).

Facing Page: Carol M. Highsmith

About the Author



Filipe Maia is an assistant professor of theology. His research and teaching focus on liberation theologies and philosophies, theology and economics, and the Christian eschatological imagination. He is finishing a book, *Trading Futures: Toward a Theological Critique of Financialized Capitalism*.

Dave Green

to producing a version of the future. Futures, one must remember, is the name of a commodity that can be bought and sold in financial markets. As the future becomes an object for financial gain, our capacity to imagine what is to come is consumed. As the anthropologist and activist David Graeber frames it, we have before us a “vast bureaucratic apparatus for the creation and maintenance of hopelessness, a giant machine designed, first and foremost, to destroy any sense of possible alternative futures.”³ The monetary and political power amassed by financial corporations grants them the ability to assure that their vision for the future shall come to be. It is a self-fulfilling prophecy turned into a profitable venture.

It is the financial empire’s version of the massacre of the dreamers. In this scenario, reclaiming the theme of hope might be one of our best tactics of resistance. For theology, this means mining the vocabulary of Christian eschatology in pursuit of alternative forms of future-talk. As the influential German theologian Jürgen Moltmann announced in his *Theology of Hope*, eschatology is not the doctrine of the end of times, but the Christian vocabulary for hope.⁴ Neither an addendum to theology nor predictive speculation about cataclysmic events, the eschatological imagination offers ways

to talk about the making of history and the divine possibilities therein. And these possibilities take us to the edges of new possible worlds. Theologian Catherine Keller has insightfully reminded us that “eschatology” comes from the Greek word *eschatos*, which means, among several things, an *edge*.⁵ Eschatology is thus Christian theology turned edgy.

“As the legend of the massacre of the dreamers makes evident, dreaming of different futures is politically charged.... For powerful forces, hope is always a matter of preserving power onto the future. For the victims, hope is a matter of survival, of creativity, and resistance.”

The Brazilian liberation theologian and poet Rubem Alves suggests that the language of hope stretches the human imagination into the future, not as an escape from the present but as a protest against it. In Alves’ theopoetics of liberation, human hope connects us to the pain of the world while also resisting the causes of such suffering. This hope is both born out of history and committed to history. For Alves, hope gives voice and name to “things that are absent.”⁶ In Latin American and Latinx social movements, this is often ritualized when the names of the ancestors and fellow fighters for justice who have passed are said out loud. When that happens, the crowd responds: “presente!” You see: the invocation of an absence gives flesh to things. In Alves’ work, this ability to actualize absences constitutes the liberating power of the eschatological imagination. When the edges of Christian eschatology meet the margins of society, hope becomes the

3. David Graeber, *Debt: The First 5,000 Years* (New York: Melville House, 2011), 382.

4. Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope: On the Ground and the Implications of a Christian Eschatology* (London: S.C.M. Press, 1967).

5. Catherine Keller, *Apocalypse Now and Then*, Second edition (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 2004).

6. Rubem Alves, *A Theology of Human Hope* (Washington: Corpus Books, 1969), 24.



Remnants of Emperor Moctezuma II’s empire remain standing in modern-day Mexico.

transformative lever to trigger new worlds into existence.

As the legend of the massacre of the dreamers makes evident, dreaming of different futures is politically charged. The story speaks to the history-producing quality of future-talk, as well as to the threat that it poses to imperial projects. For powerful forces, hope is always a matter of preserving power onto the future. For the victims, hope

is a matter of survival, of creativity, and resistance. The moment we gather our breath to speak of the future is a time when something comes to be. Future-talk *summons*. Hope, the mode of future-talk that is conjured by a liberative eschatology, may be the energy that interrupts the inexorable force of imperial powers. It is one of the edgiest tools we may have to flip the page and construct a new planetary epoch. □

Photo: Starcevic/iStock

JOURNAL

AT THE BEDSIDE

Revisiting the imagery and rhetoric of 2 Peter

BY SHIVELY T. J. SMITH

A scene from Jane Austen's Sense and Sensibility, in the bedroom of an English estate, provides an allegory for 2 Peter.

This is now, beloved, the second letter I am writing to you; in them I am trying to arouse your sincere intention by reminding you that you should remember the words spoken in the past by the holy prophets, and the commandment of the Lord and Savior spoken through your apostles.

—2 Peter (3:1–2)

Imagine an elderly man reposed in a large sleigh bed crafted out of dark mahogany wood. He lies in a room lit by flickering candelabras and wears a white nightshirt soaked in perspiration. He looks up with a weak, yet inviting smile in greeting to his son, who approaches clad in a black suit and sporting a somber countenance. In a raspy voice, the father says, “The law prevents me from dividing up my estate. You are to have everything. Without your help your stepmother and the girls will have almost nothing. You must do something...you must give me your solemn promise.”¹ The son nods his head in agreement. He commits to do as his father instructs while mentally preparing for the future. Soon, it will be his responsibility to continue the family name as the custodian of what he and his father inherited.

Although this is a literary rendering of a scene in the 2008 television adaptation of Jane Austen’s book *Sense and Sensibility*, the scenario of the dying father addressing his last words to his son is ideal for imagining what is happening in the letter of 2 Peter. The opening scene of 2 Peter, immediately following its greeting (1:1–2), functions as the final words of a heroic, apostolic elder—namely, Simeon Peter, the “servant-apostle of Jesus

Christ.” The letter portrays “Peter” as one who has spent the majority of his life in service and witness (1:17–18) to an unfolding movement of people and he now prepares to continue this work after he dies.

In a literary moment cast as looming loss and grief, the writer reminds readers of the real significance of their current situation—it is not about death, but recollection (3:1). The feeling and state of loss is potentially mitigated if readers actually remember all the apostle said and taught. For example, in 2 Peter 1:12, he says, “Therefore, I intend to keep on reminding you of these things.” Although the writer uses language that denotes ongoing existence, readers quickly realize that the time for recollection is short-lived: “I think it right, as long as I am in this body, to refresh your memory, since I know that my death will come soon, as indeed our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me. And I will make every effort so that after *(Continued)*

About the Author



Shively T. J. Smith is an assistant professor of New Testament. Her work in the New Testament focuses on the general letters, diaspora studies, hermeneutics, and African American interpretative histories. She is also a preacher, writer, and an itinerant elder in the African Methodist Episcopal Church.

Illustration from: A series of picturesque views of seats of the noblemen and gentlemen of Great Britain and Ireland (1840).

1. *Sense & Sensibility*, written by Andrew Davies, based on the book by Jane Austen, directed by John Alexander, BBC, 2008.

Dave Green

my departure you may be able at any time to recall these things” (2 Peter 1:13–15). The letter leverages the power of memory to embolden a community struggling to understand their purpose and value as observers of the prophetic traditions (1:19–21) and participants in the work of the earliest Christian apostles who are behind them (3:2).

In the history of the development of early Christianity, 2 Peter is located at the juncture between the earliest generations of the Jesus movement in the 1st century CE and the emergence of 2nd-century Christianity with its accompanying accoutrements of rising interest in martyrologies, institutional development and organization, the rise of other gospel stories of early Christian heroes, and the unfortunate decline of female and slave equity and voice in the movement. If we follow the large scholarly consensus, the letter of 2 Peter is likely the youngest writing included in the New Testament, with its compositional date approximately between 100 and 120, placing it after the death of Peter and the entire first and second generations of early Christian leaders and members. This means the author of the letter is literarily constructed. As is common to testament literature, farewell addresses of heroic figures are fictional, crafted to commemorate,

preserve, and advance the perspectives and teachings of the hero without asserting that they actually stated those exact words. It is the *spirit* of the letter and *character* of the hero that ancient writers sought to capture accurately in such literary creations.

Consequently, the discourse of 2 Peter does not represent a rupture or disconnection from those earlier generations. Rather, it blends the emerging religious discourses of prophecy and apocalypticism in 2nd-century Christianity with the historic consciousness, imagination, and reasoning from the first 70 years of early Christian origins. Unfortunately, the contribution of 2 Peter to reconstructions of early Christian development and rhetoric is easily missed due to its canonical placement and three short chapters. Wedged

between 1 Peter and the Johannine letters, 2 Peter is hidden from sight. Yet its rhetorical and historical offering to studies of early Christianity should not be underestimated.

It is a unique and masterful tapestry of religious imagery, language, and meaning. It is rich with short retellings and allusions to biblical figures and moments—from Noah and the flood, to Lot, Peter, Paul, and even the transfigured Jesus. Within this short letter, we encounter early Hellenistic Jewish and Christian traditions

[2 Peter] is a unique and masterful tapestry of religious imagery, language, and meaning. It is rich with short retellings and allusions to biblical figures and moments—from Noah and the flood, to Lot, Peter, Paul, and even the transfigured Jesus.

not always known by the average layperson, such as traditions about Enoch or echoes from writings of the pseudepigrapha like the Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs, or the Testament of Abraham, or 2 Enoch.

By reading 2 Peter with appreciative eyes and charitable ears, contemporary readers can detect the traditions the letter received and its unique reinterpretations and reconfigurations of those same traditions. It invites readers to consider where the tradition has been, where it is, and what it is anticipated to do for future generations. Furthermore, located on this side of history, contemporary interpreters may even be able to measure the author’s intuition about the community’s immediate future against the extant writings of early Christianity that follow within a few years of the letter’s composition. One can get a sense of just how good the author was at reading the signs of the time and preparing the community for its immediate future.

Contrary to what a superficial review of 2 Peter may yield, this letter is not just concerned with individual, inner sensibilities around righteousness (2 Peter 1:1; 2:5, 21; 3:13). Though many modern translations use the language of “righteousness” to translate the Greek root word *dikaïosunē*, this theologically loaded term diminishes how, in Greek, the word represents social and relational

rightness and justice; to go “the way of what is just,” righteous, loving, and communal means to resist the enticing lure of other opinions and teachings that create an environment of antagonism, competition, and suspicion (2:21).

Second Peter encourages readers to grow in grace, knowledge, faith, goodness, mutuality, and love (1:5–8; 2:1). If they are suspicious of anything, it should be of teaching that encourages otherwise (3:17).

Ultimately, a major task of the letter of 2 Peter is to buttress the Christian tradition and identity in an environment of instability, uncertainty, and contention. Even as the letter affirms that the Christian escape from trial and danger is near, it reminds readers of the scriptural, liturgical, and ethical resources already present among them to support

One can get a sense of just how good the author was at reading the signs of the time and preparing the community for its immediate future.

their ongoing presence in the world, navigate its corrupt institutions, and remain mindful of corrupt influencers among whom they currently exist—at least, for now. In this way, 2 Peter invites us also to stand at the bedside of Peter and heed these last words of recollection and warning. We remember the stories of old—both honorable and shameful—and we reflect on their significance in the ages-old struggle between good and evil, justice and injustice, and life-giving or life-taking actions of humans so that we, too, might be found flourishing “in peace” with God and with each other (3:14). □



Seoul, South Korea

JOURNAL

SEEKING THE GOOD LIFE

Flourishing in postcolonial South Korea

BY HYEBIN HONG ('13)

1. The first half of this piece is a revised writing of the author's 2018 presentation in the book panel discussion on Walter Fluker's *The Ground Has Shifted* (New York: NYU Press, 2016).
2. Lisa Tessman, *Burdened Virtues: Virtue Ethics for Liberatory Struggles* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).
3. *Ibid.*, 24.

Facing Page: C/Nattana/Stock

How do we define a good life? One of the answers to this simple question, which many theologians and philosophers have pondered century after century, is that of virtue ethics. The classical Western virtue ethics, based on Aristotelian and Thomist traditions, attribute the principle of morality to the objective and superior goodness. It means that the ideal of goodness sets the ultimate value of human life. Classical virtue ethicists viewed that the *telos*—or purpose—of the human is living a life in accordance with the superior good, which is what happiness, or *eudaimonia*, means. The morality proper, in this account, is understood as a person's lifelong cultivation of virtue that is relevant to this superior good, so that one can live a life as in accordance with the superior good as possible.¹

What if, however, people's capacity to cultivate such virtues necessary to flourish has been enervated by historical or systematic circumstances? The more complicated and diversified our world has become, the more challenges we face in virtue ethics. For example, feminist ethicist Lisa Tessman, in *Burdened Virtues*, recognizes that classical virtue ethics do not attend that oppression interferes with the ability of the oppressed to cultivate virtue and to achieve moral good. The oppressive external systems render the oppressed to develop a set of harmful character traits that come with a moral cost to the bearer of those "burdened virtues."² Tessman contends feminist ethicists should consider the issue of human flourishing, but should also pay

"particular attention to systemic barriers to human flourishing that have been created by conditions of oppression."³

The national rendering of history in Korea draws the nations, such as the two Koreas, the Japanese empire, the United States, as the sole agents of its colonial history. By doing so, it has intentionally and effectively concealed the destructive impacts of colonial occupations on the Korean people. Local narratives of survival and resistance have been silenced. So many deaths, disappearances, and other physical and mental damages are unheard and unrecognized. On the contrary, we are constantly reminded how humiliating our past has been and how marvelous the West is and how it saved us. In the vacuum of narratives of the lives and deaths of the generations before us, we grew up as an intellectually and spiritually uprooted and dislocated generation.

For my generation, there is a go-to moral script: that of freedom and autonomy. The US military, which utilized and fortified the same governing and regulating (Continued)

About the Author



Hyebin Hong ('13) is a PhD candidate in theological ethics. Beyond her academic work, she is a lover of dogs, an enthusiastic amateur cook, and a tae kwon do practitioner.

Benjamin Austin

colonial system established by the Japanese empire—which slaughtered thousands and thousands of civilians during and after the Korean War—has presented itself as the savior of the nation, the guardian and protector of freedom, peace, and prosperity. It demands allegiance to itself as something superior and inevitable, by demonizing North Korea and by constantly comparing their destitution to the miraculous and glaring growth of the South under more than 25 years of authoritarian rule supported by the United States and its anti-communist propaganda.

The production of historical narratives, images, and cultural artifacts constantly reminds us how those Western ideals of freedom and autonomy—and only these ideals—can pull us out of our humiliating and shameful colonial

past. We are indoctrinated with a very particular moral script that would make a nation comparable to the “global standard.”

This neoliberal narrative has plagued we Koreans for years and years, debilitated our cognitive skills and moral capacity to imagine and pursue a life outside of the liberal market ideals of freedom and autonomy. A good life for us has been a life within the global market. Freedom to purchase;

freedom to travel wherever we want to go; freedom to do whatever we want; freedom to claim rights so that we are not going to be violated anymore as our ancestors were; freedom to be autonomous so that we can escape the trap of the painful past.

Postcolonial theology is a set of discursive practices that critically explicates these problems of colonial discourses and their operations. In particular, Asian feminist postcolonial theologians demonstrate that the complexities in race, ethnicity, class, culture, religion, and language in Asian postcolonial contexts demand an interrogation of Western liberative theological approaches that often employ representational identity politics.⁴

When I first came across postcolonial theologies it was an eye-opening moment. It felt like all of my problems and predicaments could now be explained and fixed, so that I could finally live a “good life.” But soon I found that discursive practices of dismantling the problems of colonialism would not automatically yield both political and moral betterment of the colonized. Even though it is important to transform epistemological, moral, and theological discourse and practices

The production of historical narratives, images, and cultural artifacts constantly reminds us how those Western ideals of freedom and autonomy—and only these ideals—can pull us out of our humiliating and shameful colonial past.

4. This section is revised from the author’s approved dissertation prospectus.

5. Tessman, op. cit., 26.

that have been deeply colonized at individual, communal, and social levels, what is also necessary is a discussion about whether these agents on multiple levels possess the *capacity* to initiate and to fulfill such a transformation. As Tessman points out, we need to take “the difficulty, or even impossibility in some cases of the transformation of character” seriously.⁵

It is a slippery argument that the colonized are morally damaged or they are inclined to do bad things. It can be easily misconstrued as denying the agency and idiosyncrasy of the colonized, as if all colonized are destined to be

diminished in their moral capacities. Yet, disregarding damages done to moral characters and abilities of the colonized cannot be a solution for decolonizing theology. In order to envision a reparative future in which the colonized can fully flourish, it is necessary to assess first whether the colonized agent is capable of undertaking the reparation and, if not, how we can develop that capacity at an individual and social level. A good life, namely human flourishing, can only be imagined under the social, political, cultural, and psychological conditions that allow and foster moral agents to cultivate their *capabilities*. □

STH launches online learning for pastors and faith leaders

Mini-courses help faith professionals continue a life of learning

The need for practical learning that’s responsive to changing times, for community connections to other faith leaders, doesn’t end when you leave STH. Pragmatic online mini-courses and reflective spirituality groups will be offered regularly, uniting alums, similarly situated leaders, and STH faculty members. Visit bu.edu/sth/oll to see upcoming offerings.

Check out the current offerings or suggest a topic.

Email sthcooll@bu.edu, or visit bu.edu/sth/oll

SERMON

LOVE PERSISTS

Rereading a parable of love and justice

BY ASHLEY RENÉE JOHNSON ('17)

Facing page: Marco VDM/Stock

Love Persists: God is love and God is justice.
—Luke 18:1–8

Love. Love is. Love is persistent, love is wide. It does not hoard, it does not withhold, it is not limited. It does not exclude others, it is not some silly ethic that's just for the weak or faint of heart, it is not harmful, it does not keep what is good, what is just from another. Love does not come easy, but it does graft us together; it keeps us close and it keeps us alive. It always includes, always fights, always fuels, always wins, always is.¹

And, justice. Justice is love. Justice is what love looks like in public. Justice is love in one of its loudest, sturdiest, truest, most courageous forms. Justice ensures that life, abundant life is accessible to all; ensures that we can all “live fully and well.”² And, justice is hard, hard work, because justice requires that we persist. Justice requires that we look beyond ourselves, beyond our needs, beyond what's familiar, beyond what's easy, beyond what's convenient, beyond our limited understanding of the will of God, and determine to continuously fight for “what is loving and caring for all creation.”³

And if God is love, then God is also justice. Which is to say that justice is the essence, the nature, the foundation of God's very being. In the beginning was justice, and justice flowed from God, and justice was God.⁴ And, whoever does not pursue justice, whoever does not do what is loving and caring for all of creation does not know God in God's fullness.⁵

The parable found in the 18th chapter of Luke's gospel is a story that begs

that we know intimately how love and justice persist.⁶ In this parable, there are two characters: a judge who is directly characterized as unfit and unjust, and a widow who repeatedly demands to be given what she is owed. The actions of both characters are extreme and there is insight to be gained in carefully looking at both, but it may be useful to first speak to what this story is not. Occasionally, some interpreters will allude to the judge, who repeatedly refuses to grant the widow's request, as a godlike figure, and preach that we must wear God down with our prayers in order to get what we want in life. But, I would argue that this is a diluted interpretation of the parable that centers the individual and is a reflection of religion's obsession with taking the easy road, worrying about the health of one's own prayer life more than the well-being of people who are hurting or oppressed.⁷ Furthermore, the judge is not a godlike figure because God cannot withhold justice from God's people; this judge, who was (Continued)

1. This is my artistic interpretation of 1 Corinthians 13:4–7 (NIV).

2. bell hooks, *Salvation: Black People and Love* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2001), xix.3.

3. *Ibid.*, xix.

4. This sentence is an interpretation of John 1:1 (NRSV).

5. For more on this, see bell hooks, *Salvation: Black People and Love* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2001). In this text, hooks explores how the beloved community is created.

6. Luke 18:1–8 (NIV).

7. The question of whether or not the judge in the parable is a godlike figure is explored in Leander Keck, ed., *The New Interpreter's Bible Commentary: Luke and John* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2015), 339.

About the Author



Ashley Renée Johnson ('17) is an elementary school teacher and minister of worship and faith formation at Union Church, Boston. She earned a Master of Theological Studies at STH and also has degrees in psychology and child development from Spelman College, Atlanta, Ga., and in teaching from Brown University, R.I.

Jolie Lune Photography

in the position to do what was right by this woman, refused to do so. God cannot withhold justice, God cannot withhold God's self from God's people. It is people who have no respect for other people as well as hateful policies, loveless systems that perpetuate oppression, and spiritual forces of evil that delay the flow of justice.

Now, to say that this parable is not about wearing God down with our prayers is not to say that this is not a parable about prayer. We don't have to choose whether its meaning is justice or prayer, persistence or prayer. We can embrace it as both if we also embrace a more expansive understanding of what prayer is. Jay Williams suggests that prayer is a posture of possibility.⁸ Prayer is a posture of possibility and prayer is the doing of the work to connect hope to action, possibility to practice, in order to realize a just society in which everyone can live fully and well.⁹ Like the African proverb suggests, "When you pray, move your feet." The widow prayed, her prayer was embodied, she "wrapped flesh around the prayer she professed."¹⁰ This woman, this widow, prayed and her praying without ceasing looked like her returning to the judge day after day after day until justice was secured.

The judge in this parable was confused. He was in a position of power but seemed to have little interest in being a helpful human being who looks up long enough to see the real, pressing needs of others. His actions clearly show us that he had very little interest in extending justice to the oppressed. So, instead of honoring the responsibility of his sacred office, he occupied space. He existed only as an adversary, a perpetuator of pain, an obstacle, a wall. When I got to thinking about this character, I got to wondering

what makes this judge and his callous nature possible? How can people exist who have no respect for other people? I was reminded that we live in a broken society that seduces us into securing power and domination by any means necessary. What's more, when we distance ourselves from people and their pain, and refuse to see our well-being, our liberation as intimately connected, we set ourselves up for failure in the worst kind of way.

The woman in this parable was persistent. We know she was probably struggling against poverty, we know that being without the support of her husband meant she was among the most vulnerable in her community, we know that if she had any grievances she could only be represented by a male in public, and we know she was human. Which is to say that she was not smarter, stronger, more spiritual, or more equipped for doing the hard work of justice. But, at some point she was confronted with a deep knowing—that what she needed, what her people needed to survive, had to be, and she decided to keep on doing something about it.

Undoubtedly, she gave up something in using her time, her energy, and her limited resources to continuously go before a corrupt judge who refused to see or hear her. Perhaps she was driven by a fear of homelessness or starvation, maybe she was driven by sheer desperation or a quieter knowing that this had to be. Whatever the case, she made a deliberate choice. Beloved, we've got to choose, choose to persist.

Like all humans do, this woman probably got to a point where she grew frustrated, where she felt as though she might as well quit. But, she kept on

8. Jay Williams is an ordained Elder in the United Methodist Church and the lead pastor at Union Church.

9. Brené Brown, "Doubling Down on Love," Brené Brown, LLC (brenebrown.com/blog/2019/10/09/doubling-down-on-love). In this text, Brown is arguing that the shift from words to action is what is needed for love to be realized in our world. I am suggesting that our actions and our practices are our prayers.

10. Keri Day, "A Different Kind of Prayer," Sermon, Sunday Service from the Memorial Church, Cambridge, MA, September 23, 2018.

11. Langston Hughes, "Mother to Son," *The Collected Works of Langston Hughes*, ed. Arnold Rampersad and David Roessel (New York: Vintage, 1995).

12. Romans 8:38 (NRSV).

13. Brown, *op. cit.*

pressing, kept on demanding, kept on praying, and so her life preaches a powerful, powerful message that I believe sounds something like Langston Hughes' poem "Mother to Son." Her life sings:

Well, [child], I'll tell you:

Life for me ain't been no crystal stair.

... But all the time

*I've been a-climbin' on.*¹¹

Beloved, we've got to keep on climbing, keep on pressing, keep on demanding, keep on praying, and keep on fighting.

Why was the widow so persistent? What did this woman know? I believe she knew in her gut that what she had wasn't it. I believe she knew—because she lived like she knew—that she had the right to continuously push back against any obstacles, defy any social boundaries, and challenge all ways of thinking that got in the way of her getting what she deserved in life. And, I would like to suggest that she knew that, ultimately, justice was not the judge's to give. His insensitivity and disregard for others delayed it, yes. But ultimately, God is love and God is justice. That is, God cannot be put in a box, or kept from God's people. Justice is an extension of God and is the manifestation of God's relentless love for all of creation. Justice is our birthright, like breath, like belonging, and we cannot rest until it comes.

Like this widow, we must persist knowing that justice will one day come, because "nothing can separate us from the love [the justice] of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation can separate

us from [the justice] of God."¹²

Here is what I believe to be true. Life is hard and we are living in sad, difficult times. Most of us devote almost all of our energy to trying to get in step with the unpredictable rhythms of our own lives and we're pretty exhausted. The troubles of this country and the lovelessness in the world can weigh us down and squeeze the hope out of us. We may or may not regularly find ourselves before judges, but wherever we find ourselves, whatever communities we find ourselves in, we've got to love persistently. We've got to stay connected and stay aware of the incredible amount of pain in this world. And, wherever we find ourselves, whatever communities we find ourselves in, we've got to fight to create communities marked by love and belonging. What I'm talking about here is "cultivating a love ethic in our own lives" that seeps into our communities.¹³ This is not easy work. But, if we persist in this broken world to secure the love, the justice that is ours, surely it will one day come because love is persistent, love is wide. It does not hoard, it does not withhold, it is not limited. It does not exclude others, it is not some silly ethic that's just for the weak or faint of heart, it is not harmful, it does not keep what is good, what is just from another. Love does not come easy, but it grafts us together; it keeps us close and it keeps us alive. It always includes, always fights, always fuels, always wins, always is. And justice is love. So, go forth and fight for it. Amen. □

This article was adapted from a sermon delivered at Union UMC in Boston on October 20, 2019. It can be viewed at unionboston.org/media.

DO JUSTICE, LOVE KINDNESS, WALK HUMBL Y



Mary Elizabeth Moore, dean, professor of theology and education, and codirector of the Center for Practical Theology, will retire at the end of June.

A GRATEFUL FAREWELL TO STH

BY MARY ELIZABETH MOORE

I remember my interview with STH. Students’ energy was palpable. They wanted to know, first of all, where I stood on sexual orientation and gender identity. The faculty wanted to know who I was, what I cared about in theological education, and how I would lead. They spoke their values of academic excellence, concerns about race and racism, and visions for an intellectually rigorous and just, caring community. I was hooked! Shelly Rambo walked the campus with me, Dana Robert and Dale Andrews talked plainly over dinner, and Kathe Darr loaned me her earrings when I lost one of mine. I also met inspiring BU leaders, hearing their passions for building knowledge and addressing global concerns. Already, I saw justice and kindness.

When the moving truck arrived in Boston on January 2, 2009, ten STH faculty and administrators worked in shifts to help my family unpack boxes and make home, while nibbling donuts. We were overwhelmed by their kindness. Meanwhile, students helped me shelve books in my office and told me about their lives. And then the meetings began, where I listened and learned. I soon had two realizations: STH folks had big dreams and expectations that no dean could fulfill in a lifetime, and yet STH folks

had in themselves the visions and capacities to reshape the school in the ways of their dreams. Together, we would face the challenges of justice and kindness.

These challenges run deep in history. Micah portrays visions of swords into plowshares and people sitting together (4:3–4) amid threats of destruction. Micah’s people lived on the edge of disaster, seeking the edge of hope—a meaningful image as people now teeter on the edge of despair before COVID-19, dysfunctional systems of public support, unjust distribution of healthcare, and the terrifying vulnerability of peoples on US borders and in prisons, nursing homes, and crowded neighborhoods. Yet, Micah turned his people to God: “For I brought you up from the land of Egypt, and redeemed you from the house of slavery; and I sent before you Moses, Aaron, and Miriam” (6:4). In Micah, God listens, speaks, and calls people to act.

The same God travels with STH as we seek, succeed, and fail. I have been privileged to witness STH, near and far, as you practice justice, mercy, and humility, and I will be forever grateful. From you, I learn that living on the edge is a place where God dwells, and it requires the impossible possibility to do justice, love kindness, and travel humbly with God. Thank you for being you! □

Chitose Suzuki

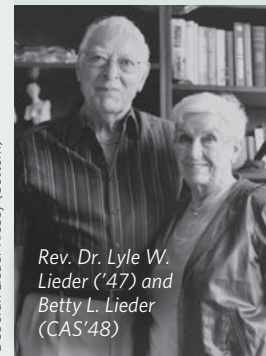
A multigenerational legacy of giving

“STH gave me not only the tools needed for ministry, but also an understanding of the issues of the larger world. STH’s emphasis on social justice has guided me well throughout all aspects of my ministry.”

—Bishop Deborah Lieder Kiese y (’76)



Bishop Deborah Lieder Kiese y (’76) and D. Bradley Kiese y



Rev. Dr. Lyle W. Lieder (’47) and Betty L. Lieder (CAS’48)

“Growing up with conservative parents, BU gave me a rich appreciation for the real God of the Universe. With Dean Muelder in social justice, I was enabled to move my congregations in that direction successfully. I have always been grateful to BU for positively preparing me most effectively for ministry!”

—Rev. Dr. Lyle W. Lieder (’47)

The Lieders and the Kieseys have included STH in their estate plans.

Education is a gift. Pass it on.

MAKE YOUR IMPACT THROUGH A PLANNED GIFT

Contact us today at opg@bu.edu or 800-645-2347
Boston University Planned Giving



Boston University School of Theology

745 Commonwealth Avenue
Boston, Massachusetts 02215

Nonprofit
US Postage
PAID
Boston MA
Permit No. 1839

Announcing the **Dean Mary Elizabeth Moore Fellowship Fund**

*Over a decade of service,
and a lifetime of impact.*

In recognition of Dean Moore's guiding and supportive presence, which has graced our institution, the Dean Mary Elizabeth Moore Fellowship Fund has been established on the eve of her retirement to further the mission of the school and its first female dean. This fellowship celebrates Dean Moore's lifelong passion for journeying with others to cultivate

deeper faith, compassionate humanity, and a more just, peaceful, and sustainable world. The Moore Fellowship honors incoming students who embody the personal aspects that define Dean Moore and share her commitment to positive social change through social justice ministries, interdisciplinary scholarship, and interfaith engagement.



Dave Green

YOUR DONATION WILL HONOR DEAN MOORE'S LEGACY AS A TRAILBLAZING LEADER AND ACCOMPLISHED THEOLOGIAN BY SUPPORTING FUTURE GENERATIONS OF SCHOLARS, CLERGY, AND COMMUNITY LEADERS.

Email sthdev@bu.edu, call 617-353-2349, or visit bu.edu/sth/giving