

Just Act

2020

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A NEWSLETTER AND RESOURCE FOR THE CENTER FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE AND RECONCILIATION

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Light *versus* Darkness



By Rodney Sadler

In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in Heaven. [Matthew 5:16]

I have been captivated recently by the contrast between darkness and light, particularly inasmuch as we live in a world that seems at times to be blanketed in darkness. Persistent poverty, chronic homelessness, a failing healthcare system, violence in communities and on an international scale, the rise of nationalism around the world—these and other maladies are all just manifestations of suffocating darkness that has beset our world at this moment.

At the Center for Social Justice and Reconciliation, we recognize the pervasiveness of the darkness. From the divisions in our nation that have torn us from each other, demonized the most vulnerable among us, and made us fear each other to the growing income inequality that has placed a greater percentage of national wealth in fewer hands, darkness is all around us.

Recently, we hosted two events in our new series, “Dangerous Dialogues,” that focused on issues of darkness. One dealt with 400 years of racial disparity and the rising tide of supremacist thought. Another dealt with human sexual trafficking, the danger to young girls and women, and how

we have failed to address this issue as the church. We know that there is darkness all around us.

Yes, we are cognizant of the darkness. But we are not overwhelmed.

Why? Because we know people of faith have always experienced periods of darkness—have been cast into pits like Jacob and Daniel, have been enslaved like the Hebrews in Egypt, have suffered exile like Israel and Judah, and have even been hung from trees to die like Jesus.

We find hope in our scriptures that assure us that “Troubles don’t last always!” We know that, with God, “We shall overcome!” We are assured that we serve a God who comes down to deliver us and bring us to a better day.

It is because of this deep faith in our “come down” God that we also call on students, clergy, and laity alike to respond to the call of God heard even in dark places. As Matthew 5:16 reminds us, we have work to do. We are called to let our light(s) shine before others. We are reminded that we have work to do in the redemption of our world and all of its people. We are called to “Just Act!”

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AFRICAN AMERICAN PREACHING SERIES

Climb On

By Tim Moore

These are the commands, decrees, and laws the LORD your God directed me to teach you to observe in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess, so that you, your children, and their children after them may fear the LORD your God as long as you live by keeping all his decrees and commands that I give you, and so that you may enjoy long life. Hear, Israel, and be careful to obey so that it may go well with you and that you may increase greatly in a land flowing with milk and honey, just as the LORD, the God of your ancestors, promised you.

[Deuteronomy 6:1–3 (NIV)]

“If your dream may be met in one lifetime, then your dream is too small.” With these words, Rev. Dr. Otis Moss Jr. called those gathered at the inaugural lecture and sermon in the African American Preaching Series sponsored by the Center for Social Justice and Reconciliation to imagine possibilities and necessities so bold they would take generations to accomplish.

Joined by his son, Rev. Dr. Otis Moss III, Dr. Moss Jr. likened the work for civil rights and the eradication of the sin of social injustice to the building of a cathedral, noting that those who initiate work on those great ecclesial edifices know from the outset that construction will not be completed in their lifetimes. They trust that they will do their part and that their children and their children’s children will carry on and ensure the work is done.

Not reaching completion in their lifetime is not a deterrent to them. On the contrary, their work is so important—so essential, so necessary—that the knowledge that it will not be finished in one generation is the very inspiration behind its inauguration, its pursuit, and its eventual achievement.

So it is with the work of civil rights and social justice.

This work, too, is so important, so monumental, that we should not presume its completion in one lifetime, and we should acknowledge its magnitude as a witness to its necessity and essentiality to a faithful life—to



PHOTO BY DAWN STEPHENS

a life committed to making all societies, especially the American society, great. It is that call to perfecting the Union that demands constant vigilance and constant refinement to become the place of equality and freedom proclaimed at the nation’s birth. It is a call not to what we were, but to what we can be—to what we *must* be.

Reading from Deuteronomy, Dr. Moss III reminded those gathered that a defining premise of Christianity is that the current generation will pass the legacy and call of faith on to the next, grounding them in the past while pressing them ever forward. Using the image of a journey up a flight of stairs, he explained that climbing stairs requires active, not passive, engagement. So, too, the work of social justice must be achieved intentionally, through the willing participation of those who are ready to climb.

The climb is not without peril or struggle or the need for rest, but the builders of the stairs have taken these things into account. There are handrails to steady. The stairs are wide enough to allow others to walk with us. There are landings and intermediary spots where we might rest—and where one generation might linger while another generation climbs on.

BE MADE WELL: SEEKING WHOLENESS OF LIFE

Healthcare as a Sacramental Mandate

By Tim Moore

Ethnomusicologist for the Center for Social Justice and Reconciliation and current UPSEM student Leslie Oliver called out, “I’ve got a feeling everything’s gonna be alright!” The audience, transformed for a moment into a congregation, called back, “I’ve got a feeling everything’s gonna be alright!” Soon, singing was accompanied by rhythmic clapping as the crowd that was gathered followed Oliver’s lead.

Seizing the moment, retired PC(USA) pastor, national leader in fights for social justice, and the evening’s lecturer, Rev. Dr. Eileen Lindner, took to the pulpit for the first Charlotte Seminar on Social Justice and Healthcare, held at Sharon Presbyterian Church on October 20. She sounded out her argument for the church’s concern for individual health and the need for access to quality healthcare using another kind of familiar rhythm—the rhythm of the Christian life shaped by the sacraments of baptism and communion.

In baptism, the congregation promises the baptized that they will help “guide and nurture by word and deed”—a promise that presumes a fulsome notion of care for the whole person and a care that is not trivial, but paired with active efforts to ensure the baptized member’s opportunity to enjoy “life—life in abundance.” If the church is not willing to fight for access to quality, affordable healthcare, then it should stop baptizing people, because we would be perpetuating a lie, Dr. Lindner asserted.

Similarly, the regular practice of communion is an act of community in which a chalice is offered with the accompanying words, “the cup of salvation.” Salvation means healing. Again, there is an implied promise to the gathered community, Lindner argued, that must be taken seriously or recalled.

Affirming for those gathered that healthcare is not a liberal or conservative issue but a biblical one, Dr. Lindner cited Jesus’s first words of



his ministry—reminding that he came to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, and to set the oppressed free. Pausing and then returning to the words “recovery of sight for the blind,” Lindner said, “That sounds like healthcare to me.”

She underscored her point by noting that in the gospels, Jesus heals nearly twice as often as he preaches or teaches—suggesting that a concern for the community’s good health is paramount to the gospel, to the Christian message, and to the church’s mission.

The church, Lindner maintained, has always understood the indelible link between personal health and spiritual wellbeing—and worked persistently to provide healthcare until the recent past. That connection was only broken when healthcare began to be seen more as an economic enterprise and less as a work of compassion and care.

To address this modern innovation, the church needs to find its prophet voice, Lindner insisted. Evoking the biblical verse that inspired this academic year’s lecture series, “Be Made Well: Seeking Wholeness of Life,” she recalled the words of Jesus to the man lying by the Beth-zatha pool waiting to be healed. There, Jesus says to the man, “Do you want to be made well?”

Jesus’s words suggest a kind of agency or power held by the man. He has a part in wanting to be made well. The kind of healing that is needed in our country and churches, Dr. Lindner maintained, demands willingness on the part of our institutions to be changed—willingness to alter their systems, their purposes, their missions. It requires a willingness to move from seeing healthcare as an economic venture to seeing it as a sacramental expression of the kingdom of God on Earth as it is in heaven.

ACTIVIST IN PROFILE

“Wherry’s Solidarity”

By Ken Garfield

Such is the commitment of Mayfield Memorial Missionary Baptist Church to affordable housing that when it came time to decide whether to dedicate church property to the cause, the vote was unanimous. “The congregation,” its senior pastor said proudly, “is all in.”

Rev. Dr. Peter Wherry arrived at the church in the Hidden Valley neighborhood in west Charlotte in 2007 from historic Queen Street Baptist Church in downtown Norfolk, Virginia. These past 13 years, he says, have been the most exciting, challenging, and productive of his 40 years in ministry. “Our mission is transforming the community and the world by daily living God’s love and justice.”

A native of Buffalo, New York, Dr. Wherry and his wife, Wanda, have two adult children, Justin and Bethany, and three grandchildren. Dr. Wherry confesses to spoiling the grands. “I’m pitiful,” he says, smiling. Formerly a professional actor and singer, now he sings God’s praises by transforming love into action.

His 481-member congregation is focusing on the affordable housing crisis, agreeing with its pastor that it is “inexcusable” in a boomtown like Charlotte for some people to have no place to call home. Thus the decision to build a mixed-income community on five acres in the shadow of the church steeple. Dr. Wherry shares details in the Q&A that follows.

What is the scriptural inspiration for your congregation’s focus on providing more affordable housing in Charlotte?

The imperative of this work is what we understand to be God’s option for the poor and oppressed. A starting point would be Luke 4: 16–21, where Jesus quotes from the Old Testament’s Isaiah 61. The context is Nazareth, his boyhood home, where he has been rejected by his own people. Jesus pronounces his solidarity with those who are poor, oppressed, and pushed to the margins—God’s disinvested people. Our context in the Hidden Valley community—our context in all of Charlotte—calls us to live that same solidarity. We cannot align ourselves with Jesus unless we are concerned with the issues we find him to be concerned about. Our encounters with homeless neighbors and the working poor chasten us to acknowledge that inaction means being complicit in their plight.

What, specifically, does your congregation intend to accomplish?

Our church already owns and operates Mayfield Memorial Apartments, which is housing for seniors and the physically challenged. Now we are working to create a unique community of 50 new residences in Hidden Valley. This new community on church property will include townhomes

and garden villas for seniors while also providing apartments for families. A community center will offer meeting space plus laundry facilities for those who need it, since each residence will include washer-dryer hookups. We are raising funds for a pocket park with a children’s splash area, green space, barbecue grills, picnic tables, a playground, basketball courts, and a pavilion for outdoor worship and other events.

This will be a mixed-income development, meaning that the likes of teachers, bank tellers, and service workers will live side by side with the formerly homeless. We will offer some social services on site, plus a connection with the Housing Partnership to lead people toward home ownership. We plan to break ground this spring. We see that as a signpost of hope.

What keeps a largely churchgoing community like Charlotte from providing affordable housing for all in our midst? Is it fear? Apathy? Prejudice? Greed?

It may be a smattering of all of the above. But I suspect it is primarily a lack of viable strategy for making large dents in the problem. This is why we have pushed to formulate a strategy that can be replicated. We are talking with other congregations to do as we have done and commit the one resource that many faith communities have in some measure—land. We have been studying a way to offer the land owned by faith communities and inject it into the housing pipeline. There are more than 1,000 churches in Charlotte. That doesn’t include houses of worship of other faiths. Imagine if just a fraction of these congregations adopted the strategy we are pursuing.

To the family facing eviction or living in a shelter, or even the back of their car, what is your message to them?

Don’t give up hope. Remember, no matter your predicament, you are part of the community and you are priceless. Remember, your struggles do not define who you are. They only define where you are at this point. Remember, your plight is not a reflection of your failure. It’s a failure of all of us. Remember, many congregations and loving people are working to solve housing injustice. Remember Jesus’s words from Luke 4: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has chosen me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free the oppressed and announce that the time has come when the Lord will save his people.”

What Your Gift Means to the Center for Social Justice and Reconciliation

Whatever the amount, your gift provides the Center with the opportunity to continue its mission to engage in urban and racial discourse, to fight social injustice, to seek equity for the LGBTQ+ community, and to make peace through interfaith dialogue.

Please give today.

Make your donation online at www.upsem.edu/give and select the Center for Social Justice and Reconciliation.

For more information, please contact Tim Moore at (980) 636-1660 or tmoore@upsem.edu

\$100 means one additional person will be able to participate in our two-day RISE anti-racism workshop.

\$200 helps make it possible to hold a Dangerous Dialogue event at the Seminary.

\$250 helps make it possible for a student to travel to participate in a national social justice event.

\$500 helps offset the cost for a student to receive an ambassador annual scholarship to serve as an intern with the Center.

\$1,500 helps make it possible for us to bring an activist-in-residence to the Seminary for a semester.

not/me by Igmara Sanchez Prunier

I.
Two by two they walked
from the ends of the earth
strung together like beads destined for the same necklace.
Male and Female,
twoness of one.
Inseparable.
Divided.
The journey long,
the destination uncertain,
the only map
traced in the gaps between them
at those fleeting points of union
that stubbornly defy their uncompromisable disunion.

Like me. But *not*
like me.
Carrying the burdens and the blessing
of nations,
of ancestors,
of self,
of a newness not mine.
The Promise
false promises;
but hope.
Always Hope.

III.
My ancestor was a wandering Aramaean.
He was Abraham
and Noah.
She was Ruth,
and Hagar,
forsaken.
And Ishmael:
robbed of Your Promise.

You outstretched Your right hand
and I knew
Shame. Rejection. Rootlessness.
And life on a margin of quicksand.

Seduced into tearing at my inseparable dividedness
I am Cain,
killing my Other
again and again.
Doomed to walk my New World
tick-tocking bloody footsteps.

II.
Adaptation.
Naturalization.
Acculturo-indoctrination.
When hatred of the other
becomes hatred of *my* Other,
Then,
I am successfully assimilated.
Twoness tentatively mended.
Agnostic of my
Self.

Why have you forsaken me?
You, who know this pain of an ever-tilting universe.
Of brokenness upon brokenness.
Until I don't know,
until I can't remember.

IV.
Insults. Glass ceilings. Conditional acceptance.
And self-loathing measured in decades.
Somewhere

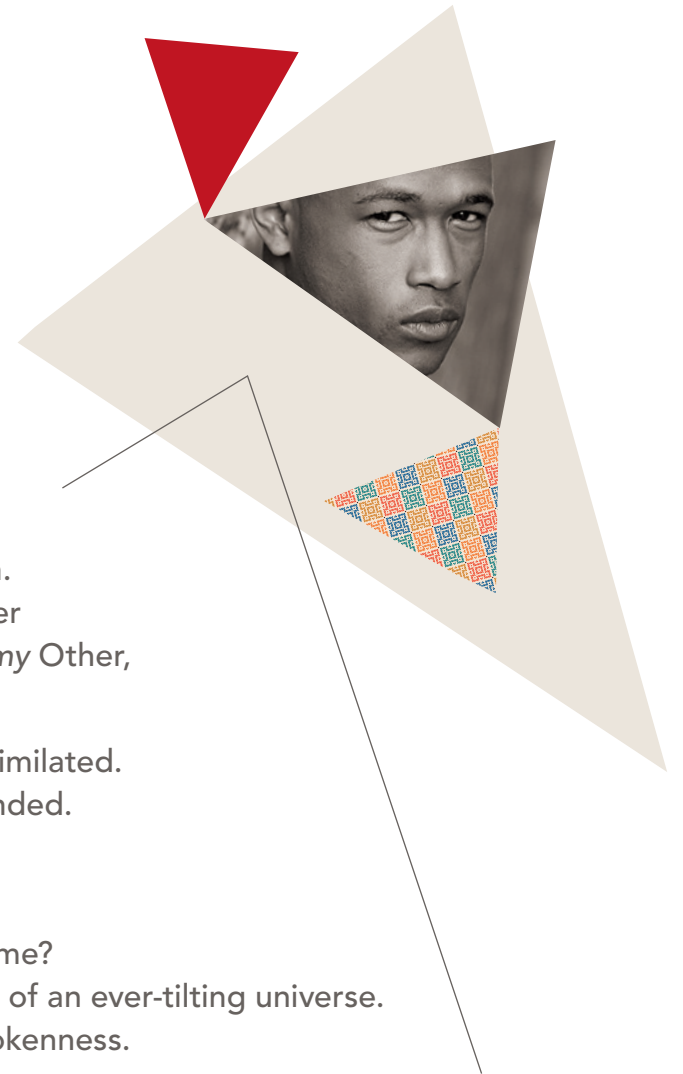
in the midst
of the gaps of my twoness
of the holes in the beads strung from a faraway self
I find a gossamer thread
like manna in the wilderness.

I walk this fragile tightrope of my Self and discover
I am not my gaps, my dividedness, my ill-fitted self.
I am more.

I am my two Selves:
Male *and* Female.
Cain *and* Abel.
Ishmael *and* Isaac.
I *am* Promise fulfilled,
only twisted into something less recognizable
but altogether me
and not me.

Bilingual. Bicultural. Bi-me-and-not-me.
My being and not-being
co-equal,
eternal.

I am on a forever-pilgrimage to the never-destination
found in my deepest longings
and in an American Dream
that is co-equally and eternally
fact
and fiction.



V.

I am gifted
in the art of mending,
of healing hurts,
of fashioning a delicate yet resilient wholeness from twoness
with nothing but hand-me-downs, catch-22's and second-class citizenship.

The scars of my mended Self
heal into a bittersweet reminder
that I *love* my native land, my native tongue, my native food, my native music,
my native hips,
my native idiosyncrasies,
my Native within me,
who now belongs more to this alien nation
than to those shores long ago lost in the Flood.

I am Rumba *and* Rock,
¡Feliz Navidad! *and* Chicken Dance,
Ricky *and* Lucy.

In my places of mendedness
where I wrestle with the Angel of Belonging,
I emerge with my long-sought blessing, but
uncertain,
conflicted,
over which Self I have been unfaithful to.

Every choice,
a syncopated dance
between fidelity and infidelity.



VI.

Oh, to go home!
To *find* home!
A home without
that matches my composite of home within.
From the ends of my Self
I have strung together a lifetime of burdens and blessings,
of promise and betrayal,
of hope,
Always Hope,
and redeemed them by virtue of my immigrant work ethic.

I roll away the stone of my dividedness
after 40 years of Self-wilderness wandering,
of living under the yoke of oppression of Otherness
and the unwritten law of "us" versus "them"

And Rise

a new creation
from the old, the incongruous, the impossible,
the stereotype.
I am Lazarus,
Lázaro.
No less me,
only *More*.



This op-ed, printed in The Charlotte Observer in July 2018, is whittled from a 2,100-word sermon delivered that month at Caldwell Presbyterian Church. Based on Habakkuk 1, it speaks a timely word about covenant living and social justice amid one city's affordable housing crisis.

Nests on High

By John Cleghorn

Eons ago, the prophet Habakkuk saw an impending invasion of his nation and the hardship it would bring, especially to his most vulnerable neighbors. “Woe to him who builds his realm by unjust gain to set his nest on high, to escape the clutches of the ruin,” Habakkuk warned.

As our city seeks to solve its 34,000-unit affordable housing gap, I've been thinking about the prophet's words and whether I might be one of those who set a “nest on high.”

Twenty-eight years ago, my wife and I scraped together every dollar we had to make a \$4,500 down payment on an outdated two-bedroom bungalow wrapped in sun-faded aluminum siding in a transitional neighborhood. Since then, as children came and life's needs arose, we moved from home to home—all within Charlotte's comfortable southeast “wedge” of neighborhoods.

Not all of our city's residents have been so fortunate—for instance, those forced out of the old African American Brooklyn neighborhood during the urban renewal movement of the 1960s. Many scrambled to find affordable housing in nearby working-class neighborhoods such as Biddleville, Seversville, and Smallwood near Johnson C. Smith University—or Wilmore near South End and Enderly Park off Freedom Drive.

Now history is repeating itself for the grandsons and granddaughters of those Brooklyn exiles. Demand for “first-ring” neighborhoods close to uptown is driving property values up and poorer neighbors out. With our affordable housing shortage, where will they go?

For families like mine, homeownership has been as sure and steady as a good bond or stock. Our initial down payment on that first bungalow has appreciated nicely—along with overall housing values in Charlotte, which have averaged six percent growth per year, according to the respected Case-Shiller housing index for Charlotte.

It may sound harsh to some to say that Charlotte has been invaded, as in the prophet Habakkuk's time. No foreign power has taken over our city. But economic factors have taken hold. Our most vulnerable neighbors lie in their path while others ride a wave of home value appreciation. Charlotte is currently the fourth-hottest housing market in the nation, according to the real estate website Zillow. More good news for area homeowners.

There is nothing immoral or unethical about the wealth that comes from rising home equity values. It may not qualify as what Habakkuk calls “unjust gain.” But many of us live comfortably in “nests on high” while waves of newcomers—estimated at 40 to 60 a day—filter into town and low-income and working people are pushed out and out and out.

Come November, Charlotte residents will be asked to vote on a \$50 million bond referendum to help close the city's affordable housing gap. If it passes, it's important we think carefully about how those funds will be used—especially in aid to those at 50 and 30 percent of area median income.

Even \$50 million will not be enough. So the Foundation for the Carolinas and others are calling on the private sector and philanthropists to create additional pools of funding to house those with the lowest incomes.

In his time of crisis, old Habakkuk made a vow. “I will take my place on a high wall and stand watch for the Lord,” he said.

As newcomers stream into our city and events like the Republican National Convention bring in promised millions, let's do as Habakkuk advises. Let's take a place on the rampart and stand watch on behalf of the voiceless and the vulnerable.

How about the creation of the Habakkuk Housing Fund dedicated to creating affordable housing through the increased home equity many of us have enjoyed and the profits the city realizes as a result of a growing tax base and big conventions?

I'll make the first donation. Who's in?

Dismantling Walls

By Mindy Douglas

Israel and Palestine. South Africa. Montgomery, Alabama. What do these places have in common? This question was asked of me repeatedly as people learned of the locations my husband and I visited during my sabbatical—a gift made possible by the Lilly Endowment Clergy Renewal Grant and First Presbyterian Church in Durham, North Carolina. Their foreheads wrinkled as they tried to figure out why I would choose to visit these places. But as I explained it to them, they nodded their heads in understanding.

The places we visited were all places where walls of division have been erected over the years—physical, systemic, emotional, and mental walls—and many are still standing. These are places where oppression has become baked into local and national systems—education, healthcare, land ownership, criminal justice, and religion.

In Bethlehem, we stood beneath a physical wall that stands twice as high as the Berlin Wall once stood, keeping Palestinians living in Bethlehem from entering nearby Jerusalem without the proper documentation. In this region, fear reigns supreme. Checkpoints divide communities. Uniformed Israeli teenagers patrol occupied territories with submachine guns and assault rifles slung over their shoulders. Palestinian children play in filthy, crowded refugee camps—already generations and miles removed from the land stripped from their grandparents and great-grandparents. Systems (including control of water and electricity, road access, land ownership, and business regulations) have been put into place that ensure the continued oppression of the Palestinian people.

In Cape Town, South Africa, Apartheid is officially over, but the effects of the 50-year institutionalized policy of racial segregation can still be seen at every turn. The wealthy, predominantly white population lives in beautiful homes along the coastline, while black Africans (making up 80 percent of the population) are crammed into informal housing communities where

many live in corrugated metal shacks and the closest access to water and restrooms can be half a mile or more away. Systems put in place to relocate and oppress black Africans during Apartheid have left deep wounds that will take generations of intentional reparations to heal.

In the United States, whites are slow to acknowledge the ongoing effects that slavery, Jim Crow, and government-sanctioned racism continue to have on people of color. Our visits to Montgomery and Selma, Alabama, reminded us of our disgraceful past dotted with racially motivated lynchings, murder, violence, hatred, and injustice. The Equal Justice Initiative's Legacy Museum shows how racist policies from our past persist in our criminal justice system, as well as in public education, housing, and healthcare.

While we traveled and witnessed the ongoing systemic racism in each of these places, First Presbyterian Church in Durham read Bryan Stevenson's *Just Mercy* together and visited the International Civil Rights Museum in Greensboro, North Carolina, with our sister congregation, Covenant Presbyterian Church, a predominantly African American church. Conversations continued as classes read together *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* and *White Fragility*, building on previous books addressing white privilege we have read in the past.

Combined with study, however, there must also be action—and so we work to address the systems of our community that continue to limit and oppress people of color. Together with other faith and community leaders, we organize for more affordable housing, bail bond and prison reform, and equal opportunities in education and employment.

In the United States, centuries of racial oppression still exist in the systems that run our nation. As people of faith, we have an obligation to dismantle them. I pray our eyes and hearts might be opened to the truth of our past so that, together, we might work toward a more just and equitable future for all.

Perhaps this can serve as a reminder that faith in God is not passive; it is always active. God calls us to move, to do, to serve, to act for the betterment of our world. Dr. King said in his "Letter from Birmingham City Jail," "Human progress never rolls in on wheels of inevitability; it comes through the tireless efforts of [those] willing to be co workers with God..." In essence, he was saying we have to act to bring about the kind of world in which we would like to live. We have to act to manifest the Kingdom of God "on earth as it is in heaven." We have to "Just Act!"

We live in a darkened time...but darkness is neither inevitable nor everlasting. It will change if we join God in light-bringing work. God's light inevitably will shine. It will break through the darkness. God's light will inevitably shine. It will shine anew in this world. God's light will inevitably shine. The question in this dark day is, will we allow ours to shine, as well?

God bless,

Rev. Dr. Rodney S. Sadler Jr.

Director, Center for Social Justice and Reconciliation



JustAct

JustAct is published by the Center for Social Justice and Reconciliation at Union Presbyterian Seminary for community activists, organizers, friends of the Seminary, and all those committed to living into God's beloved community.

Director of the CSJR

Rodney Sadler, Associate Professor of Bible

Coordinator for the CSJR

Erin Mills

Editor for JustAct

Timothy S. Moore, Director of Donor Relations

Designer for JustAct

Edith Ridderhof

Union Presbyterian Seminary

Richmond Campus: 3401 Brook Road, Richmond, VA 23227 (804) 278-4240

Charlotte Campus: 5141 Sharon Road, Charlotte, NC 28210 (980) 636-1700

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Inside this Issue

Mindy Douglas is a graduate of Union Presbyterian Seminary (M.Div.) and Duke Divinity School (D.Min.). All of her ministry has been in North Carolina, where she has served in Wilson, Chapel Hill, Chatham County, and Durham. She currently serves as the president of the board of the North Carolina Council of Churches and on the board of Union Presbyterian Seminary. Her passions include working toward racial and economic justice, creating affordable housing opportunities, and including all in the gospel message of inclusion, hope, and peace. Mindy currently serves as the pastor of First Presbyterian Church in Durham, North Carolina.

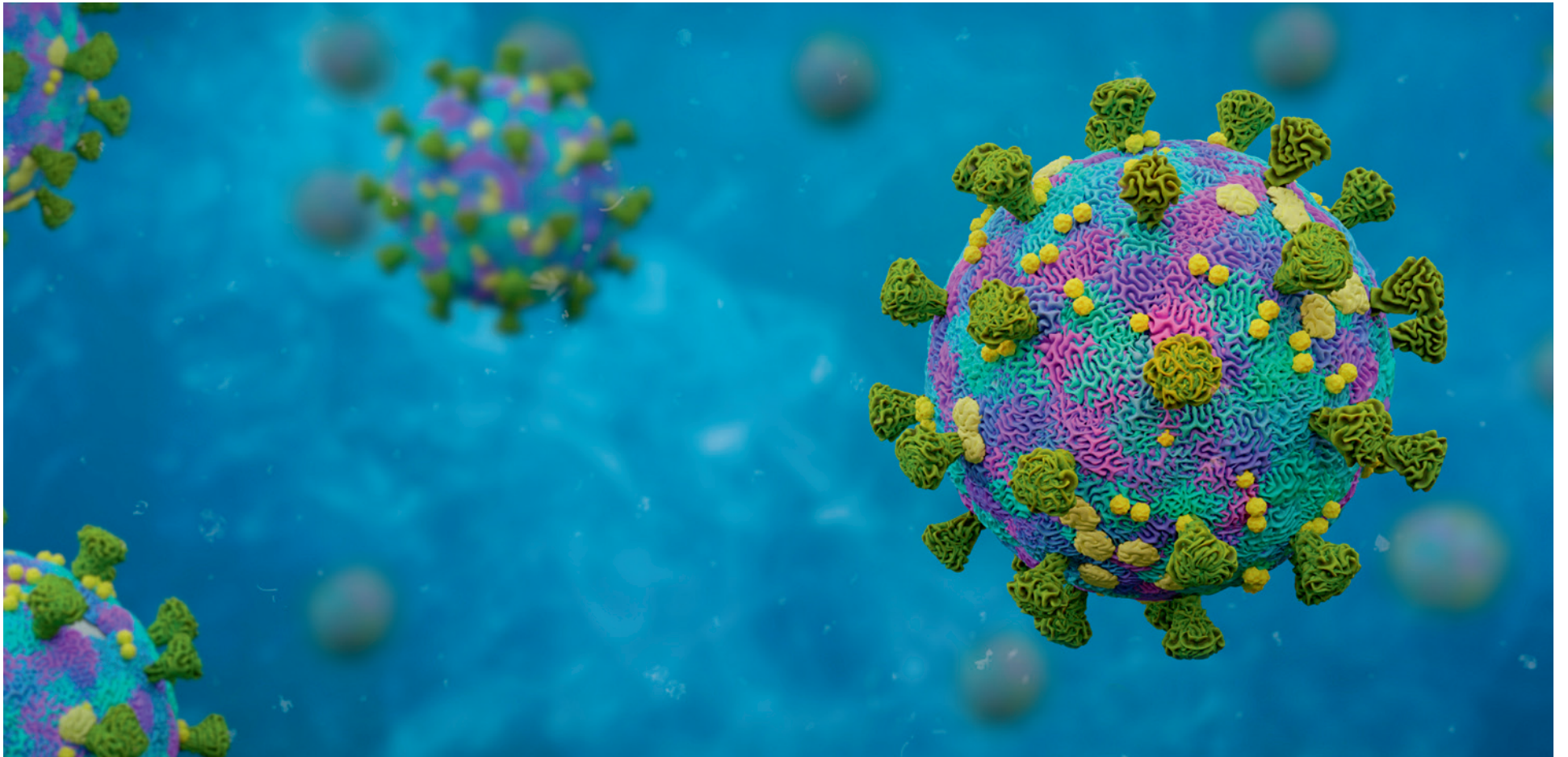
Igmara Sanchez Prunier is a Cuban-born immigrant and naturalized U.S. Citizen reared in New York/New Jersey. She left her professional writing career behind and relocated to Richmond to attend Union Presbyterian Seminary and follow her call to ministry. Over the past 11 years, she's worked in both hospital and community-based healthcare settings, and is currently serving as a hospice chaplain. Igmara is a wife, mother, writer, Greyhound rescuer, and ordained Presbyterian minister residing in central Virginia.

John M. Cleghorn is the pastor of Caldwell Presbyterian Church in Charlotte, a 108-year-old church resurrected to a thriving, diverse, and missionary congregation. After a 25-year career that included working for *The Charlotte Observer* and Bank of America, Cleghorn answered the call to ministry and arrived at Caldwell as a new pastor in 2008. He holds divinity degrees from Union Presbyterian Seminary and Pittsburgh Theological Seminary. His book about the church's experience as an intersectional congregation is due out in fall 2020.

Ken Garfield is a Charlotte writer focusing on faith and values and telling the story of charitable causes. He is a former religion editor at *The Charlotte Observer* and served for 12 years as Director of Communications at Myers Park United Methodist Church in Charlotte. He has published several books, including one celebrating the life of Billy Graham. His family belongs to Sharon Presbyterian Church.

Tim Moore is an ordained United Methodist minister and serves as Director of Donor Relations at Union Presbyterian Seminary. Before coming to the Seminary, he served local congregations and campus ministries in the Mid-Atlantic and worked in administrative positions at the denominational level of The United Methodist Church. For nearly 20 years, he has been a professor, an academic and administrative dean, a college chaplain and campus minister, and a pastor. The author and editor of numerous articles and books, he is a native of southern Appalachia. His wife, Amy Spivey, is also an ordained United Methodist minister. Spivey and Moore have a 14-year-old daughter.

Rodney S. Sadler Jr. is an ordained Baptist minister and is Associate Professor of Bible and Director of the Center for Social Justice and Reconciliation at Union Presbyterian Seminary. His teaching experience includes courses in biblical languages, Old and New Testament interpretation, wisdom literature in the Bible, the history and religion of ancient Israel, and African American biblical interpretation. His first authored book, *Can a Cushite Change His Skin? An Examination of Race, Ethnicity, and Othering in the Hebrew Bible*, was published in 2005. He frequently lectures within the church and the community on Race in the Bible, African American Biblical Interpretation, the Image of Jesus, Biblical Archaeology, and the Dead Sea Scrolls. He is the managing editor of *The African-American Devotional Bible*.



SPECIAL CONTENT ON THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

Guidance for Faith Communities in the Age of COVID-19

By Rodney Sadler

I want to speak to our faith leaders today.

The question from Genesis 4 resonates within our community at this time. “Am I my brother’s/sister’s/neighbor’s keeper?”

It looms large now as we face the COVID-19 pandemic, for the way we respond is truly a test of what we say we believe.

In this moment of uncertainty, I want to encourage all of us to live without fear, but with wisdom. We need to maintain the competing values expressed in Leviticus 19:18 and find a balance between them: “Love your neighbor as yourself.”

1. **“Love your neighbor”:** How do we care for those who are suffering, those who are most at risk, those who are impoverished and hit hardest, those who are on the streets without homes, and those who are incarcerated? How do we not let our love lapse due to fear at this time?
2. **“As yourself”:** We have to ensure that we begin our care with ourselves. As the flight attendants advise in their safety demonstrations, “First, put on your mask, then attend to the masks of others.” How do we ensure that we are taking care of ourselves so that we do not further imperil others?

In this challenging time, I want to encourage all of us to live the values of our various faith traditions, to seek to be of service to others, and to continue to do the good that all of our scriptures call us to do—while at the same time working to protect ourselves, lest we put others at risk.

The Governor has offered some guidance for things we can do. As religious leaders, this guidance might be hard to hear—particularly for those of us who have never had to cancel worship before—but in this instance, we need to consider what is best for our people.

According to guidance from the Governor’s Office:

“MASS GATHERINGS, COMMUNITY, AND SOCIAL EVENTS”

NC DHHS recommends that organizers of events that draw more than 10 people should cancel, postpone, or modify these events or offer on-line streaming services. If people do gather, they should stay at least six feet apart. Also, only events that are essential should still be held, especially given the wise and precautionary advice to shelter-in-place.

Many of our congregations are populated by people who are most at risk. NC DHHS recommends that people at high risk of severe illness from COVID-19 should stay at home to the extent possible in order to decrease the chance of infection.

People at high risk include those:

- over 65 years of age;
- with underlying health conditions, including heart disease, lung disease, or diabetes; or
- with weakened immune systems.

Many of our congregations do not have 100 people, but some of the people we do have are those most at risk. In this regard, we must be particularly sensitive to this guidance.

I want to end my comments by repeating that this is not a time for fear. Prudence, yes. Vigilance, yes. But fear...no!

We as people of faith believe in a higher power:

One who has brought people through much tougher times than these.

One who has done marvelous things for people in the past: Noah in the flood, Moses in the wilderness, Daniel at the lion’s den, Jesus in the grave. Our Creator specializes in producing victories against impossible odds!

One who is *still* at work now.

If we act responsibly during this period—if those at risk stay home unless travel is necessary, if those who are sick self-quarantine, if those who know they have at-risk neighbors who live alone reach out to them, if all of us wash our hands for 20 seconds at a time, if we disinfect surfaces and monitor how we are feeling...

If we all do that—if we people of faith do that, if we faith leaders do that, and if we believe—I trust that God will bring us through this challenge, as well.

SPECIAL CONTENT ON THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

What Can Congregations and Congregants Be Doing?

(This article was originally produced and distributed by LeDayne McLeese Polaski, executive director of MeckMin: Mecklenburg Interfaith Network. It is reproduced here with permission.)

In this crisis, as in any other, the most vulnerable suffer first, suffer most, and suffer longest. In response, we have been communicating with some of our area's largest direct-service providers to ask how houses of faith and individual congregants can help lessen the impact of our current challenges on our neediest neighbors.

Faith leaders are also urged to direct congregants experiencing critical needs to these resources. There may be many people in your house of faith who have never before needed such support, and they may be unaware of the resources available.

Please note that circumstances change daily, even hourly. This material is current as of press time, but it is a good idea to check websites for updated information. Please note that these non-profits are EXEMPT from the current stay-at-home order due to their essential work, but that volunteers need to be in excellent health, not in a high risk group, and symptom free, with no known exposure to Covid-19. Social distancing and other prevention protocols are being strictly enforced.

Loaves and Fishes

Needs include volunteers to sort and pack emergency food boxes, financial donations, and participation in their virtual food drive. Full and up-to-date resources can be found on their website:

loavesandfishes.org/covid19-response/

The Urban Ministry Center (UMC)

www.urbanministrycenter.org/join-the-conversation/news-events/

Having cancelled the remainder of the Room in the Inn season due to health concerns, UMC has created an Amazon Wish List of items of particular value to our neighbors experiencing homelessness. This list is being updated regularly. You may purchase items from the list here:

tinyurl.com/UMCAmazonwishlist

UMC is also seeking grab-and-go lunches as they continue to serve hundreds of neighbors every day:

www.meckmin.org/bagged-lunches-for-urban-ministry-center/

Crisis Assistance Ministry

Having temporarily closed their facilities, Crisis Assistance Ministry is still working to ensure local families remain in stable housing. They are

providing help particularly for families facing eviction from long-stay hotels. Donations are needed for this and for the coming spike in need:

tinyurl.com/crisisassistancebasicneeds

Block Love CLT

Block Love CLT is a grassroots organization providing daily outreach and support to neighbors experiencing homelessness. They need volunteers and non-perishable food donations. (The UMC list noted above offers guidance that would also be helpful for them.) Text Contact Deborah Woolard at (704) 577-1812 to volunteer or to offer food.

QC Family Tree

QC Family Tree is a grassroots community development organization in the Enderly Park neighborhood. They are regularly updating their needs:

tinyurl.com/neighborupdate

Other Ways You Can Help

Give

If congregations or individuals are able to make financial gifts to sustain these crucial ministries, that will be immensely helpful.

Pray

Please pray for people being directly impacted by the virus and/or by the many disruptions we are all experiencing. Please pray, too, for the many people, like the leaders and staff of these non-profits and others, who are providing services in very challenging and constantly changing circumstances.

As you become aware of other critical needs, please communicate them to ledayne@meckmin.org so that we can share them as widely as possible.

MeckMin is hosting weekly Zoom meetings with faith and non-profit leaders so that those providing direct services can share updates on their greatest needs. ALL ARE WELCOME TO ATTEND. **Email meckmin@meckmin.org to receive an invitation to the Zoom calls.**

In all that we do and say in these days, may we be guided by the directive common to all faiths to love our neighbors—which includes being willing to give and receive specific acts of care.

Rev. LeDayne McLeese Polaski has been the Executive Director of MeckMin (Mecklenburg County's Metropolitan Interfaith Network) since October 2019. She came to this position after 20 years of service to the Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America—Bautistas por la Paz. She is an active member of Park Road Baptist Church and the Charlotte Clergy Coalition for Justice and serves as a grant consultant for QC Family Tree in Charlotte.



Holding Us All in Prayer

WORLDWIDE WELLNESS PRAYER CONNECTION

Providing Healing and Outreach through Prayer

We are an incarnational, gathered people. Yet circumstances and prudence place us in isolation.

Because we are a gathered people, we are also a spiritual people. The same Spirit that makes the disparate one is the Spirit that makes us a people bound together across time and space. As the old hymn cries out, we are held "with cords that cannot be broken."

Today, we give thanks for the Spirit of grace that holds us to you and you to us.

We have created a website dedicated to holding us all in prayer:

www.upsem.edu/prayer-network.

Visit the prayer site, remember us in your prayers, and recall anew these words from the Psalmist:

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. [PSALM 46:1]

CENTER FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE AND RECONCILIATION

The Center for Social Justice and Reconciliation operates from the Seminary's Charlotte campus and is directed by Associate Professor of Bible Dr. Rodney S. Sadler Jr.

Grounded in a ministry that is mandated in scripture, its two main goals are to remind people in the Seminary of the significance of social justice work as part of ministry and to bring the activist community into the Seminary.

The Center's areas of focus include: urban ministry concerns, social justice ministry concerns, contemporary issues, black church studies, LGBTQ ministry and justice issues, and evangelism from a social justice perspective.



Center for Social Justice
and Reconciliation

Charlotte Campus 5141 Sharon Road Charlotte, NC 28210

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Our Response to the Coronavirus Pandemic:

At the time of publication, Union Presbyterian Seminary and the Center for Social Justice and Reconciliation have moved our work and events online out of an abundance of caution and to be sensitive to the most vulnerable amongst us. We continue to monitor developing circumstances, address them as best we can, and remain vigilant to aid those most affected and potentially disadvantaged by the advancing pandemic.

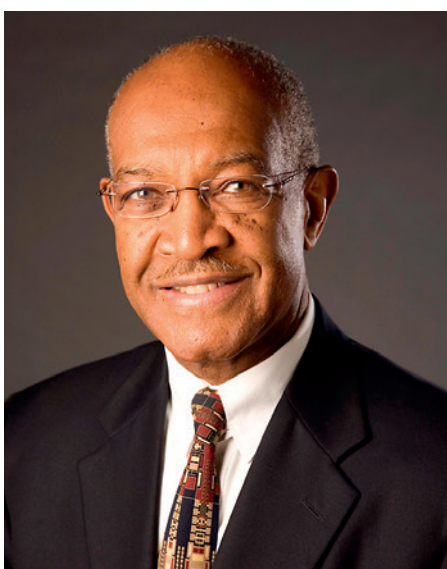
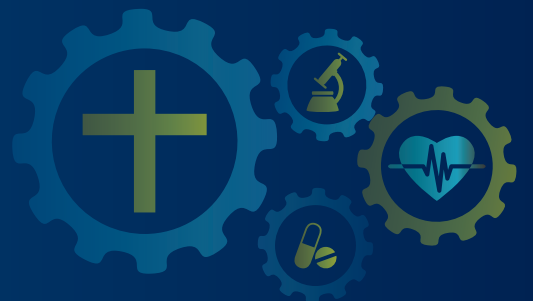
Please visit our website, upsem.edu/csjr for up-to-date information about events and community response.



Center for Social Justice
and Reconciliation

BE MADE WELL

A series of public conversations sponsored by the Center for Social Justice and Reconciliation of Union Presbyterian Seminary, Charlotte Campus



Health on Earth as in Heaven

Rev. Dr. James Forbes
Senior Minister Emeritus, Riverside Church, New York, New York

7:00 pm / Monday, September 14, 2020*
Covenant Presbyterian Church, 1000 E. Morehead Street, Charlotte, North Carolina 28204

Join us to hear James Forbes consider issues of injustice and how communities of faith might respond as an exercise of that faith.

Born and reared in North Carolina, Forbes is senior minister emeritus of Riverside Church in New York City and has served that church for nearly two decades. Forbes was the first African American to serve as senior minister of one of the largest multicultural congregations in the nation. In 2009, he authored the book *Whose Gospel: A Concise Guide to Progressive Protestantism*, in which he offers a compelling vision of progressive social change and addresses the most crucial issues of our time—poverty, war, women's equality, racial justice, sexuality, and the environment.

UPCOMING EVENT:

PANEL DISCUSSION

Moving Heaven and Earth, a Conversation about Efforts to Improve Healthcare in our Communities

7:00 pm / Monday, June 1, 2020* / Caldwell Presbyterian Church, 1609 East Fifth Street, Charlotte, North Carolina 28204

* Due to current Coronavirus protocols, events may be held online, postponed, or cancelled. Please visit upsem.edu/csjr for up-to-date information.