Panel Presentations
Baylor Symposium on Faith and Culture 2023

<u>Untimely teachers in an age of discord: Nietzsche and Wittgenstein as Educators</u>
Karl Aho, Tarleton State University

While they are both better known for their other contributions to philosophy, Friedrich Nietzsche and Ludwig Wittgenstein are both fundamentally concerned with education. Their attempts to educate their readers are each motivated by the discords of their times. Nietzsche presciently anticipated the nihilism of our own time. Likewise, Wittgenstein synthesized formal and linguistic questions of meaning with the existential traumas that arose for him and the world during his military service during the First World War. They both approached philosophy as a calling and a way of life, and both saw our fundamental human conflicts as questions of meaning rather than between persons. Accordingly, we propose that their pedagogical interventions could help us fruitfully respond to the discord of our age. Nietzsche's pedagogy owes much to Schopenhauer, whom he famously describes as an educator. In his essay of that name, he describes people as hiding their uniqueness on account of fear of their neighbors. One reason for this fear is the demand for conventionality. Nietzsche exhorts his readers to cultivate themselves as individuals, who may then more authentically participate in the community. We contend that this element of Nietzsche's philosophy, rather than the more agonistic appeals for which he is better known, can help us resist the conventional sources of discord we face in the present. Wittgenstein was largely engaged in philosophy as a way of engaging and being engaged with dialogue. The entirety of the work of the 'latter' Wittgenstein is an almost unending dialogue about what it means to be human. His multiple voices are the voices of possibilities. Their variety opens a space where new insights and growth are likely. That is, by creating space for these voices, he allows for the emergence of education as deeply marked by humble co–learning and co–teaching. This dialogical epistemic humility could serve us by fostering more authentic learning communities, and thus offering hope for less cynical forms beyond the classroom. All of this is to say that philosophers familiar with discord may offer the sort of untimely lessons that can help us escape the bewitchment of intelligence through discordant language.

<u>Sounding It Out: Calling and Caring in Abilene, Amarillo, and Waco</u>

John N. Davis, Hardin–Simmons University
Jeff Reid, Pioneer Drive Baptist Church, Abilene
Gary Jensen, First Baptist Church, Amarillo
Toana Smith, First Baptist Church, Amarillo
Bill Brian, First Baptist Church, Amarillo
Joshua Hays, First Baptist Church, Waco

A dozen congregations, both large and small, from multiple denominations across the State of Texas are engaged in a multiyear project called The Soundings Project. It is funded by the Lilly endowment Inc. and is headed by Baylor University's Institute of Faith and Learning. The purpose of this project is to allow these congregations to reflect deeply and theologically about the nature of vocation. It should be no surprise that each congregation has chosen a different approach, based on the needs and interests of each church. Representatives, both clergy and laity, of the three largest churches in the project will discuss how each has intentionally engaged in calling and caring within each congregation as a part of The Soundings Project and what each has learned so far. In particular, funding made available to each church made it possible to try things that might be outside of normal church budget priorities. Following presentations, we will have a Question & Answer time so that we all, including audience members, can learn from each other. This session is primarily practical by design. Academic matters, while touched on, will remain secondary.

Faithfully and Fruitfully Navigating Divides in an Age of Discord

Madeline R. Garrett and Richard N. Williams, Department of Counseling Psychology and Special Education, Brigham Young University

We propose a panel discussion of three papers united in their general focus on the principal issue of how Christians can more faithfully and fruitfully navigate divides in this age of discord. The first paper will argue for the need to drive discourse deeper, from its often-superficial level even regarding matters of intellectual and moral significance, to the level where metaphysics, epistemology and ethical judgment reside. The second paper will argue for a particular understanding of the nature of Christ-like love, which Christians are called to emulate as they engage with others in the public sphere but also in the sphere wherein the helping professions operate. The third paper will argue that Christianity and, specifically, a psychology informed by the concept of Christ-like compassion manifest as recognition of and engagement in the fundament alterity of the other—as opposed to psychology in its current preoccupation with interiority and interest in the self in either its modernist or post-modern forms. The final paper takes up the essential role education (at all levels) in providing to students the means of navigating the troubled intellectual and cultural waters that lie between the easy relativism of scientism on the one side and the easy relativism of Critical Theory-informed perspectives on the other. The course between must take its bearing from the true and the ethical.

From Barn Raisings to Metaphysics: The Path to Civil Civic Discourse in a Riven World

Richard N. Williams and Kiara Burdge Aguirre, Department of Counseling Psychology and Special Education, Brigham Young University

The title of this proposed paper invokes the image of the ubiquitously recognized positive effects of finding common ground with those with whom we disagree, by engaging in a joint project, coming together, toning down the rhetoric, and appreciating those who do not agree with us, and acknowledging our common humanity. We will also discuss the experience that such common-ground experiences, are often insufficient to provide any lasting resolution to substantive disagreements, or even real fellowship. Such common ground often provides good opportunities to practice common courtesy and some Christian charity, but it is too often more akin to a metaphorical barn raising than it is to real understanding. We argue that such interactions do not last long even in their reverberations because they do not drive the conversation deep enough – down to the level where understandings and commitments are forged and where the vital importance attached to ideas and actions under discussion is clarified. At this deeper level, we argue, genuine alternatives are clear, even when resolution or satisfaction are not. Getting down to this deeper level prevents rhetorical excess (because one can't really bluff much down there), obviates most *ad hominem* and labeling (because it is clear that there are more important things than merely scoring argument points), focuses on truth and right (instead of winning and losing), and establishes trust among interlocutors because discourse at the deepest levels exposes our most real and most intimate selves to each other. For all these reasons, it seems, our contemporary culture seems to want to avoid getting down to, or even approaching, the deepest levels of our most important understandings and moral commitments. The deeper and stronger and more comprehensive the level at which issues are engaged, the less likely it is that animosity has a place in our hearts or our interactions. The greatest sign of respect for another is to feel the obligation to engage the other at the deepest moral and intellectual levels, exposing ourselves to the other, and presuming of the other equally good faith and respect.

Truth and Invitation: The Nature and Implications of Christ-like Love in Social Discourse

Madeline R. Garrett and Richard N. Williams, Department of Counseling Psychology and Special Education, Brigham Young University

In an age of discord, people of faith may be left wondering how God would have them engage and participate in social discourse or how they ought to respond to people with whom they disagree or to ideas, values, and trends that seem damaging to faith. Christ-like love is often acknowledged as a guide by such people, yet understandings of the nature of Christ-like love, as well as the positions and actions of those who cite Christ-like love as the inspiration or justification for such positions and actions, often

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differ radically from one another. Some may assume that the most Christ-like way to respond is to unconditionally accept, support, and encourage the chosen ideas, values, or actions of others, and regard all such ideas, values, and actions as valid and equal. Others may feel it is their Christian duty to stand for truth but end up doing so in a way that lacks genuine concern, responsiveness, and compassion. Yet others, stuck between these opposing approaches, may opt to do nothing, withdrawing from social discourse and resolving to quietly pursue their personal salvation. This paper aims to articulate an alternative view of Christ-like love and the nature and implications of that love for Christians participating in social discourse. This love, as evidenced by the life, mission, and teachings of Jesus Christ, is not unconditional acceptance and validation of the ideas and values of others, nor is it a cold, uncaring "laying down of the law." Instead, Christ-like love arises from a love of truth and a genuine concern and care for others, and it involves expecting, hoping, and inviting others to love truth as well. Christians are called to strive to emulate Christ's love as they faithfully navigate divides and engage with others in the public sphere.

The Failure of the Therapeutic: What Christian Compassion Really Means in the Age of Discord

Kylie M. Burdge, Department of Counseling Psychology and Special Education, Brigham Young University, Edwin E. Gantt, Department of Psychology, Brigham Young University, and Aaron R. Burdge, Alterity Psychological Services, Oak Harbor, Washington

For well-over a century now, the discipline of Psychology has claimed to possess a privileged understanding of human moral, emotional, and interpersonal distress, as well as the origins of the social discord that inevitably accompanies such things. Theorists and therapists alike have proclaimed that naturalistic psychological accounts of human behavior can provide the necessary scientific techniques to overcome all manner of human social and emotional problems. However, clear evidence for the validity of such claims is still very much in question given that over the decades we have seen not a decrease in, but rather an increase in rates of depression, anxiety, suicide, feelings of isolation, alienation, and hopelessness, the breakdown of the family and the collapse of the institution of marriage, the erosion of sexual standards and moral sensibilities, all of which contribute to the "malaise of modernity" and rapid disintegration of our communities and our social and political order. Indeed, it is this very malaise and societal anomie that have given rise to our current Age of Discord in the first place. And, while sole blame for such things cannot be laid at the feet of the discipline of psychology, we will contend that the discipline has nonetheless thus far failed to show that it possesses the conceptual and moral resources to adequately respond to the problems we face or provide for lasting healing of the human soul. We will argue that while psychology does not possess the necessary resources to provide the sort of moral and intellectual guidance we need to successfully bridge the social, political, and interpersonal divides we face in this Age of Discord, Christianity does. And, further, that a psychology informed by the concept of Christ-like compassion is one that is capable of providing a "peace-full" response to our tumultuous era, a response that offers a surer foundation for navigating the dangerous waters of human affairs in this challenging historical moment. We will argue that Christianity entails that as psychologists we have an obligation to engage our patients in genuine, loving, Christ-like compassion – as opposed to its secular humanistic counterfeit of therapeutic empathy and unbounded affirmation. Such compassion requires not only that we embrace and accept others in honest loving concern for them in their hour of suffering and need, but also that we stand firmly and openly in the cause of truth by inviting them to live according to the truth of who they really are and in accord with the kind of life we were all meant to live. For the Christian psychologist, then, compassion and truth-telling are inextricably bound up together and neither can be neglected without emptying the other of its meaning. Only by compassionate truth-telling can contemporary psychology cease contributing to social and moral chaos of our time and instead begin to point the way toward mutual love and respect, personal and interpersonal wholeness, and a joyous and lasting healing that knits together souls, minds, and hearts.

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Education As Truth and As Ethics

Edwin E. Gantt, Department of Psychology, Brigham Young University, and Madeline R. Garrett, Department of Counseling Psychology and Special Education, Brigham Young University

This paper argues for an understanding of education that has lost its once more prominent role in our society. In recent decades, education has been reduced to scientistic communication of facts and information, on the one hand, or ideologically driven activism, on the other. This reflects the powerful influence of the two main intellectual movements of the past century: modernism and postmodernism. From a modernist perspective, education is taken to be essentially a technological process whereby objective facts, detached from their moral and spiritual context, are conveyed by trained scientific experts to untrained young minds in a fundamentally utilitarian enterprise of mastery over and rational control of the world. This conception of the purpose and meaning of education reflects a core commitment to what is known as scientism, a view of intellectual life in which only natural science is thought to be able "to produce knowledge and solve the problems facing humanity" (Williams, 2015, p. 7). In contrast, the postmodern approach is one in which there is held to be no meaningful distinction between knowledge and power, particularly political power. The purpose of education, in this view, is to awaken young minds to the multitudinous ways in which they are and have been oppressed by others – by political, economic, and moral systems, by religion, history, and science, indeed by culture itself – so as to engage in the utopic project of liberationist activism. At present, this vision of education is most commonly articulated through various formulations of critical race and gender theories.

We argue, however, that for education to achieve its fullest purpose as an intrinsic and virtuous good, and thereby sustain an intellectually productive and morally fruitful culture, it must be grounded in a deeper and more fundamental vision of human being and flourishing. Education, across the expanse of disciplines, must offer an account of what really is "the case" (i.e., the truth) about our human being-in-the-world. Further, education must serve another equally vital cultural and intellectual function since truth – the aim of any serious educational enterprise – necessarily involves the articulation of meaningful implications, and, thereby, captures the evaluative element at the heart of any truth claims. Thus, we argue education *qua* education, as opposed to either the mere communication of information stripped of its moral context and import or simply as an instrument serving destabilizing ideological and political agendas, must be centrally concerned with articulating the meaning of truth and ethics. Only by being so oriented can education achieve its essential purpose of cultivating a flourishing society nurtured and sustained by virtuous, knowledgeable, and wise men and women.

How Food Brings Us Together: Literature and Theology
Brent Gibson, University of Mary Hardin–Baylor

This panel will consist of 5–6 undergraduate English majors from the University of Mary Hardin–Baylor who will each present research in the form of a short paper.

Called to Boise: A Conversation with the Multi–Faith Action Project
Kathryn House, Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary and Meadville Lombard Theological School
Jennifer Wilson, Windley Works (Coaching with Myrtle Collaboration)

The Multi–Faith Action Project (MAP) in Boise, ID is an initiative forged in 2020 by faith leaders from different Christian traditions who wanted to build relationships with one another and one another's faith communities better in Boise, ID. Amid a contemporary moment of polarization and isolation, grounded in a desire to center racial justice and transformative action in Boise, leaders from Christian traditions including the Baptist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, ELCA, and PC(USA) began meeting to discern how they might be called to collective and collaborative partnerships in Boise. With support from the Myrtle Collaboration, the Called to Lives of Meaning and Purpose Initiative Innovation Hub at Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary, leaders pursued opportunities to better understand one another and what common callings might emerge in discussions. Through vulnerable conversations, memorable shared meals, and the discernment of a common desire for collaboration, MAP leaders discerned a common vision for their group in 2022: "The Multi–Faith Action Project (MAP) exists to meaningfully change the Treasure Valley by bringing faith groups and other community members together to help our most vulnerable, disadvantaged, and at–risk neighbors in building healthy, stable, and rewarding lives. In the process, we unite to build understanding, cooperation, and friendship. Our goal is to truly love our neighbors." In 2023, MAP solidified a partnership with St. Paul Family Life and Education Center and celebrated their launch in the community with a luncheon with over 150 in attendance from a wide variety of civic, non–profit, and ecclesial backgrounds. This September they will prepare 100,000 meals with members of their congregations and new potential partners.

In this interview–style panel, Myrtle Collaboration Coach Jennifer Wilson and Project Director Kathryn House will facilitate a robust conversation with MAP leaders. Panelists will briefly discuss the film and then welcome questions from the audience. Topics will include significant practices of discernment and formation; critical theological frameworks that ground and enliven MAP leaders; the impact of MAP on personal faith and congregational life; the power of attending to meaning, purpose, and calling in group processes; the possibilities and growing edges of collaboration; discerning the "calling" of a city and to a city; and emerging insights for individuals and groups exploring resonant callings. Panel members include Ms. Amy Fife, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter–day Saints, Boise, ID; Rev. Dr. Michael J. Ross, St. Paul Baptist Church, Boise, ID; Rev. Dr. Kevin Starcher, Covenant Presbyterian Church, Boise, ID; Mr. Dennis Williams, St. Paul Family Life and Education Center, Boise, ID; and Ms. Shauna Williams, St. Paul Family Life and Education Center, Boise, ID. After the panel, we will debut segments from a video currently in production, filmed in May 2023 in Boise, that is capturing the story of MAP. Panelists will briefly discuss the film and then welcome questions from the audience.

<u>Wisdom in an Age of Discord</u>
Scott Huelin, Union University
Justin Barnard, Union University

Four research groups of undergraduate Honors students will present their findings on several topics related to the conference theme.

<u>Vocations Don't Just Happen: Organizing Church Life to Hear God's Call*</u>
Jason Ingalls, Holy Spirit Episcopal Church

In our parish, we've recognized the importance of vocation as a unifying force, especially in these divisive times, and we've developed a unique program that combines spiritual guidance, community dialogue, and social action to help individuals discover their calling. But, we've noticed that the concept of vocation is often limited to individual purpose, missing the opportunity to address the broader societal discord that we're all grappling with. Therefore, our talk will present our parish's approach as an adaptable model for how faith communities can expand the notion of vocation to become agents of unity and purposeful living, particularly in an age marked by division and unrest. Participants will leave the workshop with a clearly articulated vocational pathway for their congregation and with clear next steps for implementation.

Christian Higher Education as Communal Means of Grace

Alison Noble, Messiah University
Shirley Muellen, Houghton University
Amos Yong, Fuller Seminary

In this panel we will explore ways in which institutions and individuals in Christian higher education create physical, spiritual, and intellectual spaces to generously navigate differences in an age of discord. The panelists will offer remarks from their own respective areas of expertise, institutional situatedness, and theological traditions that provide pathways and insight for fostering charitable discourse. The panel will engage the ways that Christian Higher Education is both responsible for and uniquely positioned to serve as a ballast against the tendencies of polarization and fragmentation.

Vulnerable to Victorious: A journey from anxiety to wellness

Ishmael Carter, First Presbyterian Church in Jamaica
Darlene Dobbs Harlley, First Presbyterian Church in Jamaica

The Myrtle Collaboration team carried out an eight–month listening program which started with a "Come Alive Experience" on Sunday, October 6, 2019, followed by six weeks of small group meetings to discuss various aspects of calling. Since receiving the grant in April 2020, the team has worked on two major projects to support the goals of the proposal, which were to empower members around their gifts and talents as well as help them to integrate calling in every aspect of their lives. Based on a congregation survey, carried out in May–June 2020, the congregation listed spirituality and Christian mindfulness as the number one area of interest and health and fitness as the second most popular topic of interest. Based on this information and divine leadership through our Pastor Rev. O'Connor, the team planned a Fall 2020 series entitled "Vulnerable to Victorious": A Journey from Anxiety to Wellness based on the book Overcoming Fear and Anxiety through Spiritual Warfare by Carol Peters–Tanksley MD, DMIN. The series ran from October 4–November 22 of 2020. It featured a Sunday sermon series that was related to the mid–week session that outlined strategies for overcoming the stress, fear, and anxiety of the post–COVID world. The series was very successful and had an average attendance of 60 persons each Wednesday night. After a successful fall series, the team sought to address the other interests of health and fitness noted by the congregation. A health and fitness campaign entitled "Breaking Barriers: A Six–Week Journey to Improved Health and Wellness" was planned. It ran from April 10–May 15 of 2021. The kick–off was an online health seminar with medical professionals speaking on diabetes and hypertension and holistic health and mental health, followed by break–out discussion groups on the topics. Each week of the series, a different area of health and wellness was addressed, namely health and spirituality, healthy eating, mental health, and health and the arts. One highlight of the series was the relaxing and stress–free evening of sipping and painting, which was a new experience for many who discovered their inner artist that evening.

Teaching Business Students the Art of Civil Conflict Resolution
Sara Perry, Baylor University
Matthew Wright, Baylor University

The presenters are faculty who teach negotiation and conflict resolution in the Hankamer School of Business at Baylor University. The purpose of this session will be to provide an overview of several specific methods they use to teach business students skills in resolving and/or discussing conflict, using strategies consistent with and informed by a Christian worldview. Examples include public deliberation simulations (deliberative democracy methods), small–and large–scale case exercises and role plays, and reflection/application assignments. This session will include overview of the foundational principles, live demonstrations of teaching methods, and suggestions for how to adapt the methods to other fields. The objective is to equip more faculty to think about ways they can enhance students' abilities to deal with the challenging conflicts found in the divided and emotional world we all live in today.

Constructing Christian Identity: The Church as Nation, Polis, and Family

Ben Peterson, Abilene Christian University
James Rogers, Texas A&M University

This session is premised on the claim that the church, the body of Christ, is the Christian's first nation, first polis, and first family. The presenters contribute to the development of an ecclesiocentric social and political theory as an antidote to our age of discord and alienation, addressing the ontological, sacramental, and practical construction of Christian identity in the church. What is the church's ontological nature, motivating ethos, and formative structure? How can Christians more fully participate in the construction and maintenance of vibrant churches and networks of churches, experiencing and sharing the gift of the Christian community and the fullness of life in the body of Christ to which we are called together?

These are the individual titles of the papers:
- Ben Peterson, "All Things in Common: The Political Theory of Acts"
- James Rogers, "Sex, Marriage, and the Social Semiotics of the Bible"
- Zachary McCartney, "A Time for Tamarisks: Why Christians Should Prioritize Building Institutions That Outlast Them"
- James Wood, "Neither Integralism nor Counter-polis: Henri de Lubac's Ecclesial Humanism"

Christian Engagement with Diversity and the Cultivation of the Common Good

Trisha Posey, John Brown University

These student presentations consider how Christian engagement with diverse ideas and communities can cultivate justice, mercy, and hope.

Emma Beagle will consider debates and evolving perspectives on the role of women in religious institutions. While women have historically played vital roles in various houses of worship, their access to formal leadership positions has often been limited, particularly in evangelical Christian churches. Beagle will examine the ways women's leadership has been promoted and restricted in different Christian denominations, and identify the historical precedents that have informed contemporary discussions on gender equality within American evangelicalism. In doing so she will explore the correlation between gender equality in church leadership and increased political engagement.

Tessa Greathouse will explore connections between evangelicals' general mistrust of academia and how they engage in conversations over controversial issues. The fear that some knowledge is incompatible with Biblical authority lingers within evangelicalism and has led to separation from academia, acquiring information from less reputable sources, and even rejection of scientific advancements. Instead of learning about topics like race and sexuality from peer–reviewed research, evangelicals turn to social media, the news, or their local pastor to understand complex topics, which makes them more likely to view controversial topics through the lens of fear and misinformation. If evangelicals embraced both general and special revelation, would they be more able to thoughtfully engage in the public square?

Sophia Schwarz's presentation focuses on connections between the pursuit of justice and reconciliation and living in diverse communities. An important witness to the Kingdom of God is viewing people as equal and breaking down hierarchical systems. To cultivate the communal calling for Christians to love others and proclaim the Kingdom of God, living in diverse communities is important. Living in diverse communities fosters empathy and serves as a practice that keeps Christian communities on the path toward reconciliation.

Kyla Isaac will explore the resilience of both refugee families and humanitarian workers through a case study of two Christian ministries responding to the Syrian refugee crisis in Jordan. While they come from different religions, ethnicities, and cultures both refugee families and humanitarian workers are in the midst of the struggle to find hope and to see a brighter future. Compelled by reasons of faith, fear, and family, the human spirit can withstand the extreme hardships of violence and persecution. Isaac's paper engages these ideas through firsthand accounts from Syrian refugees and humanitarian and ministry workers.

Language, the Arts, and Shared Meaning
Trisha Posey, John Brown University

Language and the arts have the power to both unite and divide by shaping meaning for individuals and communities. This panel, composed of students from John Brown University, will explore the power of language, culture, and the arts to either draw people together or exacerbate divisions in an increasingly polarized culture.

Colin Sanders, a student filmmaker who has won numerous awards at film festivals including the Toronto Independent Film Festival, the Los Angeles Film Awards, and the London Indie Short Festival, among many others, will explore the relationship between Christianity and filmmaking. Sanders will focus specifically on the use of the medium of film to promote hope and flourishing. Sanders will consider not only how this can be done in one's creative work, but also how Christian filmmakers can engage with the film industry as a whole.

Zipporah Jones will ask how the word "diversity" has become a buzzword. Within the Church it often carries the political stigma of liberalism, being dismissed as something from "the world." However, according to the Bible, diversity is far more than a buzzword–diversity was created by God and is something to be celebrated and honored. Jones will answer the questions, "What is biblical diversity?" and "What does the biblical pursuit of diversity look like for believers in Christ?"

Sarah Grace Smith will consider the role of language in meaning–making and its impact on the pursuit of truth. Smith will examine how a person's cultural background has a profound impact on their perception of ideas, truth, and the world at large. She will explain linguistic scholarship related to how language influences the mind's grasp of larger concepts and ideas. People from different cultural backgrounds might agree to the same idea, but simply approach it from very different ways of thinking. While this underlying difference can often cause much tension and discord, this paper seeks to explore how different perceptions of the same ideas can instead bring a fuller understanding of truth, especially in the Christian life as fellow believers seek to deepen their faith by learning from one another.

Higher Education, Vocation, and the Common Good

Erin VanLaningham, NetVUE/CIC (Network for Vocation in Undergraduate Education, Council of Independent Colleges) and Loras College
Geoffrey Bateman, Regis University

This panel, made up of contributors to the forthcoming volume Called Beyond Our Selves: Vocation and the Common Good (Oxford University Press), argues that educators can play a key role in shifting the framing of vocation as contributing to the common good. Imagining the good life as flourishing for all means that we understand success as significantly different than a common cultural narrative of prestige or achievement. Recognizing that students come to us with various levels of cynicism, brokenness, and obligations to family expectations and personal hope, we seek to embed any notion of a good life within what Paul Waddell calls "a willingness to move beyond self-centeredness and to live for something greater than ourselves." This does not mean that we ask students to abandon their dreams of career or family life, nor does it disregard the realities that many students have family and community members depending upon their pursuits. It instead focuses on how we "grow in goodness" throughout our lives, practicing and living the virtues to restore a fuller humanity to ourselves and others. This is a way of talking about a vocation that emphasizes goodness, but also greatness, as we seek to live a magnanimous life so that others can as well. Higher education is not a stranger to responding to the call of and the common good, most recently experienced in the COVID–19 pandemic as well as the effects of institutionalized racism, economic disparities, the struggle for LGBTQIA+ rights, gun violence, and climate justice concerns. Specifically, we suggest that by acknowledging our deep interconnectivity we can work to emphasize dialogue and deliberation (Timmerman) and membership and mutuality (Jeske). We also expand the notion of what is "common" and what is "good" to value the "uncommon" (Bateman).

Throughout all of our papers, we offer clear practices for classrooms and campuses, such as the ways that reading together can build a capacity that helps recognize differences while also cultivating strategies for contributing to a shared life (VanLaningham). By examining the multiple sides of the common good–how it obstructs and encourages flourishing, what prevents its achievement, and what fosters it –we can better consider what we might name as the world's hungers and needs in ways that become more complex and textured. Students need tools with which they can respond to the daily crises endured individually and collectively. Educators–meaning those engaged in the life of a university–have a responsibility to teach to build solidarity, compassion, reflection, and action at every juncture of our work. This is what it means to be called beyond ourselves as we educate to contribute to communal well–being and the common good.

Called to Lives of Meaning and Purpose: Calling at the Intersection of Community, Leadership, Technology, and the Pandemic

Roman R. Williams, Interfaith Photovoice
Kathryn House, Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary and Meadville Lombard Theological School
Jason Burtt, Trinity Western University
Gabriel Lotarski, Wayne State University

The Called to Lives of Meaning and Purpose Initiative aimed to deepen and enrich the lives of Christians by equipping them to discern and live out their callings. A team of researchers led by Nancy T. Ammerman and Roman R. Williams conducted a multi-year study exploring the innovative work of congregations and the Hubs supporting them. They assessed what the congregations did, how they did it, and what difference these efforts made in the lives of persons, congregations, and the organizations involved in the Initiative. This panel brings together several project researchers to reflect on key themes that emerged in the project at the intersection of calling, community, leadership, technology, and the pandemic.

Teaching Diversity and Social Responsibility to Future Doctors: An Interdisciplinary Approach

Zane Yi, Loma Linda University
Jessica ChenFeng, Fuller Theological Seminary, School of Psychology & Marriage and Family Therapy

Loma Linda University (LLU) is a Christian health sciences institution in Southern California. In the last few years, the medical school curriculum has transformed to deepen students' integration of LLU's approach to "whole person care." This requires understanding and attending to patient diversity in their social and cultural contexts. Thus, the curriculum has expanded to include the social determinants of health and topics about diversity, equity, and inclusion. The School of Medicine partnered with both religion and marriage and family therapy faculty to design and co–co-intstruct curriculum that spans the four years of medical education, focused on the formation of the learner. Foundational to the new design is LIFE communities, groups of nine students paired with a physician faculty mentor that, for three years, engage in curricular discussion groups, labs, clinical skills, team–based–learning, and clinical rotations together. The mission of these groups is to facilitate the development of safe, significant relationships and foster a sense of community. Students from differing backgrounds, beliefs, and experiences engage in brave conversations around challenging topics where the virtues of humility, charity, and grace are modeled and encouraged. The second component of shaping student growth is deepening their self–awareness as it relates to relational health. They become aware of their interpersonal triggers, explore the dynamics from their families–of–origin, recognize cognitive distortions, and reduce the impact of their own implicit biases. Through the open and public sharing that faculty mentors offer on each of these topics, they reduce stigma and model courage and a growth mindset. The third distinguishing feature of this curriculum is the integration of topics and issues that are covered with Christian Scripture, theology, and practice. Students read and discuss stories of Jesus' teaching and healing ministry as recorded in the Gospels and the model of the early church. Students engage with pastors/chaplains and theologians from the School of Religion, along with their physician mentors, on topics such as vocation, humans being made in God's image (and the implications of this for ethics), God's presence in and response to suffering, the delivery of spiritual care, and the prophetic view of justice.

This integration of community life, self and relational awareness, and Christian faith has led to initial positive outcomes. Students have indicated an increased understanding and appreciation of diversity and social responsibility. In addition, the physician mentors report this aspect of their job as the most fulfilling (decreasing burnout), appreciate the comradery of other like–minded physicians, and have gained new skills and knowledge. In this panel, the faculty who have supported the development of this integrative curriculum–a physician, a therapist, a chaplain, and a philosopher–will reflect on their experiences, highlighting interdisciplinary pedagogical dynamics, strengths, and areas for growth and future development.

Paper Presentations

Religious Fundamentalism and Ideological Radicalism: A Psychological, Cultural, and Spiritual Analysis.
Naji Abi–Hashem, Baylor Institute for Studies of Religion (ISR)

Extremism and fundamentalism have recently gained momentum and popularity in all spheres, societies, and subcultures. Not only in religious circles but among community leaders, social thinkers, government politicians, spiritual clergy/ministers, and other segments, including social activism, corporate businesses, intellectual academia, policy-making in the East and West alike, and in between the wide spectrum!

Extremism and fanaticism appear to have similar basic roots and functions across time but manifest themselves in different ways. Their tendencies and processes happen in various shapes and forms and in multiple psychological packages, but the developmental dynamics, intrapsychic contents, and tangible outcomes seem to be the same. That is consistent with the faculty of "human nature" and the rise/fall of social movements in history.

Fundamentalism is not only a phenomenon within a localized region of the world, nor an isolated psychosocial diagnosis in some parts like the Middle East, South Asia, or certain Islamic groups/governments/nations. Rather, fundamentalism is prevalent in many unsettled/disturbed regions, where the geopolitical and sociocultural environments are highly complex, profoundly unstable, and significantly charged/troubled.

Such phenomena are found in all levels of social existence yet in various degrees and intensities. Some are just raw in symptomatology and aggressive in nature. Others are very subtle, sophisticated, and generically powerful behind the scenes.

Unfortunately, moderate people are becoming the vast, silent majority. Meaningful human existence and interaction are being reduced to polarized camps on opposite sides, namely "Us versus Them!" Constructive communication, cooperation, and appreciation have stopped, and people quickly classify those who disagree with them as "enemies."

Fundamentalism, extremism, and fanaticism present serious challenges/disturbances to communal development and harmony, social support and stability, peaceable living and personal maturity, and religious faith/spiritual values practices in cultural humility. The increase in polarization is resulting in increased schisms, militancy, and therefore marked traumatization.

Ideological radicalization can be triggered by social injuries/injustices, cultural/religious invasions, ethnic/political threats, socioeconomic meltdowns, or armed conflicts/promoting weaponry and strict military controls. Some ideologies begin with political, racial, or economic causes but take an existential, philosophical, materialistic, secular, or pure religious, theological "umbrella/cover," and "vice versa" is also true.

Some passionate movements based on hard-core religious doctrines and spiritual dogmas were born from a socio–cultural reaction to serious social issues/ills, local malpractices, outside interferences/maltreatment, and ethnopolitical biases. They usually justify their zealousness "theologically."

It is important here to realize that religion and culture are intertwined, overlapping/interdependent in most communities around the world. The Western model of trying to sharply separate lived/faith

experiences from civil/social existence does not hold, but rather is considered as artificial splitting. There are models today on either side of the spectrum, fully embracing and integrating versus severely dividing and splitting both spheres.

But in most tight–knit communities and warm cultures (even in Western societies), religious affiliation is part of people's social identity.

What are the motives driving a person or group to adopt a skewed/polarized attitude? Or join a sect/cult derivation or radical ideological movement? What are the personality characteristics that put individuals at risk? That leads us to discuss/reflect/analyze the root causes of militancy and violent, terrorizing behaviors. Can we fully understand the mindset of an attacker/terrorist person or tribe? Are there possible Stages of Development that take place "over time" or does the switching–flipping into radical mindset, violent militancy happen "overnight?"

Caregivers/educators/clinicians/pastors are called to be peacemakers and learn necessary cross–cultural tools/skills and healing, and counseling approaches, to help in both the Prevention and Intervention of unhealthy Extremism.

[Resource articles & book chapters, some authored by the presenter, and a list of bibliography & references will be made available to attendees]

Acts 15 as a Model for Discernment Amid Sharp Disagreements

Andrew Arterbury, Baylor University

In Acts 15:1–35, Luke narrates what is often referred to as "the Jerusalem Council." In the late 40s CE, Christians disagreed sharply over the inclusion of Gentile converts into the earliest forms of the universal church. In particular, some Christians claimed, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved" (Acts 15:2; NRSV). Others added, "It is necessary for them (the Gentile converts) to be circumcised and ordered to keep the law of Moses" (Acts 15:5; NRSV). In essence, some early Christians argued that Gentile converts must first become practicing Jews before they could be assured of salvation or be fully welcomed into the people of God. Paul and Barnabas were among those who vigorously opposed those voices (Acts 15:2). The subsequent dispute threatened to split the earliest expressions of the universal church and seriously curtail the spread of Christianity in the Mediterranean basin within the church's first two decades of existence. In response to this perilous divide, Christian leaders gathered in Jerusalem to navigate the discord, discern God's will, and chart the path forward. The apostles, elders, and missionaries met to resolve the festering conflict that had the potential to do permanent harm. Rather than going their separate ways or agreeing to disagree, the early Christian leaders instead gathered, debated, testified, raised questions, listened, consulted Scripture, and arrived at a decision, all of which the author of Acts depicts as an outgrowth of the Holy Spirit's guidance (Acts 15:28). Amid this robust theological dialogue, these Christian leaders discerned God's will, arrived at a decision, and proclaimed a singular message for Christians throughout the Mediterranean basin. The church in Antioch, and presumably in many other congregations, then rejoiced when they heard this newly clarified teaching about God's reception of the Gentiles into the universal church without the encumbrance of circumcision and other Jewish identity markers. Notably, the author of Acts appears to elevate this event, which takes place at the center of Luke's second volume, as a model for his first readers to imitate. As a result, this paper will seek to further identify and describe elements of the discernment process that were employed by the apostles, elders, and missionaries as they ultimately moved forward in unity near the middle of the first century CE. By looking back at Luke's narration of one of the earliest controversies in the history of Christianity, perhaps Christians today will rediscover a model for resolving disputes that threaten to divide and separate God's church. Perhaps, Christians will be reminded that the Holy Spirit may be at work precisely as Christians disagree, dialogue, read Scripture, discern God's will together, and forge deep relationships that have the potential to outlast the disputes that arise among them.

Calling of the Ancestors: Bridging Racial and Ethnic Divides by Reconceptualizing Vocation with an Awareness of the Role of Our Ancestors

La Ronda Barnes, Boston University School of Theology

While there has been a recent outpouring of scholarly works on vocation, it has yet to adequately address issues of race and racial justice. This paper seeks to contribute to the conversation by reconceptualizing vocation with an awareness of the role of the ancestors. Our ancestors offer ways to help us bridge divides, especially racial and ethnic divides. We do so in three ways: 1) by learning about and embracing who we are through our ancestors (including the "bad" or "disreputable" acts); 2) by acknowledging their ongoing impact on who we are today, not only in our DNA but in our cosmologies and in the myriad ways we carry their trauma as well as their courage and strength in our bodies; and 3) by realizing that for those of us whose ancestors lived in the United States of America, we share a common calling: a call to rest. And we honor our ancestors by fulfilling a call to rest. This call includes taking time to be, to dream, and to imagine holistic and life–giving ways of being as individuals and in the community. As Christians, we are called to help individuals and communities understand the power and healing abilities of learning, owning, and telling the stories of our ancestors. While each of our stories of call is enhanced through particularity, there are common threads of loss of holistic ancestral cosmologies and traditions, and of a debilitating equalization of our dignity and worth with our work, productivity, and material accumulations. This paper will focus on the ancestral component of work being done by congregations in Boston University School of Theology's Creative Callings Grant Project, funded by the Lilly Endowment. The congregations who are pursuing calls to racial justice and reparations, including material and spiritual reparations, are engaging in activities of ancestral learning across racial divides and of somatic abolitionism to address the trauma those divides have rendered in the lives of all Americans.

A Narrative–Based, Communal Framework for Individual Pastoral Development

Eva Bleeker, Denver Seminary

"What do I do with all these horrible stories?" When I train seminary students for chaplaincy and pastoral care positions, this question often enters our classroom conversations. Internships and practicum work expose graduate students to suffering, social division, and theological chaos. In community–based pastoral training, students transition from reading about suffering in textbooks to providing pastoral care amid violence, death, and the acute tensions of a culture in upheaval. How might seminary courses build capacity within pastoral caregivers to move toward suffering in divided times? How might a professor teach students to analyze divisive social discourse with empathy rather than judgment? And, centralizing the common good as an explicit goal, what is the role of community in this kind of pastoral development? Making personal narrative a component of theological training can yield resiliency, empathy, integration, and generativity in students. The frameworks of narrative identity theory and transformative learning theory ground narrative practice in the pastoral care classroom. When they are exposed to stories that contrast or conflict with their own experiences, students can examine their emotional disorientation and theological dilemmas. However personal transformation is possible only in a community of supportive peers and educators. A community–based learning experience can train pastoral care students to provide ministry that is predicated on personal differences rather than on sameness. It provides a model for ministry among diverse care recipients which allows pastoral caregivers to honor their own beliefs while faithfully navigating theological and social divides. This paper calls on data–driven research, transferring narrative theoretical frameworks into best practices for pastoral care curricula. It describes the role and potential outcomes of community–based learning in pastoral training. Narrative–oriented adult learning theory and narrative identity theory–both of which are enacted and studied in group learning settings– combine to inform a community–based pastoral learning model. When students integrate these skills with a new pastoral identity, ethical and compassionate care can be extended to all people in an age of discord.

The Malaise of Modernity: Authenticity and Loneliness

Paul Carron, Baylor University

Authenticity is one of the new things under the sun, a value that emerged and spread during the Enlightenment and was solidified by movements like Romanticism, Transcendentalism, and Existentialism. Charles Taylor's definition (from The Ethics of Authenticity, 1991) is helpful: "Being true to myself means being true to my originality, and that this something only I can articulate and discover. In articulating it, I am also defining myself. I am realizing a potentiality that is properly my own" (p. 29). Authenticity involves "creation and construction as well as discovery" (p. 66). In its ideal form, developing an authentic self requires mutual recognition, dialogue, and horizons of significance that give a background of meaning to the individual's originality. Taylor proposes that the essential features of authentic selfhood–i.e., that each person has something unique to offer the world that the individual must discover and to some extent, create and that happiness is found in realizing and expressing a unique self– often fail to reach the moral ideal of authenticity and devolve into moral subjectivism and radical individualism. This perversion of authenticity is due to its essential features such as individuality and uniqueness. What Taylor does not seem to see is the connection between authenticity and loneliness. Independence and uniqueness easily devolve into relativism and subjectivism, but a third quality of authenticity–creation–devolves into loneliness. An individual seeking to develop their authentic self will necessarily be wary of anyone they feel impedes creativity and construction. Emerging technologies– especially social media–exacerbate this development. With social media, one can easily succumb to the notion that authenticity is self–generated and that the dialogue and recognition necessary for actualization can be replaced quickly using technology. The combination of the quest for authenticity and the prevalence of social media makes a new form of despair possible–what I call profound loneliness.

E Pluribus Unum: Faith, Federalism, and Unity through Factions
Samuel Chen, Northampton Community College | The Liddell Group

Contrary to the oft–raised hype from modern-day pundits, factions in American society and politics are not a novelty of the past decade or generation. Such fracture is unique neither to contemporary society and politics nor to America. History provides a plethora of evidence of both deep division and dissent from America's earliest days to the present and disputes far less civil than the average contemporary experience. A journey beyond America's borders–both historically and in modern times–yields similar observations, namely, that such deep divides are not an American condition, but a human one. A stark difference exists, however, between how America's founders addressed such factions in the forming of the United States and how other leaders, both past and present, have approached the same challenge. Drawing from the then–rising theory of liberalism, as well as the fundamental tenets of the Christian faith, the founders introduced American federalism. Reflected in the national motto "E Pluribus Unum" (out of many, one), this uniquely American approach does not seek to eliminate division but rather to bring unity through the diversity often found at division's core. The results are visible across American government and society from governing principles to the structure of political institutions to American society and what sociologist Robert Bellah has termed "American Civil Religion." This paper presentation will examine the founders' federalist approach to divisions and dissent, the recent and increasing drift away from it, and its parallels to religious faith, suggesting avenues for the latter to engage the former in today's society toward a greater sense of coming together.

Last Updated October 24, 2023

Technology Toward the Common Good

Daniel Crouch, Baylor University

Through reflection on the theory of natural law, this paper offers a way of assessing the opportunities and challenges of technology for promoting social cohesion in our increasingly interconnected (and fractured) world. More and more, technological solutions are held up as the necessary response to threats facing our world–solutions ranging from clean–energy and carbon–capture interventions that help mitigate climate change to pharmaceuticals and brain implants that produce more ethical citizenry. While such responses may seem fitting given society's growing reliance on technology and its exponentially growing sophistication, communities (including the Christian community) find themselves divided in their willingness to embrace these developing technologies. Moreover, our current technology has both enhanced social cohesion and exacerbated our differences. On the one hand, digital platforms enable individuals from diverse backgrounds to come together, fostering dialogue and understanding among various communities, while on the other hand, they often only expose individuals to information that reinforces their existing commitments, thereby contributing to the rise of ideological polarization and echo chambers in our digital age.

In response to this, natural law theory provides a way of assessing technology and directing its use toward the common good. This paper thus investigates how our innovations can either foster or hinder the pursuit of human flourishing within society–central to the natural law–and how they can be harnessed for promoting inclusivity, compassion, and solidarity among diverse groups (while also acknowledging potential pitfalls that may undermine social cohesion). At the individual level, natural law theory requires the cultivation of digital virtues, such as empathy, sensitivity, and respect in our online and other technologically–modified interactions. The development of such virtues–and a sense of personal responsibility in utilizing technology for the greater good–is vital for building a cohesive digital and technological community. By engaging the Protestant natural law tradition as well as current and emerging technologies, this paper explores technology's place in societal division and seeks to offer strategies for promoting social cohesion guided by the ethical principles of distinctly Christian thought. A natural law approach emphasizing the common good is an opportunity for Christian theology to wrestle with the merits of different technologies and to counter the discord at work in the world.

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Doing Life Together in a Neoliberal Age: The Promise of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Political Theology
Frank Della Torre, Baylor University

In my paper, I draw upon Dietrich Bonhoeffer's political theology–particularly his conception of the four divine mandates (family/marriage, labor/culture, government, and church)–as a resource for imagining how to do life together in an age of neoliberal capitalism. Bonhoeffer, who formulated his account of the mandates amidst the barbarism of Nazi Germany and the pervasive destruction of Germany's culture and values, serves as a timely guide, I argue, for helping us navigate the social disarray of our present time and promote forms of genuine community in the future. In the first part of my paper, I define neoliberalism as an ideology whereby commodification and a competitive market ethos come to pervade virtually every area of life–medicine, education, law, culture, religion, family life, and personal relations. A consequence of this unrelenting neoliberal encroachment, I claim, has been the erosion of the nonmarket values and communal norms upon which healthy societies depend. Neoliberalism, which defines human well–being in almost exclusively economic terms, tends to turn humans into self–interested entrepreneurial selves shorn of the lasting social bonds that constitute a true community. Under neoliberalism, we become socially impoverished individuals who are licensed to form and express our rational preferences apart from any social contexts or relations to others. For these reasons, I suspect neoliberalism to be one of the primary causes of the evident social alienation of our time.

The second part of my paper turns to Dietrich Bonhoeffer's account of the mandates as an alternative vision of social life–a vision we desperately need to be reminded of today. In my reading, the mandates name the God–ordained social institutions that structure human life and allow human beings to be human before God. In contrast to neoliberalism's tendency to impose the norms of the market as universally appropriate for nearly all human interaction, the mandates summon us to see our lives–and our very selves–as embedded within several irreducible relationships that call for our collective guardianship. A society attuned to the mandates will see our families, our workplaces and cultural institutions, our secular polities, and our religious communities as vocations that enable us to express the full range of what we value in life: fatherhood/motherhood/childhood, economic and cultural vocation, earthly citizenship, and heavenly citizenship. The mandates, in other words, offer us a socially integrated vision of life that illuminates the various forms of human community that cannot be expressed through the logic of the market. In this way, Bonhoeffer reminds us of the rich ecosystem that constitutes our social life: the distinct, though always interconnected, bonds that intersect in family, work, culture, civil society, and faith community. Each mandate is a crucible of character–-formation, a vocation into which we are called to live before God in personal relationships with others. Amidst the deterioration of our culture by the unrelenting intrusion of neoliberal market logic, the mandates offer us a timely vision of life together in all of its immense richness.

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Church Under the Bridge "No Divisions Among You"
Jimmy Dorrell, Church Under the Bridge, Waco, TX

"There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28) Our church–line is "black, white and brown, rich and poor, educated in the streets or the university, all serving the same God who makes us one." Last September, Church Under the Bridge celebrated its 30th anniversary under the Interstate 35 and South 4th Street underpass in Waco, TX. What began as a Bible study with five homeless men eventually grew into a congregation of some 250 persons who continue to meet there each Sunday. In 1992, Janet and I ate breakfast outside near the interstate, when we noticed several homeless folks. Acknowledging that we didn't understand homelessness, we walked across the street and invited them to join us for breakfast and share their stories. They came on three Fridays to discuss their own experiences of broken families, lost jobs, incarceration, mental health challenges, addiction, and life under a bridge. Panhandling by day, many would drink their "40-ouncers" by night. Cursing, fighting, coarse joking, and an awkward camaraderie bound them together. There was little talk of genuine love, family restoration, respectable employment, and hope. Their frank honesty surprised us and a "listening audience" drew them back. Over the next three Friday mornings, we met for breakfast, with more hungry mouths to feed. As the meal cost escalated, we sought an alternative meeting location, to which they suggested, "Meet us under the bridge this Sunday and lead a Bible study!" So, with the roar of overhead traffic on Sunday, Janet sang a Christian song and I shared a thought from the book of Romans. They asked questions and made comments. After a short prayer, their consensus was, "Let's do this again next Sunday." Thus, the journey began. Church Under the Bridge is a montage of people from numerous walks of life. Illiterate homeless folks are sitting next to academic professors, recovering addicts taking communion with alcohol and drug consumers, and college students worshipping alongside those with mental health issues. There are children and adults, blacks, whites, browns, Asians, Republicans, Democrats, and Independents, rich and poor. The unhoused or disabled may lead an opening prayer or read Scripture, and musicians from rock to country to hip hop alternate leadership. Special days celebrate Hispanics, African Americans, and AAPI members. Social justice issues are sometimes incorporated in biblical sermons, including topics like prison reform, immigration, racism, sexism, police brutality, global poverty, the "persecuted worldwide church," and "unreached people groups," usually leaving time for discussion. During the week, small groups meet for fellowship and discipleship in homes and common spaces. Some twenty of these gatherings are affinity groups and others are "family" groups. We also play together with annual softball, touch football, chili cook-offs, a fishing trip, and a professional baseball game. We worship, include, discuss, take stands, play, and work hard to love each other. "In 20 years of studying diversity within American congregations, I have not encountered a congregation with more internal diversity than Church Under the Bridge. Members differ by race, education, income, cognitive ability, and functional ability. And all are valued as equals." Kevin Dougherty, PhD (Baylor Sociology Department)

Is it PC? Personal Commitment, Pragmatic Context, Political Correctness
Jeffrey Dueck, Alliance University

Too often our movements of conviction, passion, and subjectivity skip the hard work of an ethical way of life. We fail to find significant grounding in the shared project of human existence, and our tribal commitments precede or preclude a broader sense of community and belonging. Perhaps the fear is that by maintaining constitutive boundaries of a shared playing field, we betray an ultimate allegiance to the absolutes we ascribe to. And so, instead of exploring our callings and beliefs within a common context, some come to reject foundational ethical commitments for the sake of advancing their convictions. Bombastic dismissals of political correctness and compromising concessions belie a deeper subversion of inclusive goods. What advocates of this viewpoint fail to realize is they have kicked aside the ladder required for climbing into such personal pursuits, leaving them on precarious grounds for the future. From the existential side, Kierkegaard's "spheres" of existence, while not a ready-made system that he might critique, provide an important model for human development in terms of both personal psychology and social cohesion (or lack thereof). The aesthetic life, lost in a pleasurable but unsatisfying cycle of immediacy and excitement, fails to lead to a self that is stable enough for the actual enjoyment of what matters within the human condition. The ethical life is a life of unity and integrity, bound to commitments and social interactions that enable a person to establish a true self, with a history and proposed future that integrates one's interior reality and external relationships. But of course, Kierkegaard's presentation of the religious sphere challenges that established self in the face of an eternal and absolute God, whose all-encompassing calling leads to a teleological suspension of the ethical. How can this model help us in a pluralistic society founded on democratic ideals? In this paper and presentation, I explore the differences between Kierkegaard's existence categories and show how classical American pragmatism offers important insights and boundary conditions for what a shared ethical life must look like in establishing a healthy community. I then propose how people of faith can maintain personal commitments amid a pragmatic framework, and how this models a way forward for unity amid diversity and in the face of social and political discord. I examine the unavoidable tension faced in holding ultimate values that stem from religious commitments (or other forms of subjectivity) amid a shared ethical context and clarify the importance of differentiating between aesthetic subjectivity and religious subjectivity. I also show how the pragmatic conditions of ethical life are not only integral to establishing a self in society but should be viewed as beneficial for personal projects that transcend those very conditions. We will see that far from undermining religious pursuits and personal projects, pragmatic existentialism substantiates them and allows them to flourish while preserving the common good of the community and society. While there is indeed a shallow form of compromise that jeopardizes existential freedom and meaning, the commitments of an ethical life provide the ground upon which we can stand together in our shared subjectivity.

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A Case Study for Reducing Division and Increasing Belonging During an Age of Discord: One Religious University's Experience
Blake Fischer, Brigham Young University

In its inaugural year, the Office of Belonging at Brigham Young University was tasked with identifying and addressing the factors contributing to divisions and feelings of exclusion across campus. As with other institutions across the nation, tension points involved racial disparities, policies related to gender identity and sexuality, and religious differences and transitions. Administrators and faculty posed very pointed and wide–ranging questions to the Office of Belonging, specifically around the challenge of teaching religious doctrine about marriage and family without alienating sexual minorities in the university community. An administrator tasked with assisting the Office of Belonging felt similar concerns regarding the office's faith–based approach to community building. The experience of the Office of Belonging at Brigham Young University, including this administrator's developmental process, provides an enlightening case study for other institutions seeking to address similar tensions. Fundamentally, the Office learned that the institutional dilemmas faced by the university mirrored the internal struggles faced by individual sexual minorities as they sought to integrate their sexual orientations with their religious convictions. Many discussions with gender and sexual minority individuals, including with those who found peace and belonging amid some unresolved tensions between their religious convictions and sexual orientations revealed consistent patterns that have provided a critical template to guide the Office of Belonging. Micro-level patterns of individual development, spiritual insight, and facilitative response processes have significantly influenced macro-level approaches to curriculum development, advisement strategies, and campus programming. Healthy individual development consistently followed a pattern in which individuals moved through the following: denial and silence, where gender and sexual minority experiences were seen as a problem to be solved; self-acceptance and exploration within a new group identity; awareness of and acceptance of persistent unresolved tensions; deep connection with self, others, and God amid unresolved tensions; making commitments while mourning perceived losses; and finally personal integration and reaching out in service. Spiritual insights and divine guidance were fundamental to this developmental process. The University has, in very consistent ways, followed a parallel developmental process. Mistakes and challenges along the way have provided powerful learning for the Office of Belonging to develop scaffolding to assist students along this critical developmental journey, and in the process reduce alienation and strengthen personal integration and belonging. The paper describes the principles that have been effective in guiding the development of this scaffolding, including in curriculum, advisement, and campus programming.

Living in a Polarizing World: Guidance from Biblical Narratives

Al Erisman, Seattle Pacific University

Christians living in a polarizing world may feel fearful or even withdraw from engagement with our world. They may give in and simply assimilate. Or they may feel anger and a desire to exercise power to put things right. The Scripture suggests another way, both through direct instruction and through examples of others who walked in their polarizing worlds. Jeremiah called the people of Israel, while in captivity, to "seek the good of the city." Micah called the people to "seek justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with God." The writer of Hebrews instructed us to "run with endurance the race marked out for us, looking to Jesus." Jesus said, "Let your light so shine before others that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven." If we look carefully at many of the narratives of Scripture, we see how this is carried out. For example, Joseph, Daniel, Esther, Ruth, and even Jesus himself lived in their times when God and his ways were rejected by the world where they lived. The writer of Hebrews reminds us to consider these examples when it is written, "Seeing that you are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses..." Rather than following fear, withdrawal, assimilation, anger, or seeking power, these and many others provide examples for us to live our lives with purpose amid the challenge. The Scripture, and these examples, call us to humility and influence rather than anger and power. They show us how to represent Christ by treating others with respect. This talk draws on a forthcoming book (Embracing the Assignment: Living Christianly in a Polarizing World, Albert Erisman and Randy Pope, Hendrickson Press, 2024). We will summarize some key teachings from the Scripture while illustrating the points with the lives of biblical heroes. We have never been promised an easy life. We are not the first to walk this path.

What is Politicization?

Rich Eva, Baylor University

Over the past 50 years, the use of the term "politicization" and its variants have increased exponentially in the American lexicon. Today one finds them in innumerable headlines: "Did Trump's habit of politicizing government extend to the Secret Service?"; "Politicizing the Holocaust dehumanizes us all"; and "13 Ways to Politicize Thanksgiving Dinner." Typically, the term "politicize" carries a tone of condemnation: one should not politicize. Yet, it is unclear if politicization is always bad. Some even claim to embrace it. Surprisingly there is no substantive philosophical account of politicization as the term is used in contemporary public discourse. In this paper, I give an account of politicization. First, I describe paradigmatic cases of politicization in popular media. Then I survey various conceptions of politicization and explain how each fails to capture the colloquial concept. Finally, I propose and defend my definition of the concept. In layman's terms, to politicize is to make something more about partisan politics. Specifically, this occurs when an agent uses a nonpartisan good as a means to a partisan end.

<u>Kierkegaard's Defense of Hope for Others and Faith In Others</u>
C. Stephen Evans, Baylor University

In *Works of Love*, Kierkegaard provides a spirited defense of faith in other people and hope for other people in Chapters Two and Three of Part II: "Love Believes All Things–and Yet Is Never Deceived," and "Love Hopes All Things–and Yet is Never Put to Shame." The message needs to be heard in this time of division and discord. In this paper, I shall briefly exegete the two chapters and develop an interpretation of Kierkegaard's claims that I shall defend against objections that his view is epistemologically or ethically compromised. In the end, the credibility of his view depends on his claim that faith and hope are not "for oneself" qualities, such as intelligence and wealth, that a person can have while denying those qualities to others. A human person can only possess faith and hope if that person believes in others and hopes for others.

Narrative approaches to find meaning in work in an age of organizational discord.
Timothy Ewest, Houston Christian University

Marcel (1978) used the broad term "technique" to refer to the intentional use of various theoretical methods that are broadly applied to humanity to ease the human condition of suffering. Since the silence of the Medieval epoch, technique as a theoretical method was applied to all areas of economic, environmental, and social life. The result of the broad application of "technique" has been the distancing of man from his work, replacing human interaction with technology, but more tacitly this process has ensued values the importance of efficiency of outcomes in daily life, and marginalized other innate values such as those about experience, connectedness to the environment, proxemics, aesthetics, and social exchange. These divisions have been widely recognized by the academic guild with sociologists such as Putnam (2015) noting the degradation of society, Follett (Sethi, 1962) noting the Faustian Dilemma of the modern worker, the degradation of the environment as noted by Berry (2015), and the distancing of the worker from their thoughts, as demonstrated by the mindfulness movement (Weil, 1986). Many of these issues have also been noted by various academic guilds, such as the Academy of Management's, Management, Spirituality and Religion division which considers the direct loss of personal meaning and purpose in the workplace. Add to this, the understanding that these values become inculcated into the structure of society, as noted by numerous scholars such as Bartness, Foucault, Lacan, etc. (Piaget, 2015). Thus, an individual's meaning and purpose can be further obscured. Given these conditions, career development should be not only aware of this ethos but also able to understand this governing structural narrative in culture and use methods to extract and ensure the authoring of a new personal story rich with purpose and meaning. Frankl (1967) proposed three distinct motivational worldviews, Frued's proposed human desire to seek a return to homeostasis, Adler's proposed human desire to seek achievement, and his proposal of the central human need for meaning. Each of these perspectives is outlined briefly and placed within the larger context of career coaching.

Then this presentation considers the history of narrative–based theories, as they emerged from structuralism, and the use and applications of narrative theory regarding career coaching. The narrative approached is used Specifically, in the aforementioned context, but the corresponding theoretic applications of narrative therapy and its corresponding intersubjective theoretical complements will be discussed, which include Tichy (1998) with leadership development, White with therapeutic healing and Blasi (2004) with the formation of personal moral identity. The presentation resolves by suggesting ways in which these understandings can be developed by presenting a research agenda regarding the exploration of methodologies of Career Coaching as demonstrated in the seminal work of Drake (2020) and Reissner (2008).

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E Pluribus Unum: Illiberal Pluralism in Augustine's Early Dialogues
Michael Foley, Baylor University

Augustine's early concern with a certain kind of self–knowledge, which is evident in his early dialogues, can also be a model for a nonliberal version of political pluralism and cooperation. My presentation will explicate this concern in three stages: 1) Augustine's treatment of reality in terms of pluralism; 2) Augustine's "method" of discovery that is congenial to political pluralism, even if it is not in full accord with certain tenets of liberalism; and 3) on a more concrete level, what pluralism might look like if it were based on the lessons and practices of the early dialogues.

Wes Anderson's Asteroid City: Art and the Search for Meaning
Brent Gibson, University of Mary Hardin–Baylor

What brings humanity together more than a shared search for meaning? In his latest film, *Asteroid City*, Wes Anderson continues to ask the same questions he has asked in every film since his directorial debut: What is the meaning of life? What is its purpose? And most importantly for the stories he tells, how do people live as the prospect of finding meaning and purpose seems increasingly unlikely to yield satisfactory results? [Answer: not well]. In Anderson's films, art has a large role to play in both bringing people together and assisting them in their search for meaning. From Max Fischer's hilariously elaborate high school dramatic productions in Rushmore to the entire premise of *Asteroid City*–the play within the play has always formed a central part of Anderson's films. *Asteroid City* is different from Anderson's earlier films in at least two respects, however. One is the recognition of the absurdity, not just of life itself as represented in the movie, but even the absurdity of the play within the play. Secondly, the film ends with the play within the play. Anderson never steps back into the "real world" of the film and in fact, only barely acknowledges that it exists. Both of these are significant for different reasons.

The first respect, regarding the connection with the Theatre of the Absurd, a twentieth-century movement exemplified by the works of Eugene Ionesco and others, aligns Anderson's long-acknowledged existentialism with one of the dramatic movements most closely associated with that philosophy. The second aspect of never stepping back into the "real world" of the film seems to signal a shift in Anderson's thinking. He telegraphs that not only are our lives absurd, but that there is no longer any use in trying to search for a larger meaning or purpose in life. Earlier in Anderson's career, the search for what Robert Johnston terms Transcendence with a capital "T" (an experience of ultimate reality beyond ourselves), although fruitless in itself, at least ultimately brought with it what Johnston terms transcendence with a small "t"–a transcendence of the human self, resulting in human community or connection with others. However, in *Asteroid City*, even that is denied the characters. The play ends, not with a coming together but with a disintegration of community, all parties separating with little hope of any sort of restoration. This ending signals a new, darker vision for Anderson, which although it contrasts with the candy–colored pastels of the film, seems to be more in line with the existential philosophers whom he channels through his connection with the absurd.

Navigating Mexico's Scylla and Charybdis: The Liberal Democratic Dissent of Octavio Paz and Enrique Krauze

Mark Griffin, Oklahoma City University

This paper focuses on the work (essays and memoirs) of two of Latin America's leading public intellectuals: Octavio Paz and Enrique Krauze, describing how the two of them have tried to steer a narrow course between the authoritarianisms of both left and right. In the case of Paz, I will describe his emergence as a critic of both right–wing and left–wing regimes –and of Mexico's 20th–century corporate state, which contained features of both. In the case of Krause, I will draw on his recently–published memoir Spinoza en el Parque Mexico (2022) to describe his intellectual evolution as a secular–Jewish Mexican who came of age in the late 1960s, joined Paz at the independent magazine Vuelta then went on to found Letras Libres. I will conclude by suggesting lessons we in the USA might draw from the work of these two, given the assaults on liberal democratic norms (from both left and right) in our own polarized political environment. Those of us who seek to navigate these troubled times have much to learn their broad and generous version of the classical liberal tradition, their engagement with dissident democratic voices from both left and right, and their courage in what has often been a hostile intellectual environment.

Called to Connection: Technology, Community, and Calling in the Called to Lives of Meaning and Purpose Initiative

Kathryn House, Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary and Meadville Lombard Theological School

This paper focuses on intersections of calling and technology in the Called to Lives of Meaning and Purpose Initiative (CLMPI), a project funded by Lilly Endowment Inc. that began in 2018 and centered on congregational discernment and innovative program development. Utilizing a case study approach drawn from research with CLMPI congregations, I explore ways congregations utilized technology for creating, connecting, and encouraging new modes of calling in their projects. In years characterized by isolation and alienation, even technology–averse churches began to rely on streaming, hybrid services, and generating an online presence to sustain life together in difficult and divisive moments. Insights from CLMPI projects will be in conversation with emerging findings from the "Exploring the Pandemic Impact on Congregations" and Tech in Churches During COVID–19" research projects as well. Although COVID caused major pivots in programming, some churches planned to build websites, create apps, host classes, or publish educational or formational resources as part of their initial project design. I probe how congregations approached the capacity of digital resources and increased digital literacy as part of their callings to deepen relationships with congregational members and to build relationships with new neighbors even at a distance. The capacity to connect online–either planned or forced–also comprised a significant aspect of the way folks talked about technology allowing them to pursue projects focused on meaning and purpose. Interviewees were quick and confident to say that COVID was a tragedy and a trauma with which they are continuing to grapple. But it also spurred an opportunity to build up technological capacities, engage more deeply in discernment, and create new spaces of connection in congregations and communities. Technology afforded opportunities for intergenerational worship, more expansive participation, and surprising collaborations. And finally, the role of technological expertise in calling emerged in exciting ways in CLMPI. Digital literacy was named an essential skill and resource for vulnerable communities. Folks who were proficient with technology answered the call (sometimes plea!) to assist with online worship and programming. Young people, whose technological savvy is often critiqued or viewed as a prohibition to the community, were essential mediators. Folks found their discipleship deepened when they could lend their tech-savvy as a call and gift to the pressing needs of their communities. One of the most striking aspects of the intersection of this initiative's focus on a call with a need to make projects entirely or at least predominantly online was the emergence of a group of folks who found that their gifts of technological expertise be essential for "such a time as this." These case studies illumine how a new or renewed need for digital expertise and technological investment during the COVID pandemic provided an opportunity for individuals and communities to embrace, nurture, or pursue new callings with technology as an essential resource in such endeavors.

Orthodoxy and Orthopraxy of 'Kill the Indian, Save the Man': From Conqueror to Loving Neighbor

Mariah Humphries, Baylor University

For us to be people of faith who are called together to be instruments of truth, justice, mercy, and reconciliation grounded in charity, we must be willing to listen and learn from the present and the past. American society is no stranger to the conversation around race and racism. We know about and have actively pursued healing between White and Black individuals and communities, but how well do pursue healing and awareness between other racialized relationships? Between 1819 and 1969, Native children started being removed from their homes. They were being taken to residential schools, or what the Indigenous of North America call boarding schools. These schools were government-promoted and church-controlled. During this era, the federal Indian boarding school system consisted of 408 federal schools across 37 states or territories, including 21 schools in Alaska and 7 schools in Hawaii. "Kill the Indian, Save the Man." This was the motto of Lt. Col. Richard Henry Pratt, founder and longtime superintendent of the influential Carlisle Indian Industrial School at Carlisle, Pennsylvania. Under this slogan, generations of Native children were removed from their families, communities, and land, and forced into an environment of abuse, separation, and anemic healthcare. Although started with government ties, these environments were disguised as mission work and Christianity. The goal was to remove all aspects of Native identity in younger generations and force full assimilation to a Eurocentric form of Christianity. The Native people of North America have experienced atrocities at the hands of self–proclaimed Christians since contact. Even our founding documents hold anti–Native rhetoric. For us, the purpose of this paper is to talk about living a life of racial humility and awareness, as Christians, toward the Native community. I will provide the historical context between Christianity and Indigenous Peoples and the responsibility the American Church has in the racial healing of this battered relationship.

What produces sustained and active hope among white Christians interested in racial justice?
Christine Jeske, Wheaton College

ccording to a July 2020 survey, only 9% of white Christians in the United States said they were "very motivated to address racial injustice," compared to twice as many white non-Christians and nearly five times as many black Christians (Chad Brennan and Christina Edmondson, Faithful Antiracism). The trends of white Christian attitudes toward racism raise the question: Is there any hope for racial justice and unity? And if there may be, what is that hope founded upon, and what exactly is it for? In this talk, I present the results of extensive qualitative research into the ways white Christians develop long-term commitments to racial justice. In 2022, I conducted over 100 hours of participant observation and 70 interviews with faith leaders of color and white Christians whom they identified as demonstrating long–term commitments to racial justice. The research revealed three common factors present in white Christians' transformative journeys: a collision with injustice, intentional exploration into the scope of racism, and a particular conception of grace. I found that the combination of these experiences shifted white people from naive and potentially harmful ways of hoping into highly resilient hopes, paired with active responses to racism. Their hopes coalesced around visions of a society in which struggle is inevitable, but by God's grace, humans can and must pursue mutual flourishing even within seemingly unresolvable and irreparable tensions. In an era when discussions of race often provoke heated and politicized ruptures among Christians, this research suggests ways in which Christians can ground their approaches to racism within doctrines of grace and hope at the core of their shared beliefs. This presentation will describe these research findings to generate practical ways to navigate racial and political divides among Christians.

A Test of Endurance
Fred Johnson, Hope College

Since 2016, the Evangelical church, like other institutions critical to America's identity as a democratic republic, has been tested and it's been found wanting. This is especially true during those instances in which evangelicals have been confronted with having to choose between Christ or Culture relative to matters of race, justice, immigration, and other related issues. The persisting choices of culture over Christ as a means of achieving political or policy ends have exacerbated the disillusionment that so many are experiencing when it comes to religion and the Church. This is mostly because rather than being a check on spreading influences endangering America's democracy (and so many people in it) the evangelical Church has been in an incubator that's nurtured extremism and normalized mindsets and behaviors threatening stability in the social order. This paper examines specific instances in which the evangelical church has been (and continues to be) a threat to America's democratic republic while highlighting the possibilities still existing for the evangelical church to live out its calling to Christ while also strengthening the institutions essential to America's democracy.

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What is Common about Common Prayer? Rethinking the Role of the Daily Office

Jonathan Kanary, Baylor University

If Christians are "called together in an age of discord," that unity should manifest itself above all in our lives of worship and prayer. Yet prayer and worship are often where we experience division most sharply. Such division appears most obviously in the fierce disagreements between various Christian traditions and the "worship wars" within denominations and congregations. But it also emerges more subtly in the many ways contemporary Christianity often prioritizes individual experience, and subordinates the corporate, unitive dimensions of worship to that individual experience. Ironically, these divisions can harm personal spiritual life as well. Many sincere followers of Jesus report deeply meaningful experiences of worship, but many also struggle to connect with God and with one another. My presentation will invite attention to an ancient resource, the Daily Office, and specifically to the form it takes in the Book of Common Prayer, to bring greater focus to the communal dimensions of worship. The Book of Common Prayer emerges primarily from the Anglican/Episcopal tradition, but it has found much wider use across denominational lines as a resource for liturgical worship and personal prayer. I will argue that the Daily Office is far more than a resource for individual devotion. Rather—following the lead of the English pastor–theologian Martin Thornton—I will consider it as an expression and participation in the corporate prayers of the Church. My presentation will explore three consequences of this fact. First (in keeping with the Lord's Prayer itself), the Office helps teach those who use it the nature of prayer. Second (building on the Psalms), the Office teaches participants how to pray. Third, and perhaps most unexpectedly, I will argue that embracing the corporate and unitive nature of the Office also helps enable, empower, and support the private devotional lives of individual Christians. Both those who struggle with prayer and those who experience deeply meaningful personal encounters with the Lord can flourish more fully as they are "called together" in the prayers of the Church.

Devotio Postmoderna
Nathaniel Kidd, Reconciliation Anglican Church

Throughout Christian history, forms of devotion and technologies of spiritual orientation have been developed and evolved in response to the cultural moment. Among these, Thomas √† Kempis' The Imitation of Christ, emblematic of the medieval "devotio moderna" movement, expresses an optimistic pursuit of spiritual renewal through disciplines like humility, simplicity, and interiority, and has been an enduring landmark for many faithful persons to our day. In our postmodern moment, however, the fracturing of metanarratives and disillusionment with institutional ideologies necessitates a new orientation–what may be termed a "devotio postmoderna." This emerging postmodern devotion must face the painful reality that the construction of a systematic spirituality is inherently suspect. And while it is possible, in this milieu, to find refuge in nostalgic recoveries and reconstructions of ancient forms, such projects are intentionally and inherently detached from the cultural conversation, and so bound to have extremely limited appeal. A new possibility is necessary. Rather than being naively built, it must be ready to sift meaning amidst ruins. For devotio postmoderna, the possibility of spiritual progress is replaced by the hope of faithfully enduring in a profoundly disoriented and rapidly changing context. Central to this orientation is a focus on the crucified Christ as a symbol of God's solidarity in suffering and brokenness.

This paper will sketch the outlines of a devotio postmoderna in contrast with modern forms. It will suggest that this postmodern devotion be characterized by five key features. First, abandoning aspirations for spiritual or cultural perfection recognizes the permanence of fragmentation. Second, it fosters contemplative practices that hold paradoxes in tension rather than seeking resolution. Third, it nurtures community among the marginalized while distinctly countercultural. Fourth, it resists idolatrous ideologies by embracing powerlessness. Fifth, it cultivates patient endurance rooted in the cross of Christ. To illuminate these contours, the paper will draw on eclectic sources that gesture in this intended direction. Along the way, I will likely identify possible practices, ethical stances, and literary/artistic works that express a devotio postmoderna, and reflect on how this form of devotion might constitute an authentic response to the disillusionment and dissolution of truth claims and social cohesion in our contemporary moment. Above all, in so doing, I hope to worthily outline the experiment that we are attempting to embody at Reconciliation Anglican Church: our little church plant barely clinging to the upper leftmost corner of these United (so–called) States: a model of faithful Christian spirituality for times marked by darkness, uncertainty, and disintegration of meaning.

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<u>The Heart of Civility</u>
Richard Langer, Biola University

The author of this paper has spent much of the last five years facilitating training seminars and workshops as part of the Winsome Conviction Project at Biola University. We have joined with other groups in providing skills and strategies for depolarization within the academy, the church, and the public square. In the past few years, it has become increasingly apparent that improving communication skills is often insufficient for overcoming deep–seated animosity and affective polarization. It appears there is a need for interventions that are longer in duration and deeper in focus; we need to cultivate hearts of civility, not simply communication skills. Substantial work has been done by a wide variety of groups, both Christian and secular, to reduce polarization and incivility utilizing skills training and workshops. Interventions commonly focus on listening skills, feedback skills, storytelling, nuance, and other communication skills. There is no doubt that such skills are needed, but as an approach to solving affective polarization, it rests on the assumption that people want to change their behavior. Frequently, this is simply not the case. Depolarization training is different from sales training. When training a sales team, one can safely assume they want to make sales. If effective sales training is offered, it is likely to be used. Affective polarization, which is marked by disdain for other people not merely disagreement with the opinions that they hold, is very different. It is not at all clear that people have a felt desire to be civil, humble, and understanding toward those with whom they strongly disagree–particularly when that disagreement has grown to actual disdain for the other person. If civil engagement is not valued in a person's heart, the skills of civil engagement will go unused. If this line of reasoning is true, there is a glaring need for interventions that cultivate a heart of civility–one which is marked by compassion, kindness, and humility–toward friend and enemy alike. The church should feel a special burden to take up this task.

The church is made up of long–term relationships making it a good place for a spiritual formation project which requires a lengthy time frame and the persistent work of the Spirit in our hearts. Scripture and Christian theology also provide a robust set of resources for cultivating civility: 1) the ministry of the Spirit in our lives which produces the fruit of the Spirit including patience, kindness, gentleness, and self–control; 2) the teaching and model of Christ (as well as teachings by New Testament authors) to refuse to return like for like in matters of interpersonal behavior and political power; 3) the doctrine of sin and the sin nature that permeates all of human life and leading one to expect to find sin present in hearts and minds on both sides of all polarizing controversies; 4) the diversity of the body of Christ and the teaching of Romans 14 and other passages that make room for differing convictions in certain areas, and 5) the confidence that Christ has overcome the world–a fact which enables us to face overwhelming challenges with faith and hope rather than fear and anger. These features of doctrine and spiritual life can be supplemented by many centuries of saints who have walked troubled waters before us–leaving us both positive and negative examples. Some may protest that the church is as polarized as any other institution of the day, so surely it is not the place to turn for help. But, even if it is true that the church is failing to produce the heart of civility at the present moment, that simply means our resources have been neglected or poorly deployed, and this should increase the urgency of such training, not dismiss the possibility of it.

Kierkegaard, "The Public," and the Vices of Virtue-Signaling

John Lippitt, Institute for Ethics & Society, The University of Notre Dame Australia

Concerns about the risks of social comparison emerge in multiples places in Kierkegaard's authorship. I argue that these concerns – and his critique of the role of "the public" – take on a new relevance in the digital age. In this paper, I focus on one area where concerns about the risks of social comparison are paramount: the contemporary debate about "moral grandstanding" or "virtue-signaling". Although the latter term irritates many, who charge its users with intellectual laziness and complain about its over-use in the culture wars, an interesting philosophical literature about the pros and cons of virtue-signaling has emerged in recent years. Neil Levy and Evan Westra have recently attempted to defend it against Justin Tosi and Brandon Warmke's critique. I argue that these defences fail, and that a consideration of epistemic bubbles and echo chambers is critical to seeing why. The over-confidence to which they give rise exacerbates certain vices with the potential to do moral, social and epistemic harm: I focus in particular on self-righteousness. I then argue that Kierkegaard's contrast between the person who effectively appeals to the authority of "the public" and the genuine person of character deepens our understanding of why we should reject defences of virtue-signaling. It helps us to distinguish between two kinds of virtue-signaler, both of whom contribute (in different ways) to the negative impacts of the vice of self-righteousness.

Rev. Deaf Carter Bearden "The deaf Billy Graham": The 80 years of His Longevity Leadership and Services in Christian Missions Teaches Us Priceless Lesson that God Loves People.
Lewis Lummer, Baylor University

Dr. Lewis Lummer, the only Deaf faculty at Baylor University interviewed Rev. Carter Bearden for 18 hours in 2013. Rev. Carter Bearden graduated with a theological degree in 1951 with the support of his mentor: George Washington Truett. Carter taught Truett how to be sensitive and develop nonverbal communication skills to share with others while Truett served as a father figure to Carter and introduced a relationship with God. Another influential companion was a Deaf elder who worked as a baker at H.E.B. Their relationship taught him a valuable lesson: to push for change and that being Deaf is an asset rather than a handicap, and with this advice, he developed an attitude of "I can do anything good no matter what people think because God is with me inside all the time." Carter was the first Deaf person to graduate with a degree from Baylor University, breaking boundaries. During our 18-hour interview in 2013, he presented and shared significant events and activities throughout his 80 years of life that changed and impacted many people. Nothing stopped him from spreading God's word; he traveled by horse, train, bus, and hitchhiking before finally owning a car. Carter's classes were scheduled from Tuesday to Thursday which allowed him to travel on weekends to reach out and mission to the Deaf community in towns and cities from Texas to Mississippi. He built bridges between hearing and Deaf people through the church to introduce spirituality by including sign language in missionaries allowing for a comprehensive education to spread through churches; pastors and elders started adopting his idea.

Despite demonstrating his prowess, his leadership role is underrepresented. People overlook the Deaf because they represent a small percentage of the disabled community and have their own language: American Sign Language. Most disabled people have one thing in common; they all share the ability to hear, talk, and communicate freely. There is a disconnect between the hearing and the Deaf due to the language barrier. Most people do not take the time to communicate and accommodate Deaf people. Another extreme divide is the polar opposite cultures of the American Identity because it is closely tied to individualism, while Deaf people rely on collectivism. However, compared to the majority group equivalents, the interview found unexpected evidence for a more advantageous view of Deaf Christian Leaders to show others to open their eyes and to seek unison through faith.

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Calling, Context, and the Church: From Belonging to Witness

Rhonda McEwen, Regent College
Gustavo H. R. Santos, Vancouver School of Theology

This paper aims to present an innovative and holistic approach to understanding and enacting vocation within church communities. Grounded in a theological framework for vocation and incorporating insights from contemporary scholar–practitioners and relevant case studies, we advocate for an expanded vision of vocation and explore the principles, postures, and practices that can enable congregations to discern and respond to God's calling. Drawn from the experiences and lessons learned in Regent Exchange: Churches for the Common Good, a church engagement and educational research initiative funded by the Lilly Endowment Inc. the paper seeks to address limitations in many contemporary understandings of vocation while proposing an integrative perspective that incorporates generative practices, ultimately redirecting individuals and communities back to the One who calls. Common views of vocation face several challenges, including confusion about its relationship to the church's mission, an exclusive individualistic focus on personal fulfillment, an overly–optimistic view of agency, and a narrow view of vocation limited to mere occupation.

To address these issues, the paper proposes a more holistic and transformative view of vocation, emphasizing its connection to the church as a learning community. It critically analyzes the current state of vocational understanding by examining relevant literature and highlighting the confusion surrounding the mission–vocation relationship. Further, it explores themes such as the illusion of choice and agency, the lack of a vocational overarching narrative, and the church's insufficient attentiveness to God's calling. Together, these challenges underscore the need for a fresh perspective on vocation. The central proposal is a transformative re–imagination of vocation from a narrow individualistic pursuit to a holistic and integrative understanding within the church community. By fostering a corporate understanding of vocation, we argue that the church can become a place where individuals discern and respond to God's calling collectively.

Such understanding is based on five main ideas. First, we emphasize the significance of viewing vocation within the context of the church as a learning community to which all who are in Jesus belong. Second, we highlight the importance of contextualizing vocation and viewing diversity as a resource for learning and growth. Third, we introduce various practices like dialogue, discernment, and doxology that help foster attentiveness to God's calling and encourage belonging within the church community. Fourth, we explore how an integrative approach to vocation can empower individuals and communities to be witnesses of God's work in the world. Lastly, we present some practical steps for exploring and living out vocation collectively, allowing the church community to engage in a process of discovery, design, and action. The paper concludes by discussing the potential implications of the proposed framework for local churches and theological education. It aims to inspire fruitful discussions and provide a solid foundation for further research and exploration into the transformative potential of embracing vocation as a communal endeavor within the church.

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How to Love a Robot: Selfhood and Community in Ishiguro's Klara and the Sun

Harrison Otis, Baylor University

In what some have called his magnum opus, *Oneself as Another* (1992), Paul Ricoeur argues that one's own selfhood is inextricably bound up with the recognition of the selfhood of others. Nobel laureate Kazuo Ishiguro's most recent novel, *Klara and the Sun* (2021), seems to reach a similar conclusion: that personal identity is located, not so much in the person him or herself, but rather in the others by whom the person is loved. For Ricoeur and Ishiguro, what to some might appear as "external" forces–one's neighbors and even one's own body–are in fact integral components of the self, working in concert with the individual agency to underwrite a sense of one's own personal identity. Drawing on Ricoeur's thought, I analyze the dynamics of intersubjective selfhood in Ishiguro's novel. In particular, I consider the characters of Klara, a sentient android, and Josie, the sick teenager whom Klara is assigned to care for and possibly, after Josie's death, to replace. Although the novel raises the possibility of using Klara to technologically duplicate Josie's body and personality, ultimately it suggests that both these characters are non-interchangeable individuals, and it justifies this conclusion with its attention to their physical embodiment and the character of their relationships with others. As a result, for Ishiguro as for Ricoeur, selfhood–for all its private interiority–is in fact a deeply communal phenomenon, born from the loving relationships that one holds with one's neighbors. In this sense, "coming together" in a loving community is not just an abstract ethical duty toward others, but rather essential to the sustenance of our own embodied selves.

The Church as Unifier

Nate Padley, John Jay Institute

In this paper, I will attempt to define the role that the Church ought to play in bringing unity to a divided world. Working towards this definition, I will first explore the depth and nature of our modern divisions, then describe the relationship between Christianity and earthly unity. After I have established my argument, I will draw a distinction between the modern notion of unity and the particularly Christian unity that my paper advances. Many people have argued that the things that divide humans from one another are insubstantial. They claim that divisions in and across political communities are based on ignorance or triviality. Such people trumpet the often repeated mantra that we must "put aside our differences" and embrace a spirit of "common humanity." I argue that this approach is blind, perhaps wilfully so, to the import of the things that divide us. Humans are not divided along simply superficial lines. Our divisions are based on profound disagreements about our understandings of God, the Good, and virtue. Aristotle claims that every community is established to pursue some defined good, and that the highest community, the polis, is therefore established to pursue the highest good. Modern political communities, on the other hand, are incapable of ranking goods. We do not have wide enough agreement on basic moral vocabulary to even attempt such a thing. As Alasdair MacIntyre argues in After Virtue, modern humans cannot have productive debates about the topics of God, the Good, and virtue because our moral vocabulary has been shattered by the last five hundred years of philosophical deconstruction. A sense of "common humanity" will not save us from such serious division.

What responsibility does the Church have to bring unity to this chaos? Christianity has long had a conflicted relationship with earthly unity. As Christ Himself says in Matthew 10:34–35: "Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother" (ESV). How could such teaching bring unity? The Apostle Paul writes in Galatians 3:28 that "there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (ESV). In Christ, all divisions are healed. This is the unity that Christianity offers. Unity in Christ is distinct from Enlightenment notions of unity. The unity of the Enlightenment prizes peace above all else. As Francis Bacon depicts it in his work New Atlantis, modern unity means the erasure of serious religious devotion. Christ came to bring a sword, and any unity that seeks to dull it must be rejected by the Church. True unity is found only in the Body of Christ. With this understanding, I argue that the mission of the Church, in order to heal our divisions, ought to be as follows: Go and make disciples of all nations.

Church Racial Composition, Linked Fate, and Support for Black Lives Matter
Jerry Park, Baylor University

Support for Black Lives Matter hit a peak in 2020 following the murder of George Floyd at the hands of law enforcement. Previous research suggests that those who perceive their racial group as having a common future with Black Americans (also termed "linked fate") are more likely to support racial justice. While some research has examined the significance of racial diversity in American churches and social movement attitudes, scholars have not considered how linked fate with African Americans is associated with racial diversity at church. I ask how the racial context of religious Americans affects public support for or opposition to BLM and racial justice efforts. Using survey data from the Collaborative Multi–Racial Post–Election Survey (CMPS2020) which includes large oversamples of racial minority–identified individuals, I examine the relationship between the racial composition of a respondent's community of faith, one's perception of similar social standing with African Americans and one's support for Black Lives Matter and racial justice. I expect that linked fate and racial composition must be more specifically directed toward the presence of Black Americans in the minds and communities of non–Black Americans. Racial diversity at a church is less significant than the ratio of African Americans specifically in diverse churches. Similarly perceived linked fate with African Americans will have a stronger effect on support for BLM than a perceived linked fate with racial minorities.

<u>Seeing It Whole: The Vocation Circle</u>
Jane Patterson, Seminary of the Southwest & Called to Lives of Meaning and Purpose Initiative

Vocational discernment is not only for times when we are choosing *what* path to take, but for discovering *how* to flourish along a path we are committed to. This workshop offers a holistic framework for considering the relational dynamics of individual and communal callings that helps individuals and congregations gain a sense for the dynamic interrelationship of God, the person or community in discernment, their context, their skills, and their particular embodiment. Jane Patterson has worked with individuals and congregations on processes of discerning their callings since 2005. She currently serves as Project Director for the Communities of Calling Initiative of Collegeville Institute and as the Associate Project Director for the Called to Lives of Meaning and Purpose Initiative.

Alasdair MacIntyre and the Church as a Tradition of Enquiry

Thomas Pearson, The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley

Since early in his career, Alasdair MacIntyre has frequently reflected on the ideological, doctrinal, and institutional dimensions of Christianity, finally embracing Roman Catholicism some fifty years ago. But while he has deeply engaged the philosophical and theological resources of Christianity, and explored the lives and commitments of figures as diverse within the Christian tradition as Aquinas and Edith Stein, he has not provided a systematic account of the Christian Church. But it may be possible to construe MacIntyre's position as one that considers the Church to be an exemplar of a community of deliberation, an assembly of those who exercise specific forms of practical reason, resulting in a portrayal of the Church as essentially comprising a tradition of theological, social and cultural inquiry. In a time of dissolving allegiances, it is proposed that the Church, throughout its history, has episodically expressed interest in shared discourse and debate which have offered the prospect of reconciliation and resolution. This then suggests the question: what can those who struggle with the incessantly fragmented public discourse of the contemporary Western world learn from the practices of the Church as a tradition of inquiry?

This paper proposes to review briefly the scattered writings of MacIntyre that touch on the nature of the Christian Church, with the intent of exploring, in a very preliminary way, how he might understand the Church as a mediating institution between the individual and civil society. My hope is to initiate an inquiry into the following set of questions: Does MacIntyre have an ecclesiology? If so, what does it look like? How might that potential ecclesiology be situated in relation to MacIntyre's familiar themes of tradition and tradition–constituted rationality; social practices and their internal goods; the failures of twentieth-century political initiatives offered by both liberalism and Marxism; of the need to re–re-integrate disintegrating forms of discourse in our academic and public life? This paper will suggest that MacIntyre's trajectory of thought does, in fact, disclose a preliminary ecclesiology and that this ecclesiology depicts the Church as a community of discourse whose history presents it as an evolving tradition of inquiry. If that is correct, MacIntyre's work thus indicates that the Church may serve as a mediating institution, and a fully engaged and evolving center of moral authority, within civil society.

Nursing as a Healing Art in An Age of Discord

Jessica Peck, Louise Herrington School of Nursing, Baylor University

Nursing is an art: and if it is to be made an art, it requires an exclusive devotion as hard a preparation, as any painter's or sculptor's work; for what is the having to do with dead canvas or dead marble, compared with having to do with the living body, the temple of God's spirit? It is one of the Fine Arts: I had almost said, the finest of Fine Arts. Florence Nightingale: Nurses are no strangers to an age of discord. The emergence of nursing as a notable profession was born in the conflict–laden shadow of the Crimean War where the Lady with the Lamp led others to follow her precedent through darkened, desperate corridors of beds holding men broken by the failure of reasoned compromise and political civility. Nurses continued to serve unsung through the halls of global conflict over the next nearly 200 years. Clara Barton led the way on the barbarous battlefields of the Civil War, mending atrocities emerging from collateral damage left by great incivility. Nurses were faithful healers through World War I and II, Korea, Vietnam, and other destructive combative affronts to civilization as we know it. Nurses in recent times know other wars... wars occurring in family conflict, wars waged on cancer battles and wars declared by crazed militants with guns targeting innocent people in the public square through mass shootings. Nurses know the secret carnage of wars waged by words, fueled by keyboard warriors, brazen pontificators, and social media influencers. Most personal and painful are the friends, family members, and trusted advisors who give well–meaning but ill–informed advice or instruction with a casual carelessness that unknowingly ignites a spark that flames a crisis of faith or a path toward self–loathing and destruction. This invisible divisiveness is perhaps the most destructive and deadly of all. So, in the face of suffocating cynicism threatening to envelop even the most optimistic and well–meaning persons, how is it that the profession of nursing clings tenaciously to hope? How do nurses resist the tentacles of despair that seek to plant seeds of bitterness in the heart of the profession ranked annually by the public as the most trusted? The truth of this paradox is found in a daring tenacity inspired by the reality of the utmost fragility of human life. Although society seeks to protect the illusion of perfected beauty, absolute wisdom, and unshakable strength held by its most revered members, nurses meet people from all walks of life on the days their human frailty fails them. Nursing is both an art and a science which requires devotion to the perpetual quest for mastery, knowing it will never be fully achieved, but influenced by the scientific framework of evidence–based practice and the pursuit of excellence in the face of human discord and frailty where nurses serve doses of hope in the face of utter hopelessness. The answer to being called together in the age of discord is to recognize the humanity of our fellow man and to fully recognize the limitations of our humanness. Nurses accomplish this through empathetic listening, compassion, and seeing each person with value as created by God. Nurses embrace truth and mercy to shape a hopeful future that helps the body and soul to flourish.

The Wisdom of Love: An Epistemology of Love for a Skeptical and Divided Age
Adam Pelser, U.S. Air Force Academy

The Bible describes wisdom as a treasure greater than gold and encourages us to "search for it as for hidden treasures" (Proverbs 2:4, ESV throughout). Unfortunately, in this present "age of discord," wisdom is a treasure that lies hidden from many. And few seem to be very interested in seeking it. Making matters worse, many people in our society–even many in the Church–are deeply skeptical of moral and spiritual/theological knowledge. As Dallas Willard chronicled in The Disappearance of Moral Knowledge, moral knowledge as a publicly available good has virtually "disappeared" from our society. And "theological knowledge" has long been considered an oxymoron. This is lamentable because moral knowledge and knowledge of God are essential to the highest kind of wisdom and human flourishing. The Church and Christian higher education can help aid the recovery of wisdom in our age–or at least within our communities of faith–by championing a humble but firm commitment to moral and spiritual knowledge. But the key to unlocking the hidden treasure of wisdom is a surprisingly counter–cultural view of human knowing. Psychologist Jonathan Haidt has observed that our moral judgments often arise from our emotional or intuitive "moral foundations" and that many political, religious, and moral disagreements can be explained by the fact that some people are more strongly influenced by certain intuitive moral foundations than are their political and philosophical opponents. Rather than resisting this feature of our psychology, Christians ought to embrace it over and against what I call the "guillotine view of rationality," which tells us we must cut off our heads from our hearts if we want to be ideally rational. To find wisdom, we must jettison the false dichotomy between our heads and our hearts and replace it with a more psychologically integrated epistemology grounded in love for God and neighbor–what N.T. Wright has called it an "epistemology of love." To truly know God is to love Him and all that He loves. And to love God is to know Him and His moral law–"for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love" (1 John 4:7–8). If philosophy is the loving quest for wisdom, then the hidden treasure it ought to seek is the wisdom of love. For, it is only by "being knit together in love" that we can "reach all the riches of the full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Colossians 2:1–3).

The Lockean Triumph: Benjamin Franklin and the Hemphill Affair
Jonathan Pike, BYU Wheatley Institute

      Following the triumph of the Glorious Revolution, the English Protestant world was plagued by nearly incessant discord surrounding the doctrine of the Trinity. In the early eighteenth–century, the subscription controversy among the Anglicans over the Thirty–Nine Articles (catalyzed anew by the Trinitarian debates) resulted in ejecting William Whiston from Cambridge University in 1710, halting the progress of Samuel Clarke's ecclesiastical career in 1714, and then continued to smolder until its final flare in the 1772 Feathers Tavern petition. Among English Dissent, subscription to the Westminster Confession (in whole or in part) had first fractured ministerial relations among nonconformity in Exeter, and subsequently London, in 1719. Across the Atlantic, in what remained of the twilight of Puritan New England, the Congregationalist Cotton Mather was alarmed at the outcome of Salters Hall. Already, the Saybrook Platform in Connecticut (supported by Mather) had been the means of advancing synodal government in response to the need for greater congregational and ministerial oversight in the first decades following Toleration, and ministerial associations had been strengthened in Massachusetts where the Breck Affair became a deciding moment for that endeavor. Similarly, it was in the more regulated Presbyterian synod of the middle colonies that the now-advanced controversy over church discipline using subscription would begin to take more immediate effect. The subsequent Hemphill Affair (the primary subject of this paper) offers a unique look into one of America's foremost "Christian Deists," Benjamin Franklin, who at this time sought (and failed) to reform his native Presbyterianism to better accord with his religious prescriptions. That Franklin failed in this endeavor (and subsequently started attending Anglican services), and that the synod succeeded in expelling one of its ministers, demonstrates within the post–Reformation's Anglo–American discourse on authority the strength of Lockean pluralism based upon voluntary principles for religious societies and individuals alike. This paper contributes to our understanding of how to navigate difference in ways that respect individual, even systematic differences, without giving away–either institutionally or individually–one's own closely held principles and beliefs, and without any recourse to the authority (let alone the sword) of the civil magistrate.

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Together Again: Identifying enlightenment ideals that perpetrated discord within the church

Finney Premkumar, University of Birmingham

The Enlightenment did not merely manifest chronological change but substantive change at the conceptual core of "secular" and "sacred" spaces. As such, it shaped the church in ways that are yet to be articulated. Unfortunately, specific enlightenment ideals infiltrated the community of faith causing discord and fragmentation. I wish to discuss three such powerful and related realities. First and foremost, the concept of the human as an autonomous entity and the philosophical centrality of the individual, an unmistakable feature of the Enlightenment, became more acceptable within the church as we navigated away from interdependent relationality in community and the accompanying logic of tradition–constitutedness. The resultant discord was inescapable without the unifying core of community and tradition. The way forward will be paved by recognizing the mythological nature of such autonomous existence, especially from a Christian paradigm.

Secondly, the precedence of the rational over the other constitutive elements of our humanity distorted our intrinsic limitations. This rationalistic (and thereby reductionistic) tendency overlooked the necessary pre–existing conceptual space provided by faith, scripture, and tradition to dialogically agree or disagree with one another in humility, especially within the context of the church. Furthermore, the discord was accelerated by those within the church who granted epistemic privileging to certain positions above others without empathetic understanding that could have fostered a real sense of unity and community. Such recognition will allow those of us within the body of Christ to truly understand and celebrate the 'other' and their respective positions as we recognize an intrinsic and healthy interdependence.

Thirdly, the above–mentioned sense of an autonomous individual as well as the rationalistic emphasis of the Enlightenment radically affected and infected the church, thereby producing a very permissive attitude about technology. Accordingly, the technologically saturated environments in which we live continue to sow discord through misinformation and manipulation, within the culture as well as the church, as in the case of artificial intelligence (AI). The remedy would be to curtail the reach of AI (and other technologies) within the community of faith while maximizing its potential positive use to propagate the Gospel. All in all, enlightenment concepts of the individual, rational, and technological have paved the way for much conflict and discord within churches infiltrated by them. I'll conclude by offering a brief remedy to our current malady within the body of Christ. I'll point out two specific pathways that will call us together in an age of discord.

The Value of Disagreement

Alexander Pruss, Baylor University

We live in an infamously divided society. We disagree on the answers to many of the humanly most important questions: who we are, where do we come from, where are we going, what should we do? I begin by noting that significant disagreement between individuals is not itself intrinsically bad, but it does imply something intrinsically bad: at least one of the disagreeing individuals is distant from the truth. Nonetheless, there is an epistemic silver lining to the disagreement that I will examine. The relationship between the opinion and knowledge of a community and that of its members is complex. Paradoxically, it turns out that there are multiple ways in which disagreeing, and in particular having wrong individuals, contributes to society's possession of the truth. Indeed there are at least three ways in which we can see our disagreement as a sacrifice of individual possession of epistemic good for the sake of community possession, in a kind of unconscious epistemic altruism. These observations should temper a strong drive to conciliation under the guise of epistemic humility and trust, and highlight how the true virtue of epistemic humility is a mean between opposed vices. Specifically, first, as is well known, given our deeply seated human desire to convince others, disagreement leads to adversarial debate that motivates people to search for evidence with diligence. Under plausible assumptions, we can prove that once we are sure enough about something it is not self–self-interestedly rational to continue gathering evidence. But a desire to convince others can keep us gathering evidence, which can have social epistemic benefits. Second, it is known (e.g., from computer simulations of investigative processes) that we can sometimes better find the truth when we don't all search in the same place. If we always deferred to others and came to agree, we would all be "searching in the same place" metaphorically speaking, and while many of us might be closer to the truth as a result, society as a whole would be less apt to find the full truth. In particular, this suggests an epistemic value to the existence of mavericks who disagree with the more common view. Third, there is a value to something's being known, even if only one person knows it. Now when two people disagree extremely, one believes a proposition to be true and the other believes it to be false, while one is guaranteed to be wrong, one is guaranteed to be right. Now being right isn't enough for knowledge, but it's a step in that direction. If instead both converged to suspending judgment on the matter, nobody would have the truth. Though of course also nobody would be wrong.

Leadership in an Age of Discord: Fostering Hope and Flourishing in Faith Communities

Richard James Putnam, Ed.D. in Learning and Organizational Change Program
Leanne Howell, PhD, Baylor University, Department of Curriculum & Instruction

In today's increasingly discordant world, the need for effective leadership that fosters hope, promotes flourishing and brings communities together has never been more crucial. This presentation proposal aims to explore the challenges and opportunities faced by people of faith in becoming agents of positive change in an age of division and discord. By analyzing the transition experiences of military veterans and their unique potential to shape the future, this presentation will delve into the critical role of leadership in promoting hope, unity, and flourishing within faith communities, institutions, and the broader society.

The contemporary world is characterized by political, social, and cultural divisions that often lead to discord and despair. In such an environment, people of faith must grapple with the responsibility of promoting healing, unity, and hope. The question arises: How can leaders of faith communities harness their potential to become change agents in fostering a culture of hope and flourishing amid discord?

The presentation will argue that effective leadership rooted in transition theory and guided by the habits of mind is instrumental in empowering people of faith to shape a future marked by hope, unity, and flourishing rather than discord and despair. Roadmap: 1. Exploring Transition. Drawing insights from Schlossberg's transition theory, the presentation will examine how individuals, particularly military veterans transitioning to civilian life, can apply this model to facilitate positive change within faith communities. (Schlossberg, 1981; Schlossberg, 1984; Schlossberg, 1989; Schlossberg, 2001) 2. The Habits of Mind in Leadership: Emphasizing the significance of the habits of mind, we will analyze their application in leadership practices, enabling faith leaders to address discordant issues with empathy, critical thinking, and resilience. (The Institute for Habits of Mind, 2022; Yosso, 2005) 3. Leveraging Veterans' Experiences: Examining case studies of military veterans who successfully transitioned to civilian life, we will showcase the unique skillsets they bring and how harnessing these attributes can promote hope, unity, and flourishing in faith communities. (Smith, 2018; Smith, 2019; Smith et al., 2019; Shue & Matthias, 2009) 4. Promoting Hope and Flourishing: The presentation will offer practical strategies for faith leaders to foster hope and flourishing through community engagement, dialogue, and intentional inclusivity. (Mosbrucker, 2019; Maury, Stone, & Roseman, 2014)

As people of faith strive to navigate an age of discord, effective leadership becomes paramount in steering communities toward hope and flourishing. By understanding transition theory, drawing on the habits of mind, and leveraging the experiences of military veterans, faith leaders can create environments that promote unity, healing, and a brighter future. Attending this presentation will give participants invaluable insights and actionable strategies to become catalysts of positive change within their faith communities and the wider world. Together, we can shape a future that upholds the sacred calling of hope and flourishing for all.

Recovering Hospitality in an Age of Discord

Randy Ridenour, Oklahoma Baptist University
Edward English, Oklahoma Baptist University

In this age of discord, characterized by religious, social, and political tensions, the virtues that can help to mitigate these conflicts are vital. Tolerance is often identified as a panacea to these issues, yet its current efficacy is questionable for several reasons. Our presentation will navigate the complex terrain of tolerance as a response to religious, social, and political conflicts, underscore its inherent limitations, and propose the virtue of hospitality as a more compelling solution for nurturing harmony, growth, and cooperation– especially within the context of higher education. We will begin by tracing the historical development of tolerance as a philosophical response to religious wars and conflicts, harking back to the 16th and 17th centuries. Drawing on the works of eminent thinkers like John Locke, Pierre Bayle, Baruch Spinoza, Roger Williams, John Milton, Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, and John Goodwin, we will illustrate how their advocacy for religious toleration largely centered on curbing state–enforced religious persecution. Although this form of toleration stands as a milestone in our societal progress, we will argue that it falls short in addressing religious conflicts rooted in citizens' attitudes rather than the power of the sovereign. Further, we will delve into the issues underpinning the concept of tolerance. We will highlight the paradox of inherent intolerance: that it requires the disapproval of that which we are asked to tolerate. In today's world, the aspects demanding our tolerance–religion, politics, sexuality–are neither dismissible as mere matters of taste nor seen as trivialities. They form a complex web of attitudes, beliefs, and desires that shape our identities and our views of the world. Thus, tolerance, with its undertone of condescension, is often ill–equipped to bridge these deep societal divides and may instead exacerbate the conflict. Transitioning from the critique of tolerance, we will explore the alternative of hospitality.

Rooted in many religious traditions, particularly Christianity, the virtue of hospitality encourages acceptance and respect for the 'other' as the Image of God. We will illustrate how this radical hospitality, in contrast to tolerance, could result in decreased animosity, fostering a deeper form of acceptance and love. In the context of higher education, we will elucidate how adopting a culture of hospitality could yield fruitful results. We propose that academic institutions consider cultivating this virtue, promoting dialogue, mutual understanding, and respect among diverse student bodies and faculty. Though speculative, we will consider what a hospitality–based approach could look like if integrated into curriculum and pedagogy. Our presentation will conclude by asserting that the key to hope in this age of discord is a shift from tolerance to hospitality. By rediscovering and embodying the hospitality of Christ, we can shape our institutions, communities, and future in ways that promote hope and flourishing, rather than perpetuating discord.

Unity in Diversity: Critically recovering a neglected political metaphor to forge unity in fractured times

Donald Roth, Dordt University

Metaphors help connect meanings, but they also often leverage this connection to suggest strategies of action that might not otherwise present themselves to us. Among metaphors used in political theory, themes of body and organism have long been among the most frequently utilized; however, they have fallen out of favor for the last few decades. While there are some good reasons for this, their emphasis on unity offers enticing opportunities in divided times. Recent theological scholarship has argued that some Christian thinkers in the Reformed tradition deploy the concept of an organism in a way that distinguishes itself from its use in the context of German idealist thought that was prevalent at the time. I draw this conversation into the realm of political theory to argue that certain Reformed intuitions can help articulate organic metaphors in a way that guards against past excesses while offering us a fertile vocabulary to suggest how we might be called together in an age of discord.

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Teaching Philosophy in Troubled Times
Anne–Marie Schultz, Baylor University

We argue that academic philosophers must respond to contemporary political and academic cultures of divisiveness by reimagining our approach to philosophical dialogue on campus and in the classroom. We begin by describing several cultural threats to the Academy. We then explore the complex dynamic that shapes contemporary academic philosophical dialogue through the lens of Valerie Tiberius's 2016–17 survey "The Value of Philosophy Survey." We describe several events at a variety of college campuses, including our own conservative Christian institution, that illustrate these broader cultural dynamics. We close by articulating proactive pedagogical practices that foster inclusive classroom conversation. We hope these classroom environments will give rise to new forms of philosophical community where people across the political divide can share their diverse perspectives in ways that are collaborative and cooperative.

Can One Pursue a Uniting Christian Telos in a Pluralistic Society?

Eric Silverman, Christopher Newport University

Resolving the problem of discord in our contemporary society requires identifying the normative source of unity within a society and a proper diagnosis of where our society has departed from this source. Contemporary discord in broad society at large is centered around bona fide, zero-sum disagreements about the genuine nature of the good in general and the good for humanity more specifically. In a pluralistic society, the ultimate good for humanity might be found in union with the divine, economic power, sexual fulfillment, broad subjective desire fulfillment, or some other type of thing. In principle, it might even be possible to have multiple types of very different unified societies grounded in these differing visions of the good. However, in contrast, to the degree that these goods are distinct and not differing ways of describing the same good, it is impossible to have a single society optimized for the accomplishment of all these competing potential goods. As finite resources are expended in the pursuit of one of the goods, this expenditure necessarily reduces the resources available to pursue the other two competing goods. E.g. Society's finite and limited time and resources spent in pursuit of economic goods simply cannot also be spent in pursuit of religious goods. Two factors make the contemporary situation more challenging: first, shared social structures increasingly encroach into historically private spaces, and, second, larger contemporary government shapes more of society than it has through most of history. As technology, such as social media, smartphones, and streaming video constantly presents a cacophony of diverse voices advocating competing visions of the good, at best it distracts and at worst it may undermine our pursuit of the good. Or if such technology–such as contemporary entertainment or media–consistently presupposes a specific view of the good within our pluralistic society, this will foreseeably increase discord and make unity more difficult. Similarly, if political structures are minimalist and limited to those needed for individuals to use their resources in pursuit of their perception of the good, a diverse society is more possible. This preference might be pursued either because one thinks the good for each person consists in the pursuit of their subjective desire fulfillment or as a compromise to the realities of a diverse society with a pluralistic view of the good. In contrast, if political structures are large and intrusive, it will be very difficult to have these structures serve truly value-neutral functions. E.g. Large public education will either implicitly assume or explicitly teach certain things about the nature of the good.

Christians have historically viewed the ultimate good in direct reference to God: such as in loving God with the whole self as expressed in The Greatest Commandment, glorifying God as expressed in the Westminster Confession, or pursuing union with God as expressed in the Summa Theologicae. This shared telos in the pursuit of God is the historic source of Christian unity. A directly implicit goal is that we should be united in securing the sorts of resources, social structures, liberties, rights, and status that make pursuing that ultimate goal possible for all. A secondary source of unity has often been found in seeking to love our neighbor materially. We see support for this idea expressed in the story of the Good Samaritan, and in the traditional priority for practical economic alms that are ordered towards the pursuit of what Christians have traditionally thought of as 'imperfect happiness' here on earth. Any other goal is tertiary to these goals. This introduction should allow us to see the challenge. There is a distinctly Christian view of a shared human telos that has traditionally been a source of unity. How do we pursue this unity together within a pluralistic society that does not share this view, often finds it at odds with its view of the good, and is full of intrusive publicly and privately controlled social structures? I proceed to catalog and critique several possible ways to proceed: Christian MacIntyrean communities with a shared telos (similar to 'The Benedict Option'), Luddism, Christian Nationalism, Catholic subsidiarity, and libertarianism.

"Doing" Christianity in Times of Discord

Susan Smith, Samuel DeWitt Proctor Conference, Inc.

Christianity is something that we do, not what we are. To be Christian, we have to know, understand, and implement the teachings of Jesus. But Jesus' teachings are difficult to carry out, and we have historically glossed over what he taught and instead offered and practiced ideology as opposed to Christology in our work. In a time of discord and deep, raw division, doing Jesus' words is more imperative than ever, but the challenge for leaders is to 1) internalize Jesus' words themselves, 2) trust the power of Jesus' teachings, and then 3) be willing to "deny ourselves" of our comfortable interpretations of his teachings and be prepared for the inevitable pushback that will come as we suggest different ways of practicing "the word." The paper will admit that doing this will involve some risk, but will hopefully present a paradigm for action that will help leaders become free and confident enough to first listen to the voices of those who in anger cry out and then find a way to develop conversations that will engage even those with whom we vehemently disagree to at least consider Jesus' words. Jesus was a genius, it seems, at getting disparate groups to at least see and hear each other and we called to imitate him, need to be ready to help the groups meet and find those areas of life, challenge, and difficulty that are common to us all. Leadership in a time of great discord requires a lessening of one's self and one's beliefs and interpretations to consider the voices of those who feel left behind, left out, and ignored. The paper will point out that this time of discord is not unique; history repeats itself but I will point out that the challenge we face is to "do" Christianity, i.e., "lead" differently as we navigate these troubling political and economic times. This paper will present the situation as it is today, analyze why the situation exists despite there being Christianity, and propose ways and methods that leaders can help God's people see that we have more in common than we realize, and need the same God to help us through our challenges. The paper will highlight key teachings of Jesus, as well as passages found in the Hebrew scriptures and the Pauline epistles. In talking about "doing" Christianity, this paper will show how understanding that results in "doing church" differently, which is not a bad thing. The paper's goal is to lessen some of the angst church leaders may be experiencing and offer a new way of thinking about how we lead. We have inherited some problems and issues from the 19th and 20th centuries, but to lead, we will have to recognize and address the problems and issues of the 21st century.

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Uncivil Discourse

Randall Smith, University of St. Thomas, Houston

Modern discourse seems to specialize in people imputing motives, mostly bad, to their adversaries. Less and less often are a person's opponents taken as honest interlocutors arguing in good faith, even if perhaps mistaken in some of their premises or conclusions. More often, people assume that, given the self–evidence of our side's arguments and the righteousness of our side's cause, our opponents must either be fools or scoundrels–perhaps both. They are taken to be obviously insincere, deceitful, duplicitous, fraudulent, misleading, unscrupulous, underhanded, and biased; their charges "trumped up"; their accusations "dishonest"; and their solutions "self–serving." It is not merely the fact of disagreement between different groups that should disturb us–disagreements of a certain sort are essential to any functioning democracy and can be a sign of its health and vitality–rather it is the tone and increasing lack of basic civility that makes attempts to work through disagreements and come to some common understanding so often nearly impossible. Expressing offense or indignation at someone else's words or actions has become the dominant theme of many newspaper editorials, letters to the editor, and on–line blog posts. Sadly, because of the increasingly uncivil nature of civic discourse, the great liberal tradition that had historically prided itself on its defense of free speech has more recently become suspicious of the speech it allows.

In this paper, I analyze our modern predicament using insights drawn from the work of Alasdair MacIntyre. According to Alasdair McIntyre, one of the typical features of contemporary moral protest is the "unmasking" of the so–called "arguments" of one's opponents which are taken to be made hypocritically and in bad faith. As a result, what might have been a serious argument turns quickly into ad hominem attacks the goal of which is to prove not that one's opponent's arguments are false, but that he or she is using them falsely–merely to further his or her own self–interests or to buttress his or her biases and prejudices. But if this is the case, then, as Nietzsche argued, what we call "arguments" are often only masks for our self–interests and will–to–power. One's opponents are never merely mistaken; they must be hiding something deeper and more sinister. Their arguments are "hypocritical" and "dishonest," their presentation of the facts "deceptive" and "misleading," their accusations "biased," their charges "trumped up," their defense of allies "insincere," and their presentation of the issues "deceitful." The result is a culture of media–savvy citizens who specialize in seeing through the illusory and fictitious claims of their opponents, but never their own. The weaker one fears one's own case is, the louder the shouting and the more dismissive the tone of address toward one's opponents. Analyzing the source of the problem in our contemporary language games and in our illusory pose as "non–judgmental" will be the main focus of the paper. At the end, however, I will suggest how we might have the deeper discussions we need to have to understand one another more honestly again.

Sabbath Practices and Burnout amount Nursing Educators

Meagan Soltwisch, Baylor University–LHSON

Nurses are the backbone of health care and make up the largest section of the health profession. Faculty shortage contributes to the overall national nursing shortage and high turnover, and inequitable workforce distribution. Nurses have always had a great demand to perform at a high capacity which has increased exponentially since the COVID–19 pandemic and those who are unable to sustain the high demands can suffer from burnout. Spirituality has been identified as an integral part of human flourishing and a core human need. It is protective against the effects of workplace stress and burnout. The purpose of this study is to examine nursing faculty's perceptions and practices of the Sabbath and determine if there is an association between Sabbath practices and burnout. A priori power analysis was conducted using G*Power 3.1. Purposive sampling was done by sending an email to the deans or directors of nursing schools in the United States selected from the list of accredited nursing programs from the Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education. If they meet the eligibility criteria, the deans/directors will forward the survey to their faculty. The Maslach Burnout Inventory and Sabbath Faculty Practices questionnaires were used for this study. Descriptive statistics, t–test, Chi–square, and ANOVA were utilized to analyze the data. Preliminary Results: Comparison of burnout subscales between nurse faculty (N=179) teaching at institutions that promote Sabbath practices and those teaching at institutions that do not promote Sabbath shows a statistically significant low mean score specific to emotional exhaustion (23.35 vs 33.45, $p < 0.001$). Regarding participants' views of the Sabbath, 61.5% reported they would keep the Sabbath. Approximately 80% reported that they participate in Sabbath practices through church ministry and 96.6% through family time. The association of the institution affiliation and Sabbath practices is statistically significant ($p < 0.001$). Approximately 73.7% of nurse faculty teaching at institutions affiliated with Baptist would keep the Sabbath, 50.0% of those teaching at institutions affiliated with Catholic would keep the Sabbath, 25% of those teaching at institutions affiliated with non–denomination and 81.8% reported "other–Christians" would keep the Sabbath. The limitation of this study is the reliance on self–reported data from participants. Another limitation is the timing of the survey. The survey was distributed during the summer when many faculty are on summer break. One of the ten commandments of the Bible is to keep the Sabbath day. Our preliminary report shows that Sabbath practices improve emotional exhaustion and may prevent burnout among nursing faculty. Further research is needed to explore this topic. A strong research design and robust tools would provide a greater understanding of Sabbath practices, its benefits, and the relationship between burnout of nurse educators. Nursing interventions to prevent burnout are warranted. The co-authors of this study are Alona Angosta, PhD; Katy Vogelaar, DNP, FNP-C; Annie Abraham, DNP, FNP-C; and Weiming Ke, PhD.

Brothers and Sisters: Rediscovering Christian Friendship in an Age of Division
Josiah Stephens, The Dunham School

Men and women live, work, and socialize in closer proximity to one another than has ever been known in history–yet all is not well between them. Social science warns us of a slowly broadening cultural chasm between the two sexes that will lead to catastrophic fissures in their ability to form successful communities. Statistically, women tend to be more highly educated liberals and men less educated conservatives, leading to a society where the two have different answers on every important question. Rapidly, two cultures–one male, one female–are forming, each complete with their own rules, media, and customs. The church knows that corporate worship and marriage can help build bridges over these gendered chasms, but more must be done. This paper argues that a new theological emphasis on biblical male–female friendship fulfills an essential need for our society. Christians possess a powerful framework for thinking about male–female friendships: the family of the Church. By emphasizing this framework, the church can reject the premise that all relations between men and women are inherently hypersexualized.

Within the metaphor of 'brothers and sisters,' the church acts as an essential intermediary between men and women that allows them to enjoy friendship. The Bible not only permits, but encourages, male–female friendships. Jesus Christ Himself befriended women and enjoyed a unique form of intimacy within His male–female friendships. The Bible bursts with examples and models of friendships in both the Old and New Testaments. C.S. Lewis heralded many of the problems–and triumphs–of modern male–female friendship in his landmark work *The Four Loves*, and Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote of the joys and tribulations of Christian community in *Life Together*. The fusion of these two insights provides a framework for how male–female friendship might be conducted with joyful maturity. Naturally, male–female friendships operate differently than same–sex friendships, but this difference does not diminish the inherent worth or essential nature of the friendship. A Christian understands that God created many different types of friendship, and that the body of Christ finds blessings in diversity. Additionally, a Christian emphasis on male–female friendship accommodates a shifting church demographic that includes singles of all ages. As this topic requires significant study, this paper serves as a quiet introduction to the part that male–female friendship might play in the Church. The Church must begin the work of constructing a theological framework of friendship for men and women of all ages.

Teaching, Learning, and Leading for Flourishing and Sustainability in an Age of Discord
William Sterrett, Baylor University

In an age where forces such as accountability and deconstruction seemingly collide, how will schools and school leaders define their success? Looking through the lens of health and wellness, stewardship of resources, and outdoors/STEM education, this paper presentation will highlight research and best practices from "green schools" and their leaders who serve in the role of student, teacher, principal, head of school, or community member. This session will examine how education can indeed shape a culture of the common good, and how school leaders can be thoughtfully positioned to faithfully navigate today's challenging educational landscape.

<u>Using a Hermeneutical Tool for Evaluating and Navigating Potential Ecclesial Discord</u>

Jill Swisher, Northwestern College
Lori Doyle, Concordia University Irvine

This article aims to utilize Trentham's Inverse Consistency Protocol (ICP) as a way in which any ecclesial organization can act productively when confronted with seemingly controversial paradigms. Social emotional learning (SEL), and the frameworks used to define systems of support such as the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), represent one such potential area of discord between otherwise like–minded individuals and institutions. The ICP can help Christian leaders discern potential areas of inconsistency or affirm authentic congruence with an organization's faith tradition. CASEL tenets were submitted through the four–step inverse consistency protocol. Findings suggest that CASEL is a valuable framework when applied authentically and that ICP is a constructive hermeneutical tool for engaging in the social sciences with integrity. This is the first known application of the ICP to SEL by way of the CASEL framework.

J. S. Bach's Vocation: Bringing Forth an Orderly Church Music to the Glory of God
Joshua Veltman, Union University

      As a young man near the beginning of his musical career, J. S. Bach articulated the *Endzweck* or ultimate purpose that would inform the course of the rest of his life: to bring forth an "orderly" or "well–regulated" (*regulirte*) church music to the glory of God. Many commentators assume that this life's calling of his was fulfilled during the early years in his final post as Cantor of St. Thomas Church in Leipzig when he composed multiple annual cycles of sacred cantatas for the weekly services there, and that he had been striving toward that goal with only limited success up until that time. But could there have been more to Bach's sense of vocation than simply achieving a major creative milestone? Could his vision for an orderly church music have been wider and more pervasive than that? These questions will be explored in this presentation through the examination of documentary, circumstantial, and musical evidence, and through the lens of Martin Luther's theology of vocation. Bach left some clues about his views on church musicianship among the comments he wrote in his personal copy of the Calov Bible. He also dedicated compositions that weren't sacred cantatas "to the glory of God alone", suggesting, perhaps, a more capacious attitude toward what he considered "church music". As a devout Lutheran who was well–versed in the writings of his denomination's namesake, Bach was likely familiar with Luther's broad conception of vocation, which included not only occupation but also family and community. It also encompassed taking up one's cross by patiently bearing trials and burdens, which Bach had more than his fair share of. Indeed, Bach's cross–shaped life, calling, and music have much to teach the modern listener.

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Exploring Civic Virtue and Behaviors Across the Christian Tradition: Emerging Findings from the National Survey of American Civic Health

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Various scholars have conceptualized ways in which individuals across the Christian tradition express their civic commitments. Among their contributions are schematics or typologies that articulate diverse perspectives about Christian presence in a secular society (see Hunter, 2010; Niebuhr, 1951). A key contribution of these works is that they illustrate the diversity of thought and practice across Christian communities as it relates to engaging in public life. At present, few social scientists have taken up the task to explore these nuances through empirical methods. As such, there is a dearth of studies designed to investigate the representativeness of civic behaviors across faith communities in comparison to non–faith communities. Moreover, little is known about how Christian communities compare to secular communities as it relates to practicing a set of civic virtues that sustain a diverse democracy. These civic virtues include tolerance for political difference and humility in political discourse (see Inazu, 2015). Motivated by closing these gaps in the literature, this study aims to address two questions: "How do individuals across Christian and non–Christian communities group together in their various forms of civic participation? How do Christian communities differ from other communities as it relates their tolerance for political difference and humility in political discourse? The data used to answer these questions emanates from the National Survey of American Civic Health at the American Center for Political Leadership (hosted by Southeastern University). Designed and launched in 2021, the National Survey draws on census data from a sample of 5,000 Americans and examines the beliefs, practices, and experiences of Americans that differ in their civic knowledge, behaviors, and dispositions (see Cabrera, Weerts & Van Dorn, 2022). The survey aims to investigate how Americans vary in their overall levels of civic literacy (basic knowledge of the US Constitution and political processes), civic engagement (voting, political advocacy, and volunteerism) and civic virtue (tolerance for political difference and humility in political discourse).

The primary purpose of this session is to share emerging findings from the National Survey in relationship to the research questions articulated in this proposal. In presenting our research, our session will also introduce participants to the National Survey database to encourage its free use across the Christian community. The session will conclude with a brief introduction to the beta test version of Civic Navigator, an educational tool emanating from the National Survey to promote depolarization and civic renewal across the US. References: Cabrera, A. F., Weerts, D. J., & Van Dorn, K., (2022). Technical Appendix: National Survey on American Civic Health. American Center for Political Leadership, Southeastern University, Lakeland, FL Hunter, J. D. (2010). To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World. New York: Oxford University Press. Inazu, J. D. (2015). A Confident Pluralism. Southern California Law Review, 88(3), 587–618. Niebuhr, H. R. (1951). Christ and Culture. New York: HarperCollins.

Disputatio and Educating for Intellectual Virtues

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Recent literature on the intellectual virtues and education for intellectual virtue has argued that helping students cultivate these virtues might alleviate social ills such as incivility, tribalism, and discord. While we agree that virtue education is a means to shape culture for the common good, it is sometimes difficult for educators to identify specific practices by which such virtues might be encouraged. In this proposal, we suggest that the medieval *disputatio* is one such practice. The *disputatio* is a form of argumentation developed in the medieval European libraries and perfected by the Scholastics, most notably St. Thomas Aquinas, who was a master of the genre. It consists of a series of formalized steps: first, the formulation of a wisdom question; second, the articulation of an initial appearance regarding the question and arguments in support of that initial appearance (*videtur quod*); third, a citation of a reputable opinion in support of the author's position (*sed contra*); fourth, the author's own argument in support of his position (*respondeo*); and, finally, replies to the arguments from the second step. We argue that the use of the *disputatio* has the potential to help cultivate some intellectual virtues that are important for reorienting social discourse toward the common good.

For this presentation, we focus only on a few virtues: intellectual autonomy, intellectual temperance, and hope. We briefly conceptualize each of these virtues, articulate why each virtue is especially salient in times of discord, and explain how the features of the disputatio might promote the cultivation of these virtues. Re–integrating this form of argumentation into the curriculum, across the humanities and at all levels of education, from primary to post–secondary, can constitute an educational practice that encourages the cultivation of intellectual virtues. Certain features of the *disputatio* make it an ideal candidate for use in contemporary classrooms. It provides a platform for bringing together a host of voices from across spatial and temporal distance and requires students to engage with and respond to the best available arguments against their own position–which supports the cultivation of intellectual autonomy. It results in a reasoned conclusion that is nevertheless subject to revision when new arguments arise–which supports the cultivation of intellectual temperance. And it is oriented toward wisdom rather than just knowledge, able to address questions about the human good–which supports the cultivation of hope. In this presentation, we will more thoroughly discuss some of these features and articulate how they might work together to encourage the formation of the intellectual virtues of temperance, autonomy, and hope.

Discord, Discipleship, and Delight: A Kierkegaardian Lesson in Joy
Ryan West, Grove City College

Kierkegaard has a potentially sobering word for followers of Jesus who would seek to be agents of harmony in an age of discord by walking Jesus' path of self–denying love. In addition to the suffering that naturally affects those who are subject to various forms of interpersonal division, the Christian striving to be an instrument of peace faces two further forms of suffering: the first is the suffering intrinsic to self–denial; and the second is the suffering that comes when the world, which neither understands nor embraces Jesus's way, responds to the Christian's self–denying love with further discord (i.e., mistreatment, scorn, mockery, shame, and the like). How is the Christian to greet this "double danger"? Kierkegaard's somewhat surprising answer is this: *with joy*. In this paper, I explore Kierkegaard's attempt to help his readers (and himself) not only to understand this variety of joy–in–suffering, but also to enter into it subjectively. I begin with a general sketch of what has been called Kierkegaard's "therapeutic of joy." Drawing on the work of Robert C. Roberts, I suggest that, in Kierkegaard's usage, 'joy' names *a pleasurable perception of putative goodness*, and that Kierkegaard's variety of joy therapy consists, in large part, in helping his readers to taste and see, with the eyes and palates of their hearts, the delectability and beauty of a range of gospel–goods, of which the reader may be aware in some sense, but which can be difficult to keep vividly in view when in the midst of "the strife of suffering." Then, I treat one representative instance of this therapy, found in a discourse titled "What Meaning and What Joy There Are in the Thought of Following Christ." In this work, Kierkegaard both argues that following Christ intrinsically involves being subject to the "double danger" described above, and poetically reflects upon what a tremendous honor it is to follow in the footsteps of Jesus on the painful road of misunderstood, self–denying love. By way of this conceptual–rhetorical exploration, Kierkegaard helps bring into focus for his readers an underappreciated, gospel–shaped, positively valenced, affectively charged perspective on their sufferings, which I call "the delight of discipleship." Part of the task of this portion of the paper is to differentiate this form of joy from some of its near neighbors. But ultimately, the goal of the paper is not simply to describe Kierkegaard's project, or to limn the contours of this peculiarly Christian kind of joy; rather, it is to partner with Kierkegaard in providing resources to the reader (and author) that might help them actually to enter into the delight of discipleship when in the midst of discord.

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Bridging Divides, One Photo at a Time: Smartphone Cameras for the Common Good
Roman Williams, Interfaith Photovoice

Snapping and sharing photos on smartphones is a taken-for-granted feature of everyday life. These pictures record experiences, curate memories, and construct identities. Frequently photos replace words in messages, as nearly every parent of a teenager can attest. But it isn't just teens who are sharing photos. On Instagram, Facebook, and Snapchat alone, users share over 800,000 photos per minute and counting—that's right per minute! Unfortunately, many of these photos are used to create divisions. But what if we could use our smartphone cameras for the common good, to build relationships and bridge divides? In this workshop, participants will learn about an innovative approach called photovoice by experiencing it. To participate, bring a photo on your smartphone you can use to talk about a recent experience of gratitude.

Monstrous Dignity: Disability, Community, and the City of God

John Wolfe, Utah Tech University

As noted by Alexander Massman, St. Augustine explores a sort of theodicy of monsters. Massman describes this discussion as a tension between the ideas of deformitas and dignitas, which centers around two general claims St. Augustine makes in Books XVI and XXII of the City of God. First, he claims that those people born with a disability are created intentionally. This is detailed in Book XVI where St. Augustine describes certain human births as "monstrous." St. Augustine concludes this discussion by stating, "We should not suppose that wisdom with which he fashions the physical being of men has gone astray in the case of the monsters...for that would be to regard the works of God's wisdom as products of an imperfectly skilled craftsman." (XVI.8) St. Augustine understands that an omnipotent, omnibenevolent god intentionally created disabled individuals. Second, this is contrasted with Book XXII, where St. Augustine returns to the topic of disability, but through the lens of the resurrected body. He states, "The sole purpose of the deformity is to give yet another proof of the penal condition of mortals in this life," and "There will be no ugliness, which is caused by disharmony when distortions have been corrected and unpleasing deficiencies supplied from resources known to the Creator." (XXII.19) On the surface, the argument of Book XXII seems to imply that the resurrected body will not possess the disabilities of the physical corpus. For Massman, and others, this creates tension between two underlying statements. God perfectly, and intentionally, creates those with disabilities, but these disabilities will be removed in the beauty of the resurrected body. Further, in describing these disabilities, St. Augustine uses the language of imperfect craftsmanship, likening the new bodies being formed to that of a potter reworking clay.

For this paper, I will respond to this tension by first exploring the work of Kay Toombs, Nancy Eiesland, Timpe and Cobb, and Belser and Morrison. The goal of this review is to establish some general concerns the disabled community, broadly understood, has with the church at large. While not meant to be exhaustive, the goal of this effort will be to establish how the church's handling of disability creates separation, distinction, and division.   I will use Luke 14 and 2 Corinthians 12 to suggest that these divisions begin based on a mistaken assumption about the living of the disabled life. It is here that I conclude that the distinction that St. Augustine makes in Book XII about the scars of the Martyrs also applies to disabled believers. They do not have "deformitas", but rather possess "dignitas" that is "a beauty in the body, but not of the body." (XXII.19). To this end, I suggest that St. Augustine's description of transformational removal of "deformitas" is not fully applicable to disabled individuals, but rather to a transformation of the church into a whole, inclusive body of believers.

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Vocational Pauses and Pivots: Spirituality and Congregations under Covid

Claire Wolfteich, Boston University

The congregation was called to dance. Not to "grow" or "listen"–words too passive to describe the urgency and agility and muscular power needed as the COVID–19 pandemic radically changed what it meant to be church. So said one of the leaders of an American Baptist congregation in Jamaica Plain, an economically and racially diverse section of Boston: "All our creative and healing energy went into reimagining every aspect of our daily and liturgical lives: adapting worship to an online format, transforming our building into a daily meals–to–go kitchen and COVID–oriented food pantry, and trying to stay connected and grounded in the sea of relentless news and new decisions to confront.   Our worship life leaped from weekly in–person gathering to daily online gathering, and our trauma program made a similar jump. The agility, flexibility, discipline, and practice required to meet the needs of our neighbors felt much more active than a sapling growing, or a beacon beckoning, or a three–headed angel peering; this was a dance."   The congregation is part of a grant project that I direct, begun in 2017 and funded by the Lilly Endowment. The project has formed an "innovation hub," entitled Creative Callings: Collaboration, Innovation, and Prophetic Witness, that links twelve New England mainline Protestant congregations. Each applied for funds to support innovative ministries to foster vocation and discernment–both personal and communal. We have documented their efforts and reflections–with our research aiming to identify fresh images and language for calling as well as promising practices to nurture callings within faith communities.

Over the first three years, our congregations leaned well into this work, with prophetic commitments to racial justice, visions for cultivating art and spirituality, and generative ideas for communal discernment practices within congregations. But in the program's fourth year, the COVID–19 pandemic radically changed the course of our work and research. Carefully discerned callings skidded to a halt, or new ones urgently demanded pivoting and reimagining in the midst of culture wars about public health protocols, race, and a host of other issues. We accompanied lay and ordained church leaders as they sought to discern callings with their congregations amidst these rapidly changing–and often conflictual—times. This paper explores these leaders' lived experiences of personal and communal vocation. In particular, it highlights the dynamics of vocational *pivoting* and *pausing*, including implications for theologies of calling and practical wisdom to guide vocational discernment and spiritual accompaniment in a time of dis–ease and discord.

Building Creative Communities of Calling as a Path of Connection in this Age of Discord

Audrey Woodhams, Boston University School of Theology

We live in a time of great divide. Longing, searching for avenues to reconnect with one another, we often overlook the ways we are also separated from ourselves. This world we live in prioritizes what we can do over who we are, what we produce more than our presence. Where is the space to discern our creative callings? Where is the time? Creativity is pushed to the edges of our lives in favor of work, family, relationships–all good things, but how many of us have an instrument tucked away in a closet, paints and brushes left in a drawer, half–written lyrics scribbled in a notebook, a heart yearning to write that book, if only we had the time? At one time in our lives–perhaps we were children–we loved these creative pursuits. We felt stirred in our spirits to sing, write, dance, build, design, create. Somewhere along the way, many of us lost those creative callings. We lost those pieces of ourselves; and in losing our creative callings, we lost those connections to our humanity and to one another.

This paper explores the challenge of nurturing and sustaining creative callings specifically in the context of theological education, drawing upon learning from the Creative Callings grant project at Boston University School of Theology (funded by the Lilly Endowment). The project is sponsoring the development of a student writing group; this paper will share key reflections of student participants as it describes practices of building creative community in a university–based school of theology. Conference participants will be invited to reflect upon the ways their contexts of theological education have formed and challenged their own creative callings, and how our shared longings provide opportunities to bridge caverns of conflict and usher in fellowship. Amidst the great diversity of our school, the hustle of academia and theological education, and the pressures of our individual lives, we are making room for life writing, for artistic expression, for human exploration of calling. We are learning that building creative community provides a path of connection in this age of discord, for as we make space for creative callings, we reconnect with ourselves and one another.

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