

FALL/WINTER 2014 | Volume 3 Number 2

# *the* DIVINITY *Magazine*



## Message from the Dean



*"Ephesians 4:12 reminds us 'there are teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry.' HUSD is firm in its dedication to equip our seminarians, clergy, and congregations for effective ministry in public life."*

Dear Friends of HUSD,

This issue of The Divinity Magazine introduces many of our readers to the Equipping the Saints (ETS) research project at Howard University School of Divinity (HUSD). The goal of ETS is to increase and share knowledge about the life giving and health enhancing practices of black congregational life. The Lilly Endowment sponsors this three-year project.

Our 98th Annual Convocation this October showcased Equipping the Saints. ETS identifies and highlights some of the most promising religious practices that are contributing to the health and wellbeing of local congregants and communities. For the past two years, HUSD faculty and research collaborators across the country have studied the faith practices of some two dozen churches in an effort to learn more about some of these life giving practices.

The ETS project promotes scholarly exchange on some of the leading dynamics in contemporary black congregational life. This research will directly contribute to our knowledge of the black faith community and benefit the quality of services that churches are able to provide to their members and surrounding areas. At HUSD, the information gleaned from this important research will also aid in the building of new course innovations, an interactive website, a scholarly monograph and the sharing of findings through a national repository.

This year's Annual Convocation was also historic in that we released the first National Resource Guide for Black Congregations and presented the inaugural production of "God's Trombones," revisited by our colleague Dr. Renee K. Harrison. The keynote speakers were Dr. Rueben Warren, director of Tuskegee University's National Center for Bioethics in Research and Healthcare and Dr. Marsha Foster Boyd, president emeritus of the Ecumenical Theological Seminary.

These are inspiring times at HUSD. This issue features articles on our Fall 2014 Opening Convocation and on our Pinning Ceremony with the Rev. Dr. William J. Barber II, pastor and progressive leader of the Moral Monday Movement in North Carolina. Updates on HUSD faculty, student, alumni and development are included, as well as other new and exciting news from around HUSD.

Ephesians 4:12 reminds us that among the litany of the called are "teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry." The School of Divinity is firm in its dedication to equip our seminarians, clergy and congregations for effective ministry in public life.

In the Presence,

Alton B. Pollard, III, Ph.D.

# the DIVINITY Magazine

FALL/WINTER 2014 | Volume 3 Number 2

The Divinity Magazine is a publication of the Howard University School of Divinity. It is distributed to the internal and external communities of the school.

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## Contents

The fall 2014 issue of The Divinity Magazine brings you news and updates from the Howard University School of Divinity. Thanks to the overwhelming positive feedback from our Spring 2014 issue, we wanted to present yet another issue that would appeal to all of the members of our HUSD community. As always, the magazine has prepared an interactive version as well, available online at [divinity.howard.edu](http://divinity.howard.edu).

This issue is centered on the theme of being 'properly equipped.' HUSD's new Equipping the Saints Program (p. 8) focuses on providing congregations and community with the tools they need to be physically, spiritually and economically sound, while three of our current HUSD students explain (p. 12) how their participation in summer programs helped equip them each with experiences that will push them forward in their studies and careers.

During Annual Alumni Convocation (p. 7), students, faculty, staff, alumni and friends of the University will witness a compelling production of "God's Trombones, Revisited," which put an updated spin on classic poems and folk sermons.

As we feature the highlights from the School of Divinity within the pages of this magazine, we seek to bring together our community through love, sharing the accomplishments and significant milestones of all of our members. Giving to and learning from one another, we ensure that we equip ourselves with truth and service, to the benefit of past, current and future generations of HUSD.

## About this Issue

- 4** What's Happening at HUSD
- 5** Opening Convocation
- 6** Pinning Ceremony
- 7** HUSD's Production of "God's Trombones"
- 8** Equipping the Saints
- 12** Annual Black Theology and Leadership Institute at Princeton Theological Seminary
- 14** Becoming a District Leader by Helping Others
- 15** Development Updates



*What's Happening at HUSD*





# “The Fire This Time”

by Rev. Robyn Franklin-Vaughn

On Wednesday, September 10, the Howard University School of Divinity marked the beginning of the 2014-15 academic year with the 157th Opening Convocation, a biannual celebration that honors our past, acknowledges our present and challenges us to move forward in truth and service with excellence and integrity.

Led by Dr. Cain Hope Felder and Dr. D.H. Kortright Davis, the convocation began with a faculty procession exhibiting the various colored robes and hoods denoting the school's diverse academic disciplines, where faith and praxis are inextricably linked. Dr. Davis offered prayer, asking that all present have an open mind to know and understand and that the Divine “refresh our errant memories, stir up our will, inspire our efforts, strengthen our... inclinations, remove doubts and fears, and open our ears to listen and learn.”

As a community grateful for those who have come before us, we paused to remember those we have loved and respected; those who, while absent from us in flesh, remain with us in spirit. We contemplated those who labored in fields and kitchens, who contributed to the arts and the academy, those whose hands caressed and corrected and who struggled that we might have an opportunity to shine.

While remembering the past, we never want to miss an opportunity to honor those among us. With a rousing standing ovation, the HUSD community thanked Dr. Cameron Byrd, professor of pastoral theology, for more than 50 years of academic service to *alma mater*, including his years as the interim academic dean of the School of Divinity.

As a symbol of pride and encouragement, returning students were also honored for their achievements.

The Voices of Mays, HUSD's chapel choir, is a perfect expression of how new students join their talents with returning students to lift their voices in song to strengthen, challenge and encourage the HUSD community. Such

collaboration is a precursor of the students' life and ministry at HUSD and beyond.

In his provocative and challenging message, Alton B. Pollard III, Dean of HUSD, employed the threads of biblical experiences, historical truths and the pressing needs moving forward for the School of Divinity.

Building on the example of Moses in the book of Exodus, Dean Pollard explained that we, too, are called to be actively engaged in the liberation of the underserved and oppressed; to serve alongside those voices that cry out for justice today, as so many have throughout history. Dean Pollard also said that too often theological education can be complicit in injustice and that it can ‘camouflage the contradictions’ between faith and society. His message highlighted the inaction that threatens to be a constant plague on our society until those engaged in theological education, on all levels, take seriously the mandate that this discipline requires. To that end, Dean Pollard offered the following charge:

- Ensure every aspect of our curriculum is permeated with the theoretical and the pragmatic and with the intellectual and the spiritual, as complementarities that seek to make persons and communities whole;
- Give priority to our indigenous experiences of faith and culture as a Black theological institution;
- Take seriously alternative learning models and platforms;
- Model our commitment to community in decisive policy making and planning; and
- Provide our students with a skill set that has the dexterity to engage the politics and complexities of difference and the capacity to expand our sense of wonder and oneness across creation.

Far from being a monolithic, business-as-usual factory for theological pretentiousness, the Howard University School of Divinity is committed to strengthening with ‘Head and Heart’ that which has been Divinely created and faithfully entrusted to our care. Ahse! Amen!

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*Franklin-Vaughn is the Anglican/Episcopal Chaplain and Lutheran Campus Pastor at Howard University Chaplain and Chapel Coordinator at the Howard University School of Divinity*

## Pinning Ceremony

# “God Still Needs Someone to Stand!”

by Matthew Riley III

As we reflect on this year’s Pinning Ceremony at the Howard University School of Divinity (HUSD), we cannot help but be reminded that this observance is such a special time for family. It is the first time incoming students have a chance to be celebrated for the commitment they make to both God and community, while their loved ones are present to witness the commencement of their journeys.

On September 17, I arrived early to observe the entrance of guests who had come to support their family members. As I exited my vehicle in the parking lot of Mays Hall, I noticed first year student Sgt. Michael Davis and his family walking into the School of Divinity. Seeing Davis holding the hand of his young son as they entered reminded me of my own Pinning Ceremony. Just one year ago, my father entered Mays Hall with me to be welcomed into the School of Divinity as well.

As the service began, first-year student Rev. Candice Breland, a Doctor of Ministry candidate, demonstrated that it is never too early to make a contribution to the ceremony when she blessed the audience with a melodious rendition of “Walk Together.” Master of Divinity candidates Tech. Sgt. Pauline Rose-Moore and Charles Butler Neto also enriched the service with their gifts of sign language.

School of Divinity Dean Alton B. Pollard welcomed both new and returning students and explained the importance of the ceremony in his Statement of the Occasion. “You are beautiful. You are talented. You’ve got gifts, and most of all, you are going to make a difference in the world,” he told students.

Family served as the breath of the ceremony when returning students, lead by Hazel M. Cherry, president of the Student Government Association, shared the HUSD light in a symbolic, candle-lighting ritual with first-year students in the Pins and Light portion of the ceremony. This demonstration exposed the love and commitment for community that returning students uphold, uniting students as family in order to sharpen, encourage, and push one another across the finish line of our unique journeys.

Next, the administration, faculty, staff and students all faced the audience and shared the HUSD light with them as well as a symbol of this

truth: “We are tied together in the single garment of destiny, caught in an inescapable network of mutuality.” We are family.

Guest speaker Rev. Dr. William J. Barber II shared his rich insight on the importance of taking action. As the architect of Moral Mondays, a civil rights movement originating in North Carolina, and Chair of the Political Action Committee of the National NAACP Board, Barber is familiar with what is needed to call for action in the name of a righteous purpose. In his sermon, “Somebody to Stand,” he told new HUSD students that they “just got pinned about serious business,” explaining that their



duty reaches much farther than receiving a degree.

“God is looking for somebody,” Barber told students. “There is no prerequisite on the resume, only a willingness to serve.”

The entire HUSD family should be commended for taking the first stand that God requires of us during the fall 2014 Pinning Ceremony—the stand for one another.

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*Matthew Riley III is a second year Master of Divinity student and the SGAVice President at HUSD.*

## *A 1920's Classic Takes a 21st Century Turn*

by Dr. Renee K. Harrison

When I was a teenager, my parents took me to see actress Stephanie Mills in a stage production of "The Wiz." Mesmerized, I remember telling my parents on the ride home that I knew what I wanted to do with my life—write, produce and direct plays. Days later, my father handed me a No. 2 pencil and a black and white composition notebook and told me that "a dream doesn't live unless the dreamer lives it out."

I soon began writing scripts for my own plays, the first of which was a modified version of "The Wiz," I called "The Wiz South Central." I gathered people from the neighborhood and held casting calls and small productions in our backyard. My father and I worked day and night to build props and set designs, while my mother made costumes for the actors. Soon, I had the entire neighborhood involved, even suspected gang members and drug dealers from the area. Local businesses supported my productions, and local churches, community centers and junior colleges opened their doors to us as venues for the performances.

Years later, the homegrown community theater my family and I put together became A Leap of Faith Productions, a nonprofit, faith-based theater company created to empower young people and revitalize our community. We saw the theater group as a vehicle of hope, enlightenment and healing. Actors and professional artists in the Los Angeles area provided mentorship to young people in the production and my parents, who never missed a performance, continued playing a major role in the behind the scenes as well.

As I watched the community theater take shape, it became clear to me that theater can be a vehicle for personal and social transformation, honoring past generations and inspiring the present and future ones.

When Dr. Velma Love, HUSD visiting scholar and project director of the Equipping the Saints Project asked me to create a production to open the ETS Conference for HUSD's Fall Convocation, I turned to James Weldon Johnson's "God Trombones: Seven Negro Sermons in Verse" for inspiration.

Similar to what I had done with "The Wiz" as a young woman, I aimed to honor "God's Trombones" as a seminal, ground-breaking book of poetry from 1927 while contextualizing it for the 21st century. The interpretive pieces in "God's Trombones, Revisited" are inspired by Johnson's original work, by the vibrations around me and by the sermons of Dr. Ron Hopson, associate professor of Psychology and Divinity at Howard.

The young people affiliated with this production are more than a joy. Their commitment to the project is both undeniable and awe-inspiring! In the end, we hope to model not only alternative approaches to ministry, sermonizing and interpreting the biblical text, but also alternative approaches to living as a community.

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*Harrison is the Assistant Professor of African-American and U.S. Religious History*



Metropolitan Interdenominational Church

# EQUIPPING THE SAINTS

The Equipping the Saints (ETS) project at Howard University School of Divinity (HUSD) is a research intensive that seeks to increase and share knowledge about the life-giving and health-enhancing practices of black congregational life. Sponsored by a \$1 million grant from The Lilly Endowment, ETS focuses on major issues such as health, economics, openness and inclusion within the church, gentrification and youth services in cities across the nation. Each area will contribute to a repository of knowledge of the spiritual, physical, social and mental health aspects of congregational life to be used by current and future generations for the betterment of our churches and communities.

## Macon County, Alabama - Economics and Health

### ECONOMICS AND HEALTH

Macon County, Alabama is in the heart of the Alabama Black Belt. The Black Belt, once known for its rich, dark productive soils that supported profitable agricultural production, with roots in an exploitative slave trade, is now known for having a large population of African-Americans, food deserts (areas where finding healthy, affordable food is extremely difficult), high rates of poverty and a stagnant economy.

Not only is Alabama among the states with the highest rate of both food insecurity and health disparities. Eighteen percent of Alabama households are classified as having low or very low food security. In contrast, the national average is 14 percent. The prevalence of obesity is at 32 percent; for African-Americans it is 49.6 percent. Like many rural, southern, Black Belt communities, Macon County is challenged by persistent poverty, widespread health disparities and lack of economic opportunity. This lack of access to affordable healthy food choices contributes to preventable diseases related to unhealthy food consumption.

## THE CHURCHES

Bethel Baptist Church is over 130 years old. Led the last twenty years by HUSD alumnus Rev. K.G. Jones, this well established congregation is comprised mainly of elderly members, many of whom are retired blue- and white-collar professionals. The cornerstone of Bethel's health ministry is the Parish Nurses Association and includes several retired nurses. They have a long-standing leadership that is active in the church and community with respect to health and wellness. Bethel has also established the Bethel Community Garden, where a wide variety of vegetables and fruits are grown and hands-on nutrition is taught to gardeners of every age and experience.

Greenwood Baptist Church began as a Sunday school class in the early twentieth century. Sometime before 1903, an instructor at Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute (now Tuskegee University) began a Sunday school class from which this church grew. Booker T. Washington, president emeritus of Tuskegee, gave the group a plot of land and loaned them money for the construction of the church. Many members of Greenwood Baptist Church are currently on the faculty or serve in leadership roles at Tuskegee University, and the congregation partners with members of the University for its health and wellness ministry. Rev. Harold Lusk has served as Greenwood's dynamic pastor since 2012.

Divine Inspirational Ministries (DIM) is a non-denominational church. The pastor, Rev. Rondey Thornton, is a military veteran who describes himself as a “street preacher.” DIM grew out of this ministry to persons on the streets of Macon County, Alabama. The church offers a transitional housing program that helps provide housing to veterans, shelter and assistance to veterans and ex-felons “who have a willingness to commit themselves to a life of sobriety, non-violence, and independent living,” and “provides shelter, job placement, transportation, social services, counseling to all citizens regardless of race, creed or color.” The Divine Inspirational Restoration House, where the homeless vets are housed, is an outreach ministry of DIM, a nonprofit organization.

Mt. Calvary Missionary Christian Church was established with members from another congregation less than 50 years ago and is part of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). Dr. Otis Head, a part-time pastor who works with the Macon County School Board, formerly led this congregation of mostly working- and middle-class members. The church partners with the Macon County Minister’s Council and the innovative Emotional Emancipation Circles Initiative. Mt. Calvary also partners with the “Stop the Violence, We are One” initiative to address the issue of youth violence as a serious problem within the local community.

## NATIONAL - OPENNESS AND INCLUSION

The focus of this research topic is several multi-denominational churches located in various parts of the country. All the churches described are predominately African-American congregations with an emphasis on social justice and a message of inclusivity that is rooted in the historic movement against racism in the United States with contemporary permutations on injustice grounded in the dynamics of ethnicity, social class, gender and sexuality. Issues of sexuality are an inclusive hallmark for each of these congregations. At the same time, the faith principle of radical inclusion extends to a multitude of theological and social issues. The intentional embrace of marginalized people in the household of faith, from same-gender loving to persons suffering from substance abuse or living with HIV/AIDS, is at the heart of the Good News for these congregations.

## THE CHURCHES

Metropolitan Interdenominational Church (MIC) is located in Nashville, Tennessee. Senior Servant Edwin Sanders, supported by a team of people, established and held the first Sunday service in 1981. MIC has a membership of about 350 persons, no formal denominational affiliation and seeks to be “inclusive to all and alienating to none.” Nashville, Tenn. is predominately Caucasian, however, the area around MIC is heavily African-American. MIC is not a large congregation, but through its outreach ministries plays a tremendous role in the community and beyond. One example is the First Response Center, which provides comprehensive service to persons who face a wide range of HIV-related and substance abuse issues.

Emerging from a desire to see a church that is theologically inclusive, radically diverse and socially engaged, Rev. Dr. Brad Braxton established The Open Church in Baltimore, Maryland. Baltimore is the largest city in Maryland and predominately African-American. The Open Church vision was made manifest in October 2011 with the first interest meeting and the first public service was held in 2012. The Open Church has no formal denominational affiliation. Although the church is still in its formative years, it is experiencing consistent growth.

Dr. Kenneth L. Samuel established Victory for the World Church in 1987. Victory for the World Church, located in Stone Mountain, Georgia, is a relatively large church with a motto of “we are more than conquerors.” An eastern suburb of Atlanta, Stone Mountain has an African-American population of more than seventy percent. Through a broad array of comprehensive ministries, Victory seeks to address the total needs of the whole person from the pew to the public square. Victory has evolved and emerged over the years to embrace a message of radical inclusivity. Currently, Victory has

dual standing in the Independent Baptist Church and the United Church of Christ.

Covenant Baptist United Church of Christ is led by co-pastors, Rev. Drs. Dennis and Christine Wiley. Covenant was established in 1945 as a white Southern Baptist Church, but gradually came to reflect the community surrounding the church. Covenant was marked by a racial and socio-economic transition that is reflected in the membership. Currently, the community comprises over 95 percent African Americans. In 1985, Dr. Dennis Wiley was called to serve as Covenant’s sixth pastor. In 2004, Covenant further proclaimed its call to radical inclusivity when Dr. Christine Wiley was called to serve as equal co-pastor. Ultimately, Covenant commits to advancing physical and spiritual liberation through its message of radical inclusivity and by providing holistic ministries to its members and the wider community.



Bethel Baptist Church



Covenant Baptist United Church of Christ

# EQUIPPING THE SAINTS RESEARCH SITES CONTINUED



The Mt. Zion United Methodist Church

## Washington, DC – Gentrification

Washington, D.C. has a rich history of black congregational life. For nearly two centuries, African-American houses of worship of various sizes and denominations have flourished and spread throughout the city and its suburbs.

The Mt. Zion United Methodist Church in Georgetown is considered the oldest black church in the District, dating back to 1816 when a group of black worshippers grew tired of the segregated practices of Montgomery Street Church and left to form a separate congregation. The church also served as a station on the Underground Railroad. The first black Baptist church in D.C. was organized in 1839 as the First Colored Church of Washington, and later incorporated in 1970 as the Nineteenth Street Baptist Church. It relocated from Foggy Bottom to 4606 16th Street N.W. in 1975. St. Mary's Episcopal Church was founded in 1827 by 28 emancipated African Americans who separated from an Episcopal congregation. It is also located in Foggy Bottom at 728 23rd Street N.W.

However, recent shifts in population and housing trends have posed significant challenges for the churches of D.C. In particular, congregations located in neighborhoods where gentrification has brought an influx of highly-paid, educated residents now need to develop effective strategies for maintaining visibility and viability in the changing urban landscape.

Seven congregations in D.C. were selected for study and analysis of promising practices in the context of increasing disparities in housing, income, education and economic opportunity. These congregations represent a diverse mix of denominations, including Baptist, Methodist, Adventist and Pentecostal, as well as all four sectors of the city: Northeast, Northwest, Southeast and Southwest. The churches in this study are Capitol Hill Sev-

enth-day Adventist Church (Capitol Hill); Christ United Methodist Church (Southwest), Fisherman of Men Church (Petworth); Greater Mount Calvary Holy Church (Edgewood); Metropolitan Baptist Church (Shaw); Mt. Zion United Methodist Church (Georgetown) and Union Temple Baptist Church (Anacostia). Although the impact of gentrification varies by neighborhood, an effort was made to incorporate denominational and regional diversity in the selection of congregations studied, thus enhancing our ability to address the broader question of how congregations in general adjust to shifting urban populations.

Research on gentrification is led by Dr. Cheryl Sanders, professor of Christian Ethics at the Howard University School of Divinity and pastor of the Third Street Church of God in Washington, DC's Mount Vernon neighborhood. The site researcher is Dr. Kesslyn Brade-Stennis.

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## Atlanta, Georgia – The Preached Word

Atlanta is the capital and most populous city in Georgia. Atlanta is known as the city of black wealth and the cultural cradle of the Civil Rights movement. There are a throng of African American houses of worship in metro Atlanta, including Ebenezer Baptist, Wheat Street Baptist, Cascade United Methodist, Big Bethel AME, and several mega-congregations such as New Birth Missionary Baptist Church and World Changers Church International.

Faculty collaborator Dr. Kenyatta R. Gilbert, associate professor of Homiletics and site researcher Dr. Anne Marie Mingo, assistant professor of African-American Studies and Women's Studies, are investigating promising congregational practices at four African American congregations in the Atlanta region including Ray of Hope, in Decatur, Dr. Cynthia Hale; Greater



Ray of Hope Christian Church

Smith Chapel AME, Rev. Toni Belin Ingram; Ebenezer Baptist, Dr. Raphael Warnock and Impact Church, Rev. Olu Brown.

Our research investigation has been principally focused on understanding the relational dynamics between congregational culture and the ways in which people process sermons, and how Atlanta clergy in four denominationally, socioeconomically, theologically diverse African-American Christian congregations prepare, embody and deliver their sermons. Our research findings have been derived from on-site participant observations of worship services, one-on-one interviews and focus groups, as well as a roundtable discussion with clergy.

Notwithstanding demographic differences, common among all four congregations is a clear and evident theological commitment to the social gospel; intentional ministry outreach to the African-American community at-large; strong embrace of fervent, charismatic worship; and a high regard for institutional maintenance and good stewardship of congregational resources.

## Detroit, Michigan – Youth and Family Services

Detroit, Michigan once reigned as the United States' fourth largest city, peaking near the two million mark in the 1950s. In the 2010 Census, the city registered a population of 714,000 persons, a 25 percent decline since the 2000 census. The figure cannot be explained by white flight. The number of African American children decreased by 24 percent, or 61,282 youth under the age of 17, as middle class African-American parents fled the city as well. The population boom of the 1950s, spurred by a robust post World War II manufacturing economy resulted in land use development which explains how, in the current recession, the city could have 140 square miles of vacant property.

The disappearance of work, which climbed as high as 25 percent in 2010 while falling to 15 percent at the end of 2013, clearly reflects both the American recession, and the ongoing struggles of the American automobile industry which began several decades ago. But the Black unemployment rate was 14.9 percent before the recession (2007) and hovered at a staggering 24.7 percent (virtually one in four) as of 2010. Detroit's unemployment rate has consistently been twice that of the state average since 2001. Detroit's youth and families struggle in these times. A 2010 report from the city's Skillman Foundation noted that in 2009 just over half the city's children lived in poverty, with approximately the same

percentage participating in the state's Food Assistance program. In the realm of education, a high school diploma offered no significant difference in life chances. Only a college degree served as a variable that indicated hope for a better life. The dropout rate for Detroit has been a matter of contestability in that different measures and methodologies have yielded numbers as high as 83 percent and as low as 38 percent. Even the latter figure represents more than one-third of Detroit youth finishing high school with their 9th grade cohort. All measures point to school attendance rates' correlation with achievement rates, with both in decline as students' progress through the system.

The Skillman report also offered that "Detroit had a violent crime rate four and a half times the national, and four times the Michigan, rate." Initiatives by research universities, foundations, the faith community, state and local government and even the Michigan National Guard seem to be making progress in reduction of crime and incarceration rates, but this does

not necessarily translate into an overall increase of the quality of life for Detroit families. Such indicators must be developed in conversations between existing social measures of quality of life and theologically informed norms that frame a Black faith distinctive, lest the former become fully captive to post-modernist notions of success drawn from a consumerist culture.

Therefore, the faculty research collaborator Dr. Harold D. Trulear and the site researcher Rev. Henry Wells explore practices that stem from and point toward such a definition of quality of life. Similarly, a theological anthropology derived from norms of Black faith traditions ought to be formed as a framework within which to implement best practices. Our commitment to congregational life as a manifestation of religious institutional well-being requires evaluating a congregations practices on more than just their ability to produce measurable outcomes consistent with the aims of non-sectarian social programming. It requires a true understanding of black congregational culture and the importance of these groups' work to the persons within their own communities.



Detroit, Michigan

# Annual Black Theology and Leadership Institute at Princeton Theological Seminary

## Transformed by Connection

From July 12 through July 19, 2014, fifty men and women—African and African-American—came together on the campus of Princeton Theological Seminary to increase their collective understanding of ministry and the people we serve. The Black Theology and Leadership Institute is an annual,



weeklong, intensive continuing education workshop for clergy and laity. Each year, participants spend the week among beautifully manicured gardens surrounding the campus with comfortable benches for lounging, rich conversations and moments of meditation for the purpose of training, worship and fellowship.

Our week began on July 12th with an opening session where all participants were welcomed and we had a chance to introduce ourselves. Participants hailed from New York, New

Jersey, Illinois, the Carolinas, Massachusetts, California, D.C., Georgia, Detroit and as far away as Edinburgh, Scotland. We dined on hors d'oeuvres and shared in wonderful fellowship as we became acquainted with one another. Dr. Yolanda Pierce, Elmer G. Homrighausen associate professor of African-American religion and literature and director of the Center for Black Church Studies at Princeton, along with Shushama Austin-Connor, organizer of the week's events, welcomed the group and gave instructions for the exciting week ahead.

Sunny weather set a beautiful backdrop as students enjoyed thought provoking Bible studies, morning and afternoon plenary sessions, campus tours and evening services. We also made use of our access to Princeton Seminary's world-renowned libraries for study time. Each night we participated in a spirit-filled worship service in the campus chapel where a speaker would deliver a powerful exegesis. These sermons partnered with the anointing of the Holy Spirit and caused full praise, hand clapping, foot

stomping and shouting, coupled with the utterance of speaking in tongue, reminiscent of a revival.

The plenary sessions addressed key theological doctrines on social and economic justice, health issues and the need to take care of our beloved communities as a whole. Cohort groups were formed after each plenary for further guided discussions.

Presenters for plenaries included distinguished leaders in the theological education community:

- Dr. Yolanda Pierce, professor of African-American Religious studies at Princeton;
- Bishop Yvette Flunder, founder and senior pastor of City of Refuge United Church of Christ;
- Dr. John Kinney, professor, Virginia Union School of Theology;
- Dr. Gregory Ellison, professor, Emory University;
- Dr. Jonathan Walton, professor, Harvard University;
- Dr. Stacey Floyd-Thomas, professor, Vanderbilt Divinity School; and
- Dr. Walter Fluker, professor, Boston University

Being at Princeton was an incredible experience for which we will all be forever grateful.

As the week's events came to a close, the entire group came together in the parking lot, packing luggage in cars, sharing emails and phone numbers, finding it difficult to say goodbye. Our lives had been forever changed for the better by this opportunity.

I am thankful for yet another opportunity to be with those chosen by God to be "agents of change" in this world. The emphasis on direct mentorship from this outstanding group of academic, civic and theological experts makes the Annual Black Theology and Leadership Institute an exceptional experience that effects real change in its students as they go forth in their lives of service and truth.

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*Rev. Dyan Abena McCray-Peters is a second year M. Div Student*



## The Theology of “Witness”

The 2014 Black Theology Leadership Institute at Princeton Theological Seminary was an unforgettable experience. It was a space for students to do thoughtful and critical introspection while building a community that was transformative.

Opening Sunday worship was the spark that united us as one. I recall the beauty of our voices lifted in hymns, the prayerful laments of fellow participants, the lifted hands, all reminded me of the special gift of communal worship. I am sure that all present for the weeklong program at the historic Princeton chapel will never be the same.

The opening lecture, given by Dr. Yolonda Pierce, set the tone for the week. She challenged us to “name our power, unmask it, and engage it (put yourself in the front line).” We each made it our mission to do just that. Each day of the program, participants sought to wrestle with a particular personal issue. It was in this tension and struggle that we encountered God. Fears, hurts and frustrations were hashed out, and strategies were cultivated for practical ways to undo and unlearn negative behaviors.

Throughout the week, each presenter discussed a topic that rang true to their personal cause. With each speaker, participants could hear the earnest call for the reconciliation and liberation of our community. Bishop Yvette Flunder’s statement during her lecture on sexual justice still rings to me. “God called me to this lifestyle, just as God has called you to yours,” she said.

Even as an ally to the LGBTQIA community, I’d never heard such a convicting claim. God doesn’t just call us to a particular purpose; our life is the purpose. No portion of our life is exempt from that. Dr. Stacey Floyd-Thomas discussed the hurts we all cause one another, such

as the negative imagery that is implanted in our young ones about their self-worth, and the ways in which our theology and praxis perpetuate sexism. For me, these words affirmed the value of my young womanist voice and helped remind me that I must continue unmasking and working against sexism in church, community and academy.

Dr. John Kinney called for us to develop a theology of “Witness,” giving name to the theology I have come to live by. A theology of “Witness,” he explained, is a theology that affirms that our God is a god of justice and of love. I believe it is God’s will for us to see the interconnection of all humanity and creation. If we do not embody this theology, it is impossible to practice justice and liberation. Acknowledging this, says Kinney, we are obligated to fight for justice and practice love, recognizing that we are all one.

“The reason why your theological inquiry is so important, is not just so you can tell the church something,” said Kinney, “It so you can do some radical self-examination of how you are participating in that which destroys our people and our community.”



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*Hazel Cherry is a third-year M. Div Student and SGA President at HUSD.*





# Becoming a District Leader by Helping Others



From June 3 through August 16, I had the privilege of serving as a District Leadership Program (DLP) intern with the Washington, D.C. local government. The DLP is an 11-week internship which provides young leaders with knowledge, tools, skills and experiences that will prepare them for a future in public policy and government. Candidates from all over the country undergo an intensive application and interview process for a chance to receive assignments in an unlimited array of functional areas related to government operations.

My assignment for the summer DLP internship was with One Congregation, One Family (OCOF), an inter-agency project between the Executive Office of the Mayor and the Deputy Mayor of Health and Human Services. The OCOF program is a new Mayoral initiative that connects teams of mentors from the faith-based organizations within the District of Columbia with formerly homeless families that have been provided with housing assistance through the Department of Human Services. The OCOF program provides mentor services that promote practical life skills and offer the caring and encouragement necessary to help previously homeless families become self-sufficient. Helping homeless families is an especially important cause here in the District, where the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development has noted that Washington, D.C. experienced the third largest increase in homelessness in the U.S. between 2007-2013, ranking after New York and Massachusetts, respectively.

My internship gave me the opportunity to collaborate with faith leaders, politicians and public service officers from all over the city. Through OCOF, I participated in classroom lectures and coursework on topics centered around core business services, utilized web-based training and development courses, enjoyed a series of 'Profiles in Leadership' lectures and took part in community service initiatives.

Working with the program from inception to implementation gave me invaluable firsthand experience that I am able to apply to both my professional and personal endeavors. It was a tremendously rewarding experience that solidified my desire to create strategic alliances and policies in order to create lasting positive change for marginalized populations.

# Development Update

Dear HUSD Alumni,

What is it that pricks your consciousness, puts a smile on your face or gives you a warm feeling when you think of your *alma mater*? If the answer eludes you, it is our hope that the current work of administrators, faculty and staff will do much to change that as we continue building a community that is responsive to your needs. At the School of Divinity, we are stepping up our game to provide quick and quality service to you as we continue to cultivate relationships with HUSD alumni and the entire Howard University community.

Since its founding in 1870, HUSD has provided quality education to students and has served as a guiding light for the church and the community. However, despite this long history of truth and service, we remain in need of your support. Fundraising has become a challenging task for institutions around the country. Similarly, the School of Divinity has programs, projects and initiatives in need of funding.

It is so important that we pass along this opportunity for growth and learning to current and future generations of HUSD students. Taking the time to reflect on a spirit of philanthropy can help you see the need to help ensure the future of your School of Divinity.

Even during this time of economic turmoil and change, *alma mater* is pressing toward the mark and “believing” that God will supply our needs. Our prayer is that you have a vested interest in the success and prosperity of the School of Divinity.

There are many ways to give, whether a one-time contribution or an annual gift, you may designate where your donation will go. You are invited to play an integral role in the future of this historic institution that has helped empower and transform the minds of many great leaders.

Rev. Shirley A. Gravely-Currie, M. Div., MBPA  
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