

# focus

Boston University School of Theology 2018

Inside:

Equality for women pastors

Cornell William Brooks on training seminarians to fight injustice

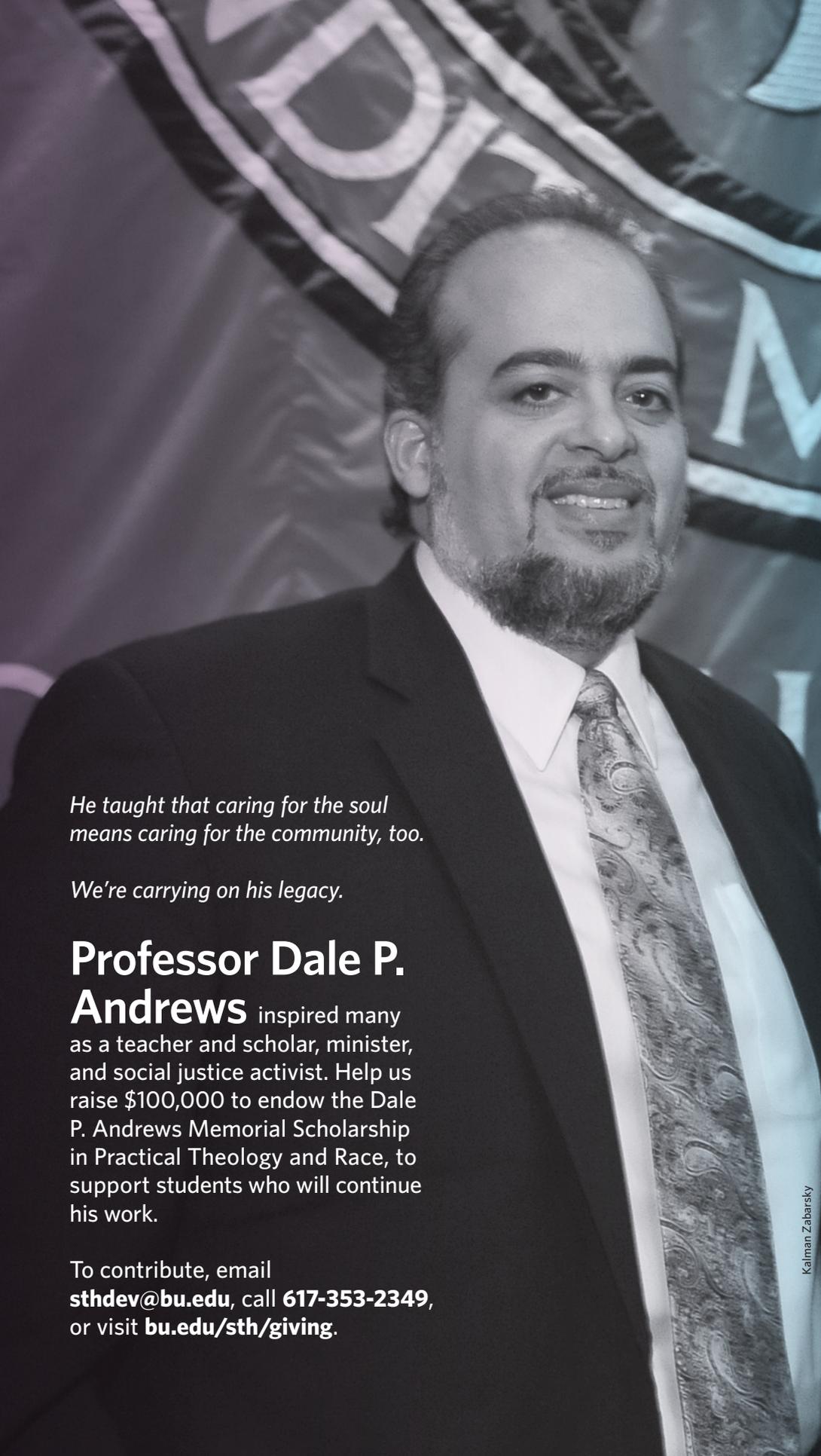


# SINGING THE BLUES ON A NOTE OF HOPE

We can find faith for the future even in the depths of despair

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## Professor Dale P. Andrews

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Kalman Zabarsky

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## DEAN'S MESSAGE

### SINGING THE BLUES AND LEANING INTO HOPE

BY MARY ELIZABETH MOORE

The New Orleans tradition of the jazz funeral is one of singing blues and leaning into hope. It is practiced largely in African American communities, especially after a musician has died. As a jazz band processes with family and friends to the cemetery, the music is soulful, slow, and somber. After the casket is set in its place (or at some similar moment), the music begins to change from a lament of death to a brighter motif until, finally, it becomes a grand jazz celebration. A jazz funeral enacts the verity of what Julian Armand Cook ('16) writes in this issue of *focus*: “[The blues] is what you get when life forces you to hold to hope while your heart is breaking.”<sup>1</sup> The blues includes despair, but also the “blue note of hope.”<sup>2</sup>

Other cultures respond to death differently. I once led a study of Ecclesiastes in a women’s convocation, and our discussions revealed sharp cultural contrasts. Women from a largely Japanese American congregation

described their quiet, somber rituals, combined with proclamation and celebration of resurrection. Women from largely Tongan congregations said that wailing in funeral services was their way to express love and sadness for the deceased. The women spoke excitedly, each mystified by the other.<sup>3</sup> They discovered that despite their differences, however, they were able to express both grief and hope in the face of death.

**Our country—and our world—cries out for hope amid devastating plagues of racism, homophobia, classism, religious discrimination, violence, and ecological destruction.**

**In such a context, despair is a natural response, and words of hope sound shallow and untrustworthy.**

Our country—and our world—cries out for hope amid devastating plagues of racism, homophobia, classism, religious discrimination, violence, and ecological destruction. In such a context, despair is a natural response, and words of hope sound shallow and untrustworthy. Yet, this issue of *focus* highlights people who feel despair as a result of what they see in the world, and who nevertheless draw hope from deep spiritual wells. These stories reveal

the abundant power of choosing to lean into hope and of becoming agents of change. Faith Fowler ('86) leads the tiny house movement in Detroit to serve persons who cannot otherwise afford

1. Cook, “Singing the Blues on a Note of Hope,” *focus*, 2018, 22.

2. *Ibid.*, 23.

3. These stories do not suggest cultural generalizations; they are narratives told by particular women in a moment of time.

4. Mary Elizabeth Moore and Francisca Ireland-Verwoerd, “Pivoting toward Hope: Interplay of Imagination, Fear, and Life Experience,” *Journal of Youth and Theology* (in press).

housing, while Alexander Johnson ('20) helps organize his church’s relief work in post-hurricane Houston. Pamela Jolly ('09) guides African American communities toward long-term financial well-being, and Leigh Goodrich ('03) works in a denominational agency to teach and support equity for women clergy. Cornell William Brooks ('87, Hon.'15) spearheads justice movements and prepares future clergy and lawyers to be first responders in outbreaks of injustice. These leaders represent a vast range of concerns, but they share a common spirit—a desire to convert their concerns, and their spiritual, physical, and intellectual resources, into meaningful responses. *They choose to lean into hope.*

All members of the STH community carry a similar passion for change. They cry out their concerns, work in and with their faith communities, and join marches and prayer vigils. They work on relief for Puerto Rico, form small faith-sharing groups, seek spiritual direction, partner with churches and agencies in justice-building, volunteer in prisons, build a more ecologically sustainable STH, and prepare to continue this work as pastors, deacons, nonprofit leaders, social workers, researchers, and educators. This is ecumenical and interreli-

**Hope is not expectation that everything will work out for the best; it is a decision to seek sparks of hope when the world is cold and dim.**

gious work, and our Wesleyan Student Association and Anglican/Episcopal and United Church of Christ Communities of Learning share in this work, as does our interreligious partnership with Hebrew College in Newton, Mass.

The bifurcation of despair and hope is one of the tragedies of this moment in history. People have good reasons for despair; yet, despair can lead people to search deeply for glimmers of hope. Hope is not expectation that everything will work out for the best; it is a decision to seek sparks of hope when the world is cold and dim. Most theologies of hope were written in such times. They did not wipe away tragedy and suffering; they leaned into God’s promises of what can be. In the 12 years

I have been interviewing youth for the Wisdom of Youth Project, I have consistently found that those who have faced tragedies in their lives are typically the ones who speak most boldly for hope.<sup>4</sup> The journal authors in this issue of *focus* echo a similar refrain. They present pictures of our past and present that, while grim, include *real* possibilities for change. They are leaning into hope. May we also take courage to face the world as it is and lean into holy hope! □

# CAMPAIGN UPDATE

## ONE YEAR TO GO

More than \$24.4 million of STH's \$25 million campaign goal has been raised thanks to alums and friends. Professor Kathe Darr has been installed as the Harrell F. Beck Chair of Hebrew Scripture (see p. 49), and \$2.5 million has been contributed to endowed student scholarships. With one year left in the campaign, the school is now focused on supporting new funds needing a minimum endowment of \$100,000—including the Korean Students Scholarship Fund and the Dale P. Andrews Memorial Scholarship in Practical Theology and Race—as well as the funds on this page.



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\* Matching funds are available.

## CONFRONTING WHITE PRIVILEGE

BY RICH BARLOW

A psychic earthquake rocked Elisabeth Smith about five years ago, when her father revealed that their family had owned slaves during the Civil War. Smith felt guilty. “I had to go back and almost rethink my whole identity,” the Methodist cleric from Rhode Island shares with fellow students in her Dismantling White Privilege, Power, and Supremacy class. “Of course, I’m not the one who even did it, but it’s like, why didn’t anybody ever tell me that before I was 50 years old?”

Recognizing one’s own race-based privilege is a key theme of this STH class. Most of the students are younger than Smith (she’s enrolled through STH’s Pastor Scholar Program of continuing clergy education). But they’ve still witnessed people denying identity-rooted sin.

Amie McCarthy (’19) recalls a high school discussion of the Holocaust: a German exchange student “stood up in class, slammed his book down, and said, ‘None of this ever happened. You’re lying,’ and left. He was told all of it was a lie, his whole life.”

On this day, the class has broken into discussion groups after watching a PBS documentary describing how visually obvious differences between people, such as skin color, have been extrapolated by many white people over

the centuries to reflect assumed biological differences—in areas of ability such as intelligence—that have no basis in genetics or biology.

“If we believe that God created all of us equal, there can be no looking down on, discriminating against, or exercising power against persons of other backgrounds,” says Susan Hassinger, a lecturer and Methodist bishop-in-residence.

Hassinger coteaches the class with Karen Montagno, an adjunct instructor and Episcopal priest. Montagno is the only African American in the room (although several of the 15 students are of Asian ancestry).

“Underlying this course,” Montagno says, “is the assumption that white people in America experience a privilege that they may or may not be aware of. It can be as simple as the fact that their skin is white, and it can be as complex as privileges that come from economic status.” She hopes the class will help students “know privilege when they see it, and ways in which they can resist.” The syllabus includes scholarly works on topics such as the history of slavery, the psychology of racial identity, and the roles of black people in the Bible, but student experiences complement the textbooks.



Students learn to recognize and resist white privilege in *Dismantling White Privilege, Power, and Supremacy*.

Tory Shane Dillard (’20) explains that in his rural hometown in Tennessee—one of the state’s poorest—white people who are economically struggling think it’s better to be poor than black, since even disadvantaged white people have better access to jobs than their black neighbors. He took the class to learn how to talk about white privilege with such people. “When I was younger, there were times when we probably worried if we would even pay the electric bill. And if someone were to come to me and go, ‘You have privilege,’ I would have completely rejected them.”

Hassinger’s life story is a tonic against despair of eroding privilege. In 1968, she was the first woman Methodist minister ordained from her neck of central Pennsylvania. “People had a hard time accepting,” she says. “But eventually, the system changes.” □

Cydney Scott

## A CHALLENGE FOR THE SOUL OF THE BLACK CHURCH

BY LARA EHRLICH

Theodore Hickman-Maynard, an ordained minister in the African Methodist Episcopal Church and STH's new assistant professor of black church studies, explores how black Christians grapple with a religious tradition that evolved in the shadow of white oppression. Hickman-Maynard talked with *focus* about how worshippers' diverging perspectives on their faith are causing a crisis in the black church, and how they're shaping future leaders.

**focus:** You've said you seek to understand "what it means to be a black person of faith in our contemporary moment." How would you define "our contemporary moment"?

Hickman-Maynard: The broad term we'd use is postmodernity. After the world wars made us question the way we approach knowledge, marginalized voices were allowed to speak to a greater degree than before. We had the birth of feminism and the black power, civil rights, and gay rights movements. That was incredibly destabilizing for the governing classes, and those whose canons of belief were called into question.

Today, we live at a crossroads of a hypermodernity that is open

to change, but at the same time produces anxiety that says, "This is chaos. We have to go back to something more stable."

### How does this tension play out in the black church?

Interpretive freedom is part of the black church's very existence. White Christians employed messages as control tactics: slaves were to obey their masters and God would bless them for their servitude; God blesses those who suffer. The black church reinterpreted those stories so they were preaching about how God told Moses to tell Pharaoh, "Let my people go."

But that interpretive freedom developed in a complex way along with a conservatism on issues like sexual orientation that sought legitimacy within white culture. The black church allowed black people a certain measure of entrée into white society, a respectability. Now, in this moment of rapid change, these traditions are colliding.

And so, you have a crisis in the black church, where primarily younger people don't want to adhere to modes of discourse and behavior that allow them to be accepted by wider white society. They are more social justice-oriented, saying, "If we are going to be a church for liberation, we have to be a church for liberation of *all* people, so we have to challenge the prevailing doctrines that have manifested in ways—like sexism and homophobia—that are



Theodore Hickman-Maynard is STH's acting associate dean for community life and lifelong learning.

deeply oppressive to people within our own community." There's a serious challenge for the soul of the black church.

### How are black church leaders responding?

Pastors are trying to spawn ministries that allow for the diversity of approaches that this new generation requires in order to feel authentic. They're preaching on Sunday morning to a traditional crowd, then leading a discussion group on Friday night that's a little freer, that's not bound by a social pressure to articulate established orthodoxy. You see pastors walking that line, trying to use established churches as a staging area for venturing into the wild new terrain of whatever this next version of Christianity looks like.

### What is your students' role in shaping this version of Christianity?

People in seminary now don't necessarily see themselves going

Simon Anderson

into pastoral ministry—but they *do* see themselves as faith leaders. They're looking for communities of faith that are different from the institutional options. We're preparing a generation of indigenous missionaries where the American

religious landscape is the mission field. People are saying, "I'm a Christian, but I don't love the Church. I want to be in community, but I can't be a part of *that* community." What are the alternatives for those people, and who

will midwife the birth of these new communities? We're preparing students to identify the seeds of organic postmodern Christianity and help cultivate them. □

*This interview has been condensed and edited for clarity.*

## REMEMBERING MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

"We've all drawn from his testament and testimony that no matter how deep the divisions... no matter how tempting the hate, love is our only option." Cornell William Brooks ('87, Hon.'15), former NAACP president and visiting professor at STH and LAW, spoke about the legacy of Martin Luther King, Jr. (GRS'55, Hon.'59) in a Marsh Chapel service commemorat-

ing the 50th anniversary of his assassination. BU held a week of events honoring King; speakers included Traci Blackmon, executive minister of justice and local church ministries of the United Church of Christ, and Deval Patrick (Hon.'14), former Massachusetts governor. Read event coverage, alums' memories of King, and reflections on his legacy at [bu.edu](http://bu.edu) (search "King 2018"). □



Martin Luther King, Jr. at BU in 1964

## MOVING ON



Nancy T. Ammerman

John Hart

Robert C. Neville

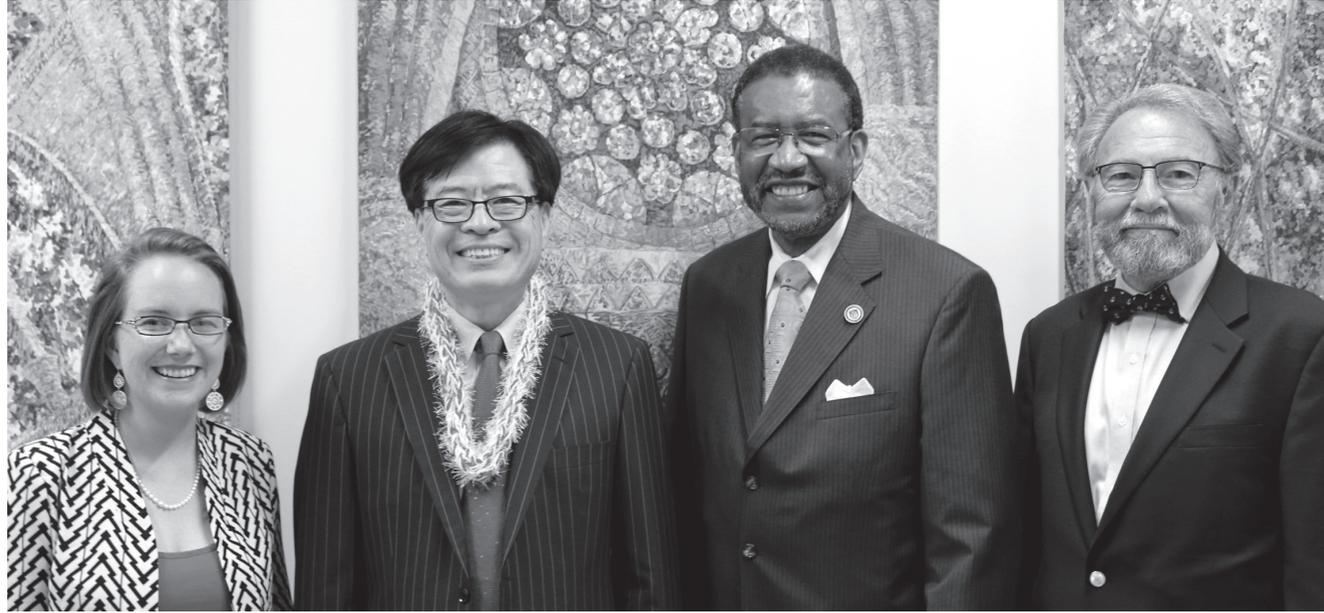
Professors Nancy T. Ammerman, John Hart, and Robert C. Neville are retiring at the end of the 2017–2018 academic year. Ammerman, professor of sociology of religion in STH and CAS, is the author of *Sacred Stories*,

lives. Hart, professor of Christian ethics, advocates for environmental care and is the editor of *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Religion and Ecology* (Wiley Blackwell, 2017). Neville, professor of philosophy, religion, and theology, is the author

*Spiritual Tribes: Finding Religion in Everyday Life* (Oxford University Press, 2013), which explores the role that religion and spirituality play in Americans' daily

of a SUNY Press trilogy in philosophical theology: *Ultimates* (2013), *Existence* (2014), and *Religion* (2015). He is a former dean of STH and Marsh Chapel and was executive director of BU's Albert & Jessie Danielsen Institute. "We celebrate these three remarkable faculty on the eve of their retirements," says Dean Mary Elizabeth Moore. "They are treasured colleagues, and they are world-class scholars who have mentored generations of students and helped shape their respective fields. We will miss them greatly." □

**STH'S NEWEST DISTINGUISHED ALUMS**



STH presented Distinguished Alumni/ae Awards to four graduates in 2017. The recipients were, from left: Melissa Cooper ('09), an ordained deacon in the United Methodist Church and an associate with Vibrant Faith—a

ministry coaching organization in Naugatuck, Conn.—who was recognized in the category of emerging leader; Jung Sun Oh ('01), pastor of Weston United Methodist Church in Weston, Mass., and a member of the

STH Dean's Advisory Board; Ronald Carter ('74, GRS'85), retired president of Johnson C. Smith University; and Robert E. Reber ('64, GRS'73), retired dean of Auburn Theological Seminary in New York, N.Y. □

**MERLE R. JORDAN (1931-2018)**



Merle R. Jordan, a professor emeritus at STH and former executive director of BU's Albert & Jessie Danielsen Institute, passed away March 25, 2018, at age 87. He was ordained a minister in the United Church of Christ in 1956 and joined STH in 1969 as an associate professor of pastoral psychology. Jordan founded the South Shore Pastoral Counseling Center in Hingham, Mass., in 1970

(now the South Shore Counseling Center in Norwell, Mass.) and was interim dean of STH from 1974 to 1977. Memorial contributions may be made to The Merle Jordan Conference Fund, c/o The Danielsen Institute, Boston University, 185 Bay State Rd., Boston, MA 02215 or to VNA-Care, Fund Development, 199 Rosewood Dr., Suite 180, Danvers, MA 01923. □

Kimberly Macdonald (top); courtesy of the Danielsen Institute



STH's Center for Global Christianity & Mission gives faith leaders the skills and knowledge they need to help the Christian Church thrive in the non-Western world. It studies new Christian movements growing in Africa, Asia, and Latin America; provides tuition grants to international doctoral students; publishes works about mission history; and sponsors distance learning for leaders of indigenous churches in southern Africa.

To help us raise \$100,000 to endow the Center for Global Christianity & Mission Fund, which will support this work, email [sthdev@bu.edu](mailto:sthdev@bu.edu), call 617-353-2349, or visit [bu.edu/sth/giving](http://bu.edu/sth/giving).

# TINY HOMES FOR BIG DREAMS



Faith Fowler ('86)

## FAITH FOWLER MAKES HOMEOWNERSHIP A REALITY FOR PEOPLE LIVING IN POVERTY IN DETROIT

BY MEGAN WOOLHOUSE

The house is tiny, just 350 square feet, but to Gladys Ferguson, it feels much bigger. The widowed 64-year-old loves her yellow miniature Colonial, with its new appliances, air-conditioning, and its own little garden. And if she continues to pay \$350 a month for seven years, she will own it.

“It’s my own teeny-weeny mansion,” Ferguson says. “It’s a tremendous blessing.”

Ferguson’s house, in a blighted corner of northwest Detroit, is one of 25 such homes under construction by Cass Community Social Services, a Detroit nonprofit led by Methodist minister Faith Fowler ('86). While the little homes look like those miniatures featured on cable TV—one is a shrunken Tudor, another a scaled-down Victorian—these weren’t built for baby boomers looking to downsize or young couples on a budget. The occupants are the Motor City’s poorest residents, including formerly homeless people.

“Our goal is to target folks who are ready to move out of the shelters or bad rental situations,” says Fowler. “We were, probably still are, the only agency to provide ownership opportunities for people making as little as \$8,000 a year.”

That’s less than what’s required for a home through Habitat for Humanity, the well-known nonprofit promoting homeownership touted by former president

Jimmy Carter and his wife, Rosalynn. It’s also an idea that has put Fowler in the national spotlight. Stories about the project on PBS, CNN, and other outlets have drawn busloads of tourists. A Facebook video posted after construction of the first house in 2016 has been viewed more than 42 million times.

Fowler says it’s been a wild ride. She recently self-published *Tiny Homes in a Big City*, both as a guidebook and a response to an outpouring of social media criticism questioning the merit of giving homeless people free houses and naysayers who simply think the idea is doomed.

“The Cass Tiny Homes project is a pilot program, an experiment if you will. It may not work or it may need to be modified over time,” she writes. “Ours was a calculated risk.”

### GETTING ALONG VS GETTING AHEAD

Fowler grew up in Detroit and its suburbs, the granddaughter of a man who survived polio as a child and unemployment as a young man and died a wealthy businessman. While she sees a hopeful role model in his pull-yourself-up-by-your-bootstraps story, she’s not sure that it could happen today.

“We live in a different time,” she says. “Large numbers of people, despite amazing drive, resilience, and hard work, do not experience comebacks or economic mobility. While polio no longer plagues the United States, pov-



Above: The first tiny home built by Cass Community Social Services is a miniature Tudor with stonework on the facade. The interior includes a sleeping area and kitchen (top right), bathroom, and living area (bottom right).



erty does.” Wages have been stagnant for 40 years, she says, and incomes have not kept pace with spiraling healthcare costs. One in five children in the United States lives in poverty, and the majority will remain there.

Fowler says her two decades at Cass have shown her that many disadvantaged people can make progress toward financial stability until a major setback occurs in their lives, like having to pay for a relative’s funeral, needing car repairs, or losing a job. When that happens, they turn to one of Cass’ traditional safety net programs, like its shelter or food pantry.

“I’ve spent most of my waking hours with very poor people,” Fowler says. “I found that we could help people get along. What we couldn’t do is help them get ahead.”

And helping people get ahead is a big part of a religious calling that Fowler says she felt as early as junior high.

Painfully shy, she says she didn’t take action on that calling until she graduated from Albion College and had a job counseling at-risk and abused youth. When a minister in the program couldn’t give a scheduled sermon and asked if she would fill in, Fowler conquered her fear of public speaking and decided to pursue a life of ministry. The next year, she enrolled in STH, drawn by its Methodist history and the social justice legacy of Martin Luther King, Jr. (GRS’55, Hon’59).

At BU, Fowler worked with prison inmates, mostly at MCI-Cedar Junction, a maximum-security prison in Walpole, Mass. After graduation, the Methodist Church assigned her as a minister to the

Photos courtesy of Cass Community Social Services

Cass Community United Methodist Church in Detroit, a church that also operated social service programs. Those programs eventually became the independent nonprofit Cass Community Social Services. In her current role, Fowler works as a senior pastor delivering sermons at Cass Church and as executive director of Cass Community Social Services, where she oversees a \$6.9 million budget and a wide array of services, including a homeless shelter and food pantry, a residential program for homeless men with HIV/AIDS, and a plant that employs 80 people who recycle tires into welcome mats and flip-flops.

Cass' services are badly needed in Detroit, a city that filed for bankruptcy protection in 2013 and, nearly five years later, has more than 80,000 vacant lots and abandoned buildings. One-third of its households have an annual income of \$15,000 or less, and people pay what Fowler calls an obscene proportion of that income for rent.

She doesn't recall how she first heard of tiny houses, Fowler says, but she was intrigued and started researching and visiting communities around the United States geared for the homeless. One was Occupy Madison, a mobile tiny-house village in Madison, Wis., and another was Quixote Village in Olympia, Wash., an area of 30 micro homes funded by government sources.

She liked what she saw, but was concerned about the village aspect, segregation, and the potential for stigma. Cass spent \$15,000 to buy much of a nearby neighborhood that was a collection of empty and abandoned lots. The agency

has subdivided it into tiny-house lots just 30 feet by 100 feet.

Fowler raised the money from private sources, foundations, and other donors, including \$400,000 from the Ford Fund, to pay for materials. She says the agency currently has enough funds to build 19 of the 25 planned houses, each costing \$40,000 to \$50,000. From foundation to furnishing, each one takes about four months to construct.

### HOMEOWNERSHIP BY 2023

In 2016, when the first six homes were completed, 122 people applied in person, as required, for a residence. Residents must live in Michigan and earn at least \$8,500 a year, and many made the cut because they work low-wage jobs or live off social security or disability benefits.

Anyone convicted of a violent offense within the last decade, drug dealing in the last five years, or a sexual offense was not considered. Using a numerical scoring system, a Cass committee scored the anonymous applicants, weighing their residential history, financial readiness, and personal references.

The age of the first group of seven residents ranges from 24 to 74. All but one are people of color. One has a prison record. They earn an average income of \$988 a month.

Gladys Ferguson, resident of the yellow Colonial and part of the inaugural group, says soaring rents and an arthritic condition had made finding a place to live difficult for her. "Here you got white, black, young, old," Ferguson says. "I like that."

*Fowler ('86) believes tiny homes are a way to help people who are homeless and economically disadvantaged gain assets that will support them through financial ups and downs.*



Brad Ziegler

The Cass program requires residents to meet with a financial coach and eventually join a homeownership association. They must also attend monthly financial literacy classes and volunteer eight hours a month on projects like a neighborhood crime watch.

Tracey Harris, a sociology professor at Cape Breton University, is writing a book about the broader tiny houses trend. She predicts that the key to Fowler's success will be the availability of continuing support for residents to help them meet the goal of ownership. "The community-building aspect is really important," Harris says. "With a tiny house, you can have all those things that are important to building a resilient and compassionate community."

If everything goes as planned, the first tenants will own the deeds to their tiny homes around 2023. At that time, they can choose to keep their tiny homes or

sell. Fowler thinks many people want to live tiny, and that most will stay in their homes. But troubled by critics who have accused her of forcing poor people to live in small spaces, she decided to downsize her home—in a big way.

Last October, she sold her 2,000-square-foot Victorian and moved into a windowless former boiler room on the first floor of the Cass administrative office building. She wanted to see what living in a 350-square-foot space was like. Seven months later, she says it's required more of an adjustment than she thought it would. For example, at night there's no getting away from the sound of a ticking wall clock. And she shares what little space she has with a boiler.

"Tiny homes are not for everyone," she says. "They are for people who want to do it." □

*Adapted from BU Today (bu.edu/today)*

# HEALING HOUSTON



Alexander E. M. Johnson ('20)

## ALEXANDER E. M. JOHNSON HELPS TEXAS' LARGEST CITY RECOVER FROM HURRICANE HARVEY

BY ANDREW THURSTON

As Hurricane Harvey charged toward Texas in late August 2017, Alexander E. M. Johnson readied his Houston church to serve as an emergency shelter—then hunkered down at home. The associate pastor at Wheeler Avenue Baptist Church, Johnson ('20) expected that whatever havoc the storm might wreak, Sunday services would go on. They'd never been canceled in his lifetime; when Hurricane Ike knocked out power in 2008, the congregation gathered in Wheeler Avenue's fellowship hall without lights.

Harvey proved to be different, dumping more than 50 inches of rain in just one week and damaging tens of thousands of homes. "Members of our congregation spent hours in their attics waiting to be rescued," says Johnson, whose home suffered only a glancing blow. "Streets were impassable; streets that never flooded were flooded." The road into the church's parking lot was inaccessible—unless you were prepared to paddle.

Wheeler Avenue canceled its services for the week.

Although the church, which has 15,000 members, had been on standby as a possible shelter for displaced residents, Harvey's devastation meant bigger spaces would be needed. Johnson and the team at Wheeler Avenue decided to turn the church's gymnasium

into a donation and distribution center—once the waters had receded. It opened on August 31.

"We put out an all call for our church, utilizing social media and our e-blast, and we requested donations of clothing, cleaning supplies, linens, household items, toiletries."

They also asked for financial support and volunteers—to work at the center and to join teams removing furniture from storm-lashed homes.

Johnson says supplies came in from across the nation as word spread. Local universities sent sports teams and student groups to help. On the distribution center's first day, he says, "we had lines literally wrapped around our gymnasium."

During the two months it was open, Wheeler Avenue estimates its donation center served 25,000 people with the help of nearly 4,000 volunteers. The supplies that weren't used in the Harvey effort filled two shipping containers, and were redirected to the Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico as they, too, recovered from 2017's bruising hurricane season.

"There were strangers helping strangers with ill regard for race, color, creed," says Johnson. "It was just heartwarming to see how people put aside differences to ensure humanity was primary and that we showed concern for one another."

One volunteer's story stuck with him. She'd been displaced after Hurricane Katrina and "every single



Johnson (right) and volunteers at Wheeler Avenue Baptist Church served Houston residents affected by Hurricane Harvey.

day the distribution center was open, she was here from start to finish, because she recalled being helped in her time of need and, consequently, she wanted to be of assistance in the time of need of others."

During the center's early days, Johnson was a constant presence, directing and energizing volunteers. But the need to balance providing practical support with pastoral care soon meant handing the day-to-day running of the center to church staff. He turned his attention to reassuring those dealing with the emotional aftereffects of the storm "that their church was concerned about them and connected to them."

The center closed in November 2017—"At some point, we needed to get back to the discipleship effort," says Johnson—but Wheeler Avenue continues to have a role in helping Houston heal. The church recently published a disaster recovery business directory filled

with the names of members providing contracting, legal, financial, and mental health services. It also surveyed its members to gauge physical and spiritual needs.

As of early 2018, some congregants were still not able to return to their homes. Johnson says the church's focus is "primarily practical and financial support for those who experienced more significant home damage."

Wheeler Avenue has a long history of disaster relief—it was a shelter after Hurricane Katrina, and sent teams to Moore, Okla., after a tornado killed 24 in 2013—but Johnson says Harvey showed the church needed to codify its response plans. He's hoping better documentation can inform future decisions about how much capacity the church has to help or the best ways to mobilize volunteers.

"You learn from everything you do," says Johnson. "Perhaps we may have overworked our volunteers in the first few weeks—we did see some volunteer fatigue as time went on." As a result, he's considering ways to proactively schedule those willing to give their time rather than issuing an open plea for help.

Johnson, who "was born and raised in this church," juggles that work and his regular duties at Wheeler Avenue with adjunct teaching at the University of Houston and his studies in STH's doctor of ministry in transformational leadership program. The lessons he's learning at STH directly inform the work he's doing in his home city.

"I think we should hope to leave the world a better place than we found it," he says. □

Photos courtesy of Wheeler Avenue Baptist Church

# ROAD TO EQUITY



Pamela Jolly ('09)

## INVESTOR PAMELA JOLLY BLENDS BIBLICAL AND FINANCIAL WISDOM TO HELP CLIENTS OF COLOR CLOSE THE RACE GAP

BY JULIE BUTTERS

By 2053, the average black household is projected to have zero wealth: their debts will cancel the value of what they own. Strategic investor Pamela Jolly wants to avert that bleak future by putting more African Americans on a stable financial footing.

Today, black people own only about two percent of firms with paid employees; they're also less likely than white individuals of similar economic backgrounds to earn a higher income than their parents. Many men of color don't have the financial education to understand how wealth is made.

"Hundreds of millions of dollars have been invested in black men over the past 10 years, but the investment has concentrated on fatherhood, education, and workforce development," says Jolly ('09), who's interviewed nearly 4,000 African American men about finances through her work. "There's been little to no conversation about wealth creation."

Even those who do bank some money might find it's transitory. "Gains made in one generation are often lost in the next," says Jolly. "A focus on legacy wealth, versus poverty, is essential to in some way address this wide gap."

As CEO of the strategic investment company Torch Enterprises, Jolly travels around the country, partnering with and investing in minority-owned businesses. The company provides strategic finan-

cial advice that draws inspiration from biblical texts—Habakkuk 2:2's lesson on writing down God's vision becomes a process for drafting a written plan to reach financial goals. Jolly hopes integrating faith and finance will encourage clients to create responsible plans to build wealth that continues for generations.

The former banker, corporate strategic consultant, and market strategist founded Torch in 2004 after seeing a need for education that would help women and people of color advance their businesses. "I realized if I don't do this work, we will continue to wait to take full possession of our promise—living an abundant life and having abundant communities," she says.

Helping rebuild New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina in 2005 showed Jolly that faith had a critical role to play in strategic financial advice. The Federal Emergency Management Agency had hired Torch to help assess damage and rebuilding needs in the New Orleans area. A lot of people Jolly met, especially pastors, believed God would provide financial help and a vision for how to spend it. But that faith was rarely backed by a financial plan, and some pastors wanted to use relief funds on pet projects instead of rebuilding.

Jolly decided to explore the connections between faith and finance by studying theology at STH and Christian education at the Graduate Theological Foundation to accompany

her Wharton MBA. As part of her studies, Jolly interviewed African American individuals, business owners, and pastors across the country, asking, "If this is our social-economic position, what's the promised land? How do we get there together? How do we fund it, and what do you need to feel more confident of your pursuit?"

Through her studies—and her work—Jolly says she learned each person needs to create their own definition of wealth in order to achieve it; our perspectives on wealth are shaped by culture, experiences, and relationships. "For too many 'regular people,' legacy is something you talk about in small groups and at funerals, while for the wealthy, it is something you studied, owned, focused on, and kept passing forward," she writes in *The Narrow Road: A Guide to Legacy Wealth* (Torchlight Publishing Inc., 2015). She also discovered that faith gives underserved people of color the power to believe things can improve, that they can overcome the race wealth gap. Financial education, she says, allows them to act wisely on that faith.

Jolly developed a wealth strategy tool, *NarrowRoad*, that uses biblical narratives like the parable of the talents (Matthew 25:14–30) to help provide guidance in five areas, which include using data-driven strategies and creating consistent actions across local, regional, and national levels. Are users directing their investments at fertile or rocky ground? Are they like the servant who buried his master's money, or those who produced a profit by investing it? Jolly uses the sys-

tem to work with clients, which include organizations such as the National Association of Real Estate Brokers (NAREB). She advised NAREB, as part of its strategy to create two million new black homeowners within five years, to work with their affiliate, a credit counseling agency, to host a series of conferences around the country for aspiring homeowners. Some participants, says Jolly, had believed a stereotype that black people have bad credit; they were shocked to learn they were actually eligible to buy a house. This advice drew on Proverbs 23:7 ("For as he thinks in his heart, so is he." NKJV).

A constant in Jolly's efforts is providing culturally relevant tools to people of color to build legacy wealth. Her next goal is to work with African American men to find ways to improve their financial status by establishing a nationwide equity syndicate, focused on increasing ownership and equity in the black community. She's formed a partnership with the Campaign for Black Male Achievement to host a 12-month Black Male Equity Initiative in Detroit. Successful applicants, chosen from a range of socioeconomic and professional backgrounds, are learning how to increase their income-earning capacity, create a budget for a seed capital fund, and pool capital to acquire land in Detroit, which they will develop and sell to become equity shareholders. Working together to build legacy wealth, African Americans can finally exit what Jolly calls a financial wilderness, and enter their own promised lands. □

Courtesy of Whitney Thomas (whitneythomas.com)

# PARITY IN THE PULPIT



Leigh Goodrich ('03)

## LEIGH GOODRICH LEADS THE UMC'S EFFORTS TO END DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN

BY LARA EHRLICH

In 2004, Leigh Goodrich ('03) became the associate pastor of a United Methodist church in Massachusetts, but she wasn't supplied with a parsonage—or a standard housing allowance. When she asked why, the Pastor/Staff-Parish Relations Committee told her they'd assumed her husband would provide a home. Goodrich appealed to the New England Conference response team, who helped her negotiate for a housing allowance. The church complied, but compensated Goodrich much less than she was owed. The experience was eye-opening, she says. "I came to the conclusion that there was a difference in the way men and women are treated as employees of the Church."

Today, as senior director of education and leadership at the United Methodist Church's General Commission on the Status and Role of Women, Goodrich helps other women respond to gender discrimination, and counsels the UMC on how to eradicate it. As part of the six-person commission, she monitors inequity in the Church, spearheads research, and develops guides for welcoming female clergy and directing them toward leadership roles. She also trains Church leaders and laypeople around the country in antidiscrimination practices.

Women have been ordained in the Methodist Church since the late 1800s, but it wasn't until 1956 that they received

full clergy rights, including the ability to serve in UMC appointments and become members of annual conferences, the UMC's regional governing bodies. There's still a long way to go, Goodrich says. "Gender inequity has existed for so long, and has seeped into our society at so many different levels, that in many cases people don't even know where those inequities exist."

It's part of Goodrich's mission to point them out, so that the 56 annual conferences—each of which has its own, smaller group dedicated to the status and role of women—can create change on a local level. A 2017 study Goodrich helped lead, for example, found that women comprise 58 percent of the UMC membership, but only 27 percent of its clergy. They're also paid 16 cents less per hour than their male counterparts. The commission posted the salary gaps for all the annual conferences on its website ([gcsr.org](http://gcsr.org)) to help hold them accountable. It also developed recommendations that Goodrich promotes in training sessions with the conferences: listening sessions to hear women's concerns, updated policies on gender discrimination, and mentoring programs for lay and clergy women.

The Church appointment process also needs to change: Goodrich asks resident bishops and district superintendents to consider at least one woman for each position they fill.

"We're not suggesting that women should be put in appointments for the

sake of having equity with their male counterparts," she says. "We're saying there are skilled and talented women out there who can offer an awful lot to congregations, and they should be considered for higher-paying appointments."

**"We're not suggesting that women should be put in appointments for the sake of having equity with their male counterparts. We're saying there are skilled and talented women out there who can offer an awful lot to congregations, and they should be considered for higher-paying appointments."**

—Leigh Goodrich

But first, women need to know they can apply. Goodrich created a free curriculum, "Women Called to Ministry," which includes study guides with scripture readings, activities, and resources to educate lay and clergy women about leadership opportunities in their local churches and in the greater UMC—positions like deans of seminaries, superintendents, and bishops.

While the commission produces a wealth of resources, it's up to the annual conferences to use them. "Because we are a small office, the progress would be so slow if it was just us," Goodrich says. "Our goal is to try to get the people in the annual conferences to do much of this advocacy and work."

And Goodrich is seeing change. She says women now make up half of Church-wide agencies, and there are more female delegates to the UMC's general and jurisdictional conferences. Although Goodrich says it's hard to quantify the commission's

impact, she believes "we helped to support that progress, and to make it possible. We like to think that because these curriculums are there and people are using them, and because we are publishing statistics and letting the Church know where we stand in terms of women's equity, we see more and more women in leadership positions."

As women enter these roles, churches need guidance for welcoming them and treating them equitably. Goodrich finds people are often open to change, but unsure how to interact with female leaders. She is often asked by parishioners—male and female—how they should speak to a woman pastor. "Don't comment on her nail polish or her high heels," she responds. "Instead, talk to her with the same respect and regard as you would a male pastor."

The commission is developing programming to tie into the #MeToo movement, and hosts a sexual misconduct help line. Goodrich is also writing a curriculum for 2019 on welcoming women to leadership appointments that will offer advice for the Pastor/Staff-Parish Relations Committee, the outgoing pastor, the congregation, the district superintendent and cabinet, and the incoming female pastor.

"It is our hope that in focusing on all aspects of the appointment process, we can train everyone to welcome the new pastor, nurture her gifts, grow through the experience of a female pastor, and avoid discrimination and unfair practices," she says. "All of these groups are part of the dynamic that will make women more welcome as leaders in their congregations." □

## SINGING THE BLUES ON A NOTE OF HOPE

HOLDING ON WHEN WE'RE HARASSED BY HELL



1. By the rivers of Babylon—  
there we sat down and there  
we wept  
when we remembered Zion.  
On the willows there  
we hung up our harps.  
For there our captors  
asked us for songs,  
and our tormentors asked for  
mirth, saying,  
“Sing us one of the songs of  
Zion!”  
How could we sing the Lord’s  
song  
in a foreign land?

2. See Hughes in Richard K.  
Barksdale, *Praisesong of Survival:  
Lectures and Essays, 1957–89*  
(Urbana, IL: University of Illinois  
Press, 1992), 203.

3. Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *The  
Will to Power*, ed. Walter Kaufmann,  
trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J.  
Hollingdale (New York: Random  
House, 1967).

4. “I’m tired of living and scared  
of dying / But ol’ man river, he  
just keeps rolling along.” “Ol’ Man  
River,” featuring Paul Robeson, in  
*Show Boat*, directed by James Whale  
(1936, Universal Pictures).

*Julian Armand Cook ('16) delivered a  
version of this sermon on Psalm 137:1–4<sup>1</sup>  
at St. Mark Congregational Church in  
Roxbury, Mass., on January 22, 2017—  
the Sunday following the US presidential  
inauguration.*

*“This is earthquake  
Weather!  
Honor and hunger  
Walk lean  
Together.”*

—Langston Hughes, “Today”<sup>2</sup>

**W**e are living in earthquake weather.  
It feels as if dysfunction has gripped  
the throat of our world with renewed  
intensity. Nobody wants to die, but we  
are killing ourselves to live.

What is it that makes us get up in  
the morning, when experience has  
proven that we do not know what  
life has waiting for us that day? What  
gives us the ontological audacity to  
go on working to cultivate children  
who are ethical leaders, when the most  
prominent leaders of this day have  
proven themselves more interested in  
“*Trumping*” people than *serv*ing peo-  
ple? How can we sing in a strange land  
(Psalm 137:4)?

Some have argued that what keeps  
humanity going is the “will to power”<sup>3</sup>  
—the will to make ourselves perma-  
nent, bigger, and better. You see it  
in the toddler, who—before they’ve  
worked a day in their life—stands in  
their parent’s home and announces with  
righteous indignation, “You’re not the  
boss of me!” The “will to power” argu-  
ment sounds convincing, but it’s too

theoretical. Most of us have no desire  
to take over the world; we’re just try-  
ing to survive. Paul Robeson, the civil  
rights activist and actor who sang “Ol’  
Man River” in the 1936 film *Show  
Boat*, was right: we’re tired of living,  
but scared of dying, so we just keep  
rollin’ along.<sup>4</sup> So, what is it that makes  
us go on living in earthquake weather?

Something happened recently that  
deepened my understanding of this  
question. A college friend—a white  
man—expressed deep concern for  
America in the aftermath of the 2016  
election. He wrote:

*I know that I’m Christian. I know that  
the work is ahead of us, but is it alright if I  
am just angry right now? Is it alright if I’m  
angry that the country I thought was finally  
dealing with the ugliest parts of ourselves has  
just been doing a good job of camouflaging  
its racism? Is it alright if I’m angry that*

*(Continued)*

About the  
Author

**Julian Armand Cook** ('16) is the senior  
pastor of St. Mark Congregational  
Church, United Church of Christ, in  
Boston. He is also assistant director  
of Thurman Networks at BU’s Howard  
Thurman Center for Common Ground, a  
student center committed to Thurman’s  
principles of the “search for common  
ground” and the “unity of all people.”

my parents—who taught me bullying was wrong, who taught me about a Jesus who loved everybody—finally admitted to me that they voted for a man who is the antithesis of everything Jesus represented?

My response began:  
*My Dear Brother,*  
*You need to learn to sing the blues.*

I felt comfortable telling him that because I'm black, and nobody can sing the blues like black people. We've had a lot of practice, because we've sung the blues for a long time. But what is different about this political moment is that people who have never had to sing the blues are singing it now, because the systems that have never worked for *some* of us did not work for *more* of us this time.

The blues is not solely style. It is not simply the anthem of Mississippi Delta-dwellers who had enough Holy Ghost power to *pick cotton* and *plant hope*. The blues is the creative masterpiece of discipleship. It is what you get when life forces you to hold to hope while your heart is breaking.

The Israelites in Psalm 137:1–4 knew something about the blues. The Babylonian king, Nebuchadnezzar, had destroyed Jerusalem. The people who had been freed by God from slavery in Egypt were again captives in Babylon.



The Israelites were sitting beside the strange waters of Babylon, atop grass fertilized by their dead dreams. If you've been there, you know something about the blues.

**What is different about this political moment is that people who have never had to sing the blues are singing it now, because the systems that have never worked for some of us did not work for more of us this time.**

For eight years, the world watched as a black man—Barack Hussein Obama—led the highest office in our land. Those of us who wanted to believe that America could one day live out the “true meaning of its creed”<sup>5</sup> sang, because we never imagined that Barack Obamas could one day lead the country where there had been Bull Connors. We played the harps of hope as we watched a *black family* live in a

5. Martin Luther King, Jr., “I Have a Dream” (speech, March on Washington, Washington, D.C., August 28, 1963).

6. Nick Salvatore, *Singing in a Strange Land: C.I. Franklin, the Black Church, and the Transformation of America* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 32.

*White House* built by their enslaved ancestors. Hope was easier then.

Now, we stand by the strange waters of Babylon wondering, *What happened to our song?*

Our song is more than pitch and lyrics. It's about our existence. The day we stop singing is the day we stop existing. What is the heartbeat's hum but a song? What is the whisper-tone of our lungs inhaling and exhaling but a physiological improvisation on the symphony of existence? Our song is about our identity. I sing because it sanctifies my survival. I sing because God is in my voice.

But how do you sing when you're strangled by struggle and harassed by hell?

Sing the blues!

Singing the blues is more than complaining. The blues would be nothing but groaning without the blue note of hope.

The “blue note” is the basis of blues music. It is both *musical* and *philosophical*; a *sound* and a *way of life*. You can't find it on the piano, because it exists somewhere in the cracks between the keys. The blue note cannot be played, it can only be sung. It cannot be charted, seen, or written because—like the grace of God—it cannot be explained, only experienced: when it touches you, you know it. The blue note is hope that

cries out, “I'm still here!” When it touches you—somewhere between the cracks of life—something happens.

Don't be ashamed if you have to sing the blues. The blues isn't the opposite of the gospel. Despair isn't the antithesis of hope. Thomas Dorsey, the father of gospel music, said that “one cannot sing the gospel without knowing how to sing the blues.”<sup>6</sup>

In Christ, we sing the blues with a note of hope. Hope and despair are a strange marriage. Tears are often followed by the deepest moves of the Spirit. Jesus won a crown, but it was a crown of thorns. The central statement of our faith—the resurrection of Jesus—happens in a graveyard, proclaiming that the *living* God works in *dead* places.

At the cross, Jesus sang the blues: “*Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?*” or, “My God,

my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:46). In that moment, there was a peculiar concoction: the despair of forsakenness mixed with the hope that allowed Jesus to still say, “My God!” That's what it means to sing the blues on a note of hope.

Keep on singing! Singing will keep you from dying, because if you can sing, you can breathe. If you can breathe, you're alive. And, if you're alive, then there is hope. □

**Don't be ashamed if you have to sing the blues. The blues isn't the opposite of the gospel. Despair isn't the antithesis of hope. Thomas Dorsey, the father of gospel music, said that “one cannot sing the gospel without knowing how to sing the blues.”**

## FIRST RESPONDERS TO INJUSTICE

TODAY'S CIVIL RIGHTS CRISES CALL SEMINARIANS TO BOLD PUBLIC LEADERSHIP, SAYS FORMER NAACP PRESIDENT CORNELL WILLIAM BROOKS ('87, HON.'15)



Too often, says Cornell William Brooks ('87, Hon.'15), moral leaders aren't engaged in critical policy work against injustice: they may lack self-confidence, or bow to political pressure. Brooks—a civil rights leader and former president of the NAACP—recently taught an STH and School of Law class, Violence, the Vote, and Hope: An Examination of Ethics, Law and Justice Movements, as the visiting professor of social ethics, law, and justice movements for 2017–2018. He spoke with *focus* editor Julie Butters about training a new generation of seminarians to engage in policy, and demonstrate the prophetic moral leadership needed to meet today's sociopolitical and civil rights challenges.

*focus:* What do you hope students learn from your class?

Brooks: The class last semester formally focused on the right to vote and to be free from violence. But it was also a seminar on the leadership of justice movements. My aspiration was to convince a group of seminarians that they have not only the moral legitimacy, but the policy expertise to go beyond the stained-glass boundaries of the Church and into the sphere of public policy, public debate, voting rights, civil rights, and police misconduct. When there's a major civil rights crisis, governors, mayors, senators, and congressional representatives call on clergy first. When you have people who are at odds with each other, who want to take up arms out of frustration, it's the clergy who have the legitimacy to say, "Wait and discuss."

How many times do you walk into a situation where the problem is not that you lack options, it's that there's a lack of a moral imagination to actually use the options? Seminarians are trained to walk into situations and inspire people.

**How do your students' views on leadership compare with those you and your fellow students had at STH?**

This Twitter-age generation of activists is much more sophisticated in their messaging and much more global in their understanding of the interrelatedness of injustices. They see the relationship between [racial profiling and police violence] in Ferguson and the Netherlands, between the alt-right in the United States and white nationalism and ultranationalism in Europe, between postcolonialism and the excesses of over-militarized police departments.

*(Continued)*

### About the Professor



**Cornell William Brooks** ('87, Hon.'15) is a visiting professor of social ethics, law, and justice movements at STH and the School of Law. He served as president and CEO of the NAACP from 2014 to 2017, and is a social justice advocate, civil rights attorney, and fourth-generation ordained minister.

Dave Green

On the flip side, there’s been talk about “slacktivism,” where people say, “I commented on that post, so I’ve done my duty in standing up for what’s wrong.” How do you see technology helping or hindering leadership?

The major challenge is that we conflate models of communication with models of leadership. Knowing how to post and tweet is different from knowing how to organize a meeting, encourage people, and from understanding the importance of the eloquence of example. As a leader, your job is not merely to communicate effectively, but to model effectively and get people to follow you effectively, which is a matter of deep sacrifice.

In terms of the role of “slacktivism,” we conflate communication with participation: having communicated the message, we assume that we’ve had an impact on the goal. I can’t tell you the number of times where the assumed goal of activism is the expression of outrage as opposed to determination of outcome. Far too often, people understand what they’re upset about but are less clear about what they want. That’s not an indictment of people; it has everything to do with the way we prepare for leadership. In the same way that a pastor building a church might become familiar with the ins and outs of a commercial loan, the next generation of religious leaders has to get smart when it comes to policy, and have the intellectual self-confidence to do that. The same folks who can master Aristotelian ethics have the intellec-

**In this diverse democracy, prophetic leadership without policy is vacuous.**

tual capability of understanding, “What do we want in terms of ending voter suppression? How do we end police misconduct? How do we bring about fairer policies with respect to immigration or the Dreamers?” You can’t tell me that the school that was home to Howard Thurman (Hon.’67) and Martin Luther King, Jr. (GRS’55, Hon.’59) and

Anna Howard Shaw (1878, MED 1886) and Harrell Beck (’45, GRS’54) doesn’t have people walking out of here who can be on the front lines of moral leadership as it relates to policy. Because in this diverse democracy, prophetic leadership

without policy is vacuous. Railing against injustices from the mountaintop without deigning to get down into a state legislature is just moral entertainment.

**What kind of leaders will be needed to do that?**

I think it will be leaders who are culturally multilingual—able to converse and engage many communities, for which seminarians are ideally suited. It will require leaders who are multilingual in terms of discipline: they understand ethics and theology and Church history and the Hebrew Bible and New Testament, but they’re also at least conversationally literate when it comes to the prevailing social injustices of the day. When Dr. King was here, he studied Boston Personalism, but he was also conversant with civil rights challenges as they related to public accommodations—like people having to sit in the back of the bus—and

1. President Barack Obama, “Remarks at the Selma Voting Rights March Commemoration in Selma, Alabama” (speech, Selma, Alabama, March 4, 2007), The American Presidency Project, [www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=77042](http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=77042), accessed April 25, 2018.

voting rights; he understood we need people to monitor the polls. And we can’t raise up leaders who are risk-averse. And I mean risking one’s career, risking one’s church or parish, risking one’s life—I dare say that.

Given the speed with which our country is changing, seminaries, like every other professional school, are struggling to keep up. When I was in seminary, we spent a great deal of time discussing racial justice, liberation theology, women’s theology, but *no* time that I can recall actually talking about civil rights, the death penalty, or law around the treatment of women. Imagine today having a class in feminism and not discussing the #MeToo movement, and not discussing law and policy around sexual harassment. Not having that policy granularity is impossible now.

**If that policy element is woven into the classroom, what might be the short-term impact on the nation?**

I believe that when you have people on the forefront of leadership who have the most moral credibility and the policy literacy to lead the debate, you get the country to where it should be faster. Too often, folks with the most moral credibility find themselves on the policy periphery. You see moral leaders being co-opted by the left and the right all the time. They use them for their

legitimacy, they use them to keep the peace without pursuing justice. And in part, they do it by saying, “Allow us to handle the legal details. Allow us to handle the policy details.” I’ve even seen more than a few of our clergy say, “I don’t have confidence I can hold my own in those circles,” not realizing you don’t have to have a PhD in public policy to be elected to Congress or serve in the White House.

**I like to remind myself hope is a moral choice; it’s not empirically obvious. At any given point in history, a compelling case could be made for despair. We choose to believe.**

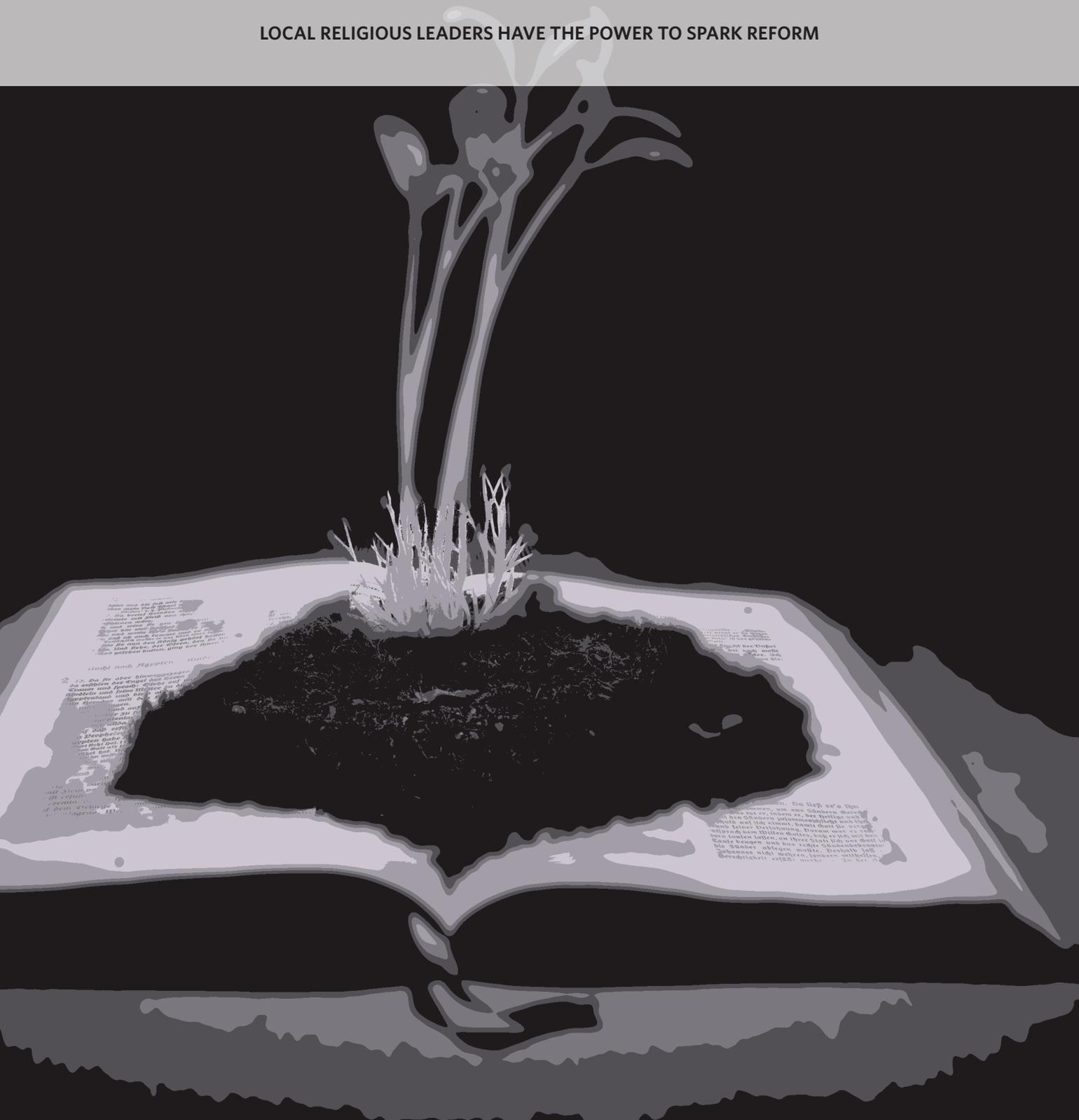
**What inspires you to continue your work as a leader?**  
I like to remind myself hope is a moral choice; it’s not empirically obvious. At any given point in history, a compelling case could be made for despair. We choose to believe.

And so my choice is, when I look at this Joshua generation<sup>1</sup> of leaders, when I look at the diversity, the moral enthusiasm, that gives me hope. I think about the fact that some of the most dim and dark chapters of American history have concluded with a bright dawn. I told my students on the first day of class, “We do not need to be morally timid; we need to be morally ambitious, because you have no idea of the power of your own ideas unless you make the assumption that you can, in fact, change the world.” □

*Read more from this interview, which has been condensed and edited for clarity, at [bu.edu/sth/2018/05/02/cornell-brooks](http://bu.edu/sth/2018/05/02/cornell-brooks).*

# CHRISTIANITY CAN BE GOOD FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

LOCAL RELIGIOUS LEADERS HAVE THE POWER TO SPARK REFORM



1. John Wesley, “Causes of the Inefficacy of Christianity,” in *John Wesley’s Sermons: An Anthology*, eds. Albert C. Outler and Richard P. Heitzenrater (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991), 550.

2. Bron Taylor et al., “The Greening of Religion Hypothesis (Part Two): Assessing Data from Lynn White, Jr. to Pope Francis,” *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture* 10, no.3 (2016), 324. (Citing Clements, McCright, and Xiao, 2013).

3. Lynn White, Jr., “The Historical Roots of our Ecologic Crisis,” *Science*, March 10, 1967.

4. Bron Taylor, “The Greening of Religion Hypothesis (Part One): from Lynn White, Jr. and Claims That Religion Can Promote Environmentally Destructive Attitudes and Behaviors to Assertions They Are Becoming Environmentally Friendly,” *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture* 10, no. 3 (2016), 296.

In a sermon from 1789, John Wesley attempted to answer the question, “Why has Christianity done so little good in the world?”<sup>1</sup> This question remains relevant more than two centuries later, as environmentally minded Christians wonder why their religion has done so little good for the world. Numerous studies of Christian communities and individuals from the last 50 years show negative correlations between Christianity and environmentally protective beliefs and behaviors. In fact, a 2013 study found that “Christians reported lower levels of environmental concern than non-Christians.”<sup>2</sup> In other words, Christianity is demonstrably bad for the environment.

In 1967, historian Lynn White, Jr. connected the burgeoning environmental crisis to Western Christianity’s patently anthropocentric worldview.<sup>3</sup> In the half century between then and now, theologians have done a substantial amount of work retrieving, analyzing, and reconstructing the Christian tradition in order to find ways in which it might foster behaviors that safeguard the Earth. Most denominations have issued position statements on a wide variety of environmental issues, many congregations have undertaken energy audits and implemented environmental programs, and some individuals have adopted environmentally protective behaviors. All of these groups—scholars, denominational leaders, and individual practitioners—are relating their activism to their faith commitments. On the basis of these and similar activities, some have proposed what Bron Taylor calls the “Greening of Religion

Hypothesis”: the belief that more environmentally aware religions can and do inspire more environmentally protective behavior, and that they “are critically important in the quest for environmentally sustainable societies.”<sup>4</sup> Unfortunately, as mentioned above, social-scientific studies of Christian communities do not seem to support this hypothesis. Despite the work being done by individuals, it appears that Christianity more generally is not yet the positive force for environmental good that we might like it to be.

The extant literature indicates that Christians are less likely to hold pro-environmental beliefs or engage in pro-environmental behavior, but it does not answer the question of why this is so. While some might argue that Christianity itself is bad for the environment, or ineffective at changing the behavior of its adherents, I would argue

(Continued)

## About the Author



**Rebecca Copeland** is an assistant professor of theology. In her research and teaching, she seeks to read theology ecologically, and read the environment theologically. She is pursuing ordination in the United Methodist Church.



that the data offers greater grounds for hoping that it can be redeemed. I suggest that Christianity has not been good for the environment because most Christians are not being introduced to the idea that environmental concerns are religious issues. If this is correct, reform lies in the hands of local religious leaders.

In 2014, the Public Religion Research Institute and the American Academy of Religion published a study about religion’s impact on attitudes toward climate change.<sup>5</sup> While only half of the general population reported being somewhat or very concerned about

**I suggest that Christianity has not been good for the environment because most Christians are not being introduced to the idea that environmental concerns are religious issues. If this is correct, reform lies in the hands of local religious leaders.**

climate change, those numbers increased to 73 percent of Hispanic Catholics and 58 percent of black Protestants.<sup>6</sup> This increased concern correlates to increased attention from their clergy: 70 percent of Hispanic Catholics and 51

percent of black Protestants report that their clergy leaders speak about climate change from the pulpit.<sup>7</sup> In contrast, only 30 percent of white Protestants report that their pastors speak about the issue of climate change,<sup>8</sup> which seems to depress congregational concern: just 43 percent of white mainline Protestants

5. Daniel Cox et al., “Believers, Sympathizers, & Skeptics: Why Americans are Conflicted About Climate Change, Environmental Policy, and Science,” PRRI/AAR, November 21, 2014.

6. Ibid., 14–15.

7. Ibid., 31.

8. Ibid., 31.

9. Ibid., 15.

10. Taylor et al., 326 (citing Barna Group 2008).

11. David W. Orr, *Earth in Mind: On Education, Environment, and the Human Prospect* (Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 1994).

and 35 percent of white evangelical Protestants were somewhat or very concerned about climate change.<sup>9</sup>

This pastoral neglect extends beyond the politically charged issue of climate change to encompass all environmental issues. In 2008, a Barna Group survey found that “89% of Christians and 85% of churchgoers had never ‘heard the phrase creation care’...most churchgoers (64%) reported that they had never heard any sermons ‘about how Christians should respond to environmental issues.’”<sup>10</sup>

It is true that many denominations can point to official position papers that assert the importance of creation and our responsibility to care for it properly, and that the pope, patriarch, and numerous councils of bishops have made statements about the importance of caring for creation. It is not at all clear, however, that those statements have any impact on the behavior of their members. It is unlikely that parishioners will view environmental problems as issues of religious concern if their clergy remain mute on the subject.

David W. Orr, Paul Sears Distinguished Professor of Environmental Studies and Politics Emeritus at Oberlin College in Oberlin, Ohio, stated that “All

education is environmental education,” and this applies to religious education.<sup>11</sup> When we offer religious instruction without addressing the environment, we reinforce the idea that ecological concerns are not religious ones. How we read scripture, and what doctrines we affirm, affects how we understand the environment. Not just the doctrine of creation, but the ways in which we talk about the human condition, salvation, Christology, and eschatology all affect how we understand and relate to other parts of this world.

Recognizing this, many theological schools have begun to incorporate environmental education into their general curriculum. In 2017, STH joined the third cohort of schools pursuing certification from the Green Seminary Initiative, a project that involves integrating environmental education into all aspects of theological training.

Seminary Initiative, a project that involves integrating environmental education into all aspects of theological training.

This initiative, and others like it, will help prepare future faith leaders to address some of the most pressing issues of the 21st century. These problems, however, are too serious to wait for the next generation to address. When local Christian leaders take up environmental issues, their congregations do as well. □

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## RESPONSE, PRESENCE, AND JOY

THREE KEYS TO LEADING EFFECTIVELY  
IN TUMULTUOUS TIMES



*BU students demonstrated at Marsh Plaza on November 13, 2015, in solidarity with students of color attending the University of Missouri who were struggling with racial prejudice and death threats. Such demonstrations have long been a part of BU STH history, and continue today.*

Dana J. Quigley

Our current social and political climate has created a desperate need for effective leaders who can balance power with compassion, and privilege with equity. True leaders must be able to harness the passion of those they lead, share the power they hold, and make space for marginalized voices. I know this to be true in the spaces where I am blessed to lead, and I will admit this is no easy task.

The STH Students of Color student interest group often discusses how to be a leader within the spaces we inhabit. This incredible collective of students, faculty, and staff of color has been active since fall 2016, and I am honored to be one of its founding members and leaders. It is here that I have learned the keys to effective leadership in tumultuous times: response, presence, and joy.

### RESPONSE

There is a fine line between reaction and response. Being responsive requires not just countering current issues, but also anticipating future needs. It is more than a one-off reaction: it is a sustained action.

Initially, Students of Color was proposed as a networking association for racial and ethnic minority students. This was after students had raised concerns that they had few organized opportunities to meet other students of color, especially if they did not fall easily into membership with the Association of Black Seminarians, Raíces Latinx Student Association, or the Korean Student Association. Attendance at our inaugural gathering represented the diversity of STH, and we felt it was successful enough to plan another for the

spring. Then, on November 8, 2016, the United States elected a new president.

The morning after the election, several students of color reached out to us, seeking a safe space to discuss fears for our nation, as well as lament the election results. It was clear that a community of color was required for more than just networking, or even to process the initial reaction to the election of our current president. Students of Color is now a recognized student interest group that also includes faculty and staff. We meet regularly, and have taken an active role in the life of STH.

Response does not end with our own community, however. In every space we inhabit, our student leaders respond to concerns that affect all of us at BU. In 2017, we spoke up at town hall meetings; organized a vigil addressing the travel ban, DACA (Deferred Action

*(Continued)*

### About the Author



**Alicia Vélez Stewart** ('18) is the graduate assistant at STH's Spiritual Life Office, president of Raíces Latinx Student Association, and a leader in Students of Color. She lives in Rhode Island with her family, and is pursuing ordination as an elder in the New England Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church.

Courtesy of Bryan W. Stewart

for Childhood Arrivals), and undocumented student concerns; drafted a statement condemning racially charged violence in Charlottesville; and helped organize students for the Boston Fight Supremacy rally. This ability to respond enables us to lead with our presence.

### PRESENCE

I have learned from my Students of Color siblings that being present is so much more than sharing space. It's holding someone in their pain and celebrating their triumphs. It's being visible and vocal, while empowering those at the margins to do the same. It's being in real solidarity with our communities, by showing up and showing support both on the front lines and behind the scenes. I have experienced the power of presence at our Students of Color gatherings, when we listen deeply to one another, share our collective experiences as people of color in ministry or academia, and show support by attending events held by member groups, participating in celebrations, and collaborating on projects.

Leading through presence also requires us to reach beyond the confines of our location and foster relationships with others—for example, engaging in dialogue with those from different social positions, political ideologies, or faith traditions. This means there will be times when our presence is questioned or makes some people

uncomfortable, and it will be easy to shut down and become insular in the face of oppression or discrimination. I go to locations not necessarily created with people of color in mind, to ensure that STH's diversity is seen and heard. I've delivered sermons in Marsh Chapel, where I'm sure BU's founders never would have imagined a woman of color preaching. I've

held conversations around micro aggressions in the faculty lounge, surrounded by alumni photographs that include few people of color. This form of leadership is vital in our current social and political climate. Being present is also exhausting, which is why finding joy in leading is imperative.

### JOY

So often, we focus on the challenges of leading. This is certainly the case for persons of color in academia and ministry. While it is important to pinpoint a particular issue that requires a response, we must also shed light on the joy that calls us into leadership. This is the source of our passion, the spark that keeps us working for change and allows us to be responsive and present.

I convened a panel discussion where students and faculty of color talked about how their identities inform their understanding of themselves and their work. Here we could state where joy is present in our lives, vocations, and calls to ministry. As a leader who is also a woman of color, I find joy in my "otherness," even

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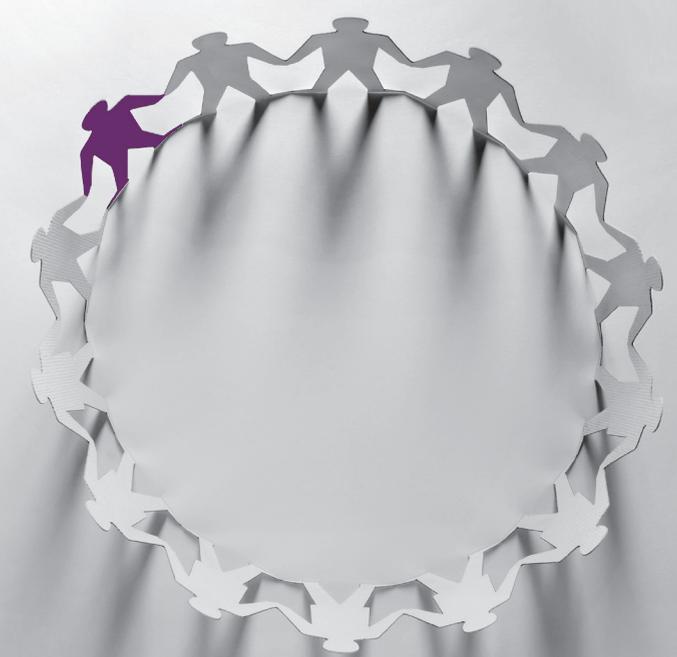
**Being present is holding someone in their pain and celebrating their triumphs. It's being visible and vocal, while empowering those at the margins to do the same.**

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when the work I do is demoralizing. As a Latina, I am able to provide a unique perspective for the communities I serve as we tackle topics like racism and discrimination, what it means to welcome the stranger, and how power is used. I find a life-giving quality in that work, and that is what sustains me as I lead.

Leadership is demanding, and difficult even in the best of times. Those

who have joined Students of Color truly embody the qualities leaders need to remain effective today, when autocratic leadership, and its demand for blind obedience, is damaging our most vulnerable communities. We diligently work to find new ways of ministering: with joy, a constant presence, a willingness to respond, and space for those on the margins to speak their truth. □



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# MARTIN LUTHER, REBEL WITH A CAUSE

A PROFILE OF THE REFORMER WHO UPENDED THE CHURCH IN HIS QUEST TO HEAL IT



Lucas Cranach the Elder, who painted this portrait of Martin Luther in 1529, also supplied woodcut illustrations for the reformer's published work.

1. See, e.g., Scott H. Hendrix, *Martin Luther: Visionary Reformer* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017); Lyndal Roper, *Martin Luther: Renegade and Prophet* (London: Bodley Head, 2016; repr., New York: Random House, 2017); Andrew Pettegree, *Brand Luther: How an Unheralded Monk Turned His Small Town into a Center of Publishing, Made Himself the Most Famous Man in Europe—and Started the Protestant Reformation* (New York: Penguin, 2015), 107; Christopher Boyd Brown, ed., *Luther's Works: Sixteenth-Century Biographies of Martin Luther* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2018 [in press]).

2. Martin Luther, *Eight Sermons at Wittenberg* [Invocavit Sermons] (1522), *Luther's Works* 51:77 (*D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, 73 volumes in 85. [Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1883–2009] 10/3:18–19).

3. In addition to Pettegree, *Brand Luther*, see Mark U. Edwards, Jr., *Printing, Propaganda, and Martin Luther* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1994; repr., Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2004); Christopher Boyd Brown, *Singing the Gospel: Lutheran Hymns and the Success of the Reformation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005).

(Footnotes continued on next page)

**M**artin Luther inaugurated one of the great seismic shifts in the history of Christianity. In 2017, the 500th anniversary of the start of the Reformation, there was an outpouring of publications about Luther's life and contributions, both fresh biographical studies and new presentations of the oldest biographies of the reformer.<sup>1</sup>

Luther's own assessment of his role was typically dismissive:

*I simply taught, preached, and wrote God's Word; otherwise I did nothing. And while I slept, or drank Wittenberg beer with my friends Philip [Melanchthon] and [Nicholas von] Amsdorf, the Word so greatly weakened the papacy that no prince or emperor ever inflicted such losses upon it. I did nothing; the Word did everything.*<sup>2</sup>

Yet recent accounts from historians have illuminated how carefully engaged Luther was with the publication and presentation of his ideas, in the form of pamphlets and hymns as well as Bibles and catechisms—texts that were central to his influence.<sup>3</sup>

Luther began his career as an obscure friar and professor at an upstart university. The text that thrust him into public prominence, *Ninety-Five Theses on the Power of Indulgences*, was an ordinary part of his work as an academic theologian, and the act of posting it on the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg—which probably did take place, despite a half century of modern debate over the question—was the standard procedure for announcing academic exercises, not the dramatic act of defiance imag-

ined in 19th-century German nationalist art.<sup>4</sup>

In the following years, Luther became the center of an unprecedented flood of printed words, predominantly in the German vernacular. He was spurred to publish not only by the vituperative official response to his ideas from Rome, but also by a desire to fulfill his responsibility as a preacher to the laity. Luther sought out the most proficient printers for his work, and enlisted artistic collaborators like Lucas Cranach the Elder, who supplied woodcut illustrations and title pages for his published materials, and the musician and composer Johann Walter, who supplied polyphonic settings for Luther's hymns.<sup>5</sup>

Historian Andrew Pettegree has argued that Luther not only took advantage of the printing press, but, in fact, saved the nascent printing industry

(Continued)

## About the Author



**Christopher Boyd Brown** is an associate professor of Church history and the author of *Singing the Gospel: Lutheran Hymns and the Success of the Reformation of Martin Luther* (Harvard University Press, 2005). He is the editor of the forthcoming *Luther's Works: Sixteenth-Century Biographies of Martin Luther* (Concordia, 2018) and is working on a monograph study of 16th-century wedding sermons.

from economic collapse. He played a key role in creating a literate public by providing content the public wanted to buy. Though Luther’s own literary production declined in quantity after about 1526, his name and his words were the foundation of the enduring texts of the reformed community, appearing in Bibles, hymnals, and catechisms for centuries to come. He inspired a host of other voices as well, often adding his own preface and commendation to other writers’ books. The solo voice of 1517 had become the conductor of a vast chorus.<sup>6</sup>

Luther’s contemporaries were deeply divided over what to make of him and the “Lutheran rumpus” (as one of his Catholic opponents, Henry II, duke of Brunswick-Wolfenbüttel, put it) he had caused.<sup>7</sup> Luther’s early adversary and first (though hostile) biographer, the Catholic controversialist Johann Cochlaeus, regarded Luther not only as a heretic but as a demonic impostor. He ridiculed Luther’s reputed enjoyment of food and drink and his habit of joking at table among friends—even at lunch, “from which meal,” Cochlaeus sourly noted, “most of the holy Fathers and monks have always abstained.”<sup>8</sup> The theologian who had not confined himself discreetly to Latin,

who was a married man and father—and worst of all, married to a former nun—was an incomprehensible monstrosity for traditional believers.

Friends and students of the reformer, however, saw Luther as a precious and prophetic witness to Jesus Christ. Johann Bugenhagen, who preached

Luther’s funeral sermon, described him as a faithful pastor of the Wittenberg congregation and “the reformer of the Church whom God sent,” associating him with the “angel flying in mid-heaven with an eternal Gospel to proclaim” of Revelation 14:6.<sup>9</sup> Melanchthon, a reformer and theologian, saw Luther as part of a historical succession of witnesses to God that stretched from the biblical prophets and apostles down to Church

fathers like Irenaeus and Augustine, and medieval teachers like Bernard and Tauler.

While acknowledging that Luther had seemed immoderately harsh to some, Melanchthon appealed to the scholar Erasmus’ verdict that perhaps “God gave this last age a severe physician on account of the gravity of its illnesses.” Whatever his roughness, Luther had been a “salutary instrument

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**The theologian who had not confined himself discreetly to Latin, who was a married man and father—and worst of all, married to a former nun—was an incomprehensible monstrosity for traditional believers. Friends and students of the reformer, however, saw Luther as a precious and prophetic witness to Jesus Christ.**

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4. For summary assessments of the debate, see Volker Leppin and Timothy J. Wengert, “Sources for and against the Posting of the *Ninety-Five Theses*,” *Lutheran Quarterly* 29 (2015): 374–75; Timothy J. Wengert, introduction to “[The 95 *Theses* or] Disputation for Clarifying the Power of Indulgences,” in *The Annotated Luther*, ed. Hans J. Hillerbrand et al. (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2015), 1:22–26. Cf. Pettegree, 13. The original debate was carried on between Erwin Iserloh, *The Theses Were Not Posted: Luther between Reform and Reformation*, trans. Jared Wicks (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968; trans. from German of 1966) and Kurt Aland, ed., *Martin Luther’s ‘95 Theses’* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1967, 2004; trans. from German of 1965). For recent defenses of the historicity of the posting as an ordinary part of academic life, see Joachim Ott and Martin Treu, eds., *Luthers Thesenanschlag: Faktum oder Fiktion* (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2008); Pettegree, 50–52, 71–77.

5. See Pettegree, 143–163. On Cranach, see also Steven E. Ozment, *The Serpent and the Lamb: Cranach, Luther, and the Making of the Reformation* (Yale University Press, 2013). On Walter, see Carl Schalk, *Johann Walter: First Cantor of the Lutheran Church* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1992), and the introduction by Brown, ed., in *Luther’s Works: Sixteenth-Century Biographies*, lxxi–lxxvii.

6. See Pettegree, 167–85; Martin Luther, *Prefaces I–II*, ed. Christopher Boyd Brown, *Luther’s Works* vols. 59–60.

7. See Martin Luther, *Against Hanswurst* (1541), *Luther’s Works* 41:231ff (D. *Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, 51:538ff).

8. Johann Cochlaeus, *The Deeds and Writings of Martin Luther*, in Elizabeth Vandiver, Ralph Keen, and Thomas D. Frazel, trans. and eds., *Luther’s Lives: Two Contemporary Accounts of Martin Luther* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2002), 348. Cf. Brown,

ed., *Luther’s Works: Sixteenth-Century Biographies*, lxxvii–lxx.

9. Johann Bugenhagen, *Christian Sermon for the Funeral and Burial of the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther* (1546), in Brown, ed. *Luther’s Works: Sixteenth-Century Biographies*, 25–35. The association of Rev. 14:6 with a contemporary teacher had already been used in the late Middle Ages in the commemoration of the Dominican preacher St. Vincent Ferrer (1350–1419): see Brown, ed., *Luther’s Works: Sixteenth-Century Biographies*, xxxvii.

10. Philip Melanchthon, *Oration at the Funeral of Dr. Martin Luther* (1546), and *Preface to the Second Volume of the Complete 53 Edition of Luther’s Latin Writings* (1546) in Brown, ed., *Luther’s Works: Sixteenth-Century Biographies*, 37–80.

11. Johann Walter, “A New Spiritual Song about the Blessed, Precious, and Highly Gifted Man, Dr. Martin Luther, the Prophet and Apostle of Germany” (1564), in Brown, ed., *Luther’s Works: Sixteenth-Century Biographies*, 81–102.

12. Johann Mathesius, *History of the Origins, Doctrine, Life, and Death of the Reverend, Blessed, Precious Man of God, Dr. Martin Luther* (1562–64/1566), in Brown, ed., *Luther’s Works: Sixteenth-Century Biographies*, 103–612.

13. For a modern account similarly emphasizing Luther’s physicality, see Roper, *Martin Luther: Renegade and Prophet*.

of God” who had drawn people’s minds back “to the sources”—the scriptures themselves.<sup>10</sup>

Others prized Luther precisely for his stalwart pugnacity. The musician Johann Walter, who had collaborated with Luther for decades, hailed him in a 1564 ballad as a spiritual knight who had taken a valiant stand against the powers of Church and state alike.<sup>11</sup>

The most comprehensive early interpreter of Luther was his student Johann Mathesius, who delivered and published a series of 17 sermons on Luther’s biography over the course of 4 years.<sup>12</sup> The Luther portrayed by Mathesius is not a gilt icon, but a human being whose faults served to magnify God’s grace.

Mathesius described not only Luther’s piety but also his sociability: he drinks with friends and is cheerful, is generous to a fault, engages in banter and jest, and takes pleasure in singing secular motets around the table. Mathesius also reminded audiences of Luther’s physical frailty, discussing frankly the corporeal symptoms of his episodes of illness. Luther’s own physicality, even as reflected in scatology that later modern readers have sometimes found distasteful, was prized as a reminder that presence in the world, not ascetic withdrawal from it, was pleasing to God.<sup>13</sup>

Mathesius was equally open about discussing Luther’s trials of faith—the *Anfechtungen* or spiritual afflictions that Luther often discussed. The reformer is described as a model of pastoral comfort who also needed spiritual care and encouragement from friends, colleagues, and the laity he encountered in his work.

This portrayal of Luther—heroic but complex, spiritual but earthy—defied many expectations of medieval hagiography, and defined his image for generations of Protestants to come.

Although Mathesius’ narrative has been superseded as a historical account, the outlines of the work—or reactions against it—can still be discerned beneath the

surface of recent scholarly publications. Five hundred years after the beginning of the Reformation, the old accounts are still worth reading alongside the new, as testimonies of those who witnessed the turmoil of their times and were convinced that God had done something extraordinary through his Word, confessed and proclaimed by Martin Luther. □

*Adapted from the introduction to Luther’s Works: Sixteenth-Century Biographies of Martin Luther, to be published by Concordia Publishing House in 2018.*

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**Luther’s own physicality, even as reflected in scatology that later modern readers have sometimes found distasteful, was prized as a reminder that presence in the world, not ascetic withdrawal from it, was pleasing to God.**

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SERMON

## “AM I MY BROTHER’S KEEPER?”

LOVE MEANS RECOGNIZING OTHERS’ DISTRESS AS OUR OWN

Cain venant de tuer  
son frère Abel  
by Henri Vidal (1896),  
Jardin des Tuileries,  
Paris, France

*Nikki Young ('18) delivered a version of this sermon on Genesis 4:1–16, Cain’s murder of Abel, at Marsh Chapel on September 6, 2017.*

I’m not quite sure how preachers write sermons anymore. It feels like in order to remain relevant, to speak gospel truth, there is simply no way to prepare eloquent poetics connecting well-thought-out themes in the biblical text with the everyday moral and ethical complications of our current estate. A sermon written on a Saturday afternoon to address the devastating effects white silence has on the moral consciousness of America can be obliterated by Facebook posts attributing hurricanes to God’s will by Sunday morning. The world is moving so fast, and the hits are coming so hard, that it feels like our embrace will never be wide enough to catch all that pain we want to hold. Yet somehow, even though the roller coaster of CNN updates is enough to give us whiplash, we persist.

I can’t escape the story of Cain and Abel. We know how it starts: “God created the heavens and the earth,” and the scripture says, “it was good” (Genesis 1:1, 10). Creation is good. Creation is beautiful. It’s living, breathing, life-giving. A gift from a Creator God. But even that Creator God has warnings, telling Cain to watch out for the sin “lurking at the door” as he wrestles with what it means to inhabit the same world as his brother. We don’t often like to talk about sin, because of the ways it’s been used as a means of control or coercion, abuse

and shame. But that’s not the story being told here. Sin is something that sneaks in quietly, changes you, causes you to make decisions you never thought you’d make—decisions that pull you farther and farther away from the idea that in the beginning, there was a God who created you, and it was good.

Cain ignores this warning. He feels upset and rejected—embarrassed, even. And all he can think about is alleviating his own shame. And so, Cain invites his younger brother out to the field and murders him in cold blood. God comes to Cain and asks him, point-blank, “Where is your brother?” And Cain replies, “I don’t know. Am I my brother’s keeper?” It’s almost as if he’s deflecting, by saying, *Well, you’re God. Shouldn’t you know? Isn’t he your responsibility?*

*(Continued)*

### About the Author



**Nikki Young** ('18) is a third-year master of divinity student and the minister of worship and discipleship at Union UMC in Boston’s South End. A native of Chicago, she is pursuing ordination as an elder in the United Methodist Church through the Northern Illinois Conference.

Erin Pearce

God cries out, “What have you done?” *What have you done?*

In the beginning, God created and it was good. In the beginning, God created and breathed life where there was none, and then that life was carelessly and needlessly taken away.

“Am I my brother’s keeper?” There is something about that phrase that refuses to leave me alone, because the question speaks something so theologically profound into the present moment. Cain refuses to say what God already knows: that the spilled blood of Abel cries out from the ground that has absorbed it. He is raising one of the most pertinent social questions of our time: Do we have a responsibility to one another, must we take care of each other, or is it every person for themselves?<sup>1</sup>

Maybe I want to hold on to this text—“Am I my brother’s keeper?”—during these turbulent times because today, in 2018, it’s almost as though Cain has never stopped killing his brother Abel. The fact is, the very salvation of the person sitting next to you is so intimately tied up in your own that there is no difference. Jesus says that if you cling to any two commandments, let them be this: that you love God with every fiber of your being and that you love your neighbor as yourself (Matthew 22:36–40). “Am I my brother’s keeper?” is not just

a cute phrase, or a hashtag. To be called to love is to roll up your sleeves and dive right in, even if you are uncertain. Because here’s the thing about love: love is hard, and messy. It requires so much of your guts that sometimes you have to swallow something like your own shame, rejection, and failure to realize that it isn’t and can’t be all about you, because in the beginning, *God* created, and you did not. Love means that I can’t sleep at night if you don’t have a place to lay your head.

What are the ways we’ve failed our brother? Maybe we didn’t kill him by our own hand, but we pretended like he wasn’t there for so long that we allowed somebody else to do it. I think about the ways that we’ve even refused to call our brother our brother, whether that’s because of the color of his skin, his country of origin, gender identity, sexual orientation,

or political affiliation. I think about how many times God warned us, as he did Cain, to watch out for the sin lurking at the door—the sin that, when we are too caught up in our own lives, can so easily change us into something we were never meant to be. And I think about how, when the world aches, God groans, “What have you done? What have you done?” as he cried in Eden. On days when we’re

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**Cain is raising one of the most pertinent social questions of our time: Do we have a responsibility to one another, must we take care of each other, or is it every person for themselves?**

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1. Rebecca Solnit, *A Paradise Built in Hell: The Extraordinary Communities That Arise in Disaster* (New York: Penguin Books, 2010).

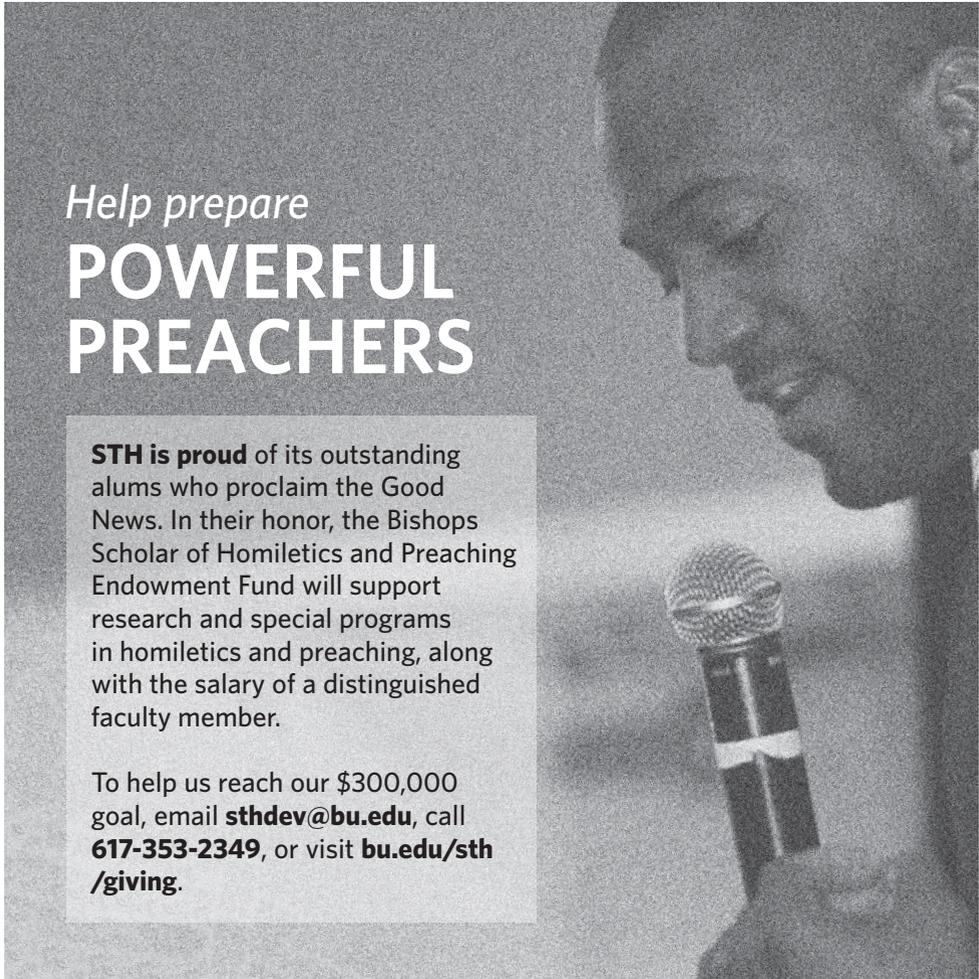
2. Terence E. Fretheim, “The Book of Genesis: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections,” in *The New Interpreter’s Bible: General Articles & Introduction, Commentary, & Reflections for Each Book of the Bible, Including the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books* (Nashville: Abington Press, 1994), 375.

3. Ibid.

quiet enough, I wonder if we can hear it.

After Cain leaves Eden, he settles in the land of Nod. The poetry gets lost in the English translation, as “Nod” literally means “Wandering.”<sup>2</sup> Cain attempts to settle in a land of wandering. He is a restless wanderer, because he now knows exactly what human beings are capable of. Because spilled blood cannot be covered up.<sup>3</sup> The human heart is a muscle, and muscles have to tear in order to grow stronger. Sometimes I wonder if the Church has been trying

to settle in a place of wandering. What would it look like for us to move in such a way that salvation becomes not about the singular, “I,” but the plural, “we,” and the distress of another is counted as our own? It’s this restlessness that allows us to be forever discontent with the way things are, to go into spaces and ask, “For whom is this gospel good news?” Because when that restlessness is gone, that’s when you know you have a problem. May we, too, wander restlessly, recognizing the distress of our brother wherever we go. □



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Photo of Timothy Jones (’09/’19) courtesy of STH

## WOMEN SHARING POWER

FEMALE PASTORS ARE CHALLENGING MALE IMAGES OF LEADERSHIP  
WITH A FOCUS ON COLLABORATION

Collaborative, open to others, willing to listen, visionary, prophetic, strong, knowledgeable, inspiring. These are some of the qualities STH students told us they associated with leaders during the Telling Stories of Your Leadership Experiences program in December 2017. The program was sponsored by the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry's Division of Ordained Ministry and run by the Anna Howard Shaw Center, which builds female empowerment through research, education, advocacy, and other support. The students named these characteristics after reflecting on their own experiences and ideals of leadership.

Although the exercise highlighted some of the qualities people expect from those who are in charge, the answers would have been very different 100 years ago. Views on leadership shifted during the women's movement of the 20th century. Before this time, certain characteristics stereotypically associated with men—such as being charismatic, authoritative, loyal, and paternalistic—were depicted as essential to leaders, while “female” attributes, such as being collaborative and listening to others, were considered typical of followers. People often ignored the fact that the subjects of leadership studies were exclusively male kings, autocrats, government officials, CEOs, and clergy. Masculine traits became *the* mark of leaders, regardless of race, gender/sex, class, and nationality.

These ideas have been challenged since the women's movement. Many women, people who are LGBTQ,

and young generations are rejecting the notion of a leader as someone dictating from the top. Rather, they're developing a new leadership model based on collaboration, trust, listening, and openness to others. They struggle against the hierarchal model, and demand a horizontal relationship based on justice and equality. They insist on sharing power *together*. This movement brings about a paradigm shift from exercising authority to earning respect. As women become leaders, they gain respect by working not as bosses, but as coworkers and coleaders. Many leadership scholars agree that collaboration is preferred by younger generations and is the most common type of leadership women have practiced; they also recognize it as one of the most effective and advanced styles.

A similar change has happened to leadership in Christianity. Images of

(Continued)

### About the Author



**Choi Hee An** is a clinical associate professor of practical theology and director of the Anna Howard Shaw Center. Her teaching and research focus on practical theology, postcolonial studies, gender and cultural studies, and leadership studies. Her most recent book is *A Postcolonial Self: Korean Immigrant Theology and Church* (SUNY, 2015).



Choi Hee An (center) runs a weekly lecture series at the Anna Howard Shaw Center, in which students, alums, and faculty explore contemporary women's issues.

Courtesy of the Anna Howard Shaw Center

male authority were powerfully produced and inherited throughout the history of the Church, and exclusive male clergy leadership has been the only legitimate form for many centuries. Even since the approval of women's ordination, male-exclusive images have been consistently generated and exercised in every aspect of Church life. There have always been common sexist barriers against which female clergy of all ages have had to struggle. They remain today. Research including the United Methodist Church Salary Study; studies by the Shaw Center on women

**All ethnic minority female clergy experience oppression in areas including salary, church size, institutional support, and job opportunities.**

and leadership, immigrant women and the Church, and the retention of United Methodist clergywomen;<sup>1</sup> and findings from a female clergy support group run by the Shaw Center from 2011 to 2015 have shown that women's leadership continues to be seriously challenged—and in some cases, dangerously threatened. In particular, the salary study—which uncovered how salaries differ by gender and race—and the support group reveal that all ethnic minority female clergy experience oppression in areas including salary, church size, institutional support, and

ously challenged—and in some cases, dangerously threatened. In particular, the salary study—which uncovered how salaries differ by gender and race—and the support group reveal that all ethnic minority female clergy experience oppression in areas including salary, church size, institutional support, and

1. See United Methodist Clergywomen Retention Studies I (bu.edu/shaw/publications/the-clergy-womens-retention-study) and II (bu.edu/shaw/publications/united-methodist-clergywomen-retention-study-ii-2).

job opportunities. They confess that they are spiritually, psychologically, and physically tired of these endless fights, and lament their losses.

Despite facing such barriers, these women do still share amazing leadership stories. As male images of leadership are challenged, and as many women demonstrate shared leadership in secular society, female pastors are developing a new collaborative leadership in ministry with laypeople. They create small groups to nurture lay influence, and work with community leaders to establish cooperative projects beyond their own church boundaries. Many female pastors emphasize that listening to others is the most important leadership quality they have learned and that they want to work with others more harmoniously.

This “shared leadership” model is exercised and claimed simultaneously by many female pastors, LGBTQ pastors, lay leaders, Christian theologians, educators, and religious leaders. It is not naturally created by the powerful and privileged, but intentionally developed by many *dis*-privileged people out of their need for survival. Whether this model is understood as innate to women or as a strategy against an oppressive, patriarchal society, it was an important part of women's ministry even before women claimed it. In fact, many female pastors who participated in

the Shaw Center female clergy support program—which provided a space for women from various cultural, racial, ethnic, and spiritual backgrounds to share their experiences and struggles in ministry—confirmed that this is essential to their approach. They are aware that they are breaking the norm and creating a new model of leadership—not only in their own churches, but also in local and larger communities. One program participant said, “Even though I am exhausted, and tired of lack of

support from the institutional system, I know and they know that I change the world.”

Supporting women's leadership has been the heart of the Anna Howard Shaw Center's mission and commitment for the last 40 years. Listening to women's struggles and sharing their tears have always been essential in the center's research. Our research reveals that, while women leaders deal with personal sacrifices and unescapable damage, they overcome them with their faith in God. In this journey, they demonstrate revolutionary creativity and dynamic energy to carry on their leadership. Moreover, the research shows that women are not giving up. Despite all their struggles and tiredness, women rise and flourish together. They prove that not everyone is a leader, but everyone can be a leader together. □

**This “shared leadership” model is not naturally created by the powerful and privileged, but intentionally developed by many *dis*-privileged people out of their need for survival.**

# LEADING THE MESSY, HOLY WORK OF RECONCILIATION



Haley Jones ('15)

## IS THERE REALLY SUCH A THING AS A SAFE SPACE?

BY HALEY JONES ('15)

On June 23, 2016, the United Kingdom voted to leave the European Union. Tension was high afterwards, as those who voted to stay accused “leavers” of being shortsighted at best, racist at worst; “remainers,” or stay-voters, were in turn labeled bad losers. I was working as an intern program associate in the Reconciliation Ministry at Coventry Cathedral in Coventry, England, a city that voted for Brexit. After the vote, the cathedral held a “Circle,” which gathers people for conversation about potentially divisive topics. I facilitated the post-Brexit discussion and set out to build a space where leavers and remainers could try to find humanity in each other, even if they could not find understanding.

In reconciling work, we often say we are creating a safe space. We certainly need to create room where marginalized voices can be heard. But in my studies of reconciliation theology and practice at STH and at Coventry Cathedral, I discovered that saying, “This is a safe space” negates the tough and messy nature of reconciliation work. Part of healing is being able to tell our story, and if we are always measuring what we say, the hard stuff never comes up. We have to be able to call each other out and challenge injustice.

People on both sides of the Brexit vote felt demonized and ignored.

“It’s difficult to say that this space is safe,” I told the group, “because you may not feel safe with people who disagree with you. But my hope is that this is a safe *enough* space where we can engage in the hard things.” After participants declared their views on the vote, they asked each other tough questions to understand their choices. Toward the end, one man said that while he still disagreed with the leavers, hearing their personal stories helped humanize them.

The work of reconciliation is hard, it is wild, but it’s most certainly holy. The way we engage with one another in these conversations prepares us to interact every day with people who are different from us. Bringing people together across difference requires us to act boldly when we are afraid, be truth-tellers when we have been silenced, seek justice when all we have witnessed is injustice. It calls us to search for the possibility of forgiveness and to create communities of peace. My prayer is that our encounters may be “safe enough” to hold all of these things, and be carried by a fierce love that speaks truth to power and creates holy relationships. □

*Haley Jones is the pastor of community engagement at First United Methodist Church in Little Rock, Ark., where she connects members of the congregation with opportunities to take part in transformative justice.*

Lesley Andrews



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## MISSION ACCOMPLISHED

**K**athe Darr fell in love with the Hebrew Bible at age seven, when she read tales like Noah and the flood and the Israelites’ flight from Egypt in a storybook. In September 2017, in a service at Marsh Chapel, she became STH’s first Harrell F. Beck Chair of Hebrew Scripture.

The occasion was three decades in the making—not just for Darr, who has taught Hebrew Bible at STH since the 1980s, but for the School of Theology. STH created the Harrell F. Beck ('45, GRS'54) Professorship of Hebrew Scripture in 1987, after the death of the longtime, beloved professor. After 30 years of fundraising, the professorship was permanently established as a chair thanks to more than \$1 million in gifts and pledges from nearly 700 alums and friends.

“Harrell excelled at evoking scripture’s meaning and its boundless relevance for faithful, prophetic living,” Darr said at the service.

It’s a legacy that Darr, a 1989 recipient of BU’s Metcalf Award for Excellence in Teaching, continues in her classroom. One way she challenges students to discover what scripture says to today’s world is by teaching contrasting biblical passages together, she said in an interview with *The Prophet*, STH’s student journal. “We need to put texts in dialogue to realize the Bible doesn’t speak with one voice about much of anything, and to do the hard work of figuring out which voices demand our greatest attention.”

—Julie Butters

➔ Watch the Beck Chair installation at [bu.edu/buniverse](http://bu.edu/buniverse) (search “Kathe Darr”).



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“*At STH, I was surrounded by professors and supervisors who were passionate about preparing me for the journey that followed, and colleagues who were exploring how God was involved in their lives and in the world. The impact of my theological education on my personal and professional development has been long-standing, for which I am very grateful.*”

**Frank J. Richardson, Jr. ('77,'82)**

Richardson has included a gift to STH in his estate plans.

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