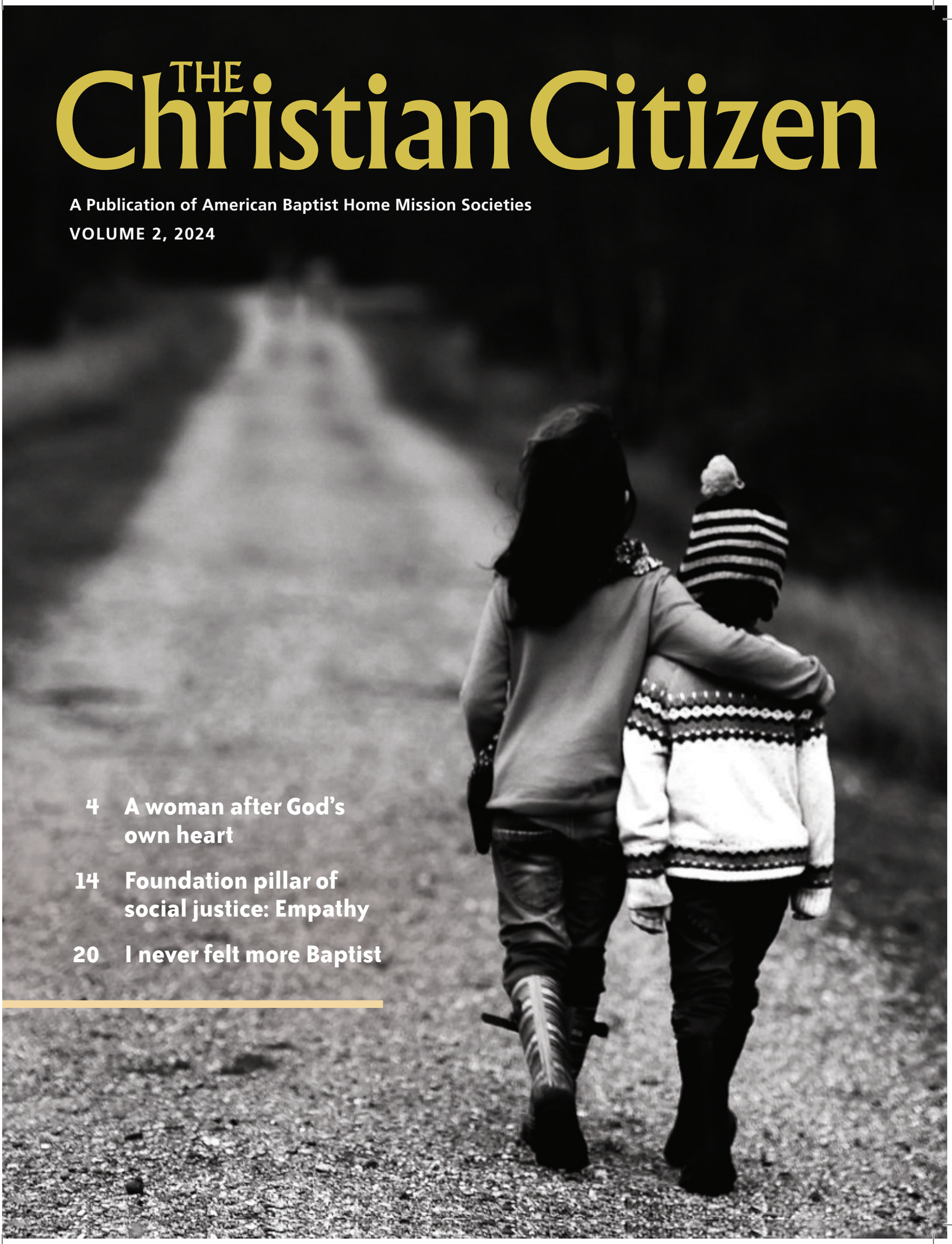
THE Christian Citizen

A Publication of American Baptist Home Mission Societies
VOLUME 2, 2024



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VOLUME 2, 2024

Featuring the publication's best content from winter and spring 2024

The Christian Citizen, supported by the America for Christ Offering and Christian Citizen Ambassadors, is mailed twice annually at no charge to American Baptist congregations and individuals and publishes monthly online at christiancitizen.us. Contributions are appreciated and may be made by check, payable to American Baptist Home Mission Societies, sent to the address below, or by credit card at christiancitizen.us/members.

American Baptist Home Mission Societies

PUBLISHED BY
American Baptist Home Mission Societies
1075 First Avenue
King of Prussia, PA 19406

888-79-ABHMS
abhms.org judsonpress.com

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EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
AMERICAN BAPTIST HOME MISSION SOCIETIES

Printed on recycled paper
COVER PHOTO: Annie Spratt on Unsplash

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Curtis Ramsey-Lucas

Letter from the editor

Dear Reader,

I am deeply grateful for your continued engagement with our publication. *The Christian Citizen* has always been more than just a collection of articles; it is a community, a shared space where faith intersects with justice, where thoughtful reflection meets practical action. Each piece we publish and every story we share inspires, challenges, and equips followers of Christ to live out their faith in meaningful ways. None of this would be possible without you—our readers and fellow travelers on this journey.

As I write this, I am reminded of how you, our audience, have contributed to this shared mission. Whenever you read an article, share a reflection, or forward a piece to a friend, you actively participate in the ongoing conversation about how we can live as faithful citizens in a complex world. Your willingness to engage with the challenging issues of our time, whether they pertain to racial justice, economic inequality, environmental stewardship, or the very nature of democracy, speaks volumes about your commitment to making a difference.

I believe this is one of the great strengths of *The Christian Citizen*. We are not merely reporting on the world around us but actively engaging in it. Through the power of words, we strive to inspire a deeper sense of responsibility, compassion, and justice. Our writers come from diverse backgrounds and experiences, each offering unique perspectives on how the gospel calls us to act in the world. But your readership amplifies those voices, ensuring that their insights do not remain confined to the page but ripple outward into churches, communities, and individual lives.

This past year has presented all of us with profound challenges. The world continues to wrestle with the aftershocks of a global pandemic, systemic injustices, and political polarization that threaten to divide us. Yet amid it all, *The Christian Citizen* has remained committed to fostering dialogue rooted in Christ's teachings and relevant to today's pressing concerns. Our writers have addressed healing in the wake of trauma, the moral implications of public policy, and the urgent need for racial reconciliation. And you, our readers, have taken these messages to heart and shared them widely, helping to spread the light of hope and understanding.

I want to thank you for your role in this ongoing work. Whether through reading, sharing, or providing feedback, your support sustains us. You remind us that we are not alone in our efforts to be a voice for justice and peace. Your participation helps build bridges where there are divides and fosters a spirit of unity in times when the world sorely needs it.

As we look to the future, I am filled with hope. The road ahead may be uncertain, but we can move forward confidently, knowing we are making a difference together. *The Christian Citizen* will continue to bring you thoughtful, relevant content that speaks to the heart of what it means to be a follower of Christ in the 21st century. And we are grateful to have you by our side.

Thank you for reading. Thank you for sharing. Thank you for being a part of this community.

With gratitude,

Curtis

Curtis Ramsey-Lucas is the director of Marketing and Communications at American Baptist Home Mission Societies and the editor of The Christian Citizen.

Richard C. Harwood

What if you have faith in God but not in people?

Struggle and doubt are two hallmarks of religious faith, no matter your background. My own experience with faith has proven no exception. I have been tested time and again through seasons of personal and societal struggle—from the time I found God in my struggle with a diagnosis of cystic fibrosis as a child, to working through multiple suicides and deaths of loved ones as a young man, to founding The Harwood Institute at 27 and then living out a journey of seeking a more just society. Struggle and doubt have been my constant companions.

While moments of doubt naturally test our faith in God, I believe there's another kind of doubt that many people of faith wrestle with today that often gets ignored. I find this other doubt best expressed as a question. What if we have faith in God but not in people?

While moments of doubt naturally test our faith in God, I believe there's another kind of doubt that many people of faith wrestle with today that often gets ignored.

When that's the case, do you turn away from the world and exclusively back toward God? Do you assume things will work out according to a divine plan? Do you equip yourself with Scripture and try to convince others of your rightness—even your righteousness—at all costs?

I find myself on the road regularly for work. Just this year I've been to Michigan, Ohio, Florida, North Carolina, Connecticut, Pennsylvania, and elsewhere. It's clear, wherever I go, that we have largely lost our faith in one another. There are good reasons for this. A constellation of fractures and divisions wracks society today. Anxiety and isolation and fear of one another grip us. Under these conditions, I find people of faith often reacting in one of two ways.

Either they retreat, withdrawing into a hermetically sealed existence rooted in their religious faith, where the rest of the world is allowed to fade into the background. Or they come out fighting, doubling down on proselytizing, looking to convert people to a specific doctrine regardless of the bridges they may burn. While either approach may work in protecting an individual's faith in God, it fails to restore our faith in one another. Nor do these reactions contribute to moving our communities forward.

I believe that, as with any faith struggle, the answer is to lean into the discomfort of a third way. To wrestle and work at it. To recognize our doubts in our fellow human beings but not let them overtake us.

At this crossroads, how might people of faith choose to operate in order to create a better world together?

I think it is instructive to turn to the story of Moses at the burning bush in Exodus 3. When this story begins, Moses has fled Egypt. His faith in God, himself, and his fellow Israelites has been tested. Indeed, in many ways it has been found wanting.

But when God calls to Moses from within the flame, he answers, "Here I am." In these three simple words, Moses chooses to make himself visible. To account for not only a God-centered purpose, but a public purpose.

His doubts did not end after saying, "Here I am."

Photo: Hannah Busing on Unsplash

Read the rest of Exodus 3 and you will see Moses practically overflowing with doubts. Yet by answering that initial call, he set in motion a series of actions that led to the transformation of his entire community.

Today what might it look like for us to restore our faith in one another? And to do so in a way that doesn't force us either to retreat or to wield faith as a weapon?

I believe engendering a civic faith is a starting point. Civic faith is the idea that placing people, community, and shared responsibility at the center of our public lives will create a more equitable, fair, just, inclusive, and hopeful society for all.

At the core of this practical philosophy sits a civic covenant. We live in relationship with one another. That is the only way shared society works. Nothing substitutes for the relational nature of our public lives.

Civic faith in no way replaces or supplants our faith in God. It surely doesn't for me. But it is essential for our lives together. After all, if we aim to make a difference in the world, people must be at the center of what we do: their lives, what matters to them, their aspirations, their dignity. We must not put requirements on their faith, what God they pray to, or if they even recognize a higher power in the first place.

We can build civic faith by recognizing people's innate desire to express their human agency together. To bring about change in their own lives and the collective life of their community. We don't have to agree on everything. We don't even have to like one another. We certainly don't have to compromise our religious beliefs. But neither must we share beliefs 100 percent in order to have faith in our fellow humans.

Like Moses before us, we are called to be in the world and to make a difference with the time we've been given in partnership with our fellow humans of all different beliefs. Through my work and through my own faith, I have come to believe ever more fervently that it is our time to answer this call.

Will we answer?

Richard C. Harwood is president and founder of the Harwood Institute for Public Innovation, a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization located in Bethesda, Maryland. He is the author of the bestselling book Stepping Forward: A Positive, Practical Path to Transform Our Communities and Our Lives.

Ryan Lindsay Arrendell

A woman after God's own heart

The other day I called my mom to ask her how she's gone about cultivating her personal devotional life. The enduring picture of my mother seated with her Bible and prayer journal lives rent-free in my head. All my life I've seen my mom set aside time from being a mother, a wife, a teacher, a daughter, a sister, a friend, to spend time with God. My mother, who has recently become an ordained Baptist minister, said she returns time and time again to the late Rev. Charles Spurgeon's devotional, *Morning and Evening*. Over the years, she's made a practice of gifting it to different folks in her life, including me. Perhaps not so coincidentally, I'd seen my copy recently, tucked away among other books. What she says she loves about this work of Spurgeon's, in addition to his gripping prose, is that it compels her to draw closer to God by delving into Scripture, since Spurgeon includes only one line in each entry.

> In my search for a deeper devotional life and communion with God as I pursue my path to ordination and continue my walk with God, I'm so grateful that Scripture tells us that we can "draw near to God and he will draw near to you" (James 4:8).

Since picking *Morning and Evening* back up, I've found myself reading the full chapter, like Hebrews 12 and Luke 10, which contain popular verses that I've certainly heard quoted and referenced often, such as Hebrews 12:1 (NIV): "Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles"; Luke 10:2: "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few"; and Luke 10:27: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself."

What I've also learned from observing my mother's devotional life is the benefit of having a variety of sources to enrich your walk with God. When I was younger, I took it upon myself to borrow my mother's copy of Germaine Copeland's *Prayers That Avail Much*. Within it are scripturally based prayers that cover an array of topics, from prayers for yourself to others in your life, to the government and its leaders. I ended up losing my mom's copy (sorry Mom!) but loved the book so much that I bought my own and have recommended it to others. When I seek God through prayer using Copeland's book, I write down the names of who I'm praying for in the book to remember and to praise God in celebration of answered prayers.

Recently I finished Well-Watered Women's *Refreshed: A Devotional for Women in Dry Seasons*, which I bought in support of a friend who helped coauthor the book. What I loved about this devotional was the candid vulnerability the contributors brought to their entries. Many days I felt like they were speaking directly to me with insight about what was going on in my life and in my heart. The questions that followed also helped me to write out my thoughts in the space provided, rather than just ruminate in my head.

Thanks to my mother, I also grew up listening to the late Rev. Dr. Charles Stanley and Rev. Dr. Tony Evans on the radio, plus too many gospel greats to name, like CeCe Winans, Yolanda Adams, Mahalia Jackson, Fred

Hammond, and Kirk Franklin, back when cassette tapes and CDs were the norm. Their sermons and songs enriched my spiritual life and fortified my faith by exposing me to what a strong sermon or praise and worship song sounded like.

In 2017 I started keeping a prayer journal after seeing my mother use hers as an example for a Bible study she was teaching. As I recorded her, she held up a journal covered in sunflowers that she said was reserved for prayers that were just for my brother and me. Sunflowers were her favorite flowers, and she watered the garden of my brother's faith and mine through persistent written prayers.

In my search for a deeper devotional life and communion with God as I pursue my path to ordination and continue my walk with God, I'm so grateful that Scripture tells us that we can "draw near to God and he will draw near to you" (James 4:8). We don't have to draw near as perfect people or even shame ourselves from growing distant or walking away from God. God understands that we are battling against our flesh more than we'd like to admit and that we are often distracted by our busy lives or by the schemes of the devil. And yet, God reminds us that He is near and always willing to draw near to us. Whether you draw near to God through worshipping, journaling, praying, or studying, remember, God is near and desires for us to draw near to him.

Minister Ryan Lindsay Arrendell is an Emmy Award–winning journalist, preacher, writer, and entrepreneur. She believes in storytelling as a powerful tool for healing and change. Whether in the pulpit, the streets, the classroom or on the stage, she leads with love to connect with those around her.

Photo: Pedro Forester da Silva on Unsplash

Sandra Dorsainvil

Here I am

I never knew that I would be living 1 Samuel 3:10: "Speak, for your servant is listening"; and Isaiah 6:8: "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?" in unique ways in my ministry journey. These Old Testament passages are usually referenced as undergirding a ministry call. On December 18, 2023, the global world of missionaries lost a strong-willed and humble servant. Our sister in Christ, Rev. Madeline Flores-Lopez died suddenly while serving in her 21st year with International Ministries in the Dominican Republic. Several short-term mission trips had cemented her call to serve as a missionary. Her faith journey bloomed in her native island of Puerto Rico. She hosted hundreds of volunteers while she served and advocated for disenfranchised communities in Santo Domingo. Which scripture did her heart embrace? I shall not know.

"Here I am. Send me" is my response to the request that came from Rev. Dr. Ramon Martinez-Orabona, pastor of Iglesia Bautista El Redentor of Puerto Rico, that I accompany his team from Puerto Rico to Santo Domingo in December 2023 to provide pastoral care and trauma support. I had met the team a few months earlier when I facilitated some pre-orientation training. The team was preparing to serve in disenfranchised communities in Santo Domingo and be hosted by Reverend Madeline. She was excited to welcome this special team of 13 servants, composed of three minors and ten adults from Iglesia Bautista El Redentor of Puerto Rico. The team had collected toys to distribute to several communities and had prepared Christmas skits and messages of hope to be shared. The team was eager to follow their missionary, meet local partners, and see ministry through her eyes. Reverend Madeline was eager to share what lived

Photo: Michael Kroul on Unsplash

ministry call is about. As Dr. Kara Martin says in her book *Workship 2*, "Sometimes, I think we get sucked into thinking we have one great calling that God is drawing us to. . . . I believe we have a calling to many different roles in private and in public life, and God calls us to honour him in all of these roles."[1]

One idea we focused on and repeated often during the training I facilitated was to hold any plans lightly before God. The work we needed to focus on was letting the Holy Spirit do the preparation of the heart, spirit, and body. The team was being prepared to see incarnate Jesus through Madeline. Pastor Ramon Martinez-Orabona reminded the team that God had been preparing them since 2017, when he answered his call to serve as their shepherd. No one could have predicted that the call to serve would drastically change upon hearing of Madeline's sudden death. The team stayed committed to going to serve, knowing their beloved host would not be welcoming them at the airport. Four days after Madeline's passing, the team and I arrived in Santo Domingo with "Here I am, Lord" in our hearts and on our lips. We became God's first responders in ministry, serving and following in the footsteps of someone invisible to our naked eyes but now part of our cloud of witnesses. Rev. Ketly Pierre, who serves as a chaplain missionary in another part of the Dominican Republic, drove to Santo Domingo and stayed with us. She joined the team while negotiating her own grief, having lost a colaborer serving in the same country.

Every interaction we had in the different communities we visited and served was Spirit led. We brought God's handkerchief, our hearts, to collect tears from grieving partners. We ministered with songs of hope to children who only understood Spanish and to grandparents who understood Haitian Creole and some Spanish. Rev. Mayra Giovanetti accompanied us from thousands of miles away by texting us spoken daily prayers. How do any of us ever get prepared for such a call, might you ask?

When we turn to how Jesus prepared the disciples, we glean some perspective. Education and empowerment were core elements of Jesus' teaching of his disciples. Whether we turn to the Gospel of Mark 1:16–20, where Jesus asked two ordinary fishermen to "follow me," or turn to the Gospel of Luke 5:1–4, where Jesus instructed Simon to "let down your nets for a catch," we come to anticipate an evolution of call, trust, teaching, and faith journey to happen through these divine directives.

Looking back at the individual and collective experiences I had with the team from Iglesia Bautista El Redentor of Puerto Rico, I can say that each member of the team (ages 7 to 60+) received holy directives. Each of us, who represented unique parts of the body of Christ, shared from our hearts, not having known in 2017 or even in early December 2023, what God had asked us to say yes to. Each of us had our own appointed assignments as first responders in ministry. We listened, we heard, we went, we followed, and we continue to be transformed as we continue to process our mission.

When we turn to how Jesus prepared the disciples, we glean some perspective. Education and empowerment were core elements of Jesus' teaching of his disciples.

We lived all of Dr. Elisabeth Kübler-Ross's stages of grief. Pastor Mayra's voice blanketed us with holy hope, mercy, peace, and love to give us strength along this uncharted territory, to remain authentic as God's ambassadors whether we were sharing God's peace in English, Spanish, or Haitian Creole.

As a result of this recent ministry experience, God's question "Whom shall I send?" has evolved and brought depth and peace to my faith journey. I humbly encourage all who feel called to serve in any capacity in ministry to spend considerable time discerning the fullness of that question and how an affirmative response today implies "more to come" for tomorrow. May it be well with our souls!

An ordained minister with ABC-USA, Rev. Sandra Dorsainvil serves as a ministry coach and women's retreat facilitator with the Center for Career Development & Ministry. Fluent in English and French, she has had cross-cultural experiences in several countries in Africa, Europe, and North America. She is the author of three devotionals, Walk with Generosity*,* Beacons of Hope*, and* Luces de Esperanza*, and she is the coauthor of a guide for leaders of short-term mission teams,* Short-Term Mission Team Essentials—Together on the Journey.

Note

1. Kara Martin, *Workship 2: How to Flourish at Work* (Singapore: Graceworks, 2018), 88.

Jonathan Malone

How can we love our neighbor in other people's spaces?

When I lead trips into the wilderness, I offer a "land acknowledgment," reminding participants that we are not the first people to walk these lands, that other communities and cultures have lived here and sometimes continue to live here, and that others have been forcibly removed. I offer the land acknowledgment in part to claim an awareness that we are walking in what may be a wilderness for us and yet for others may likely have been a sacred, holy place where a different understanding of the Divine could fully be encountered.

I regularly offer the acknowledgment, but it is not often that I have been forced to confront such sentiment directly.

Recently I was visiting the Petroglyph National Monument in the desert outskirts of Albuquerque, New Mexico. I went to experience the desert but also to have an opportunity to view petroglyphs that are at least 400 to 700 years old.

I'm not an anthropologist or an archaeologist, so I cannot offer any deep explanation about the carvings. From what I read on the park's informational signs, current experts are not sure that all of the carvings are religious but assume that a significant percentage of them are. This suggested that to at least a degree, the space I was walking through was at one time seen as sacred by the Pueblo people. With this in mind, I decided that I would treat all of the carvings as sacred and treat the space as sacred.

I fully recognize that by just going to the monument, walking the trails, and observing the carvings, I was already transgressing as a tourist/observer. I was participating in a system that has made what was once a part of a culture and a people an oddity and curiosity to view with a voyeuristic sentiment. Perhaps it would be better if I did not participate in the display at all and thus did not support my tourist's curiosity. On the other hand, if the National Park Service did not create this national monument, the encroaching urban sprawl of Albuquerque would have overtaken the spaces and the carvings, and they would have been lost. As much as I was somewhat uncomfortable with the tourist experience of seeing these reminders of past cultures, I am glad that the minimal space had been set aside and protected.

Still, the question of being a good neighbor lingered. By visiting the park, I was entering into a sacred space and a relationship with people who walked the land centuries before I took my first step. I wrestled with how to be respectful in that relationship. I decided not to take pictures of the petroglyphs.

This probably seems like a small thing. Yet our current culture is keyed into the practice of showing our experiences with pictures on social media. "Pics or it didn't happen." Most people I saw at the monument were taking pictures of the carvings, often as a selfie with the carving in the background. This did not feel right or respectful toward the sacred nature of the carvings. Even if I did not ascribe to the same tenets of faith as those who made the ancient carvings, it seemed as if I should still respect the attention and awareness of the Divine, past and present, and however that was understood.

I wondered what it would feel like if I had belonged to a church, and 500 years from now, I saw individuals walking through the tattered remains of that church I grew up in.

I wondered what it would feel like if I had belonged to a church, and 500 years from now, I saw individuals


Photo: Ethan Wright-Magoon on Unsplash

walking through the tattered remains of that church I grew up in. How would I feel to see them looking at the symbols, the pews, the wood carvings? How would I feel if the people were taking pictures, selfies, and maybe even joking about what they saw? I would not be OK with such a frivolous and disrespectful treatment of a space that was once important to me. Such actions would not honor the history that this is a space where I went to worship, to be in community, to experience the Divine. This is what I found with the petroglyphs.

The least I could do in loving my neighbor was to walk with a sense of solemnity—and not to take any pictures.

I did not take any pictures. I took my time looking at the carvings, imagining and wondering what stories, beliefs, and truths they were pointing to. I tried to take in the totality of the landscape and put myself into the space of someone walking multiple miles and then taking the time to meticulously etch into rock a marker of a spiritual experience. I wondered about the sense of awe that one would have in the open and stark landscape, the wind, the silence, the heat. I wondered about how one might have experienced the Divine in that time and space. And then I quietly moved on.

The awareness of the presence of others, past and present, can give one a sensitivity for the sacred in respecting the relationships. What I believe matters less than how I can respect what others believe. What matters is if I can be a good neighbor. What matters is if I can love my neighbor. If I go into someone else's home or someone else's place of worship, as a Christian it is my duty to show Christ through respect and awareness of what others see as holy. In memory or in present experience, this is how we all are called to express love of neighbor. And in loving my neighbor, past and present, I believe I experienced a sense of the Divine.

Jonathan Malone offers hikes and backpacking trips around the country for individuals and organizations to encounter the Divine in the wilderness. He is the author of A Peculiar Church*, published by Judson Press.*

Jerrod H. Hugenot

Review of "A Darkly Radiant Vision," by Gary Dorrien

Historian Gary Dorrien's *A Darkly Radiant Vision: The Black Social Gospel in the Shadow of MLK* (Yale University Press, 2023) concludes his survey of the development of the Black social gospel. Dorrien, longtime faculty at New York City's Union Seminary, builds on his prior works *The New Abolition* (2015) and *Breaking White Supremacy* (2018), which guided readers from the latter 19th century to the civil rights era. In his writing here (and in an earlier trilogy on the growth of theological liberalism from 1805 to 2005, published by Westminster/John Knox Press from 2001 to 2006), Dorrien raises up the leading voices of key figures like W. E. B. Du Bois and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., yet he contextualizes the more famed alongside the many, many others who were working within their time to counteract racism and be a witness for the gospel in their day.

Photo: Gift Habeshaw on Unsplash

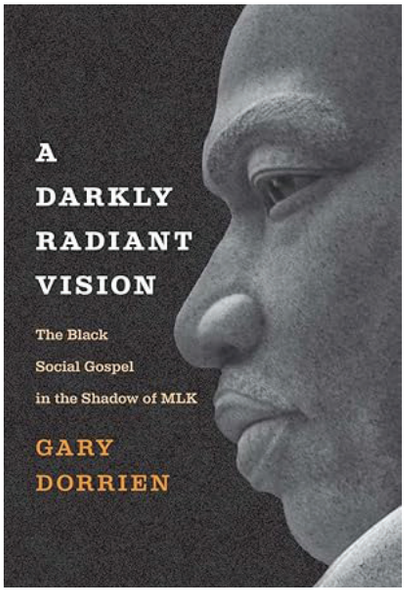
Dorrien's work is equally astonishing in scope and dedication as he works to bring theological voices and movements to fuller appreciation for their contributions to what he terms the overall "Black social gospel." Like the white social gospel (synonymous for many American Baptists with the work and legacy of Walter Rauschenbusch), the Black social gospel "was fundamentally a movement, not a doctrine, featuring a social ethical understanding of the Christian faith" (Dorrien, p. 3).

Yet, with the realities of racism and segregation defining U.S. history (American religious history not excepted and more often deeply complicit or accommodating), the Black social gospel has far more "formative opposition to racism and giving its highest priority to racial justice activism. The vaunted democratic progress of the Progressive Era was worthless if it did not break the chains of racial caste" (p. 3).

For the euphoria sometimes felt in social gospel retrospectives of churches and minds more aware of the need to connect gospel with social action, the indictment of white social gospel remains: not enough and often too unaware of its relative comfort on the other side of the "color line" defining much of America's past and present. Indeed, dedicated readers of Dorrien's earlier trilogy on theological liberalism must read this newer project if they are to have a more honest understanding of the 19th century to present and the theological, ethical, social, political, and ecclesial challenges brought by the Black social gospel, running parallel in some ways to the work of white liberal or Progressive voices. Those white liberal readers given to such sentiments must embrace the indictments as much as the resonances that occur between the two strands of social gospel theology.

This third volume traces the varied voices rising within academia, politics, and Protestant denominational traditions, pressing forward after the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., and broadening the conversations about Black theology and social ethics beyond the frameworks the next generation of scholars, pastors, and politically engaged leaders inherited from the eras before. After the 1970s, Black social gospel proponents would rise in political prominence (Atlanta's Representa-

tive John Lewis, Ambassador Andrew Young, and Senator and Rev. Dr. Raphael Warnock, alongside Chicago's Rev. Jesse Jackson Sr., and the two-term 44th president of the United States, Barack Hussein Obama). Representative Shirley Chisholm's run for president in 1972 and the current vice presidency of Kamala Harris are part of that history, yet even more remarkable due to the steeper path forward for African American women who have worked doubly hard against white and Black sexism and white feminism defining standards for church and society that have led to the counterwitness of Womanist and Black feminist critiques.



In this "post-MLK" era, one might be tempted to cite the work of the late James H. Cone (a longtime colleague and friend of Dorrien at Union Seminary) as the seminal figure that should adorn this volume as the prior books featured Du Bois and MLK. With his work in Black liberation theology, Cone's career was tone setting for many while he learned to understand and engage his critics. Cone spent his first years in academia, writing in search of more systematic thought and engaging the white theological/Western European academy's frameworks. He would move into later engagements with Black cultural identity (his book *The Spirituals and the Blues* [Orbis, 1972], for example) and critiquing the era that shaped him (his latter work *Martin, Malcolm, and America: A Dream or a Nightmare* [Orbis, 1991]). Through Cone's corpus, we see much that continues to inform and challenge, even as his thought needed the Womanist critique, among others. His faculty colleague Delores S. Williams authored *Sisters in the Wilderness* (which remains one of my personal favorite books from seminary coursework), providing an example of the counterbalance Cone's work needed.

Dorrien discusses the political rise of Ambassador Andrew Young and Rev. Jesse Jackson Sr., two civil rights era veterans among those who gained political prominence and heightened national and international profiles. Both steeped in the Black social gospel, the two led very public careers, leveraging opportunities and calling out systems that perpetuated the racist undertow of American history. Dorrien does not shy from showing the clay feet of any of his subjects, here highlighting gaffes and shortcomings Young and Jackson made in their careers. The "rainbow politics" advocated by Jackson continue to resonate in parts of American politics, a measure of honesty America still struggles to embody.

Other chapters trace the emergence of theological voices in the academic world. The brilliance of Cone, Samuel DeWitt Proctor, J. Deotis Roberts, Kelly Brown Douglas, Katie Geneva Cannon, Delores S. Williams, and Emilie Townes are highlighted among the many contributors to Black liberation theology, Womanist and Black feminist theology, and other strands emerging from the theological critiques of scholars engaging not abstract dogma but the demands of justice for systemic racism and our broken-down society.

The more "prophetic fire" strand of Black social gospel (post-1960s) is addressed well by Dorrien's survey of Cornel West, Eugene Rivers, Traci West, and bell hooks, among others. The activist work of William J. Barber II and Traci Blackmon raises the need for a Third Reconstruction, addressing the failure of the post–Civil War era and the unfinished work of the civil rights era. Dorrien critiques the need for a Third Reconstruction, especially considering the achievements yet shortcomings of the Obama presidency, whose early days were marked by wistful sentiments we were becoming a post-racial society versus what actually ensued. The public policy progress that was made was mired down in frequent legislative battles. Acts of outright racially motivated brutality persisted (for example, the 2012 shooting of Trayvon Martin and the 2015 massacre of nine persons at Mother Emanuel AME in Charleston, South Carolina).

Dorrien does share from time to time of his personal friendships and encounters with many of his subjects. He was quite close to James Cone. He taught Raphael Warnock, among others, at Union Seminary. As a historian, he cites these "close at hand" moments in his career where he experienced firsthand being part of advocating for a candidate (Jesse Jackson's run) or encounters with his counterparts in conversation where they diverged in opinion about the issues they faced. All of Dorrien's books are graced by splendid endnotes, guiding the reader to a wealth of primary and secondary sources for further reading.

Sometimes I have the feeling, as a reader, that a confessional moment is at hand, as Dorrien also works through the grief of remembering friends and colleagues who have passed on. His careful work to contextualize various voices and help their moment in time come to fuller understanding by future generations is a fine testament to Black social gospel voices past and present, and a valuable resource for those yet to come.

Rev. Jerrod H. Hugenot is associate executive minister, American Baptist Churches of New York State.

Clint Schnekloth

The new reading matter

I've been blogging now since 2001. I ran a quick calculation and estimate that I've written over a million words of blog content. Conservatively, that's about 20 books.

When I first published a book back in 2014, I aimed to publish it at a traditional publishing house because traditional publishing had (and still has) street cred. Many readers place importance on whether a book is self-published or published through a reputable "house."

The same is to a certain extent true of blogging. Many people prioritize reading blogs written for magazines or curated pages. *Substack* has this kind of credibility, as did *Blogger* back when I first started blogging.

Today I believe forms of self-publishing and traditional book publishing are coming closer and closer to each other. Books are still doing great, which I'm happy about. But now some books (like novelettes at Tor) are primarily digital and blog-like, and conversely many blogs (and podcasts) now gain such notoriety that they function almost like traditional publishers.

Photo: Bram Naus on Unsplash

You as a reader might ask yourself, *When I sit down to read entries at* The Christian Citizen *or* Substack, *am I approaching them like I used to approach books?*

Here's why this might matter: cumulatively many of us journal the list of books we read or post photos of our book stacks. I wonder why we do not also make such lists of the excellent things we read online (an exception is a page like Longreads, which does).

Additionally, those of us who read for "edification" might benefit from tracking how much religious or theological content we read from blogs and journals, in the same way we make lists of books to read for continuing education.

I know why I write blogs: it's the primary means by which I do pastoral or theological education. I strive to provide a resource for Christian (and human) thinking.

I do not often assemble such writing into a printed book, and I understand that books have credibility at least in part because of their length. But there is another kind of stability to publishing incrementally over a long period of time that perhaps could or should have a kind of credibility similar to books (we have examples of this in the work of Heather Cox Richardson and others).

All kinds of publishing have drawn close because of the equalization of platforms. Increasingly, publishers rely on the author's platform to sell books. But on the other hand, the tools for publishing have never been easier. Literally anyone can, with a few clicks, get their content uploaded to print-on-demand publishing sites like Amazon.

Nobody has to spend a thing until someone wants to print your book.

Publishing, like any industry, is always going to have people like Sarah Maas and Brandon Sanderson, and blogging will have similar stars. But what has happened more generally in publishing is a new and fantastic opportunity: everyone has drawn close, and a favorite author you've discovered is often only a click and a message away on Facebook Messenger, and eager to hear from readers.

Partially, I recommend this habitus or posture toward blog reading to invoke some of the habits of mind we operate from when reading books. When we read longer works, we engage an argument or topic over time, over the course of chapters. Reading books is a whole practice or way of life.

One could in fact read blogs in a comparable way, curating a set of posts to read on a specific topic. The only thing stopping us is the habitus that new media has oriented us in, of shorter attention spans and scanning of content.

We do even more with books that could be adapted. Some of us keep commonplace books with handwritten quotes pulled from inspiring texts. Or we underline in our books. We write book reviews.

You as a reader might ask yourself, *When I sit down to read entries at* The Christian Citizen *or* Substack, *am I approaching them like I used to approach books?*

There is simply an intentionality with books. We have to check them out or buy them, carry them around and engage them. They are less ephemeral than blogs—but blogs needn't be approached in this manner.

Remember magazines? Or print journals? These have some of the same tactile impacts of a book and are curated collections.

What might it be like if, when we sat down to scan the internet, we thought of ourselves as picking up and engaging a magazine?

Conversely, as blog authors, what if we created content with a mind toward longer forms? Rather than a shot across the bow addressing the hot topic of the moment that will get the most clicks and good search engine optimization, what if we wrote with longer methods of argumentation in sight and curated lengthier resources for readers?

I think at least some of these newer and older media comparisons might be fruitful. Inasmuch as Christians are a "people of the book," we need to ask ourselves how being "people of the internet" can be an intellectual and spiritual practice that forms us in productive ways.

Are we satisfied with how we engage the new reading matter?

Rev. Clint Schnekloth is pastor of Good Shepherd Lutheran Church in Fayetteville, Arkansas, a progressive church in the South. He is the founder of Canopy NWA (a refugee resettlement agency) and Queer Camp, and is the author of Mediating Faith: Faith Formation in a Trans-Media Era. *He blogs at* Substack.

John Zehring

Foundation pillar of social justice: Empathy

"Empathy is seeing with the eyes of another, listening with the ears of another, and feeling with the heart of another."

—ALFRED ADLER, PSYCHOLOGIST

If we desire to work for social justice, one of the most effective efforts we can pursue is to encourage empathy. Practice empathy. Model empathy. Teach empathy. Lift up empathy. Because empathy is a foundation pillar of social justice. Empathy is the ability to understand and share the feelings of another person. It has been described as walking in the shoes of another, to gain insight and feeling into their experience. A humorous take on an old saying is that you should never criticize another until you have walked a mile in his or her shoes. Then, when you criticize them, they'll be barefoot—and you'll be a mile away from them. The point, of course, is that we should try to understand what a person is going through before judging them. More so, by understanding what they experience, we develop a heightened sense to see with their eyes, listen with their ears, and feel with their heart. Another old saying goes, "To know all is to forgive all." If you only knew all of what another was going through, you would be inclined to forgive them, understand them, feel for them, and accept them.

Empathy involves actively sharing in the emotional experience of the other person. Empathy inspires us to stand with, speak for, and advocate on behalf of those who are on the margins of society and who need our support. Poet Rebecca Rijsdijk writes, "Understanding the actual experiences of people who are marginalized, discriminated against, or victims of injustice is made possible by empathy. We can develop a greater level of empathy by attentively listening, acknowledging their difficulties, and validating their emotions. With this knowledge, we can see how urgent it is to solve the systemic problems that contribute to social injustice and inequality."

The prophet Amos (5:24) wrote, "Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an everflowing stream." Justice is care and advocacy for those on the margins—those least able to advocate for themselves and those with the least power, least voice, least security, and least wealth. One of the finest translations of the word for righteousness is "right relationships." Let the care and advocacy for those on the margins roll down like waters, and right relationships like an ever-flowing stream. Part of the watershed that feeds the ever-flowing stream of justice is wonder. Wonder can lead to empathy by causing us to pay attention to the experiences of others. Empathy, in turn, can motivate us to work toward social justice. Poet Aimee Nezhukumatathil says, "Without wonder, we lose the ability to imagine lives and hearts different from us. . . . If wonder becomes a habit, we can set the pattern for a more just and tender world."

All of us have opportunities to sit and people watch, whether at a sidewalk café, waiting in the car or by a shopping area, or wherever we have the chance to observe people going by. Practice a people-watching exercise, centering upon the idea of wonder. Look at those most different from yourself, perhaps those least attractive or appealing, those from different cultures or orientations. Wonder: *I wonder what they are having for dinner. I wonder if they feel neglected by others. I wonder what their hurts are. I wonder what their beliefs*

tell them about kindness. I wonder what regrets they may be carrying. I wonder if they feel loved. I wonder what makes them happy. I wonder if they feel alienated. I wonder what dreams they have for their future. I wonder about who they have loved. I wonder what it would be like to have a conversation with them. I wonder if I could do better at seeing them as a unique wonder, never to be repeated in all of history, and how I might view them as God's most sacred creation. To wonder about them leads to a companionship walking on a shared journey of life. Can wondering about them lead me to walk a mile in their shoes, to see with their eyes, to listen with their ears, and to feel with their heart?

But then what? Wondering leads to empathy, which leads to action, which leads to social justice. As John Lewis said so simply, "When you see something that is not right, you must say something. You must do something." The Center for Responsive Schools notes, "Compassionate empathy moves us past simply understanding the emotional experiences of others and compels us to take substantive action to create change. Many grassroots movements have their foundations in an understanding that not only are people suffering, but something must be done about it. Movements such as those for social and racial justice or human and animal rights have been inspired by an imperative to operationalize compassion into action." The ability to embrace empathy serves as a foundation for understanding, acknowledging, and addressing social injustices, ultimately contributing to the creation of a more equitable and just society.

There are many commendable actions in the work for social justice, but one of the most powerful is to feed the watershed. Wonder flows into empathy, and empathy rolls down like waters into the ever-flowing streams of justice. Let us join Amos, the prophets, Jesus, and good people of faith everywhere in feeding the watershed of wonder, kindness, and empathy. Perhaps one of the most powerful acts of social justice we can pursue is to encourage, practice, model, teach, lift up, and celebrate empathy.

Rev. John Zehring has served United Church of Christ congregations for 22 years as a pastor in Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Maine. He is the author of more than 30 books and e-books. His most recent book from Judson Press is Get Your Church Ready to Grow: A Guide to Building Attendance and Participation.

Photo: Annie Spratt on Unsplash

Robert Wallace

Warning: This article contains mild spoilers for Terry Pratchett's Discworld books. If you don't wish to be spoiled, go immediately to your local library and read all 41 books. The article will wait. It's worth it.

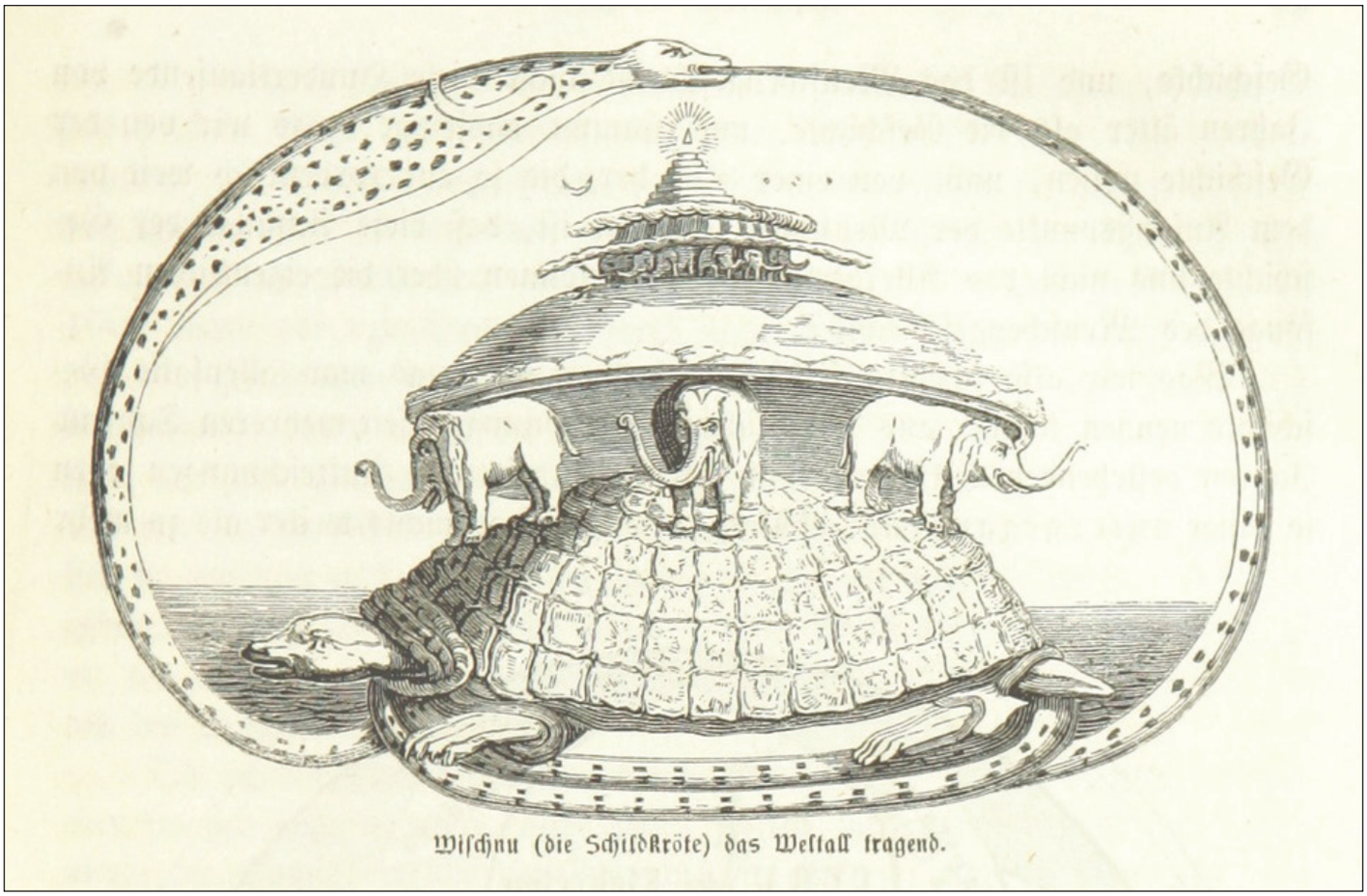
There is no Jew or Greek, slave or free, 'cause we're all coppers:

The Discworld Night Watch as a metaphor for church community

During the worst days of the pandemic, I was desperate for something fun to read. A friend recommended Terry Pratchett's "Discworld" series. I had enjoyed the show *"Good Omens"*, based on the novel of the same name, which Pratchett wrote with his dear friend Neil Gaiman, and so I thought I'd give "Discworld" a chance. Pratchett was a confoundingly prolific writer, writing 41 books set in "Discworld" from 1983 until his death in 2015. He recommended starting the series with book 3, since he felt it was there he had figured out what he was doing. Trusting the author, that's what I did.

The stories of "Discworld" take place on a flat planet, 10,000 miles in diameter, balanced on the back of four elephants, standing on a giant turtle flying through space. The stories parody classic mythology, folklore, and fantasy elements and use them to make satirical points about issues that plague us in the round world. One doesn't need to start the series anywhere in particular. The internet is full of debates on the "best way to read the 'Discworld' books." Though I read the stories in publication order, Pratchett writes each book so that it is accessible to a first-time reader, and my wife read the books in their individual series.

Some books follow the adventures of a coven of witches led by the indomitable Granny Weatherwax. Some follow the work of the Death of Discworld, who only speaks in small caps in the text, so it is clear when



Wiſchnu (die Schildkröte) das Weltall tragend.

he is speaking to those who are near or post-death. (I confess that if the Death of Discworld does not walk with me as I cross over to the other side, I will enter glory a little disappointed). Some books follow how the inventions of the printing press, moving pictures, or the steam engine affected the people on the disc. The books that hooked my wife, however, were the stories of Sam Vimes of the Night Watch—the police force of the city of Ankh-Morpork.

When we first encounter Sam Vimes, he is a cynical, alcoholic cop, passed out in the gutter while mourning the death of a friend and colleague. The police force is little more than a joke. That is, until Carrot Ironfoundersson arrives. Carrot is a human who had been adopted and raised by dwarfs (his dwarf name translates to "head banger"). When Carrot joins the collection of misfits in the Night Watch, his dwarfish upbringing compels him to follow the letter of the law. His simple but sincere passion for doing what is right reawakens in Sam Vimes the desire to do right as well. The Night Watch is revitalized, and instead of just four misfit coppers, the Watch is suddenly hiring new recruits and stationing them all over the city.

At first the new recruits come mainly from the city's human population, until the interest group, The Campaign for Equal Heights, insists the Watch hire more dwarf members for better representation. This leads to the hiring of troll members of the Watch (trolls are made of stone and, therefore, adversaries of the frequently mining dwarfs). Across the series of "Watch Books," the Night Watch becomes more diverse and inclusive. The Watch hires a werewolf, a zombie, golems, a vampire, a gnome, an Igor, various gargoyles, and even an accountant.

Vimes had a philosophy, "All coppers are just coppers." But he also had his own prejudices. Beyond his own struggles, he recognized the additional challenge of having a werewolf and vampire patrol together or a troll and dwarf walking down the street as a team. Just because they were "all coppers" doesn't mean all the old prejudices were gone. At times Vimes leaned into the diversity and mixed the composition of patrols so that the city could see different species working together in an effort to calm interspecies violence. Vimes (and the reader) discover that although he pushed against the "diversity, equity, and inclusion" program that led to this diverse group of cops, the individual gifts each species brought to the Watch led to crimes getting solved and the world being made better. The Night Watch became everyone's.

In that way, the Night Watch becomes a remarkable parable for the church. Much like Sam Vimes, the church in Acts was dragged to more diversity, equity, and inclusion in its early years. In Acts 2, what started as a group of Palestinian Jews on the morning of Pentecost became a group of Jews of various ethnic backgrounds by the evening. That diversity soon became a challenge when it came to light that some widows weren't being treated fairly because of their ethnicity in Acts 6. Once that issue was addressed, soon after in Acts 8, the church had to send an inspection team to confirm that Samaritans could receive the Holy Spirit. Then later that same chapter, individuals who couldn't convert to Judaism before becoming Christians were welcomed—like the eunuch from Ethiopia. Ultimately, even Gentiles were offered full welcome into the church without first becoming Jewish—after a lengthy debate at the council in Jerusalem in Acts 15.

Sam Vimes recognized it might be simpler if all the coppers were human, but the Watch wouldn't work as well if they were. While it might be simpler if everyone in the church had the same gifts, Paul spent 1 Corinthians 12–14 emphasizing to the Corinthian church that the diversity of the body of Christ made it alive. In fact, a diverse and inclusive church is the ultimate goal. In Revelation 7, the faithful standing in front of the throne of grace are from every tribe and every nation—so many of them that no one can count them all—shoulder to shoulder. No one is above anyone else, but all are under Christ.

When Paul, in Galatians 3:28 (NIV), said that in Christ there is "neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor . . . male and female," he was not suggesting that individuals lose their individual gifts or identities. He was emphasizing that no group could exercise power over any other. Our individuality still exists, but Jewish Christians could not force Gentile Christians to be Jewish. Neither could men dominate women. The punishments of the fall had been overcome by new life in Christ.

All those identities now rested under the headship of Christ. In the same way, Sam Vimes's belief that "all coppers are coppers" means that their identities are used in the enforcement of "the law," not the enforcement of any individual person's or species' privilege.

Jesus understood the value of a good parable to make a point understandable. In reading the Discworld books, I am certain Terry Pratchett did too.

Rev. Dr. Robert Wallace is senior pastor, McLean Baptist Church, McLean, Virginia.

IMAGE AT LEFT:
Discworld from "Der Mensch, die Räthsel und Wunder seiner Natur. … Vierte Auflage" vol. 1.
British Library via Flickr/Wikimedia Commons. Public domain

AN INTERVIEW

"When all of God's gifts are being celebrated and used, there is a joy that is abundant":

An interview with Rev. Dr. Gina Jacobs-Strain, new ABCUSA general secretary

The newly called general secretary of American Baptist Churches USA, Dr. Gina Jacobs-Strain, spoke with *The Christian Citizen*'s Anna Piela about her plans and hopes for the denomination and the challenges she anticipates in her new role. The following is an excerpt. Read the full interview at christiancitizen.us.

Congratulations on your new role! My first question is a big one: In which direction are you hoping to take the denomination? What would you like to champion?

I would like a renewed emphasis on youth and young adults. The inclusion of young people is a common need for our denomination. I think most of our churches are without young people or they make up a very small part of the congregation. It is necessary for us to enter more spaces where the Great Commission and soul saving are at the center of what we do. So, I hope we are willing to be in spaces where people are looking to know God and even more so spaces where people don't know they need God—and that may involve stepping outside of the norms of our churches.

I also know that in the short run, I really have to get to know the staff of ABCUSA as well as the board and understand how they understand their role as the harmonizers and conveners for the denomination.

I believe we have more common ground than differences, we have interdependence alongside independence, and that being able to think critically and creatively together is essential. We have to continue to participate in genuine conversations that are sometimes prickly, but in a family, at the end of the day, you realize that this is still your family. That's still your brother, that's still your sister. Lastly, I hope that I will be known as one that expresses Christian love, extends hospitality, and sustains fellowship.

And what are the challenges that you foresee during your tenure?

I think that we often have conferences and gatherings that do not make space for youth and young adults. So that to me is an immediate concern. How can we, as a denomination, grow and prosper if we are not engaging young people in a way that they want to be engaged, not the way that we want to engage them? At American Baptist Women's Ministries (ABWM), we have a young adult women's ministry, and they plan the events, and they select the venues. They select the topics that address their life choices, faith journeys, careers, and family life.

Thinking about who's going to lead the church in 30 or 40 years, these are the children that are now students at Sunday school. And if they're not in church now as young people, we can't expect them to come back.

Right, our classes are very small and sometimes empty. I don't believe it's that young people don't love Jesus. I think it is that they don't always feel welcome. They don't always feel accepted. Sometimes they feel judged, and we don't want to give them too much responsibility.

We have to realize that Sunday school may look different, but the goal has not changed. We are still excited to teach the story of salvation and to expose people to the love of Jesus Christ. The young people that are missing from our churches are our future and our present, so we have to build bridges.

And how do you envisage working with ABC partner agencies?

I'm always looking for opportunities for us to collaborate. At ABWM we have engaged in several collaborative projects with our partners, allowing us to capitalize on the strengths of each organization. We need to figure out more ways for us to connect outside of the biennial. So, we may need to consider different opportunities

for the staff to work together so that we are curating resources and benefiting from one another's wisdom, experience, and expertise.

The last year there has been a lot of controversy around women's ministry. Do you have a message for female clergy about their place in the bigger plan?

One of the best pieces of advice that I ever received in ministry was when a pastor said to me, "Guard your heart." I didn't fully get what that meant, but I think he was trying to prepare me for the opposition that I was going to come up against and to know that guarding my heart would not always be easy. There were times when my heart was broken, and the opposition was and is difficult. I think most women in ministry may have this experience. And so, I think, guarding your heart, self-care, soul-care, having a safe space to be with people who trust you and love you, and they don't expect you to be clergy in that space. They're not expecting you to be pastor. They're not expecting you to be "Reverend Doctor." They're just expecting you to be you, whoever that happens to be. That is really important. Having friends, fellowship, and relationships that are broad, that are ecumenical, that are in corporate settings, that are part of churches so that you are aware of other opportunities and things that are taking place around you.

While we support women in ministry, we still have a very, very long way to go. I think that our statistics would show that maybe 12 or 14 percent of our pulpits have women as senior pastors. For women, the opposition has always been there, and often we're not given a chance to lead a church or to be in a senior position until a situation is quite desperate. And then it's like, "OK, we'll give a woman a shot. Let's see what she can do."

I think it's up to all of us as brothers and sisters to work together so that all of God's gifts are being used. When all of God's gifts are being celebrated and used, there is a joy that is abundant.

So many clergy leave in the first five years because ministry is not easy! So, the idea of building communion and fellowship among clergy and making space for all of God's gifts is really important.

Is there anything I didn't ask about in the interview that you would like to share with our readers?

One of the things that's really important. I believe in bathing everything in prayer. And I'm hoping that as we collaborate more with our partners, and as I find out more about the strengths of the ABCUSA staff, we will be very intentional about being prayerful for everything that we do, and really seek the face of God.

Rev. Dr. Anna Piela is senior writer at American Baptist Home Mission Societies and the assistant editor of The Christian Citizen.

Photo: Marc-Olivier Jodoin on Unsplash

Justin Cox

I never felt more Baptist

I have a closet in the corner of my office. I'm inclined to believe most pastors do. On the top of it is a container filled with Duplos. Resting beside the building blocks is an original Lite-Brite.

Plastered all over the outside are drawings from my oldest daughter. Her artwork showcases the leaps of her fine-motor skills. Her pictures, paintings, and handprints constantly clarify to me who she's becoming. Lastly, a long mirror covers one of the doors. Sometimes, when I'm stressed, I look in the mirror for answers. The guy staring back rarely has any.

Tucked away inside the closet is a menagerie of items rarely used. A small washtub for foot washing. There's a pair of well-worn boots and a neon green yoga mat that has never been unfurled. At eye level, a wooden bar supports several hangers. On them are a couple of cozy sweaters, including a Mister Rogers–style cardigan. Going down the line, a few pieces of academic regalia. And, finally, a plain black cassock with a smattering of stoles tucked around the neck. These vestments are a collection of what I rightly label as comfortably cumbersome.

You see, for me, a low-church, grassroots-loving sort of preacher, the robes and stoles rarely see the light of day. Sure, I'll suit up for Lent, Advent, or what others might call the higher holier days. And, in the case of a wedding or funeral, I always ask the family if they'd prefer I wear the more formal attire. Out of courtesy, I respectfully bend the knee.

But here's the deal: I just don't possess the wherewithal to know when and when not to wear hallowed garments. You see, my upbringing in institutional religious communities was, shall we say, limited. Even growing up in the southern Bible Belt, all things church were more peripheral; my experiences were shaped by sporadic vacation Bible school attendance and the once-a-year Moravian love feast service my family flocked to around Christmastime. It's not hard to imagine, then, that I simply never developed an image of what a minister is supposed to look like, or, more precisely, what a minister is

Photo: Clem Onojeghuo on Unsplash

supposed to wear. Collars? Cloaks? All are an ensemble, a costume I never felt the need to mimic when I accepted a call to work in congregational ministry.

As fate or providence would have it, maybe that's why I landed in the stream of Christian faith I have. While it took some time to profess it, my identity as a follower of the lowly Galilean is exercised through my identity as a Baptist. Now, the term *Baptist* is as broad as it is at times problematic. There are a slew of folks who claim the moniker—some of whom I know I can greet in a liquor store, and some who would stone me if they saw me there. While the group comes in all different flavors, one of the primary ties that bind us is the concept of freedom. A mentor once told me that if you want to correctly spell Baptist, you spell it f-r-e-e-d-o-m. From the most progressive to the most fundamental, all Baptists cling to the fragile Bible, soul, church, and religious freedoms.

Walter B. Shurden gets a fair amount of credit for naming these Baptist pillars. Still, if I could make a small addendum to his famous book, I'd tack on the freedom of attire and self-expression. This is why you might find a Baptist minister in a robe on Sunday morning or a pair of overalls, perhaps even an apron. I've worn all three and openly confess to finding more meaning in the latter two. None has an edge in helping me feel like a minister more than the other.

Of course, I know other individuals and traditions that place significant importance and prestige on attire and vestments. I'm fortunate to know and work with clergy peers who absolutely enjoy, value, and treasure their priestly uniforms. I was reminded of this fact recently when I received an invitation to participate in an ordination service for a fellow minister.

I arrived early to their church, wearing black jeans, Doc Martens, a striped short-sleeve shirt, and an inky unisex dress jacket. The thought of bringing my seldom-used cassock never crossed my mind. I did have enough sense to grab my red stole, a reversible one oozing classiness. However, as the other ministers filed in, I realized I was dressed for the wrong sort of party.

Intimidating-sized garment bags were flung over my ministry peers' shoulders. I saw as the bags were being unzipped that they were full of stark white robes. Springing forth next came an exhibition of intricately designed polychromatic stoles. Some displayed images of rising flames accompanying a host of Holy Spirit doves. Some peers came with cinctures at the ready, tying knots that would put any Eagle Scout to shame. I knew I should have read the invitation closer when I spotted one gentleman coming through the parking lot carrying a staff that would have made Tolkien's Balrog of Moria think twice.

As the ministers and others more revered than me lined up for the processional, I was afraid the wielder of the impressive walking stick would bar my entrance into the sanctuary with his own rendition of the wizard Gandalf's famous line "You shall not pass!" Be it mercy or pity, I was permitted inside.

A mentor once told me that if you want to correctly spell Baptist, you spell it f-r-e-e-d-o-m. From the most progressive to the most fundamental, all Baptists cling to the fragile Bible, soul, church, and religious freedoms.

Now, let me tell you, from the start, the service was beautiful. It was, to me, the epitome of what I understand to be high church. It was dignified, possessing an air of sophistication I rarely rub elbows with. The flow was orderly and scripted. It was layered with solid liturgy, including the part of the candidate's charge to accept the responsibilities of the call to ministry; the presiding bishop asked the candidate to affirm the authority of Scripture and the Apostles', Nicene, and Athanasian Creeds. Before I could ask, "What's a creed?" I surveyed the room and decided not to.

And for those next couple of hours, I don't believe I've ever felt more like a Baptist.

This recognition of my dissenting, nonconforming faith and how I choose to live it out warmed my heart more than a warm cup of soup on a cold New England day. Witnessing what I wasn't helped me name yet again who I am.

Later that afternoon, I placed my red stole back in the closet, securing it away until I would need it again, and thankful for how it works for some but not for others. Thankful I caught another glimpse of how big the kingdom of God can be.

Justin Cox received his theological education from Campbell University and Wake Forest University School of Divinity. He is an ordained minister affiliated with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and enrolled in the Doctor of Ministry program at McAfee School of Theology.

Photo: Clem Onojeghuo on Unsplash

Michele Turek

Past the paralysis

At the end of January, over a thousand people came from around the world to the International Religious Freedom Summit in Washington, DC. This gathering brought attention to religious freedom violations around the globe. The 2023 U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom annual report described persecution of religious minorities in many countries—for example, in Afghanistan under the Taliban; China persecuting Uyghur Muslims; Nigeria, where Christians are targeted in some parts of the country; and India, where Hindu nationalism underpins discriminatory laws, vigilante violence, and razing of mosques and churches.

I was struck by my very human reaction to hearing about global atrocities, including the injustices we see in our own country. I feel helplessness and paralysis, something I suspect that many others feel too, when I hear about things that go wrong in the world. However, I want to change the situation; I want to fix the problem. I want to see things become better, but then I seem to hit a wall, thinking, *I am just one person. What could I possibly do to change this?* It seems impossible—too enormous of a task to even know where to start.

I was struck by my very human reaction to hearing about global atrocities, including the injustices we see in our own country.

Then I look around me to see the people who are doing something, and they're making change in the world. They don't get paralyzed, or at least they don't linger in paralysis. They take the next step. They find collaborators. They use their networks and resources to make an impact. They make phone calls, write letters, make appointments, and do the research that can be taken to policy makers who can make the "big picture" difference. At this conference, I was surrounded by courageous souls who are consistently making a dent, reshaping the world and its systems.

The day before the IRF Summit, I attended a congressional hearing on the current situation in Myanmar (Burma), which just reached the third anniversary of its military coup. I bore witness to hardworking and dedicated American Baptists and other ministry partners from the Burmese diaspora. It was in a small room, confined by its institutional four walls and small windows, but they were fighting for their cause. Young and old, across religious, national, and language barriers, they were united in this common goal: to call for the leaders of the United States to take action for the sake of lives saved, freedoms won, and a legitimate government to be restored. It was an inspiring thing to witness.

I told a colleague once that I have found great inspiration in the musical *Hamilton* by Lin-Manuel Miranda. Beyond the music that gets stuck in your head, the flash of costumes and lights, there is a story of individuals striving to make a difference in their own ways. The members of the audience might identify with one character and see their own experiences and thoughts mirrored onstage. In the three times I have seen the musical, I always find that I identify more with Aaron Burr, as he is portrayed. He plays the game and stays in his lane; he is hesitant to speak his mind and waits for the opportunity to come to him. When Alexander Hamilton rushes forward and aggressively takes the initiative, Burr is often seen in the margin of the main events, waiting, baffled, as he so often gets left behind.

God has not given us a spirit of timidity or fear, but of power, of love, and of self-discipline (2 Timothy 1:7). Sometimes we need to take matters into our own hands. Sometimes we need to take the initiative so that we can

Burma protests in front of the White House
Photo: Michele Turek

be "in the room where it happens." Christ followers are not called to shrink into the shadows, but to take one step after another. In the face of empire, powers, and principalities, we declare the power from our Holy Source and keep walking to forge the path for ourselves and our neighbors in love.

In my same trip to Washington DC, I went to the Holocaust Memorial Museum. There, on the wall in the final steps of the exhibit, the following quote by Martin Niemöller (a Lutheran minister and early Nazi supporter, later imprisoned for opposing Hitler's regime) is displayed:

This dramatic call to solidarity with others, especially those who are oppressed for other reasons than we are, resonates strongly with me. Oppression should matter to us regardless of whether we experience it the same way. In the words of the Jewish American poet and activist Emma Lazarus, "Until we are all free, we are none of us free."

Rev. Michele Turek is the national coordinator for Asian Ministries at the American Baptist Home Mission Societies.

First they came for the socialists, and I did not speak out—
Because I was not a socialist.
Then they came for the trade unionists, and I did not speak out—
Because I was not a trade unionist.
Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out—
Because I was not a Jew.
Then they came for me—and there was no one left to speak for me.

Margaret Marcuson

One minute is better than no minutes

One minute is better than no minutes. Doing something is exponentially better than doing nothing. Literally. Any amount times zero is still zero.

One minute of movement is better than not moving at all.

One minute of picking things up off the floor of the living room is better than not picking anything up.

One minute of brushing your teeth is better than not brushing at all. I'm sure your dentist would agree.

And . . . one minute of prayer is far better than no minutes of prayer.

Time management teacher Mark Forster used to say, "I'll just get the file out." Forster suggests that after you open the file, you often find yourself getting on with the work. Nowadays it could be, "I'll just open the document." I did use his catchphrase to get an actual paper file out just last week. It got me going. If you open the file and close it again, you've brought that work to your attention. You've taken a little step over the hump of procrastination. "I'll just do something for one minute" is a similar mind trick to get started.

I know that longer periods of concentration are valuable. However, I've always worked well in shorter spurts. I'm finishing up a book manuscript on sustainable ministry in times like these. Of course it took a lot more than one minute or even one minute a day. But I haven't worked on it for more than an hour at a time. It was far easier to get started when I knew I didn't have to work on it all day.

Photo: Brett Jordan on Unsplash

Good church leaders tend to have high standards for themselves. Paradoxically, that can get in the way of getting started. Doing it right can seem overwhelming. But the energy to put things off is sometimes more than the energy to do the work once we start. I've found taxes to be a great example of this. When I added up the time once I actually got started on it, it was only a few hours. I used to spend weeks putting it off.

Here are a few ideas for one-minute (or less) ministry tasks:

- Read one verse of the text for Sunday.
- Text someone you've been meaning to call or visit but keep putting off. If they don't text, pray for them.
- Watch your breath for ten breaths. Use a phrase like "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want."
- Open a book on your pile of unread books. Read the first sentence and decide immediately whether you want to read it.
- Write down your purpose for the day. Don't take more than one minute to think it up.
- Send a one-sentence email asking someone to do something. (Don't look at the rest of your email while you're doing it.)
- Say a quick prayer for someone in need.
- Make a list of five other one-minute tasks.
- Do one of the tasks on the list you made.

What causes procrastination? Anxiety. I don't get started on things because I think they are going to be hard. I'm anxious that I'm not up to it. Tiny tasks help me lower my anxiety and get going: "I'll just do it for one minute."

Rev. Margaret Marcuson helps ministers do their work without wearing out or burning out, through ministry coaching, presentations, and online resources.

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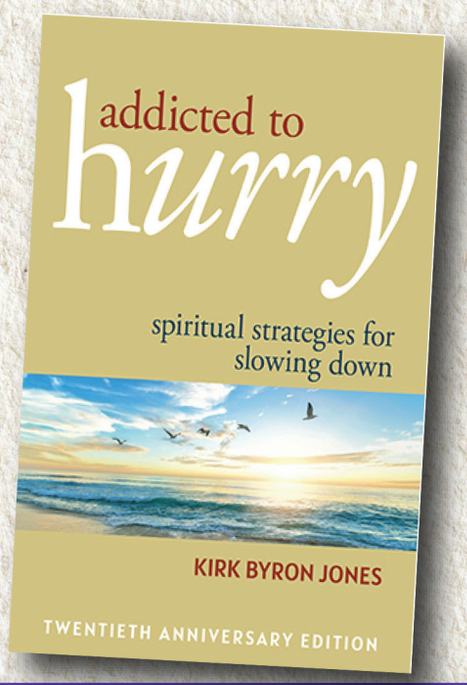

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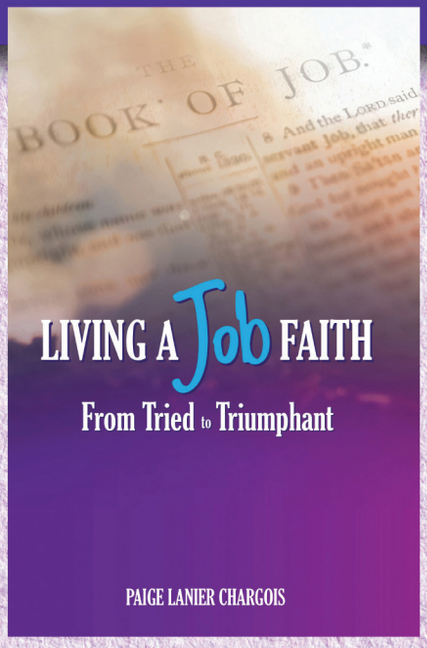

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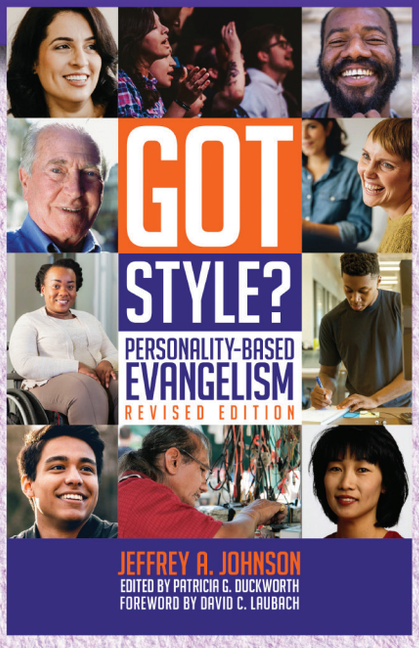

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