

Inside:

A study addresses PTSD among clergy and chaplains

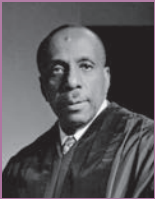
The Womanpriest movement's first transgender, nonbinary leader

Razing a church to fulfill its mission

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OF LEADERS TAKES ON  
TODAY'S SOCIAL CRISES  
WITH COMPASSION  
AND HUMILITY

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Above: Howard Thurman (Hon. '67) and LaTrelle Easterling ('04)

focus

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KIMBERLY MACDONALD (CFA'04, COM'23)

Editor  
MARC CHALUFOUR

Contributing Writers  
RICH BARLOW  
STEVE HOLT  
PAM REYNOLDS  
MARA SASSOON  
ANDREW THURSTON

Designer  
BRUNO PEROSINO

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Vernon Doucette





Dean G. Sujin Pak

## DEAN'S MESSAGE

### THE RADICAL REIMAGINATION OF CHURCH

BY G. SUJIN PAK

These are transformational times. As with any season of intense challenges and forced change, there are opportunities, hidden gems, and silver linings. The COVID-19 pandemic has forced changes in the lives and practices of churches and religious communities, each of whom are examining what those changes mean in the long term—what has been lost, what has been gained, what to maintain, what to modify, add, and, yes, even discard.

There are so many serious challenges exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which shed a piercing spotlight on our nation's social ills: racism, inequities in healthcare systems, intensified political divisions, compounded feelings of fear and anxiety, social isolation, increased mental health challenges, frailties in educational systems, and more. If ever there was a time when we need deeper experiences of community and stronger networks of collaboration and partnership, it is now.

Amid such intense change and challenges, there are extraordinary opportunities for religious communities and churches to step into this breach—to embody and offer deepened experiences of community and foster stronger collaborative networks and partnerships. But this begins, I believe, with a far-reaching, fearless embrace of one particular opportunity—the opportunity for *radical reimagination*.

This is the call to reimagine “church,” to reimagine the contours and callings of religious communities. It is the opportunity

to intensely reassess assumptions, practices, vocation, and mission. It is the need to reconceive how, when, and where one gathers. It is the invitation to reenvision the purposes and functions of religious buildings. It is the clarion call to more profoundly integrate practices of nourishing internal community with courageous practices of social justice—that is, to go out and truly be a neighbor beyond the four walls of the church. It is the opportunity to reenvision religious leadership with broadened affirmations of a diversity of embodiments—welcoming and nurturing lay leaders, intergenerational leaders, BIPOC leaders, LGBTQIA+ leaders, interreligious leaders, leaders who integrate religious and public life, young leaders and leaders not limited by assumptions of age, and many more.

This *focus* issue offers stories and testimonies of reimagining church and religious communities that illuminate possibilities and pathways forward. These are stories of reevaluating priorities, redefining “community,” rethinking traditions and uses of space, reconceiving worship practices, and boldly being willing to let go of long-held customs and invite new possibilities and new persons into the community. From these stories and voices, we hear calls for acts of solidarity, resistance, flux, fluidity, and wisdom. We hear a call to deeper partnerships, reimagined space, intersectional advocacy, cultivation of bold and needed embodiments of leadership, such as trans leadership, and, on pages 12–13, a future of a church “that does not rest in the production of a Sunday service” but “lives in the small moments of Jubilee—resistance and the healing salve of authentic relationships.” □

## SPIRITUALITY MEETS PSYCHOLOGY

### PEALE FOUNDATION GRANT FUNDS NEW RESEARCH PROJECT IN SUPPORT OF RELIGIOUS LEADERS' MENTAL HEALTH

BY MARA SASSOON

Many people who experience trauma or mental health challenges turn first to leaders in their religious community for help. But assuming the role of spiritual and psychological care provider can take a toll on clergy and chaplains, causing high rates of stress and burnout. The pressure on religious leaders has only worsened during the pandemic. In a recent poll of US pastors, the faith-based research company Barna Group found that 38 percent had considered quitting full-time ministry in 2021.

Steven Sandage, the Albert and Jessie Danielsen Professor of Psychology of Religion and Theology, has observed this in his own research. “We did a couple of studies with clergy where we found their rates of post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms were at an alarmingly high level—in fact, at a level that would be higher than postdeployment military personnel.”

Sandage, research director at the Danielsen Institute, which conducts research and provides clinical care at the intersection of spirituality and psychology, wants to help change that. He and his research team have received a \$2.19 million



Steven Sandage

**“We discovered during the pandemic that there are some pretty accessible, convenient ways to offer support to leaders in these settings, and give them a place . . . to try to deal with some of the profound existential and psychological challenges of their work.”**

**—Steven Sandage**

grant from the Peale Foundation, which will allow them to explore ways to address the mental health needs of spiritual leaders and therapists in a five-year project. It's the largest gift ever awarded by the foundation, which was founded by Norman Vincent Peale ('24, GRS'24, Hon.'86), a minister who was interested in the intersection of religion and psychology.

Sandage spoke with *focus* about the project.

#### **focus: What's the first step in this project?**

**Sandage:** In phase one—this year—we're conducting a national survey of caregivers to try to continue to better understand their particular stressors, and the factors and practices that help mitigate stress and contribute to well-being.

We're also conducting research with students at STH. We want

to think preventatively for people like them who might be moving into these vocations. And we're going to do a continuing education event that will bring in spiritual leaders to talk about these issues of stress and burnout and create some community dialogue.

#### **How has your previous work at the Danielsen Institute informed this project?**

We discovered during the pandemic that there are some pretty accessible, convenient ways to offer support to leaders in these settings, and give them a place to connect, to process the impact of their work, and to try to deal with some of the profound existential and psychological challenges of their work. At the Danielsen Institute, we started offering Zoom-based relational spirituality support groups, and (Continued)

we're going to expand on that program in phase two, which will be years two through five. Those will be led by clinical staff at the Danielsen Institute. They'll still be Zoom-based, and we'll have a research component where we try to evaluate the effectiveness of those groups, and learn what would make them more helpful.

### What else will the second phase involve?

It will involve introducing online resources about self-care and well-being to spiritual leaders. We'll do a series of education events so that we can keep the dialogue going. Clergy members, chaplains, and therapists will be able to come to those events and help us continue to figure out how to better make use of these resources.

We also want to draw in other collaborators who are interested in these issues of formation, well-being, and overcoming suffering so that we create a network committed to making a difference in helping folks on the front line. This includes researchers in the field of positive psychology, folks in the clinical mental health and psychotherapy communities, and people involved in various capacities in spiritual and religious communities across many traditions. Our vision is to bring folks together who have a stake in each of those areas and to make use of that interdisciplinary network to move our work forward. □

## FIRST LATINX DEAN

### CRISTIAN DE LA ROSA'S APPOINTMENT AS ASSOCIATE DEAN FOR STUDENTS AND COMMUNITY LIFE IS "AN AFFIRMATION OF THE LATINO COMMUNITY"

BY ANDREW THURSTON

When Cristian De La Rosa was named associate dean for students and community life in summer 2021, she became the School of Theology's first Latinx dean. It's a milestone she says is significant for the institution—if a little less so for her.

"I've been the first in many places because of the limited access for our community to higher education," says De La Rosa, a clinical assistant professor of contextual theology and practice, who adds that she was the first Latina member of the United Methodist clergy to obtain a PhD. "But it is definitely an affirmation of the Latino community and ministries, and I hope to help the school find more meaningful and relevant ways of being engaged with the Latino community."

A longtime codirector of the Hispanic Youth Leadership Academy, an organization that partners with local congregations to identify, train, and support future Latinx church leaders, De La Rosa is looking forward to strengthening leadership formation opportunities for all students.



Cristian De La Rosa (center)

"Part of my goal is to identify new ways to engage with local congregations, to facilitate the engagement of our seminarians, of our faculty, to do more intentional programs that facilitate transformation," she says. One example: students interning with local groups and living in church housing to forge tighter community bonds and bridge differences. De La Rosa says such programs are "a space for practice as students finish their degrees."

Directing the school's community life also means supporting its spiritual life—including regular Wednesday worship services and programming for students from different denominations—and listening to student concerns, about classes, the pandemic, funding, or anything else.

Weaving through it all, she says, is a commitment to serving people, communities, and congregations beyond BU—and helping others do the same.

"For us, it's very important to look at justice and equity issues and prepare our students to be agents of change, agents of transformation, to equip them with the skills to lead congregations and community organizations." □

Dave Green (x5)

## WISHING FOUR 2022 RETIREES WELL

Four members of the STH community announced their retirements in 2022, each of them a longtime contributor to the academic and spiritual vitality on campus:



**Eileen Daily** has served as a lecturer and director of the Doctor of Ministry in Transformational Leadership program since 2014. She also directed the Online Lifelong Learning program and is the author and architect of art/y/fact.Xn, a mobile app that allows users to engage and meditate with works of art in museums, churches, public spaces, or online.



**Susan W. Hassinger** became bishop-in-residence at STH in 2005, working with students in contextual education and teaching courses on spirituality and leadership, conflict transformation, leadership in times of change, and dismantling racism. Following her ordination in the United Methodist Church in 1968, Hassinger served as pastor, district superintendent, and Boston-area bishop, New England Conference.



**Judith Oleson** retires as director of the Tom Porter Program on Religion & Conflict Transformation. She also wrote and taught on peace and

conflict, feminism, and interfaith conversations. Oleson spent 30 years as a social worker and program administrator in Minnesota before earning a Master in Public Administration from Harvard and a DMin from Episcopal Divinity School. She came to BU in 2016 from Gordon College, where she taught sociology and social work and founded and coordinated its Peace and Conflict Studies interdisciplinary minor.



**Wanda J. Stahl** retires as clinical assistant professor of contextual theology and practice and director of contextual education and congregational partnerships. Stahl joined BU's faculty in 2011, before which she served as director of Christian formation for the UMC's New England Annual Conference for 12 years. Stahl's academic research and denominational leadership have centered in Christian formation and congregational life, and most recently she studied the environmental values of churches that meet outdoors. —Steve Holt □

## NEW PROGRAMS

With the approval of a certificate program and the school's first fully online master's degree, STH has expanded and diversified its academic offerings in 2022.

## CERTIFICATE IN ANGLICAN & EPISCOPAL STUDIES

"The new certificate in Anglican & Episcopal Studies signals STH's commitment to building a robust program of study and formation in the history, theology, polity, spirituality, and liturgy of Anglican and Episcopal faith traditions," says Bryan Stone, associate dean for academic affairs. The certificate, which can be earned in conjunction with a degree program or as a stand-alone certificate, requires four courses from the approved list—which includes History of the Episcopal Church, Book of Common Prayer, Dismantling White Privilege, and Worship in the Anglican and Wesleyan Traditions—plus an additional two semesters of Anglican Formation.

## ONLINE MASTER OF ARTS IN RELIGION AND PUBLIC LEADERSHIP

STH will begin its first fully online master's degree program, the Master of Arts in Religion and Public Leadership (MARPL), in the fall 2022 semester. The program is designed for students who seek to enhance their capacity for serving religious communities and/or other forms of leadership that engage the challenges of public life. The program is "ideal for persons in any profession who wish to gain a more robust appreciation for the ways in which religious traditions, including their own, shape and creatively engage public life," Stone says. —Marc Chalufour □



## ANNUAL AWARDS

### FIVE ALUMNI RECEIVE STH AND BU HONORS

The School of Theology presented four Distinguished Alumni Awards in 2021, while Lawrence Carter, Jr. ('68,'70,'79) was recognized with BU's highest alumni honor.

"The 2021 Distinguished Alumni magnificently embody the visionary, transformative leadership needed in this world today," said G. Sujin Pak, dean of STH, during the school's hybrid Community Day in September. "These amazing and gifted leaders bring concrete visibility to the aspirations of theological education, the witness of the Christian gospel, and the hope of renewal and rejuvenation in our churches, communities, social systems, and academies. We are profoundly grateful for these trailblazers and proud to call them our own!"



**Mark Bowman ('82)**, a gay man who was denied clergy status in the United Methodist Church, is a longtime advocate for LGBTQIA+ justice. He was active with Affirmation: United Methodists for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Concerns and was a founder of the Reconciling Congregation Program (now Reconciling Ministries Network) in 1984, serving as cocordinator and executive

director, until 1999. An ongoing interest in history led him to initiate the LGBTQ Religious Archives Network (LGBTQ-RAN) in 2001. The network uses digital technology to preserve the history of LGBTQ religious movements around the world. Bowman is executive director of the organization.



**Heidi Kugler ('97)** is an ordained elder from the Greater New Jersey Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church and a certified correctional chaplain with the American Correctional Chaplains Association. Kugler has served the needs of congregations, at-risk youth, poor and homeless persons, incarcerated populations, those in the hospital, and the elderly. She is the national chaplaincy administrator for the Federal Bureau of Prisons in Washington, D.C., providing executive oversight to chaplaincy departments in all 122 federal prisons nationwide. Along with her chaplaincy team, she seeks to guide religious accommodations across faith lines, policy development, national training, branch hiring, and faith-based reentry for the agency.



**Gilbert Rendle, Jr. ('72)** most recently was senior vice president with the Texas Methodist Foundation and as a consultant focused on issues of

change and leadership in Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish denominational systems. He has consulted with congregations on conflict, planning, staff and leadership development, and issues of change. He is the author of 10 books and numerous articles and monographs. An ordained United Methodist minister, Rendle has also served as senior pastor of two urban congregations in Pennsylvania and as a denominational consultant for the United Methodist Church.



**Gina Ann Zurlo ('17)**, the 2021 recipient of STH's Emerging Leader Award, is codirector of the Center for the Study of Global Christianity at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in South Hamilton, Mass. Zurlo studies the intersection of world Christianity, women's studies, global history, and mixed-methods research, and published, with Todd M. Johnson, the *World Christian Encyclopedia*, 3rd edition (Edinburgh University Press, 2019). She is also coeditor of the World Christian Database and a contributor to the World Religion Database, online resources containing data about thousands of world religions and denominations. The BBC named Zurlo one of its "100 Women of 2019" for her work on quantifying religion, in particular, the important role of women in religion around the world. She is a visiting research fellow at Boston University's Institute on Culture, Religion & World Affairs.

At the University's 73rd Best of BU Alumni Awards, held during Alumni Weekend in October, **Lawrence Edward Carter, Jr. ('68,'70,'79)** was one of four honorees to receive a BU Distinguished Alumni Award. In his speech, Carter recalled both highs and lows from his time at BU. He spoke of praying, in tears, in Marsh Chapel the night he learned of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s assassination. He credited the same educational environment that nurtured King (GRS'55, Hon.'59) with turning him into a "moral cosmopolitan," with a concern for global human rights. "No philosophy counters American racism, and potentially environmental injustice, more powerfully than the one Martin Luther King studied at Boston University," Carter said. —M.C. □



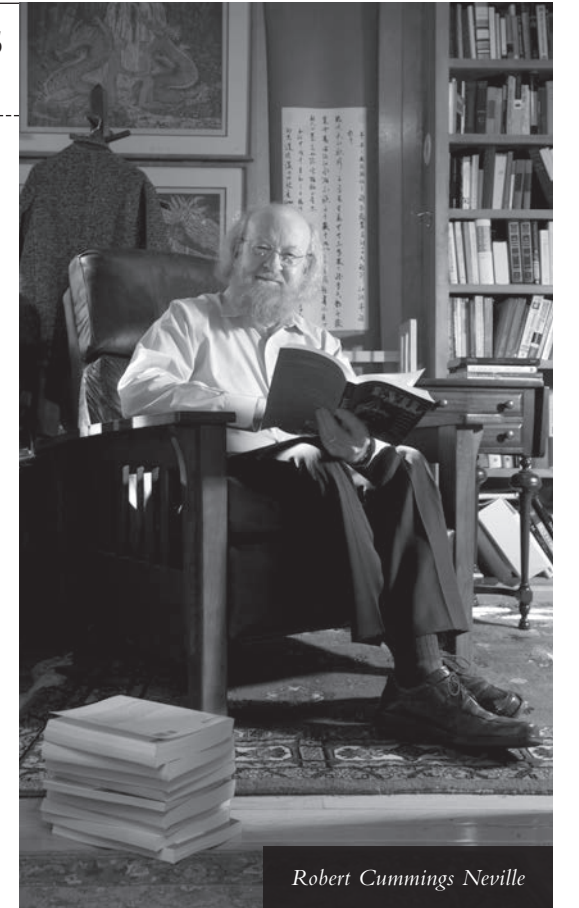
Facing page: Photos courtesy of the subjects.  
This page: Doug Levy (Carter); Frank Curran (Neville)

### ROBERT CUMMINGS NEVILLE HONORED

Nelson Mandela. Rosa Parks. Desmond Tutu.

The list of recipients of Morehouse College's Gandhi-King-Ikeda Community Builders Prize is illustrious—and now it includes Robert Cummings Neville. The former dean of STH and University chaplain accepted the award in an online event in April 2021.

The Community Builders Prize—named for Mohandas Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr. (GRS'55, Hon.'59), and Daisaku Ikeda—honors individuals who have demonstrated global leadership through nonviolent means. In his introduction of Neville, Lawrence Edward Carter, Jr. ('68,'70,'79), dean of Morehouse's chapel, praised his scholarship and inclusive embrace of all religions. "You have served as one of the most powerful paradigm-shifting philosophical theologians of the 20th and 21st centuries, with your decades of groundbreaking scholarship that have cast illuminating light on the interstitial relations of human mind, life, and spirit," Carter said. A philosopher and theologian, Neville is best known for his



Robert Cummings Neville

metaphysical theory of being, which he explored in his dissertation at Yale University and later in *God the Creator*, the first of many books. He served as dean of STH from 1988 to 2003 and was dean of Marsh Chapel and chaplain for Boston University from 2003 to 2006. He retired from teaching in 2018 and is now a professor emeritus of philosophy, religion, and theology.

A portrait of Neville, painted by his wife, Elizabeth, will hang in Morehouse's Martin Luther King Jr. International Chapel, alongside portraits of the other winners. —M.C. □

IN MEMORIAM

J. PAUL SAMPLEY (1935-2021)

John Paul Sampley was born in Georgia on March 5, 1935, and began his academic career 30 years later on the faculty at Drew University and later at Indiana University. He arrived at BU in 1980, where he taught for more than two decades before becoming a professor emeritus of New Testament and Christian origins. He died September 25, 2021.

Sampley was perhaps best known for his studies of his namesake, the Apostle Paul. Among the books he edited or coedited are *Paul in the Greco-Roman World: A Handbook* (Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2003), *Paul and Rhetoric* (T&T Clark, 2010), and *Walking in Love: Moral Progress and Spiritual Growth with the Apostle Paul* (Fortress Press, 2016).

In an obituary that he wrote before his death, Sampley expressed his wonder for the world he spent 86 years exploring: “I was always intrigued by and curious about honeybees, birds, indeed about all of nature and its creatures, and how things work. Like my namesake, the Apostle Paul, I have been amazed not only at the grandeur and generosity of spirit we humans sometimes manifest but also about our persistent proclivities to shoot ourselves in the foot. The most awesome gift I ever received was Sally, my love and my partner across all these years in which

we danced and tiptoed our way through this awesome, marvelous and broken world.” —M.C. □

OMAR BROWN (1990-2022)

During three years as a BU student and nearly three years as a humanities teacher at St. Paul’s School in Concord, N.H., Omar Brown made a lasting impression for his curiosity, empathy, and faith. Brown (’16), 31, died of a sudden illness on January 4, 2022.

“He was inquisitive, inspiring, and a great leader with young people,” says Cristian De La Rosa, associate dean for students and community life, and a clinical assistant professor of contextual theology and practice, who recalls Brown’s contributions as a leader for the Raíces Latinas Student Association. She also remembers the first of his many visits to her office, which followed a class about recovering knowledge from our ancestors. “He said, ‘Professor,



Omar Brown

Michael Seamans/St. Paul's School

OBITUARIES

STH publishes alumni obituaries online at [bu.edu/sth/category/alumni-deaths](http://bu.edu/sth/category/alumni-deaths)

I want to talk more about Epistemological retrieval. Can we?”

“I remember Omar as a serious student who was also seriously lighthearted and caring,” says Samuel Lovett (’17), Brown’s classmate at STH and colleague on the humanities faculty at St. Paul’s School (SPS). “He would ask me how I was doing, and I would answer with something about a course reading or assignment. He would ask the same question again: ‘How are you doing?’ It was a gentle invitation to go deeper.”

Brown earned a Master of Theological Studies at STH. SPS has published a collection of reflections ([sps.edu/reflections-on-Omar-Brown](http://sps.edu/reflections-on-Omar-Brown)), with students, staff, and faculty recalling Brown’s friendship, leadership, and powerful presence in the community. —M.C. □

ENDOWING TOMORROW’S ETHICAL LEADERS TODAY

While discourse on student debt in the United States continues, Boston University alumni have led the transition from rhetoric to action by establishing named scholarships (\$10,000) and endowed scholarships (\$100,000) to support various communities at STH. This year, we proudly celebrate our recently endowed scholarship funds, which will benefit students for generations. As shown in the data to the right, every STH student receives some financial support, but we’re striving for a time when all our students can receive *complete* financial aid.

ALUMNI PRIDE PAVES THE WAY



SACRED WORTH SCHOLARSHIP FUND

“I endowed the Sacred Worth Scholarship Fund because STH gave me a scholarship in the 1970s. I was aware that Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., (GRS’55, Hon.’59) had graduated from BU and I was proud to be enrolled. I was in the closet as a lesbian pastor, serving two UMC pastorates in Upstate New York, living 70 miles apart from my partner. Knowing God created me as I should be, I left the church and studied law on the

| MINIMIZING DEBT, MAXIMIZING IMPACT                          |     |  |      |
|---|-----|--|------|
| ENDOWED SCHOLARSHIPS  | 112 | MASTER’S-LEVEL STUDENTS RECEIVING SCHOLARSHIPS                           | 100% |
|   |     | (242 students, 79 partially made from endowed or gift funds)             |      |
| MASTER’S-LEVEL STUDENTS RECEIVING FULL TUITION SCHOLARSHIPS | 70% | MASTER’S-LEVEL STUDENTS RECEIVING STIPEND SUPPORT                        | 46%  |
|   |     | (169 students)   |      |
|   |     | (111 students, 80 partially or entirely made from endowed or gift funds) |      |
| CLAFLIN SOCIETY MEMBERS                                     | 162 | PHD STUDENTS RECEIVING STIPEND SUPPORT                                   | 100% |
|   |     |  |      |
|   |     | (41 students, 33 partially or entirely made from endowed or gift funds)  |      |

West Coast. With God’s help, I was blessed with a Superior Court judgeship after several years of being a deputy district attorney. God used my talents in profound ways I could never have imagined after I left my first vocation broken and hurting. Although the United Methodist Book of Discipline barred me from ministry as a lesbian pastor, I want other LGBTQI spiritual people to study for the ministry with the hope they can be encouraged to use their talents as ministers to a very spiritually bereft world.” —Martha Bellinger (’75), a retired California Superior Court judge, was ordained in the United Methodist Church in 1974. She is the author of *From Robe to*

*Robe: A Lesbian’s Spiritual Journey* (Trafford, 2010).



REV. JOHN R. LILLY ENDOWED SCHOLARSHIP FUND

“I have been fortunate to do well in life and had been looking for a way to honor my brother, John, a graduate of STH, who has spent his life in the service of others. After talking to [former] Dean Mary Elizabeth Moore, [assistant dean for development] Ray Joyce, and others at Boston University, my wife, Denise, and I could think of no better way to honor John’s lifetime of service than to endow



**“Boston University School of Theology was life-changing for me, and George and Denise have provided a high honor and meaningful support for students called to ministry.”**  
**—John Lilly (’58, GRS’63)**

a scholarship in his name to help young students of practical theology who plan to follow in his footsteps.” —George Lilly (CGS’54, COM’56), is a veteran broadcaster, who has owned television stations since 1983 through SJL Broadcasting and Montecito Broadcast Group. His brother, John Lilly (’58, GRS’63), is a retired pastor who served United Church of Christ congregations in New England since his ordination 60 years ago. George is also a Claflin Society member.



**DR. DORIS L. HUNTER SCHOLARSHIP FUND**

“Both of us owe our professional lives to the excellent education we received from the School of Theology and Graduate School of Arts & Sciences at Boston University. We are pleased to return in some financial way our gratitude for this gift, knowing this will support future students on their way to their professional goals. We welcome this opportunity to give to our alma mater.” —Doris L. Hunter (’55, GRS’58) is a retired

professor of philosophy and Unitarian Universalist minister and Howard E. Hunter (’54, GRS’57) is a professor emeritus of religion at Tufts University. In June 2019, to celebrate his wife’s 90th birthday and 65th anniversary of receiving her Bachelor of Sacred Theology, Howard surprised her by announcing they had endowed the Dr. Doris L. Hunter Scholarship Fund. “All the jewels in the world would not compare to this,” Doris Hunter said. The Hunters are also members of the Claflin Society.



**TASHA M. VINCENT FUND FOR LITURGICAL ARTS**

“I have long believed that the paradigm for traditional church gatherings will continue to change due to systemic changes. COVID-19 has only made the paradigm shift more real, leaving many people of faith to become the ‘unchurched faithful.’ My late wife, Tasha, had always been a member of the unchurched faithful, not because of external situations, but because of her deeply felt convictions about what religion should be and often failed to achieve. She rarely attended

worship services, but eagerly attended gatherings of the faithful, like the Connections gatherings at the Spring Hill United Church of Christ in Spring Hill, Fla. These gatherings focused on music, art, and participation but not on what is considered traditional worship. The Tasha M. Vincent Fund for Liturgical Arts will allow STH to prepare future pastors and worship leaders for authentically serving the faithful in the world of today and tomorrow.” —Kurt Glacy (’07) has been an organist and choir director for more than 30 years. He endowed this fund in memory of his wife, Tasha M. Vincent. Glacy, a Claflin Society member, also made an estate gift to further endow this fund.

## STUDENT REFLECTIONS ON SCHOLARSHIP SUPPORT



**BISHOP JOHN H. ADAMS AND DR. DOLLY D. ADAMS SCHOLARSHIP FUND**

“The Bishop John H. Adams and Dr. Dolly D. Adams Scholarship Fund provided me with the opportunity of a lifetime to pursue my Master of Divinity at STH. For years, I avoided answering my call to the ministry because I did not want to take on additional school loans to attend seminary. When God has a plan for your life, God will equip you with the means. With this scholarship, God has equipped me with the financial means I needed to

attend seminary. I am truly humbled by the generosity of this scholarship, and grateful to Dr. Dolly Adams and the late Bishop Adams for opening the doors of STH to me.” —Aderonke Lipede (LAW’94, STH’23) is a Master of Divinity student on the global and community engagement track. She is a proud member of the Association of Black Seminarians (ABS) at STH.



**REV. DR. YONGSHIK KIM GRADUATE SCHOLARSHIP**

“I am led by God with the scripture, ‘Go to the land that I will show you (Genesis 12:1).’ As a female Asian foreigner in the US, I have experienced a variety of difficulties. But whenever I reflect on receiving the Rev. Dr. Yongshik Kim Graduate Scholarship, I gather strength because it reminds me that an ancestor of faith from Korean heritage came to the United States much earlier than I did and has done great things. I consider myself to be the fruit of the countless prayers, support, and love of faithful ancestors. So, my vocation is to be a channel of blessing. God has fed me with love and support through faithful communities, and now I want to flow out that love and support back to my neighbors. We live in a society that needs love and peace more than before. May God let me be thy love.” —Yewon Park (’24) is a Master of Divinity student from Korea on the global and community engagement track. She serves as the international student life coordinator and president of the Korean Students Association (KSA) at STH.

## Help us affirm, empower, and provide diversity, equity, and inclusion programming for our students

Established by the STH Class of 2021, the **Affirmation & Empowerment Fund** will support educational and mentorship opportunities that foster greater equity and inclusion for underrepresented groups at STH, including Black, Indigenous, Asian, Latinx, Pacific Islander, Queer, and Trans communities. The fund will provide financial support for curriculum development, workshop support, and event funding.

**Your gift will help the growing need of addressing these important initiatives at STH.**

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## Matching challenge

**will double your support of the Tom Porter Program on Religion & Conflict Transformation**



**Joan Murray (Questrom’82)** and Bob Murray have created a \$250,000 matching challenge to support the Tom Porter Program on Religion & Conflict Transformation (RCT). “We want future generations, all our grandchildren, to live in a world where civil discourse is the norm, and we want them to have the skills to resolve ongoing conflicts.” With a dollar-for-dollar match, the Murray family warmly invites alumni and friends to join them in contributing to the RCT. Please contact Ray Joyce at [rayjoyce@bu.edu](mailto:rayjoyce@bu.edu) to make a pledge.

**Boston University** School of Theology

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# REIMAGINING THE CHURCH

## ALUMNI AND FAITH LEADERS REFLECT ON THE LASTING, POSITIVE CHANGES THAT MAY RESULT FROM THE PANDEMIC

When *focus* asked alumni and leaders of STH faith communities how they have reimagined church in recent years and what they think it will look like in the future, they spoke of reevaluating priorities and redefining community. They talked of reaching new people in deep and meaningful ways, rethinking traditions and routines, and they imagined their churches emerging from the pandemic stronger because of what they have learned these past two years.

Here is what those alumni and faith leaders had to say, in their own words. —*Marc Chalufour*

**Jamie Mangiameli ('19), executive pastor at New Roots AME, Dorchester, Mass.**

**Mariama White-Hammond ('17), founding pastor at New Roots AME, Dorchester, Mass.**

New Roots AME Church's motto is "reimagining what church can be." Even with this explicit mission, the past two years have stretched our imagination beyond belief. We began as a hyperlocal neighborhood church. Now, thanks to Zoom, we have active members in Detroit, Philadelphia, St. Louis, Atlanta, and beyond. Being a national church was definitely not part of our vision, but the Holy Spirit sent folks to us from around the country who have become central parts of the community.

While we pivoted to Zoom because of the pandemic, we quickly discovered that its interactive nature allowed for deeper intimacy and congruence of experience. Through prayer and discernment, we realized that Sunday service is not our pinnacle or purpose. On Sundays, we might gather for worship, but we are being the church when we: build deep healing relationships across identity differences, live the principles of Jubilee through solidarity and gift economies, visit our local watershed, connect with



*Even as people return to in-person worship, the very idea of "church" has changed in fundamental ways during recent years.*

Creation, acknowledge one another's belovedness, rest, and dance together.

The future of the church does not rest in the production of a Sunday service. The future of the church lives in the small moments of Jubilee—resistance and the healing salve of authentic

relationships, neither of which are bound by geographic proximity.

**Wendy Miller Olapade ('95), lead pastor and connector in chief at Sanctuary United Church of Christ, Medford, Mass.**

My small, postmodern, local UCC congregation let go of everything it had as an institution—the building, the historic congregational identity, the organizational structure, and even our classic worship model—and rebooted as an emerging, mission outpost that followed Jesus into the streets to spread love, care, and the gospel. Yet, necessity is still the mother of invention. Convincing others to join us in new models of mission was often met with resistance, but the perpetual pivoting of the pandemic broke down barriers and motivated amazing, life-giving, inspired partnerships of service in my city.

Partnerships—this is my hope for the postpandemic church. We cannot go back. So let's put our egos in our pockets and build partnerships to tackle inequity and make love and justice real. Let's partner with God to lead with love across communities and the region. Let's connect across denominations, faith traditions, and civic, nonprofit, and for-profit organizations. Let's multiply resources, create complementary collaborations, engender

creativity, and support each other to be the blessing we want to see in the world. With God and partnerships, the sum is always bigger than the parts.

**Susan W. Hassinger, bishop-in-residence and lecturer at STH**

Over the past 10 years, I have evidenced "the church as it is becoming" in the formation of several groups of women, who meet to share their faith journeys and their current challenges, and to seek support for how they are currently living out their faith. All three began as in-person connections. In the past two years, they began to meet by Zoom. This has allowed the groups to continue our monthly connections while members have been spread out across the United States. A key component is time for sharing by each woman: What is going on in her life? How is she facing challenges and dealing with opportunities? In response, group members share supportive comments and thought-provoking questions, sometimes with references to scripture or hymns or other resources. Also, on a rotating basis, one woman brings something to share: a concern happening in her life, family, or world; an opportunity to engage in mission or outreach; a poem or book excerpt to share and briefly discuss. The groups conclude

with prayer, for each other, for our concerns, for the church/faith community, and the world. I believe this is illustrative of part of what the church will be, even beyond the pandemic.

**Wendy von Courter, Unitarian Universalist Community of Learning mentor at STH**

This pandemic has taken tolls yet to be realized. We have lost loved ones, relationships, health, and previously treasured moments. Some among us will continue to suffer from the long-term impacts of the disease. In Unitarian Universalism we are experiencing a surge in clergy retirements and burnout among volunteers and lay leaders.

Despite the losses and the weariness, the question of prophetic leadership never wanes. It is in the responses to that question that hope thrives. Hope thrives because a vocation defined by "presence" is adapting creatively and collaboratively to showing up, and in doing so reaching those previously unreachable. Hope thrives because this pandemic has solidified our interconnectedness and through that illuminated the path toward our collective liberation. Hope thrives because the pandemic has required we focus on who we are, together, and hold that more dear than where and how we meet. □



## REALIZING MLK'S VISION IN BOSTON



Carrington Moore ('14)

### CARRINGTON MOORE AND NONPROFIT KING BOSTON IMAGINE A MORE JUST AND EQUITABLE CITY

BY MARC CHALUFOUR

When Carrington Moore considers Martin Luther King, Jr.'s story, he sees in it a little of his own experience. "We think about Dr. King and his wife, Coretta Scott King (Hon.'69), as these phenomenal superheroes," says Moore ('14). "But it's also important to notice that they were born from the Black community, the Black institutions, the churches that they attended and that molded them."

Moore was active in the church from a young age—his father was a pastor—and he was drawn to BU's School of Theology in part by an image of King (GRS'55, Hon.'59) in a University brochure. He's now an associate pastor at Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Boston and, as of August 2021, he's carrying on a piece of the civil rights leader's legacy as director of community organizing for King Boston. The nonprofit behind the planned Boston Common memorial to the Kings is devoted to creating an inclusive and equitable city.

*The Embrace* memorial, a 22-foot-high sculpture of the intertwined arms and hands of King and his wife, will be unveiled in 2023 near where King spoke at a 1965 march. (BU contributed \$250,000 to the project.) King Boston is also creating the Center for Economic Justice in Roxbury, where the organization will focus on gathering data related to economic and social disparities.

Moore recently spoke with *focus* about his work and how King Boston hopes to create a more just and equitable city.

#### *focus*: What is King Boston?

**Moore:** King Boston is a phenomenal Black institution that is experimenting with a radical joy and prophetic love to bring about the liberation of BIPOC [Black, indigenous, and people of color] in the city of Boston. That's my answer. For a more formal answer, King Boston envisions a radically inclusive and equitable Boston where BIPOC people can thrive. Our aim is to dismantle structural racism, in partnership with diverse partners at the intersection of arts, culture, community organizing, and research.

#### How does your role fit into that mission?

My role is to influence the transformation of institutional practices away from racialized and color-blind norms, regulations, and standard operating procedures that have generated racially biased outcomes. One goal is to engage and cultivate intergenerational BIPOC leadership. That's so important—being able to cultivate youth voices, persons who are millennials and young professionals, but also making sure that we have the wisdom of our elders. The other part is to organize public, private, and corporate institutions toward liberative systems change. We're interested in



The Embrace, designed by Hank Willis Thomas with MASS Design Group, depicts the arms and hands of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Coretta Scott King.

uplifting those voices, those ideas, those hopes that can lead us to the new practices that center liberation and well-being. That's my job in a nutshell.

#### What are some specific projects you've worked on so far?

We're building the New Boston Coalition, which is a multisector, multiracial, interfaith,

intergenerational space where people can come together. It centers on BIPOC learning, BIPOC being, and BIPOC practices. We have over 500 members and over 75 institutions signed on. One initiative is centered on reparations. In the city of Boston, the average white family might have upwards of \$150,000 to \$200,000 in wealth, and in the Black community the

average household wealth is \$8. And so we know that there's a system of plundering, sanctioned by the federal government, the state government, and also the local government, that has exploited the labor and resources of Black communities for hundreds of years. Boston has a responsibility to think about how we repair the exploitation of labor and resources

Facing page: Courtesy of Carrington Moore; This page: Courtesy of King Boston



The Embrace is scheduled to be unveiled in the heart of Boston Common in fall 2022.

from the Black community. If we can organize in Boston, the epicenter of freedom and liberation in this country, that will help build a political will for a federal mandate toward reparations.

**Have conversations about racism, sparked by the tragic events of 2020, including the murder of George Floyd, changed the receptiveness to ideas like reparations?**

That's why I started out by saying that King Boston is experimenting with radical love and prophetic joy—but also trying to build power. And whether it be a political expediency or desire to build better organizations and institutions, people are responding in a real way. And King Boston is trying to share that love, share those resources, to help build up other organizations, as well. For so long, people thought some prophetic leader would come along and

bring liberation to the masses—and we know that great leaders are important [for] advocacy and awareness—but, really, strong institutions are at the center of liberation.

**What does “liberation” mean to you?**

Liberation is a space that is full of love and justice, that allows for the maximization of human flourishing. In some ways, that has existed for dominant society, meaning that if you're a white person living in America, if you work hard, you *possibly* can maximize your potential, because there is a social currency that comes with whiteness. But in the Black community, we're not always able to maximize our potential, because of the types of bigotry that we face. So, liberation is a tearing down of the caste system that we exist in, and allows for full human flourishing.

Courtesy of King Boston

**You've been busy building coalitions. What actions do you hope emerge from this organizing?**

We're hoping that particular policies around housing justice, economic repair, and education will be transformed. We're also thinking about changing the narrative of Boston, and that there will be greater spaces and greater opportunities and greater pathways created for Black people in the city. That could mean pathways from high school to college, and college to career, or just simple pathways of being able to spend time and enjoy yourself in the city. Boston has historically been segregated and there are certain parts of town where it feels like BIPOC people are unwelcome. We want to make sure that all of Boston belongs to the BIPOC community.

**How does *The Embrace* memorial fit into King Boston's broader plans?**

Stories of Black liberation and the contributions to American society have been marginalized. They've been hidden. They've been oppressed. Because of anti-Black racism, we don't know the fullness of the true American story. We have to engage in counterstorytelling about what BIPOC people, and particularly Black people, have contributed to society. At the heart of the changing of minds has to be a changing of the story.

**At a time when controversial monuments are being removed, is there added significance in putting up a new monument?**

I think the question you have to

ask is why it took so long for this one to be erected. There's such a bevy of monuments that celebrate the Confederacy in the South. The erection of this particular monument is saying that there is a battle for the sharing of truth in this country. In this moment of racial reckoning, we think about George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and so many beautiful Black melanated bodies that have been plundered by a dominant society and by the police. Witnessing the injustice of all that has happened is beginning to uncover stories of pain, but also of resiliency and brilliance of Black people. This monument is a testament to that as we're coming to a cataclysmic confrontation for truth-telling.

**King spoke in Boston in 1965 about school segregation and economic disparities. What has or hasn't changed since then?**

What has changed is public policy that brought a formal end to segregation. What hasn't changed is how we think about racism and the intersection with capitalism. People believe that we're competing against each other for resources, for social capital, for political power, and that uplifting the BIPOC community has to come at the expense of the dominant culture. We're saying that's not true and that, in this moment, diversity and solidarity, the liberation of BIPOC people, will lead to even greater human flourishing for all society. □



# ORDAINED AND EXCOMMUNICATED



Kori Pacyniak ('15)

**KORI PACYNIK, BELIEVED TO BE THE FIRST TRANSGENDER AND NONBINARY WOMANPRIEST, IS A LEADER IN THE BREAKAWAY CATHOLIC MOVEMENT**

BY RICH BARLOW

Growing up in a Polish neighborhood of Chicago, Kori Pacyniak was swaddled in Catholicism. Their family was devoutly Catholic. Friends in Girl Scouts and a Polish folk dancing group were Catholic. But Pacyniak's love for the Church often felt unrequited, as when, at just eight, they told their grandmother, "I want to be a priest."

"Only boys can be priests," their grandmother responded. "Fine," Pacyniak recalls saying, "when I grow up, I want to be a boy."

Now 40, Pacyniak ('15) was ordained in 2020 as the first known transgender, nonbinary cleric in the Roman Catholic Womenpriests—a revolution among revolutionaries. Womenpriests is a global breakaway movement from the Church, with 200 clergy, mostly in the US. Its priests are automatically excommunicated by the Vatican, which recognizes ordination for cisgender men only.

For Pacyniak, pastor of San Diego's Mary Magdalene Apostle Catholic

Community, a Womenpriests church, that accomplishment is bittersweet. "I've felt called to serve the Church as a priest for years. [Excommunication] limits my job prospects," they say. "However, the Roman Catholic Church also teaches that we should follow our

conscience, and after years of discernment, I knew that I couldn't deny my vocation. I still intend on working for gender equality and ordination justice within the Roman Catholic Church, but I think that much of my vocation is being called to serve those Catholics who feel there is no room for them within the Catholic Church.

"Jesus calls us to the margins, and my work on the margins of the institutional church doesn't require a blessing from Rome."

## CREATING AN INCLUSIVE CHURCH

The Vatican cites divine mandate for ordination restrictions: Jesus chose only men for his Twelve Apostles. Dissenting, former priest—and Vietnam-era BU chaplain—James Carroll noted in his

**"Much of my vocation is being called to serve those Catholics who feel there is no room for them within the Catholic Church. Jesus calls us to the margins, and my work on the margins of the institutional church doesn't require a blessing from Rome."  
—Kori Pacyniak**



Kori Pacyniak was ordained as the first known transgender, nonbinary cleric in the Roman Catholic Womenpriest movement.

memoir, *Practicing Catholic*, "No Celts were among Jesus' Apostles, but the Irish can be ordained." Even some members in good standing with the institutional church advocate for a wider welcome for the LGBTQIA+ community, if not for ordination.

A prominent voice is James Martin, who ministers to the

LGBTQIA+ community and is editor at large of the Jesuit magazine *America*. "Part of being Catholic, part of being Christian, is standing on the side of those who are rejected, excluded, or marginalized, as Jesus chose to do," Martin wrote. "As we Jesuits say, it also means 'walking with the excluded.' And LGBTQ people

are among the most excluded in our church." He pointed to a 2015 survey, by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, in which 29 percent of gay and bisexual high schoolers reported attempting suicide in the previous year, versus 9 percent of all high school students. A 2016 survey, Martin wrote, found that Catholic

Facing page: Richard Rinaldi; This page: Courtesy of Kori Pacyniak

**“Kori is driven by a hope that God’s embrace is wider than any human institution. I delight in seeing them robed—clergy robes and stoles—and recognized for the gifts that they bring and for their testimony to that wide embrace.” —Shelly Rambo**

teaching that same-sex acts are sinful drove more Catholics to leave the Church than the pedophile-priest scandal.

Even among Womenpriests, Pacyniak’s groundbreaking status can be a burden, as if one person could represent an entire group. As progressive as the movement may seem, some members struggle with accepting nonbinary and transgender individuals, Pacyniak says.

“The Roman Catholic Womanpriests movement is made up of a majority of cisgender women—and there have been a lot of conversations, some difficult, in my time with them,” Pacyniak says. For example, Mary Magdalene pastor emerita Jane Via confessed to the *San Diego Tribune*, “I’m struggling to refer to Kori as ‘they.’ When there is a single person and we know that is

just one person, well, I’ve never used the word ‘they’ for a single person.

I know Kori gets frustrated with me at times.” Pacyniak’s tongue-in-cheek response: “This is hard? Learning to spell my last name as a child was hard.”

#### A STRONG FAITH

Pacyniak’s time at the School of Theology followed Barack Obama’s repeal of the military’s “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy regarding enlistees’ sexual orientation. Pacyniak studied LGBTQIA+ military ministry with Shelly Rambo, an associate professor of theology, who created STH’s track for training chaplains, military and otherwise.

“When Kori first came to STH, they were one of few scholars concerned about addressing the spiritual needs of transgender military personnel,” says Rambo. “Kori is driven by a hope that God’s embrace is wider than any human institution. I delight in seeing them robed—clergy robes and stoles—and recognized for the gifts that they bring and for their testimony to that wide embrace.”

“My time at BU helped me examine the way trauma and moral injury function in our societies and in our religious organizations, and our theologies,” Pacyniak says. “STH gave me a passion for making sure my academic work is not separate from the world but integrated into it.”

*Rather than leave an unaccepting religion, Pacyniak hopes to change the Church from within.*



That work includes helping everyone—Womenpriests, the canonical Catholic Church, and other denominations—affirm transgender people. “Just because a church or denomination ordains transgender people,” Pacyniak says, “doesn’t mean its leaders and communities are always affirming or educated on trans issues.”

Which raises a question about the institutional church: Why remain Catholic in a church that doesn’t validate your ordination or your identity?

Pacyniak long ago threw off the temptation of many lapsed Catholics to join the Episcopal Church, with a similar liturgy but a more progressive take on gender and ordination.

“Being Catholic is so much more to me than just membership within the Roman Catholic Church,” they say. “It has to do with identity, ritual, and spirituality. I think the Church is a human institution that can and has changed over time, and I hope that it will move toward full inclusion of LGBTQIA2S+

persons in all the sacraments. I also don’t intend to allow the Vatican or the institutional church to take my faith identity away from me.

“I would hope that my experience makes it a little easier for those who come after me. I think there are so many amazing, talented transgender people who are called to serve churches where their gender precludes that, and it’s truly a shame when churches and church leaders refuse to acknowledge a person’s gifts and talents because of their gender identity.” □



# FROM THE GROUND UP



Sarah Harrison-McQueen ('07)

## SARAH HARRISON-MCQUEEN HELPED HER CONGREGATION REIMAGINE THEIR CHURCH—BY TEARING IT DOWN TO BUILD AFFORDABLE HOUSING

BY MARC CHALUFOUR

In April 2014, Sarah Harrison-McQueen was in the seventh year of what she expected to be a 10-year appointment as associate pastor at Warrenton United Methodist Church in Virginia. Then her phone rang.

“Would you be open to an appointment change?” the district superintendent on the other end of the line asked. A church in Arlington, Va., about 40 miles east, needed a pastor. “We’re not sending you to rearrange the chairs on the *Titanic*,” Harrison-McQueen ('07) recalls the superintendent saying. “We’re sending you to start over with a whole new ship.”

Several years earlier, the congregation at Central United Methodist, in Arlington’s Ballston neighborhood, had begun a ministry to provide food and services to people without homes. Now they wanted to launch a project that would replace the 98-year-old church building with actual homes.

Harrison-McQueen arrived just a few months after that phone call, ready

to guide a complex and ambitious planning process. It took seven years, but in December 2021 demolition began. Over the next three years, an eight-floor building will go up in its place. Worship space and a childcare center, both temporarily relocated during construction, will return—and they’ll be joined by 144 units of affordable housing.

**The congregation at Central United Methodist had begun a ministry to provide food and services to people without homes. Now they wanted to launch a project that would replace the 98-year-old church building with actual homes.**

### FROM COFFEE TO CONSTRUCTION

Ballston is a thriving transit hub. Metro and bus lines converge across the street from the church, and Washington, D.C., is a 10-minute ride away. Amazon’s new East Coast headquarters are under construction nearby. Rents have sky-

rocketed. Back in 2007, members of Central UMC went on a prayer walk through their neighborhood and were surprised to see so many people living on the streets.

“The members of the church would describe themselves, at that time, as being very inwardly focused,” Harrison-McQueen says. “The journey they began



An artist's rendering of the completed building, which will include 144 apartments, a worship space, and a childcare center.

that day resulted in them being much more outwardly focused. It opened their eyes to the needs of the community.”

Church members started small. They began serving coffee and donuts to people without homes on Friday mornings, then they added hot breakfasts and lunches. Partnerships with local nonprofits helped them expand the meal program and provide other services, like on-site social workers and nurse practitioners. Initially, they considered a church renovation that would add space for a homeless services center and amenities like showers. They also looked into selling the property, moving to a less

valuable piece of real estate, and using the profits for housing.

Fortunately for Harrison-McQueen, Central UMC’s congregation was well equipped for the journey ahead, and she didn’t need to become an instant expert on development. The building committee included two lawyers, a nonprofit CEO, a CPA, a retired engineer, and an economist. “They didn’t expect the pastor to have an MBA,” she says.

With the committee’s help, she led the congregation through a lengthy discernment process that ended with their decision to raze the church and build something new.

Facing page: Courtesy of Sarah Harrison-McQueen; This page: Courtesy of APAH

**"I was able to witness the vision of the project getting deep in the bones of the entire congregation."**

**—Sarah Harrison-McQueen**

#### BUILDING ON A TREND

Central UMC isn't the first church to transform its property into housing, but, says Harrison-McQueen, "we were blazing trails in the Methodist world."

Just within Arlington County, a Presbyterian church recently completed a development that includes 173 apartments, and a Baptist church built eight floors of apartments adjacent to their sanctuary. In California, according to a recent study by the University of California at Berkeley, religious institutions own 38,800 acres of land. Proposed legislation there would remove some of the red tape for faith-based organizations looking to develop their property.

Although Central UMC's project was motivated by a desire to help the Ballston community, it has also strengthened the congregation,

Harrison-McQueen says. Members became more active. People who sought food and services on Friday began attending the Sunday service. Thirty people would sign up to speak at a public meeting about the redevelopment plans (the average attendance on Sundays was just 70). "I was able to witness the vision of the project getting deep in the bones of the entire congregation," she says.

That dedication served them well, as the process dragged on. To launch the project, the church had to find the right nonprofit partner to secure funding, apply for federal loans, conduct a capital campaign, and navigate development challenges like historical preservation regulations. Each step took longer than expected. And then COVID-19 hit.

#### LAST WORDS, FIRST WORDS

By spring 2020, Harrison-McQueen had already begun imagining her final sermon in the old church. "It definitely would've included a lot of people in the room. It definitely would've included the choir singing," she says.

The pandemic ended those plans. Instead, after more than a year of remote services, the congregation returned in May 2021 to say goodbye to their church. They held three in-person services to maintain social distancing and replaced the choir with prerecorded hymns. It wasn't the send-off anyone had envisioned.

For the next three years they will worship from their temporary home in

the nearby First Vietnamese American United Methodist Church. Harrison-McQueen is now thinking about her first sermon in their new, rebuilt sanctuary, expected to open in the first half of 2024.

The pews will be replaced by chairs. Light will come in through the restored stained glass windows from the old church. The old gymnasium and chapel will be gone to save space, but a new commercial kitchen will help the congregation expand its meal program.

One other relic was salvaged from the old church's kitchen: a 70-year-old butcher block table. It had become a focal point for Central UMC's new ministry—thousands of lunches were bagged and hot meals prepared around that table over the course of hundreds of late Thursday evenings and early Friday mornings—and it symbolizes the journey that led the congregation from their 2007 prayer walk to construction of an apartment building. When Harrison-McQueen delivers that first sermon in the new sanctuary, it will be from an altar that includes the butcher block: "It tells the story of that community that gathered to feed others and has such a deep connection to the Eucharistic story." □

Lloyd Wolf/Courtesy of APAH

*Harrison-McQueen (fifth from right) and other church and local leaders celebrated a groundbreaking for the project in December 2021.*





FEED MY LAMBS



Dorlimar Lebrón Malavé ('18)

PASTOR DORLIMAR LEBRÓN MALAVÉ SHEPHERDS A HARLEM CONGREGATION TOWARD RENEWED RELEVANCE IN A HURTING COMMUNITY

BY PAMELA REYNOLDS

In March 2020, Dorlimar Lebrón Malavé, pastor of the First Spanish United Methodist Church in East Harlem, was eagerly anticipating a “restart.” Her tiny church, known around the neighborhood as “The People’s Church,” had shriveled to a shell of its former self. While it once was a vibrant community hub with a congregation of more than 300, by the time Lebrón ('18) arrived in 2018, the congregation had dwindled to 20 people. The congregants were mostly older women—“my aunts and my grandma,” she jokes—with few younger folks coming into the fold. There wasn’t much interest in community outreach.

“The church had been shrinking and shrinking, becoming less and less relevant in the community,” she says. “They brought me in as kind of a last resort.”

Fresh out of seminary, Lebrón was undaunted. She organized a renovation of the church sanctuary and

planned to debut a newly invigorated Sunday worship service that would include a traditional service in Spanish and a contemporary one in English. Drawing on the symbolism of the resurrection, Lebrón scheduled the launch for Easter Sunday 2020.

Then, of course, the pandemic hit. As COVID-19 barreled across New York City, Lebrón and members of The People’s Church retreated to the safety of online services, held in collaboration with four other Harlem congregations. Lebrón preached only every five weeks. Suddenly, she had a lot more time on her hands to contemplate how she might make her church relevant again.

“We were literally forced to not stress out about the best liturgy or the best sermon or the best music selections,” she says. “We were actually free to do the work, to do what we felt called to do: to take care of our neighbors.”

Asking herself what her church’s mission should be at the height of the pandemic’s economic devastation, it

“We were literally forced to not stress out about the best liturgy or the best sermon or the best music selections. We were actually free to do the work, to do what we felt called to do: to take care of our neighbors.”

—Dorlimar Lebrón Malavé



The People’s Food Project fed about 500 families and attracted nearly \$100,000 in grants.

didn’t take long for her to come up with an answer, perhaps divinely ordained: People needed food.

“My lay leader said, ‘I know a family who needs food, who lost their jobs,’” Lebrón recalls. “And I said, well, I know a pantry.... We were like, a lot of people are going to be in need. How do we become a part of this?”

Lebrón began visiting local pantries for groceries to take to people in need. She shopped for one family, which became 25 families, which became 200 families. Neighborhood volunteers contributed time and goods. When

the numbers grew too big for at-home delivery, Lebrón asked people to meet her at the church instead. In that way, The People’s Food Project was born, feeding, at its busiest time, about 500 families each week. The program grew to stock food pantries in four United Methodist churches in the Bronx and Harlem, a Pentecostal congregation, and a mosque, in addition to supplying produce for free “community fridges” in Queens, Manhattan, and the Bronx. The program caught the attention of both city officials and denominational partners, attracting nearly

\$100,000 in grants. And the food program was just a part of the church’s pandemic response.

“The denomination didn’t know what to do. The institution didn’t know what to do. But the people knew what to do,” says Lebrón.

A MISSION IN SOCIAL JUSTICE

Although the pandemic was a devastating blow to the community, The People’s Church had found its purpose—and had its restart. And that purpose is very much aligned with Lebrón’s own interest in social justice issues. A queer, Puerto Rican—

Courtesy of FSUMC (x2)

**“The denomination didn’t know what to do.  
The institution didn’t know what to do.  
But the people knew what to do.”  
—Dorlimar Lebrón Malavé**

born 34-year-old, who was raised in Brooklyn with a pastor father, Lebrón has always leaned toward liberation theology, which emphasizes the uplift of the poor and politically oppressed. The pandemic offered her the opportunity to put that philosophy to work by ministering to East Harlem’s low-income and working-class populations, which had been hit particularly hard by both the virus and its economic fallout.

Sickness was everywhere, so the church began offering holistic wellness services, including acupuncture and workshops on healthy eating. When protests for racial justice erupted after George Floyd’s murder in the spring of 2020, The People’s Church channeled community anger into a Black and Latinx solidarity march that attracted more than 3,000 people. After

COVID-19 closures decimated local businesses, the church held an outdoor pop-up market of artists, artisans, and food vendors to help replace lost income. And to address neighborhood political tensions, The People’s Church held a Love Fest—an outdoor sidewalk fair featuring live DJs, a pool, Zumba classes, and games for kids. It was supposed to be a one-time event, but it was so popular that the church turned it into a monthly affair. The church building also became a COVID-19 testing and vaccination site.

Since Lebrón has taken over, membership, while still small, has doubled, to around 40. Most important for Lebrón, the church is relevant again.

#### BACK TO THE FUTURE

While the concern with social justice at the First Spanish United Methodist Church may be a new direction for its youngest members, there is a historical precedent vivid in the minds of church elders. Back in 1969, the church building was occupied for a time by the Young Lords, a Chicago street gang that transformed into a national Puerto Rican civil rights and social justice group modeled after the Black Panthers. The group, which included a few teens with church-member parents, set up a daycare center, a breakfast program for children, and Spanish language lessons for the 11 days that they controlled the church. Eventually, the Young Lords ceded the building back to church elders, but

*When the program grew too large for at-home deliveries, volunteers began distributing food from First Spanish United Methodist Church.*



they occupied it again in 1970 to call attention to police brutality and miserable conditions in city jails. Their actions sparked outrage among many congregants, but their activities also led to a lively discussion about whether First Spanish United Methodist was doing enough to address the real-world needs of its congregation and community.

Viewed in this context, Lebrón’s work is just a continuation of what has come before. Her social justice activism hasn’t been embraced by everyone in her congregation,

admits Lebrón, but it persists because she sees the church as “the hands and feet of Jesus.”

“I often describe my role as being like a hospice chaplain and a midwife or doula because we are transitioning,” she says. “How do we honor our tradition? How do we honor our history, the good, the bad, and the ugly?”

Meanwhile, in January, the Omicron variant set off yet another surge of COVID cases, requiring The People’s Church to pause many of its activities. The pantry was suspended. Ultimately,

Lebrón says, these ever-changing circumstances will require the church to continually reimagine its role.

“I used to think that starting something was the hardest thing,” she says. “Once you get it started, you build it, and the people will come. But really, in these pandemic times, the life of the church is being thrown for a loop as far as what local church ministry will look like.”

Through it all, Lebrón says one thing has become clear: “Church is not just what we do on Sunday.” □

Courtesy of FSUMC



## JOURNAL

# REPAIRERS OF THE BREACH

A call for transformational leadership to  
address the social crises of today

BY G. SUJIN PAK

1. Willie James Jennings, *After Whiteness: An Education in Belonging* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2020), 6.

2. Jennings, 10.

In a recent book, *After Whiteness*, Willie Jennings eloquently articulates a vision of leadership that calls persons to belonging and community rather than isolation and to recognition and celebration of mutual interdependence rather than self-sufficiency. Jennings describes the myth of the white self-sufficient man, whose self-sufficiency is defined by “possession, control, and mastery.”<sup>1</sup> Too often theological education has knowingly or unknowingly pursued this myth as its telos. Yet, urges Jennings, the real work of theological education—its true calling—should be something quite different: to form people “in the art of cultivating belonging.”<sup>2</sup>

When I look at the state of the world today, the state of this nation, the state of Christian churches and particularly the United Methodist Church of which I am a member, the need for leaders who cultivate an invitational spirit of belonging and mutual interdependence is so glaring that it is sobering. Too many are drowning in the cold waters of isolation, deceived by the assumption that self-sufficiency and intellectual certainty are the marks of success. Too many are caught in the pursuit of performative mastery that they have forgotten about character. Too many prioritize the sure grasp of an ideology that they neglect to see, hear, feel, touch, and allow themselves truly to be impacted by the multiple and various lives, experiences, and voices of the very people and communities to whom they have committed themselves in service.

In reenvisaging what faithful leadership looks like, we begin to reimagine the vocation of theological

institutions. A first step is to broaden and redefine the qualities and goals identified with “strong leadership”—qualities and goals that move away from isolation to a focus on belonging, away from self-sufficiency to a celebration of interdependence, away from mastery and mere academic achievement to the importance of character. It also requires a wider vision of *who* is called and equipped for such leadership, deliberately making spaces for diverse embodiments and bolstering our abilities to visualize these. Out of the wreckage of isolated, self-sufficient mastery, I am in search of life-giving forms of leadership and life-giving forms of theological education. I propose that *transformational leadership* has much to offer.

What are the key qualities of a transformational leader?

Theorists often draw a contrast between transformational and transactional leadership. Transactional leadership focuses on goals and tasks, exchanging one thing (Continued)

### About the Author



**G. Sujin Pak** is dean of the Boston University School of Theology and a professor of the history of Christianity. Pak’s scholarship and teaching focus on the Protestant Reformations, Jewish-Christian relations, and the history of biblical interpretation. She is a strong advocate for diversity and equity, prizing these in her teaching, research, and administrative work.

for another, whereas transformational leadership centers around cultivating the agency and thriving of persons and communities by nurturing creativity and inspiring innovation.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, fostering the flourishing of communities and their members precisely entails the celebration and nourishment of diverse gifts and graces. Transformational leaders are persons of vision whose persuasion is rooted just as much in their character and integrity as in the cogency of their vision. They lead with and from authenticity—an authenticity grounded in confidently embracing their gifts and calling and humbly recognizing their limitations and need of the partnerships and gifts of others.

Transformational leaders are not afraid of change and conflict, nor are they crushed by them. Rather, exactly amid these, they can see the seeds of possibilities, the opportunities for transformed imaginations, the potentialities for healing, the rediscoveries of past insights in renewed light, and avenues for greater openness to and awareness of diverse experiences and histories of pain and hope. In prioritizing flourishing, creativity, and innovation, the goal is not so much to find a solution or reach a resolution of conflict. Rather, such leaders cultivate transformative practices that sustain possibilities of mutual connection and wholeness amid journeys of change and conflict.

To do and be this, transformational leaders are characterized by profound compassion, prophetic vision, healthy confidence, humble self-awareness, patient listening, and courageous action.

Transformational leaders are intersectional in their outlook, method,

and being. Growth in knowledge is vital; yet knowledge and excellence are embraced as intersectional and multidimensional, engaging mind *and* heart *and* spirit *and* body, attending to multiple contexts and locations. The pathway is interdisciplinary and intercultural. As the late American feminist and social activist bell hooks would say, it is *transgressive*,<sup>4</sup> defying constructed boundaries and false dichotomies.

“*Trans*-formational” points to crossing over, moving across, not being located in a singular space but in multiple spaces, not static but dynamic. Transformational leaders embrace and affirm the complexities of life and living; they embrace and affirm these beautiful complexities across manifold manifestations of what it means to be human.

“*Trans*-formational” points to another key aspect: the call to advocacy. This is the call to cross over, move across—in solidarity—to promote the causes of others, to support and amplify the voices of those who may find themselves powerless, silenced, and/or burdened by years of oppression. Transformational leaders are bridge builders. They are such not for the purposes of assimilating one group into another. Rather, they foster avenues of connection and belonging while simultaneously recognizing and honoring differences.

Undaunted by change and conflict, pursuing solidarity across boundaries, transformational leaders are *particularly* equipped and called to engage and respond to the social crises of today: multiple forms of racism, lack of full inclusion of LGBTQIA+ persons, ecological devastation, mental health needs, poverty, and many more. Transformational leaders are bold, compassionate, and humble

3. Steve Echols, “Transformational/ Servant Leadership: A Potential Synergism for an Inclusive Leadership Style,” *Journal of Religious Leadership* 8.2 (2009): 94–95, 99.

4. bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* (New York: Routledge, 1994).

5. Debora Jackson, *Meant for Good: Fundamentals of Womanist Leadership* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson, 2019), 23, 138–42.

6. Jackson, 147.

7. Isaiah 58:12 (NIV).

leaders willing and able to lead across differences, change, and conflict; to listen and cultivate the posture of listening; to speak truth to power; to discern with wise patience the time and place for courageous action; and to foster advocacy, solidarity, and authentic experiences of belonging that honor a diversity of experiences and embodiments.

The womanist scholar Debora Jackson may well exclaim that this account of transformational leadership echoes a womanist vision of leadership, which

encourages “an expansive, inclusive, justice-advocating, communally focused way of leading”—expansive precisely through its “intersectional standpoint.”<sup>5</sup> Jackson writes, “What if we tried to be as expansive and inclusive as possible in developing strategies that maximized

flourishing for all? What if we employed tactics that would invert operational structures and restore human dignity rather than exploit? What if our efforts as leaders were truly about changing and positively effecting our communities? Would it not be of value to harness such a leadership style?”<sup>6</sup>

What if, indeed.

In a world rocked by multiple systemic inequities and injustices, theological leaders and institutions must step into the breach. Theological institutions must lead in intentionally

fostering diverse embodiments of faith leaders—leaders of color, queer leaders, trans leaders, leaders from underprivileged economic backgrounds, leaders of multiple intersectional identities. This is crucial to the work of dismantling racist, sexist, and capitalist structures and policies; it is also crucial to rebuilding life-giving pathways forward—pathways that cultivate connection and belonging, pathways that ensure the invitation and participation of a

multiplicity of diverse voices, perspectives, practices, and intelligences. The vocation to cultivate connection and belonging is no “kumbaya-let’s-just-all-get-along” goal. It is the hardest and most fragile and precious vocation of all, for it calls for connection and belonging that moves beyond homogeneity—creating and traversing sacred spaces that welcome and honor differences while building bridges of mutual well-being and flourishing. Through prioritizing thriving across differences, nurturing creativity, inspiring innovation, supporting intersectionality, and fostering advocacy, transformational leaders might well begin to embody the prophetic call to be “repairers of the breach, the restorers of streets to live in.”<sup>7</sup> □

**“Transformational leaders are bold, compassionate, and humble leaders willing and able to lead across differences, change, and conflict . . . to discern with wise patience the time and place for courageous action.”**





## JOURNAL

# CALLED TO SERVE

Leadership isn't about age or experience,  
but a willingness to act

BY OMARI JAHI AARONS ('23)

Oladimeji Odunsi on Unsplash.com

I was born with a calling to serve. My parents, both first-generation college students, were raised during the civil unrest of the 1960s and 1970s. Their lived experiences became the foundation for raising my brothers and me, impressing the twin tools of education and activism—what they saw as the key to our futures and our best chance at healthy and prosperous lives. For me, the word “citizen” was defined by active engagement with the policies and processes that govern community. When I was in elementary school, my parents were copresidents of our condo association. In middle school, they were officers in our civic association. In high school, they were presidents of the parent–teacher associations. My brothers and I are rooted in a philosophy, belief, and practice that what our education, talents, and faith demand is a need to give back and to help others. I am fond of saying “service is in my DNA.”

The rebellious spirit of the Black Power movement was also my birthright. My fidelity to notions of fairness often overruled what was considered appropriate for me to say in conversations I engaged in as a child and teenager where the complexity of justice issues was often assumed to be beyond my scope of understanding. I carried that tendency to speak out into my professional career, and it remains a trait that brings me toe-to-toe with institutions in public and corporate sectors.

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My calling came to collect earlier than I would have planned. As someone who grew up 15 minutes from the

Pentagon and with both parents from New York’s Manhattan and Brooklyn neighborhoods, I often think about September 11, 2001. At the time, I was a sophomore in high school and serving as a lobbying chair for our regional student government association. A day or two after the attacks, our student government president pulled our leadership team together. While his words are lost to my memory, the emotional context that made that call a defining moment pushed leadership beyond being about age or experience. We cried together, we shared our fears and doubts amid unprecedented chaos and uncertainty, and we found the resolve to be the leaders our school communities needed us to be. A year later, at 16, I was elected as the student member to the county board of education. It was there I experienced the power of my voice and perspective for the first time and learned to use it to advocate for the interests of other people.

My path wound through student and community leadership (Continued)

### About the Author



**Omari Jahi Aarons ('23)** is a Howard Thurman Fellow and Master of Divinity candidate. In 2020, Aarons was named to the Greater Boston Chamber of Commerce’s Ten Outstanding Young Leaders list. He serves as president of STH’s Association of Black Seminarians and leads the Aarons Group, a workplace inclusion consulting firm.



roles as an undergrad—staffing political campaigns, serving in the student senate, and pioneering roles in diversity and community action. Following graduation, I joined Macy’s at their Ohio headquarters, progressing through various roles before landing a role as a customer service and loyalty programs facilitator, working with Macy’s and Bloomingdale’s stores coast to coast, and in Hawaii and Puerto Rico, to develop a performance culture that was embedded with transparency and care. When a colleague was promoted, I took on a dual appointment managing our executive development and mentorship programs, creating a program that earned me international recognition as a rising star in the learning and development function.

Today, while grateful for that recognition and others that came after it, I have an innate resistance to “emerging leader” and “rising star” awards. They are well intentioned; our way of calling attention and saying, “This is someone to keep your eyes on!” or anointing someone as the new “next best thing.” I am uncomfortably familiar with the reality that the lists of emerging leader award winners often lack racial and gender diversity, perpetuating deep-seated narratives about who belongs in certain roles and spaces, and who doesn’t. But more than that, these terms allow us to hide in a perceived gray area that says leadership is about a title, age, rank, and experience. Calling ourselves “emerging leaders” and “rising stars” lowers

the bar and lets us off the hook for leading now, in the places where we are planted. It allows us to say, “It’s not my turn yet,” or to say, “It’s someone else’s responsibility.”

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Ibram X. Kendi, founder of the BU Center for Antiracist Research and the University’s Andrew W. Mellon Professor in the Humanities, posits, in *How to Be an*

*Antiracist*, that there is no gray area of antiracism work.<sup>1</sup> Our actions either perpetuate a system that actively works against people of color or work to resist and dismantle the system of white supremacy. I propose that

leadership, too, requires an active orientation, and a willingness to address the broken systems in front of us through their repair or reconstruction. In rooms and stages big and small, in everyday conversations or social outings, in the classroom or the boardroom, in the pulpit or the street corner, in times of sorrow or great joy, we each have the opportunity to be the leader that is needed for the moment at hand.

What a moment we are experiencing! As the world wrestles with deep and complex questions for which there are no easy and simple solutions, I wonder if the relationship between *servant leadership* and *transformational leadership* is as distinct as some scholars have suggested.<sup>2</sup> The 21st-century leader in every sector must integrate the humility and kindness that

**“Leadership requires an active orientation, and a willingness to address the broken systems in front of us through their repair or reconstruction.”**

3. Jeremiah 1:7–10.

enable healing and restoration with the intensity and focus that this moment demands. The paralysis of personal fear and inadequacy can no longer show itself as inaction. It is through centering the needs of people in our service—our friends, neighbors, colleagues, and strangers alike—that we call forth the divine intention for humanity: to see and love our neighbors as ourselves. I was born with a calling to serve, and I have learned to transform the world

around me through serving others.

In accepting my call to ordained ministry, I asked God to fulfill for me the promise made to Jeremiah: to give me the words to say and be with me in all the places in which I would be sent.<sup>3</sup> My journey has upheld my faith in the promise and possibility of the human condition and my deep belief in our ability to transform this world beyond what it is, to what it can be, together. □

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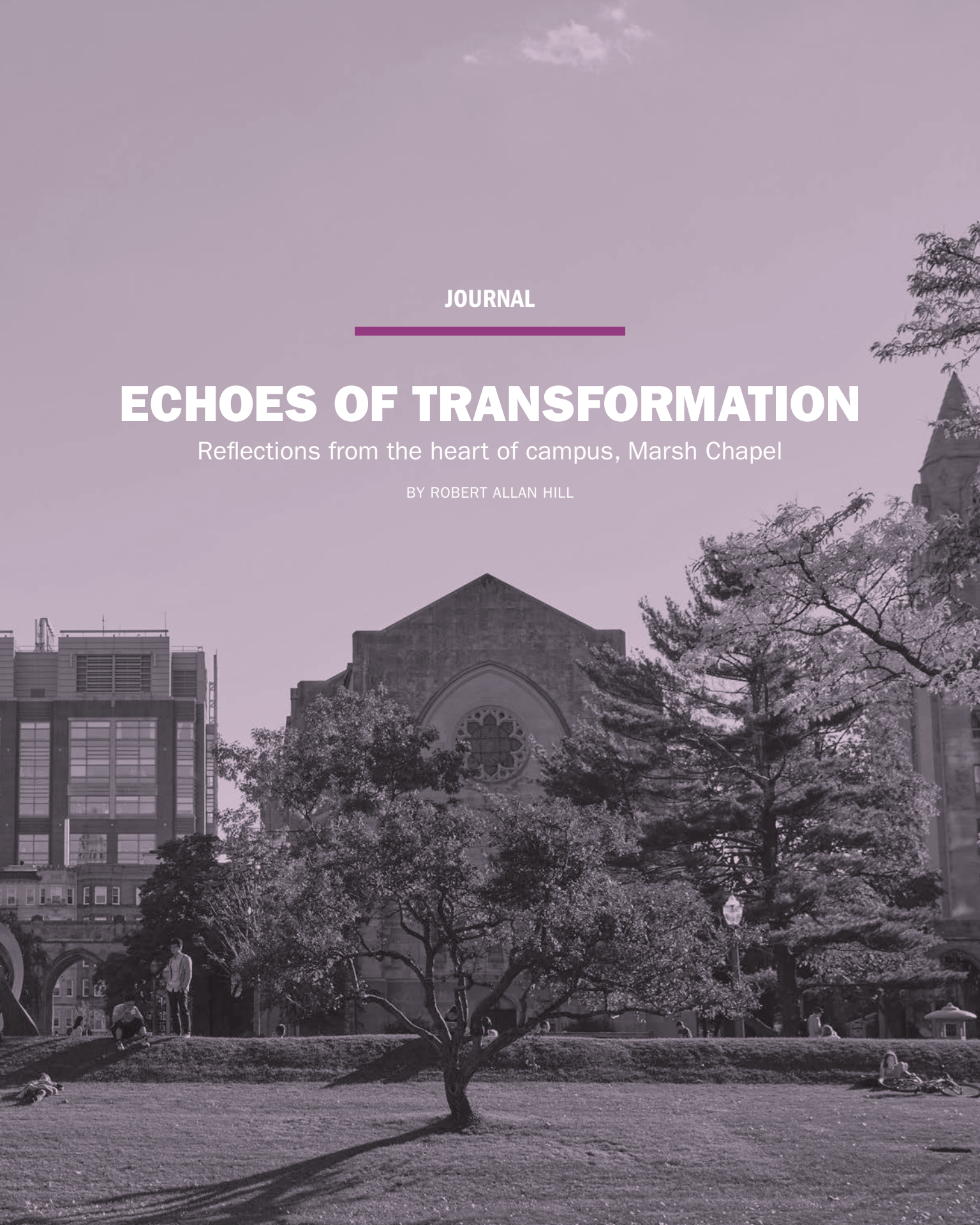
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1. Ibram X. Kendi, *How to Be an Antiracist* (New York: One World, 2019).

2. Dirk van Dierendonck, Daan Stam, Pieter Boersma, Ninotchka de Windt and Jorrit Alkema, “Same difference? Exploring the differential mechanisms linking servant leadership and transformational leadership to follower outcomes,” *The Leadership Quarterly*, 2014; 25(3): 544–62.





JOURNAL

# ECHOES OF TRANSFORMATION

Reflections from the heart of campus, Marsh Chapel

BY ROBERT ALLAN HILL

Marsh Chapel

The autumn of 2021 has proven to be both a challenging and a fruitful time for life, work, teaching, and ministry in the city of Boston. So, reflecting on transformational leadership, coming in such a season, offers the gift of a moment to pause, and reflect, in quiet, on that theme. What echoes of transformative leadership resound right now, in late COVID, along the banks of the Charles River? As the leaves of autumn coat the BU Beach with amber and gold, and the breeze from the Atlantic swirls over the Plaza out front of Marsh Chapel, what inklings in transformation have we seen? As I recall our mentor long ago at the World Council of Churches, George Todd (a founder of the East Harlem Protestant Parish), saying, speaking of leadership, “sense what the spirit is doing, then follow.” We have tried to live up to his proverb here, especially in four ways.

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First: To begin, the key words of transformational leadership for our work at Marsh Chapel and Religious Life are *heart, service, voice, vocation, and volume*. That is, the envisioned mission of Marsh Chapel is to be a heart in the heart of the city, and a service in the service of the city. Our paraphrase of former BU president Lemuel Murlin’s saying means city as the global city, and service as worship and community. Our foci guiding this envisioned mission are voice, vocation, and volume. Voice is what we do on Sundays, vocation is

what we do on weekdays, volume is what we do every day. It is the dean’s job in transformational leadership to articulate this envisioned mission and to lead the chapel and the religious life community at BU with its guidance, as “a cloud of smoke by day and a pillar of fire by night,”<sup>1</sup> to use the biblical refrain.

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Second: To illustrate, the heart of our aspiration and work of transformational leadership at Marsh is focused on the University Interdenominational Protestant Worship Service every Sunday at 11 am, both in person and broadcast by WBUR 90.9 FM. This means, for me, planning for the full year, preaching most Sundays during the school year, and arranging particular special series, including an autumn sermon series each year, a Lenten series each year, and a National Summer Preacher Series, every year since 2007. (Continued)

## About the Author



Robert Allan Hill is dean of Marsh Chapel, a professor of New Testament and pastoral theology, and a United Methodist minister. He preaches most Sundays at Marsh Chapel (at 11 am on WBUR 90.9 FM, Boston University’s NPR station) for a global, regional, and local listenership. He and his wife, Jan, have been married 44 years and have three children and eight grandchildren.

Dave Green



Several groups have developed at Marsh Chapel in the last few years, which meet on Sunday: three choirs, a mission group called Abolitionist Chapel (which works to oppose human trafficking), an ongoing Book Study Group, an Intercessory prayer gathering, an after-church luncheon, and Inner Strength Gospel Choir in the evening. Our pre-COVID attendance ranged from 175 to 250 in worship, with attendance climbing to over 300 on special Sundays (Eucharist, Bach Experience, Matriculation, Baccalaureate, Christmas, Easter, MLK, others). The growth of the Sunday congregation has been one of the transformative, and joyful, developments in my years here, thanks to our excellent staff leadership in music, hospitality, and ministry.

We also host another 10 midweek services for different religious traditions and other constituencies, including the School of Theology service on Wednesdays, a partnership dating back 70 years.

The Marsh Chapel Sunday worship service is unique, as is its music, liturgy, and homily, with a global listenership that expanded even further during COVID. Our friend Mick Punch from Dublin listens every Sunday. In addition, at various points, special moments are honored in

our worship life. For instance, to observe the 2018 50-year remembrance of the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. (GRS’55, Hon.’59), Marsh Chapel cohosted nine days of programs, gatherings, and worship services, including sermons delivered by Cornell William Brooks (’87, Hon.’15), then a visiting professor of social ethics, law, and justice movements, and former Governor Deval Patrick (Hon.’14). Also, 15th- and 20th-anniversary memorials

of 9/11 were hosted at Marsh Chapel, along with many other regular events (Veterans’ Day, vigils, Boston Marathon 2013 memorials, and several others). We are grateful for, and hope to be good stewards of, these and other transformational moments in worship life.

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Third: To report, any leadership that

hopes for transformation needs a *smart* plan—specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and timely. As Dean Sujin Pak said in her 2021 Commencement sermon on transformational leadership, Peter was able to lead in part because of *gentleness and patience*. The current Marsh Chapel strategic plan is based on the direction given through the full BU plan, now set through 2030, and subdivided into five sections. Our leadership is intended to

**“The growth of the Sunday congregation has been one of the transformative, and joyful, developments in my years here. . . . The Marsh Chapel Sunday worship is unique, as is its music, liturgy, and homily, with a global listenership that expanded even further during COVID.”**



The author and choir at Marsh Chapel.

be transformational, in connection to that BU plan, especially its own fivefold emphases: academics, research, global engagement, diversity, community. In particular, that means a focus on 75th Marsh Chapel anniversary goals. Marsh Chapel was dedicated on March 14, 1950, six months before my dad came to study at STH. In celebrating our coming 75th anniversary, we hope to be able to achieve several measurable goals, beginning with the endowment of the deanship itself (a \$5 million aspiration). Perhaps someone reading this reflection will be moved to endow the Marsh Chapel deanship. What a day of rejoicing that would be!

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Fourth: To conclude, transformational leadership means the ability not only to generalize and to specialize but also to improvise, to learn in and from the moment. Improvisation, as all in ministry fully know, became a

means of grace, a form of salvation, in COVID. So, one new and challenging horizon in ministry, familiar to anyone preaching today, is the question of ministry post-COVID. On that question, an exemplary voice in transformational leadership coming out of the pandemic is that of our colleague, frequent guest preacher at Marsh Chapel, and senior minister of Asbury First UMC in Rochester, N.Y., Stephen Cady, who told me recently, “Decision by decision, the pandemic has packed 30 years of pastoral ministry into 20 months. Those of us who don’t just retire will find ourselves serving a very different Church than two years ago. Successful leaders will have to improvise, adapt, and lean on God’s grace. Fortunately, we’ve now had some practice.”

Said George Todd, “sense what the spirit is doing, then follow.” Here, then, are four echoes of transformation, moments in reflection from Marsh Chapel. □





SERMON

# DOERS OF THE WORD IN A NEW WORLD

Reflections on wisdom at the start of a journey

BY CRISTIAN DE LA ROSA

Eddi Aguirre on Unsplash.com

- 1. “God has brought us to this place.”
- 2. “Always changing.”

*This sermon was delivered during STH’s matriculation ceremony in Marsh Chapel on September 15, 2021.*

**H**asta aquí nos trajo Dios.<sup>1</sup> Today marks the beginning of a new journey as the Boston University School of Theology community, a new journey through circumstances we have never experienced before. We are facing complex and uncertain times in the midst of global crises. We are engaging realities in flux, *siempre cambiando*.<sup>2</sup>

*Hasta aquí nos trajo Dios.* God has brought us this far, to this place, and it is no coincidence that we find ourselves together in Marsh Chapel on a beautiful day, celebrating the beginning of a new journey at the School of Theology.

Welcome to those of us who are returning and finding our way after a time of isolation and remote work, teaching, and study. Welcome to those who are here for the first time, from near and far, answering an invitation or a call to be in this space. Welcome to those who came from other countries, overcoming so many obstacles and difficulties with distance, communication, and immigration issues. You are here, and it is not just a dream—it is a dream fulfilled! You are welcome to this STH community. We are all welcome to this experience of a new semester, and I thank God for the ways in which each of us will engage and complement our formation processes as we share from our own cultures and experiences.

As I stand here today, in this chapel that has held many sermons, we are

welcomed through the particular circumstance of a global pandemic. We are welcomed and invited to share new messages, to sing new songs, to pray in new ways, to learn and teach differently, and to retrieve what has been made invisible or ignored and has now created powerful points of reference for our own survival and for new ways of being and doing.

Welcome to this space! Take a moment to see those around you. We cannot see the smiles behind the masks, but smile and welcome each other. See and feel this new space. Breathe deeply. See and breathe with gratitude and amazement at how beautiful and powerful our new STH community is. I am astounded by how the wisdom of God—in our own seeking of knowledge and, perhaps, in our seeking of faith and hope—has brought us to this place. For this amazing response to wisdom and the task of seeking knowledge, I say again, *Hasta aquí nos trajo Dios*.

We come together in complex times of uncertainty (Continued)

About the Author



**Cristian De La Rosa**, associate dean for students and community life, and a clinical assistant professor of contextual theology and practice, is originally from Mexico. Her areas of scholarship include Mujerista and liberation theologies, cultural theory, and urban ministry. She is an ordained elder with the UMC and coordinates several Latinx leadership initiatives at BU.



and flux. Everything is changing and continues to change so quickly. And as much as we hope and expect everything to return to normal somehow, we must begin to think in terms of an ongoing experience in flux. Like never before, and like many people point out these days, we need to think in terms of a new normal.

Here is where our readings for this morning<sup>3</sup> point to wisdom as a resource and to the question of identity as an essential consideration in the new journey we begin this semester. In my own time and space of isolation this year, I had the opportunity to read about and reflect on wisdom and my own identity. And this particular section of *Wisdom of Solomon* called my attention: “Although [wisdom] is but one, she can do all things, and while remaining in herself, she renews all things; in every generation she passes into holy souls and makes them friends of God, and prophets; for God loves nothing so much as the person who lives with wisdom.”<sup>4</sup> From my identity as a clergywoman of Nahuatl origins from Mexico who operates within the Wesleyan tradition of the

**“Wisdom, like God, is there from the beginning. She creates, builds, nurtures, and renews through encounters that produce knowledge, insight, creativity, and more. She invites us into the cocreative processes of renewal, and she helps us see, understand, design, renew, and rebuild.”**

Christian faith, I am fascinated with the role and relationship between wisdom and God. I am fascinated also by the way wisdom seeks us out, as Proverbs 1:20–21 notes, “Wisdom cries out in the street; in the squares she raises her voice. At the busiest corner she cries out; at the entrance of the city gates she speaks.”<sup>5</sup> Wisdom, like

God, is there from the beginning. She creates, builds, nurtures, and renews through encounters that produce knowledge, insight, creativity, and more. She invites us into the cocreative processes of renewal, and she helps us see, understand, design, renew, and rebuild.

From my own points of reference and identity, I believe that wisdom brought us all together as a community today. Perhaps the collective call is to find ways in which the Word is incarnate, made flesh, in our own time, space, and experiences in the uncertain times of a global pandemic where everything is in flux. Our call is to assist in the renewal of all things in our own time and circumstances through our common experiences as we become a new STH community.

3. *Wisdom of Solomon*, 7:26–8:1 and Mark 8:27–38.

4. *Wisdom of Solomon*, 7:27–28.

5. Proverbs 1:20–21.



Paco Vaca on Unsplash.com

At an administrative council meeting, my esteemed colleague Eileen M. Daily stated that, as tired as she is from a year of flux, she remains committed to transformational leadership. She explained how we need transformational leadership in these uncertain times. So, she is here in spite of all the difficulties and limitations we face. Her presence is a prophetic statement made in this wisdom that renews and perhaps retrieves the designs of creation and calls for our cooperation and partnership in different forms through every generation.

Wisdom for me is like quantum physics in science. I am not a scientist, but my understanding of quantum physics, particularly

quantum computing, is that it moves us beyond the binary language and understandings of Western philosophy. In our times, binary designs within our social, political, and religious language become stumbling blocks for inclusiveness and diverse, life-giving processes needing to prioritize human dignity. In an article titled “Six Things Everyone Should Know About Quantum Physics,” Chad Orzel writes, “Properly speaking, the objects described by quantum physics are neither particles nor waves, but a third category that shares some properties of waves (a characteristic frequency and wavelength, some spread over space) and some properties of particles (they’re generally countable and



can be localized to some degree).”<sup>6</sup> The knowledge of quantum physics, without any religious or faith claims, invites us to reconsider and reframe our binary points of reference embedded in the design of colonial social, political, and religious systems.

I have been at Boston University for 10 years, and like Dr. Daily, I am also tired. I am so tired of all that subjugates our *pueblos* and denies dignity and human rights. I am tired of all who attempt to make our life-making, nurturing processes a struggle. I am so tired of the “isms” that I must face every day. However, in the spirit of the ancestors who came before me and made a way for me—in the hope that sustains all of us and the new generations that will come after us—I continue *en la lucha*<sup>7</sup> with those alongside me who see and answer the call of wisdom to design and rebuild through every generation.

I continue in the struggle to renew, to be prophets of wisdom and facilitate spaces for everyone to access formation and higher education as a way of encountering wisdom and producing meaningful and relevant

knowledge and practices for our own times. I understand this to be *una forma de encarnar la Palabra en nuestro propio contexto para transformar el mundo*,<sup>8</sup> a way for the Word—*la Palabra*—to become flesh in our contexts, transforming the world in very tangible, concrete ways.

Wisdom is a resource that helps us manage limitations, find knowledge, and renew our own practices and identities. Wisdom can also be critical and judge harshly sometimes when we find ways to bridge the gaps. When my children were very young, I accepted my first academic position in a large city. The institution I worked for had a mortgage program for faculty, and I took this into consideration when I accepted

the position. My children had always lived in a house with a yard and garden. The idea of living in an apartment was interesting, but soon the children began asking when we would get our own home. I had to explain about the need of a mortgage and the fact that the institution did not have any more money to loan to faculty at this time, and it might be some time

6. Chad Orzel, “Six Things Everyone Should Know About Quantum Physics,” *Forbes*, July 8, 2015, [forbes.com/sites/chadorzel/2015/07/08/six-things-everyone-should-know-about-quantum-physics](https://forbes.com/sites/chadorzel/2015/07/08/six-things-everyone-should-know-about-quantum-physics).

7. “In the fight.”

8. “A way to incarnate the Word in our own contexts so we can transform the world.”

9. Matthew 16:15 NRSV: “He said to them, ‘But who do you say that I am?’”

10. Gloria A. Anzaldúa and AnaLouise Keating, eds., *This Bridge We Call Home: Radical Visions for Transformation* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2002).

11. “in between.”

12. James 1:22 (NIV).

13. “We are those that incarnate the Word of life in this world.”

before we could actually secure the resources for a house. I thought that was the end of the conversation. However, one day I took my daughter to work, and we had to park in a different lot and walk around a great deal of construction equipment in front of the building where my office was located. My daughter said to me, “Mami, they did not want to help us. They have money; see all this construction?” At her early age, she noticed the priorities of the institution. Her young wisdom questioned the priorities of spending money on buildings over human beings. Like Jesus’ line of inquiry, her realization cut to the institution’s identity—“Who do people say that I am?”<sup>9</sup> Most of the time, our practices speak louder than our words.

Chicana poet, activist, philosopher, and writer Gloria Anzaldúa best describes who we are collectively in these uncertain times of flux. She retrieves the Nahuatl term *Nepantla*, which communicates a traumatic place of change where we no longer experience what our reality was, but we are not yet clear as to what it

will become.<sup>10</sup> We experience some of what it was, all that it is with change and uncertainty, and we also experience some of what will be without a clear idea or a timeline. Anzaldúa helps me understand that the times in which we find ourselves today are times of *Nepantla*,<sup>11</sup> where we dwell at the borders of what our reality was, what it is changing into, and what it will be in the future. As a new STH community, we are engaging our own experience of *Nepantla* and becoming a new community of borderland dwellers. Perhaps we are in search of knowledge, hope, transformation, and new identity in these complex and uncertain times.

I leave you with an invitation and a charge to identify and answer your calling. I charge you to embody wisdom through meaningful and relevant practices of justice and peace that prioritize human dignity and life. In this way, when asked “Who do people say that we are?” we can answer: We are “Doers of the Word” in a New World.<sup>12</sup> *Quién encarna la Palabra de vida en este mundo*.<sup>13</sup> □

**“In the spirit of the ancestors who came before me and made a way for me—in the hope that sustains all of us and the new generations that will come after us—I continue *en la lucha* with those alongside me who see and answer the call of wisdom to design and rebuild through every generation.”**

**“I leave you with an invitation and a charge to identify and answer your calling. I charge you to embody wisdom through meaningful and relevant practices of justice and peace that prioritize human dignity and life.”**

# INSPIRING TRANSFORMATION, INSPIRING ME



Eileen M. Daily, a lecturer and director of STH's DMin and Online Lifelong Learning programs, plans to retire later this year.

## RETIRING DMIN DIRECTOR REFLECTS ON LESSONS FROM HER STUDENTS

BY EILEEN M. DAILY

Leading transformation can look daunting—but it is doable. The 120 or so students who have entered the Doctor of Ministry in Transformational Leadership program (DMin) at STH are ample evidence.

How could people be living better? How could they exhibit more of the characteristics God has called them to embody, as individuals and communities? What habits have they developed that keep them from seeing their potential as stewards of God's gifts? What has changed in the world that requires a refocused commitment from them?

With questions like these, recent DMin students have identified specific starting places for transformation in their own faith community contexts.

They've all brought different visions for the people with whom they minister. Their visions—rooted in either scripture, the inspiration of a religious leader of the past, or some aspect of their theological tradition—reframe the world for the communities they lead. They weave these theological visions together with the tools of social science to inspire action.

As I prepare to retire this year, I reflect on the honor it has been to create a scaffold on which these visionaries can structure their leadership ventures. When I started as director of the program back in 2014, before our first cohort took its first class, I imagined this journey to be another service to the church. I never

dreamed I would witness the variety of changes these people have led. From putting the Mayan spiritual classic *Popol Vuh* in dialogue with Christian spirituality to integrating watershed awareness into a congregational life; from infusing deeper hospitality-awareness into the staff of a Houston megachurch to building love-awareness among the staff of an Australian hospital network; from airport chaplaincy to campus chaplaincy—these leaders have overseen transformation in a variety of contexts. One student even created a BBQ truck—And Also With 'Cue—to serve the lunch crowd in Raleigh, N.C., the food insecure in the area, and members of the congregation with which he partnered.

We can all see that the church is facing challenges. It can seem like an unnavigable desert between the present reality and that sacred location toward which God calls the church. Like good pilgrimage guides, these nascent transformational leaders will see some of the way stations between the starting place and the goal, setting forth with their communities alongside them.

Of course, STH has long produced transformative leaders—just look at the roster of alumni! That is one reason it was easy to sign on to direct this program. As I move toward a retirement devoted to more visual creativity, I have learned enough from the leaders who have participated in this program that my art, my work, and my leadership will be forever enhanced because of these encounters. □

Dave Green



## Double your gift to expand conflict transformation scholarship

STH is pleased to announce that Rev. Joan Murray (Questrom'82) and Bob Murray have established a \$250,000 dollar-for-dollar match to support the Tom Porter Program on Religion & Conflict Transformation.

"Even as divisions among us are becoming more pronounced, the truth remains that we are all connected—one to the other, and all to creation." —Rev. Joan and Bob Murray

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*“As my own identity had evolved while attending STH, Terry and I saw the need to honor, empower, and encourage marginalized voices, particularly those whose sexual and gender identities are minoritized, misconstrued in binary categories, and/or rejected by church and society. I remain grateful for the opportunities given me to study, learn, question, and change.”*

**Ann Britton (STH'03,'05) and  
Terry Louise Schwennesen**  
Wareham, Mass.

*Ann Britton (left) and  
Terry Louise Schwennesen*

