

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

NON-PROFIT
ORGANIZATION
U.S. POSTAGE PAID
RICHMOND, VIRGINIA
PERMIT NO. 1027

**Learn to do good; seek justice,
correct oppression; defend the
fatherless, plead for the widow.**

Isaiah 1:17

Engage. Join. Seek. Peace.

**Engage in urban and racial discourse.
Join us to fight social injustice.
Seek equity for the LGBTQ+ community.
Peace-make through interfaith dialogue.**

Visit our website at www.upsem.edu/csjr



Center for Social Justice
and Reconciliation



Just Act

2019

ISSUE

1

upsem.edu/csjr

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

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

YEAR ONE

Ken Garfield summarizes “Just Jesus” lecture series

A FRIENDLY CORRESPONDENCE

Fred Robinson writes a letter to his friend

EYEWITNESS

Megan Argabrite goes to the Mexico/US border

Acts of Faith

Our steps are made firm by the Lord,
when he delights in our way... [Psalm 37:23]

By Rodney Sadler and Tim Moore

Few journeys are ever completed with just one step. Yet every journey begins with a first action, an initial movement. Welcome to our first step in a witness of faith that seeks to link what might be with what must be.

Established in 2017, Union Presbyterian Seminary’s Center for Social Justice and Reconciliation is an effort to bring faithful voices, insight, wisdom, and action to the issues of injustice in our communities by turning to the reconciling work of the gospel as a natural resource for restorative, just work. *JustAct* is meant to function as a regular periodical accompanying the work of this new Center. As an instructive, reflective piece, this resource is paired with the intentional efforts of the Center to bring together community activists and faith leaders through public lectures, times of dialogue, acts of witness, and moments of consciousness-raising. However, not all action—just acts, prophetic witness, righteous indignation, loving-kindness—is apparent. Sometimes it is dormant, requiring a liberating catalyst.

The energy stored in an object is called *potential energy*. This is the concept in physics that something might happen to or with that object. For example, the energy used to compress a spring is transferred to the spring and stored inside it waiting to be released. The release of that stored energy is called *kinetic energy*. When the compressed spring is released, the energy is restored from a passive to an active state. Several interesting theological observations emerge from this rather rudimentary recollection of high school physics.

First, the Latin root for “potential” is *potentia*, meaning “power.” Second, the Greek root for “kinetic” is *kinesis*, meaning “motion.” In other words, in both instances action, change is assumed. In the first instance, change is coiled in the spring. The law of conservation of energy does not allow the energy used to compress the spring to dissipate. Rather, that energy is transferred to the spring itself and stored throughout the object, awaiting liberation. Similarly, the reality of change is static, awaiting its opportunity to erupt. Potential has a real, tangible power. In the second step, change is realized; motion is actual. Our spring bursts to life, racing from compression to extension, from what might be to what is. The change that was thought lost was only dormant and has been awakened to life. That is the third observation. The conversion of energy from potential to kinetic, the transformation of change from stored to sprung, requires a catalyst.

Catalysts come in many forms and at many times. In life, as in the case of our spring, the energy of change—often thought absent or destroyed—is made manifest, is incarnated in objects now in motion. Metaphorical springs are coiled all around us, awaiting release, longing for their catalyst to spark action.

continued on page 7

Just Jesus

By Ken Garfield

Jesus in the Public Square / March 17

In a conversation about Jesus, justice, and love, an impromptu gesture spoke volumes: Poised to share their divergent views, North Carolina State Senator Jeff Jackson (a Democrat) and former North Carolina State Senator Jeff Tarte (a Republican) leaned toward each other at the pulpit of Caldwell Presbyterian Church and bumped fists. Lest we miss the symbolism, Tarte articulated it for the 125 people gathered to consider *Jesus in the Public Square*: Never forget that we have more that unites us than divides us.

The gathering on March 17 was the second in a series of lectures on the question, “Why should a seminary focus on social justice?” Union has offered its answer through the creation of the Center for Social Justice and Reconciliation. Operating from the Charlotte campus and directed by Associate Professor of Bible Dr. Rodney S. Sadler Jr., the center seeks to inspire the Seminary and general community to see reconciliation work at the core of God’s mission. This inaugural lecture series, open to all, kick-starts the conversation.

It was not lost on anyone that this gathering came two days after 50 Muslims were murdered at two mosques in New Zealand. Together in response, Dr. Sadler said, we proclaim a Jesus who is concerned about issues of love and justice, and who welcomes the marginalized without qualification.

Charlotte’s Jackson, a former assistant DA, and Tarte, former mayor of Cornelius, covered a lot of ground in their hour’s give-and-take.

On their role as Christians in the public arena: Jackson said it’s to see injustice as a call to arms. Tarte said it’s to take care of every person who can’t take care of themselves.

On the need for civility: Jackson noted that North Carolina is equally divided between Democrats and Republicans. Wouldn’t it be trailblazing, he suggested, if we could show the rest of the nation how to have a civil debate on gun violence and any other issue? Tarte suggested that when a legislator submits a bill, no one’s name or party should be attached to it. That way, the proposal can be judged on its own merits, free of partisanship. They both agreed that debate and disagreement are fine, so long as we preserve the potential to reconcile.

On their moral core belief: Tarte said his is a belief in service. Jackson said his is a determination never to be a bystander. There’s more than enough ministry and injustice in the world to act upon, he said.

On not taking it personally: Jackson praised Tarte for being a friend and ally, and a leader in the push for early childhood education in North Carolina. But nearly in the same breath, he acknowledged their political differences, and noted that he worked for Tarte’s defeat in 2018.

Just as they began with a fist bump, Jackson and Tarte closed the conversation with a gesture of reconciliation. On a Sunday afternoon devoted to a just Jesus and a gentler world, they hugged.

From Social Justice to Social Change / May 5–6

A justice revival, it was dubbed—an opportunity to come together and explore the most pivotal questions of faith and activism.

Are salvation and social justice intertwined?

Are we called to confront racial injustice, Islamophobia, homophobia, sexism, classism, anti-Semitism, and police violence?

Are we ready—eager, even—to bring Jesus into the troubling moment in which we live?

The questions are ours to answer. But during two days of soul-searching in Charlotte, two of the nation’s leading faith activists left little doubt where our Christian convictions must take us.

Rev. Traci Blackmon said, “Love that doesn’t pay attention to justice is not love at all.”

Rev. Jim Wallis chose to let Jesus’ words speak for him: *“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven...”* As a kid growing up in segregated Detroit, he said, the Sermon on the Mount shaped his life. Let it now shape ours.

Blackmon and Wallis joined Union Presbyterian Seminary for the *Just Jesus* lecture series May 5–6, hosted by the Seminary’s Center for Social Justice and Reconciliation. Based on the Charlotte campus and led by Associate Professor of Bible Rodney Sadler, the Center has two main goals and one mission: to help seminarians embrace social justice work and to welcome the activist community into our midst—both meant to nudge us toward boldness. As Blackmon said on the opening night, “Justice is not what we do. It is who we ought to be.”

Blackmon and Wallis come to their convictions through tough work. She is Executive Minister of Justice & Wellness Ministries of The United Church of Christ and pastor of Christ The King United Church of Christ in Florissant,

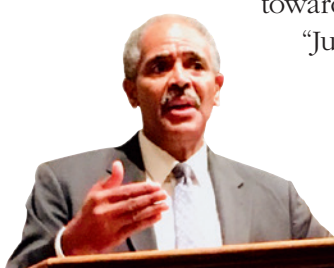
Missouri. After the 2014 shooting death of Michael Brown Jr. in Ferguson, Missouri, she became a national voice for justice amid the unrest. Wallis is an internationally known author, theologian, and commentator who has spent a lifetime railing against racism. He is also founder and president of *Sojourners*, a print and online publication devoted to exploring social justice.

As the several hundred people who attended the gatherings will attest, these were unflinching conversations:

Before Blackmon could preach a single word, the tone of the gathering at Myers Park Baptist Church was illuminated: Six candles were lit for the two students murdered and four wounded in a shooting several days earlier at UNC Charlotte. Blackmon said working for social justice isn’t a dimension of our faith, it is our faith. “Justice is the same as discipleship,” she said. “I don’t call myself an activist. I’m a disciple of Jesus Christ.”

At a Seminary luncheon for an audience largely comprising clergy, Wallis challenged us to make the prophetic word specific. Practicing what he preached, he called white nationalism a threat to democracy and described the current President as a “white nationalist fascist.” Blackmon painted a disturbing portrait from Ferguson, Missouri, noting that from one side of the street (the white side) to the other (the black side), there is a 26-year difference in the average life span. Her question? What does that say about us and the circles we choose to live in?

At the final gathering at Myers Park Presbyterian Church, Wallis said that Jesus survives us. The teachings of a brown-skinned Palestinian rabbi remain life-changing even if the young are dropping out of church in droves and our society exists in that dangerous place between loving and demonizing its neighbors. Wallis, the kid from Detroit, has seen a lot. But nothing sways him from the Sermon on the Mount—and the counsel of an activist who set an example for all of us to live and die by. *Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God...*



Dr. Brian K. Blount, president of Union Presbyterian Seminary, delivered the inaugural lecture in the series, titled “Just Jesus: Why Our Seminary Feels Led to Address Issues of Justice and Racial Reconciliation,” for the Center for Social Justice and Reconciliation at Sharon Presbyterian Church in October 2018. To see that address in its entirety, visit www.upsem.edu/cs jr



The Center for Social Justice and Reconciliation: Reflecting Back, Looking Ahead

By Erin Mills

Step out. Seek justice. Make peace.

This was the charge from Dr. Rodney Sadler when the Center for Social Justice and Reconciliation (CSJR) was born last fall. As we reflect back on the Center's first year, we are both grateful for and humbled by the way the Seminary and activist communities came together to explore the overarching question, "Why should a seminary focus on social justice?"

Our inaugural engagement, in October 2018, brought President Brian Blount to Sharon Presbyterian Church to discuss social justice from a biblical perspective. In March of this year, the Center invited North Carolina State Senator Jeff Jackson (D) and former North Carolina State Senator Jeff Tarte (R) to a conversation titled "Just Jesus: Jesus in the Public Square." This event, held at Caldwell Presbyterian Church, explored how it looks when people of faith engage in politics. Finally, we were honored to welcome Reverend Jim Wallis to Myers Park Presbyterian Church and Reverend Dr. Traci Blackmon to Myers Park Baptist Church and to the Charlotte campus to engage in the conversation, "Just Jesus: From Social Justice to Social Change."

This first year demanded introspection as it challenged participants to consider the indelible connection between a faithful life and a life committed to justice. While introspective, this year also catalyzed change, challenging members of the Seminary community to not only consider this indelible connection, but also to act on it.

As we look ahead to the Center's second year, we are reminded of our calling to be grounded in a ministry that is mandated in scripture. In John 5, we encounter the story of a man at Bethesda who had "been an invalid for thirty-eight years." When Jesus sees him lying by the pool and learns of the many years he has suffered, Jesus asks him, "Do you want to be made well?" Jesus follows this question with a command, "Get up and walk." The man is healed.

We can learn a great deal from this story as we consider the current state of healthcare locally and nationally. How are people—all people—made well? What would it mean for a society with healthcare practices and policies that are crippled to get up and walk in new way? What are we doing as a society to impede healing, leaving many to languish at the edge of the healing pool yet never able to enter it? How are biases, unfair practices, and discriminatory policies negatively impacting our family members, our friends, and our neighbors? And what does our faith say about what we should do?

In the coming year, the Center will host a series of lectures and conversations titled "Be Made Well," in which local and national speakers and panelists will help us wrestle with these and other questions, challenging us again to consider what faith might demand of us.

In anticipation of the CSJR's second year, the Director offered the following comments: "I am excited by what we have been able to accomplish this first year and eagerly anticipate expanding our work in the future. In addition to the major lectures, the community social justice events that we have sponsored or hosted, and the anti-racism workshops that we have offered to the local faith community, we hope to add a monthly series called "Dangerous Dialogues" that will examine controversial issues on selected Thursday nights at the Seminary and a travel seminar that will be open to seminarians and community members that explores civil rights and racial justice in the American South. We hope that through our work, it will become undeniable that the ministry of the Gospel of Jesus Christ requires that we join with God in an effort to manifest God's Reign as in Heaven, thus on Earth."

Upcoming Lectures

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 20, 2019 / 6:30 PM

Be Made Well: Seeking Wholeness of Life

Speaker: Rev. Dr. Eileen Lindner



Rev. Dr. Eileen W. Lindner is a historian, researcher, pastor, and popular public speaker. Much of her career has embodied the best of ecumenical leadership, justice, and unity in ministry at the National Council of Churches, serving as Deputy General Secretary and as Associate General Secretary for Unity and Relationships. Earlier in her career at the Council, Lindner served as Director of the Child Advocacy Office. During her tenure, she established the Ecumenical Child Care Network, serving 18,000

preschool programs housed in churches of all denominations nationwide.

Dr. Lindner is widely known as the editor of the *Yearbook of American & Canadian Churches*, widely recognized as the most accurate and complete compilation of facts and figures on U.S. and Canadian churches and organizations. She is the first Dean of the Riggio Lynch Interfaith Chapel at the Children's Defense Fund's Alex Haley Farm. She is also the author of numerous books and articles on a variety of child advocacy subjects; most recently, *Thus Far on the Way: Toward a Theology of Child Advocacy*. She also wrote *When Churches Mind Children*, reporting on the nation's most extensive childcare study.

Dr. Lindner serves as Theologian in Residence to the Children's Defense Fund's Summer Institute in Child Advocacy and has held other leadership positions in the CDF. She has served in an advisory capacity to Presidents and on national and international commissions dealing with topics related to

children and families. Her most recent service to the larger church includes serving on the Way Forward Task Force, and she is currently researching generational giving trends for the boards of the Presbyterian Foundation and the Presbyterian Mission Agency.

Lindner is an Honorably Retired Presbyterian minister holding a Ph.D. in American Church History from Union Theological Seminary, New York; an M.Div. from McCormick Theological Seminary in Chicago; and an M.S. from George Williams College, Downers Grove, Illinois. She earned her B.A. at Waynesburg College, Waynesburg, Pennsylvania.

This event is free and open to the public. For more information, please contact **Tim Moore** at tmoore@upsem.edu. Register at www.regonline.com/elindner

Sharon Presbyterian Church
5201 Sharon Road
Charlotte, North Carolina 28210

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 29, 2019 / 6:30 PM–8 PM

Dangerous Dialogues: Uncomfortable Conversations and Why We Need to Have Them

Rev. Dr. Rodney Sadler Jr.

Union Presbyterian Seminary Charlotte
5141 Sharon Road
Charlotte, North Carolina 28210

Correspondence with a (White Evangelical) Friend

A letter from Fred Robinson

NB: Below is my actual response to a friend's letter discussing social, political, and other contemporary issues from our shared perspective as Christians. This is not our first correspondence—nor, it is my hope, will it be our last. I offer it as an example for framing both civil discourse and faithful disagreement through prophetic witness. Also, "Steve" is not my friend's name. I have substituted "Steve" to ensure my friend's anonymity.

Hi, Steve:

First of all, thank you for sharing your thoughts on where we are in our nation and where the church should stand. We are better off as a nation and as a community when we're talking to each other, even when we disagree. You and I have had conversations in the past, and I have enjoyed them. I appreciate your love for God, your honesty, and your dedication to your church.

In response to your letter, allow me to, as the old black Baptist preachers used to say, "offer a few scattering remarks." If it seems like I'm lecturing, that is not my intention. I'm a natural polemicist, so forgive my tone.

Steve, you said, "I know I should not be surprised when I see and hear the heated rhetoric directed toward whomever the next Supreme Court justice nominee will be, but it still seems woefully inappropriate."

Passionate dissent, or what you call "heated rhetoric," is absolutely appropriate in political discourse. Calls for civility only serve those in power. Groups that dominate others do not get to tell oppressed people how to fight back. Stacking the Supreme Court with conservative jurists is a very real threat to marginalized groups in America. The idea that it should be tolerated quietly—along with a host of other racist, sexist, and xenophobic actions the Trump administration has taken and is taking—is dismissive to those who have a lot to lose. Most of those who are calling for civility in the face of an uncivil bigot in the White House don't really want civility; they want acquiescence as the train of injustice, incivility, and racism rolls on. I'm not accusing you of that, but that's the thing about white supremacy: It snares us all if we're not intentional about resisting it.

You said, "I lack confidence in our political leadership to do the right thing or the media to serve as effective watchdogs. For the most part, I think the public is being played for fools in this non-stop, rage-fueled, political money-grubbing game. No one wins in this."

Your lack of confidence in the nation's political leadership is spot on: The right has sold its soul to Donald Trump, and the left doesn't have much of a spine. Both are the beneficiaries of white supremacy at the expense of what James Cone calls the "crucified classes" of society. But your pivot to making false equivalences between the excesses of the right and those who oppose those excesses is problematic. There is no equivalence between the violent, rage-fueled discourse coming from those who are inflicting political, social, and economic harm and those who are trying to stop it. The poor and other marginalized groups do not win by playing nice. The only strength the weak have lies in raising their voices, disrupting the status quo, and subverting business as usual.

Theologian Dorothee Soelle said it best: "If we love heaven, we find ourselves less and less able to tolerate hell."¹

You asked, "How will abortion, LGBTQ rights, and protecting illegal immigrants help the black community? And please explain to me how encouraging illegal immigration helps the black community."

Keeping abortion legal helps blacks in the inner city in many ways. Poor black women already have less control over their bodies than white women, and would have even less if abortion were taken away. Poor black women are more likely to be raped, and they have less access to birth control. For many black women, dealing with unplanned pregnancies is not just about lifestyle choices; it's about life and death. Women will not stop having abortions. The question is whether they will have safe procedures or dangerous ones. Poverty forces people into desperate situations.

1. Dorothee Soelle, *The Strength of the Weak: Toward a Christian Feminist Identity* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1981), 70.

To survive, democracy depends on citizens to defend and reexamine and protect it—constantly. That means we can't afford to opt out of politics or political discussion.

Concerning LGBTQ rights and immigration, in his “Letter from a Birmingham Jail,” Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said it best: “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.”¹ Advocating only for positions that favor your group is not fighting for justice; it’s fighting for privilege. Not to mention there are many blacks who identify as gay, bi, trans, and queer, and, because of race, they experience compounded oppression.

Illegal immigrants? Really? I reject the idea of classifying anybody as “illegal.” I would also add that, as Christians, we should reject “America First” ideology. There is so much wrong with it. It makes worshiping the nation more important than worshiping God and honoring God’s command to welcome the stranger and love thy neighbor.

You said, “I consider leftist policies to be a catastrophe for the black community and the inner cities—simply devastating.”

I’d love for you to elaborate. But the problem hasn’t been leftist policies. The problem has been a lack of long-term commitment to equality. Dr. William Barber talks about the Three Reconstructions that have taken place in America concerning black progress.²

The First Reconstruction took place after the Civil War. The gains that blacks made during that era were taken away with the election of Rutherford B. Hayes, the airing of “The Birth of the Nation” (which President Woodrow Wilson said was like “writing history with lightning”), the growth of the KKK, restrictions on voting rights, the adoption of Black Codes, etc.

The Second Reconstruction came after the Civil Rights Movement and the passage of the Voting and Civil Rights Acts, the earlier Brown decision and later adoption of affirmative action, etc. The response? Republicans adopted a Southern Strategy, attacked affirmative action, frayed the safety net, and weakened unions.

The Third Reconstruction was the election of Barack Obama, which sparked the rise of the Tea Party, the Birther Movement, and the eventual election of Donald Trump.

Whenever blacks have made progress, there has been a white-lash to attack those gains. We’re seeing it again now. If your argument is that leftist policies are disastrous because they spark dependency, that racist trope has long been discredited.

You said you “shut down political chatter whenever it begins to rear its ugly head.”

Don’t shut it down. Explore it. See where people are coming from. Are you afraid of what you may hear?

To survive, democracy depends on citizens to defend and reexamine and protect it—constantly. That means we can’t afford to opt out of politics or political discussion. As pastors, we have to lead and shape those conversations so that they can reflect the values of God. There’s no escaping it.

Psalm 83: 2–4 (NIV) is clear. It says: “Defend the weak and the fatherless; uphold the cause of the poor and the oppressed. Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked.”

How can you do these things and avoid dealing with the political? The truth of the matter is, you can’t.

Your Brother in Christ,

Fred



1. As quoted in *Gospel of Freedom: Martin Luther King, Jr.'s Letter from Birmingham Jail and the Struggle that Changed a Nation* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2013), 170.

2. William J. Barber and Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove, *The Third Reconstruction: Moral Mondays, Fusion Politics, and the Rise of a New Justice Movement* (Beacon Press: Boston MA, 2016).

How Do We Know What Love Is?

Reflections on a Border Pilgrimage

By Megan Argabrite

In August, I traveled with a church group to the border city of McAllen, Texas, to respond to the current immigration crisis. We didn't call it a mission trip. It felt wrong for us, as white Americans from an affluent church, to claim that we had something to offer these people who were being denied so much in our name. We called it a Border Pilgrimage—a journey *with*, an attempt to see with our own eyes and comprehend. I'm still unsure if that title sufficed, but we went, somehow certain that we needed to go.

What we experienced was an utterly heartbreaking glimpse of what it looks like to run for your life and the lives of your children, ultimately seeking safety in a country that doesn't really want you. We tried to piece together, from firsthand stories and local encounters, all the soundbites and images we have been bombarded with recently. What really happens to people when they try to cross the border? Why do they come? What are they seeking? How are they treated? Who are they?

I saw hundreds of weary, grieving faces; heard stories; learned names; fed children the same ages as mine. If I know anything for certain after this trip, it is that *they* are us. *She* is me. *Her* son is my son. *His* fear is my fear. *His* will to live and protect is the same as mine. *Her* belovedness in the eyes of God is just as my own. I was overwhelmed at the realization that our collective desire to divide and define, our need for proof of worth, is causing all this unnecessary pain. I heard the words of 1 John shouting at me from the pages of scripture:

This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person? Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth. (1 John 3:16–18, NIV)

Still, weeks after the trip, I fall into sudden, deep pits of frustration and despair. Where is our love in action? Where are the truth-bearers who will tell what is really happening at the border? Where is the church? Where are all the Jesus-followers who are supposed to be laying down their lives for each other?

I've since realized that I did indeed meet them on this Border Pilgrimage. I met the mother traveling for three weeks alone with her four children under age ten. Last she had heard, her husband was "somewhere in the Rio Grande," but she was praying he was okay. I met the women who paused to pray over their meal as their children stuffed tortillas in their mouths like they might not eat again for a while. They might not. I met the father who collapsed into tears when asked where he was from and where he was going. He had traveled 1,455 miles so that his 15-year-old daughter wouldn't be raped anymore.

"This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters..."

As Christians, we don't have the privilege to ignore the pain others walk through. As Americans, we do. As people of means, we do. But as

Christians, we don't. By the example of Christ, we have the privilege of joining others in their pain. It is an honor to be with someone through their worst days. It is our calling. It is our privilege. Having witnessed the grief and strength of these, my brothers and sisters, I am changed. I can bear witness to their journey. I can go to Jesus with their names on my lips and in my heart. The Holy Spirit leapt out from so many of these faces, and took hold of me with a relentless grip. If they had not been allowed to come here, I would not have met these faces of Jesus Christ. I would never have had the privilege.

We heard stories in Reynosa, Mexico, from people who were recently deported, with or without their families. We prayed outside a privately run detention center where children under ten years of age are being held behind blacked-out windows and doors, and even senators are turned away from seeing what goes on inside. The office-building-turned-children's-prison sits close to a movie theater and a McDonald's. In the parking lot, an empty flagpole stands—the building marked only with a small vinyl printed banner bearing its name: *Casa El Presidente*.

"Let the little children come to me..."

Much of our time was spent at the Catholic Charities Respite Center in McAllen. These incredible people greet busloads of frightened, determined, beautiful, traumatized people every day whom Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) simply discard at the local bus station with nothing to help them. These are people who have been granted temporary asylum and released from the processing and detention centers. Respite Center staff and volunteers offer them food, showers, clean clothes, and medical attention, and help them contact family who will hopefully buy them a bus ticket. They then walk them back to the bus station, often on the same day, and help them board the correct bus for the uncertain, days-long journey ahead. Some, even those who speak no English or Spanish, will need to make as many as five bus transfers to reach their destination.

The disciples at this center began their work in response to the sudden influx of people fleeing danger in their home countries in 2014. In five years, this McAllen center has received and served 100,000 people. That is only one center, in one border city. Babies. Toddlers. Pregnant mothers. Children. Single parents. People traveling alone. Broken-hearted fathers. Abused. Traumatized. Frightened. Hungry. Exhausted. Strong. Beloved. Hundreds at a time. Bus after bus. Day after day.

As we drove down a highway that followed the U.S.-Mexico border between Brownsville and McAllen, the border wall was a startling presence. It divided fields of crops, formed the fourth wall of residents' backyards. It would disappear behind buildings and trees and then snake back into view suddenly, something sinister, looming—a snake we have read about before, tempting us to believe the falsehood that we decide what is good and evil, what is right and wrong, what is ours and theirs. Even the metal used to build portions of the border wall came from damaged, defunct military equipment from the Vietnam War. Its very substance is one of violence and division. It still lives up to its legacy.

Inside this Issue

Ken Garfield is a writer in Charlotte focusing on faith and values and telling the story of charitable causes. He is a former religion editor at *The Charlotte (North Carolina) Observer* and served 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 the 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, academic and administrative deans, 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 13-year-old daughter.

Megan Argabrite, a Union Presbyterian Seminary graduate (2013), is the pastor of Amity Presbyterian Church in Charlotte, North Carolina. She has a passion for the arts in worship and congregational life, and has served as Director of Worship and Arts at several area churches. Megan is from High Point, North Carolina.

Dr. 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*.

Erin Mills serves as Coordinator at the Center for Social Justice and Reconciliation. She has a bachelor's degree in Biology and Neuroscience from Davidson College, a master's in Clinical Psychology from UNCC, and a master's in Christian Education from Union Presbyterian Seminary. She served as the youth director of Selwyn Avenue Presbyterian Church in Charlotte for eight years and is currently an Elder there. She volunteers and serves on the Board of Directors for the Carolina Refugee Resettlement Agency and lives in Charlotte, North Carolina, with her husband, Roger, and their three children.

Fred Robinson is the Executive Director of Mecklenburg Ministries (MeckMin). He joined their staff in 2016. He is also the associate pastor of Holy Covenant UCC and is an executive board member of the Charlotte Clergy Coalition for Justice. Fred is a graduate of Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, with a master's degree in religion and Christian thought. A 2014 Fellow of the Black Theology & Leadership Institute at Princeton Theological Seminary in Princeton, New Jersey, he also graduated with an advanced Master of Sacred Theology from Chicago Theological Seminary in 2018.

Acts of Faith *Continued from page 1*

Prophets often provoke change; their words recorded in both the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament echo this potential for change, often acting as the catalyst itself. Their words take dormant ideas and “enflesh” those ideas in the fervor and gesticulations of faithful servants of God, actively speaking latent truths before recalcitrant Powers. Their bodies become the incarnation of God's liberating ideas for change as the prophets place themselves between the Powers and the people. This “enfleshing” of God's words of liberation and change in our lives is the proper outcome for a life of faith.

This resource and the issues to follow is our attempt to offer a distinctive witness in the area of social justice and reconciliation. We believe there is room for such a voice and a need for our distinct voices of faith in these conversations—voices that might break through to provide depth and press forward the cause of social justice and reconciliation. In providing space for critical reflection, we hope to supply a resource for in-depth learning and exploration, adding more rejuvenating light than destructive heat.

Given that this is our first effort in exploring together the deliberate intersection of faith and justice, this periodical is both a public draft and a broad primer. As a public draft, it is our collective thinking out loud and making the case for why persons of faith should be committed to acts of justice and reconciliation as a natural outcome to lives of discipleship. As a broad primer, the resource explores the variety of ways that persons of faith may engage in thinking and speaking about issues of social justice and reconciliation. This means that this forthcoming volume provides voices from various contributors on numerous topics penned in different styles and disciplines. Within this diversity, all the pieces are drawn together by the single thread of faithful witness. If prayer and faithful living is a kind of potential energy seeking a catalyst, our hope is that this resource and the various events of the Center it accompanies might supply the transformative jolt to convert what might be to what must be to what is.

So be it.

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

To be added to our mailing list, please email Tim Moore at tmoore@upsem.edu with your name and address.

Submissions: If you have an original article, reflection piece, poem, prayer, etc. that seems appropriate for this resource, please send your submissions to Tim Moore at tmoore@upsem.edu. Not all items submitted will be guaranteed to be printed, given space and content constraints. Thank you for your submissions and understanding.

www.upsem.edu

©2019 Union Presbyterian Seminary