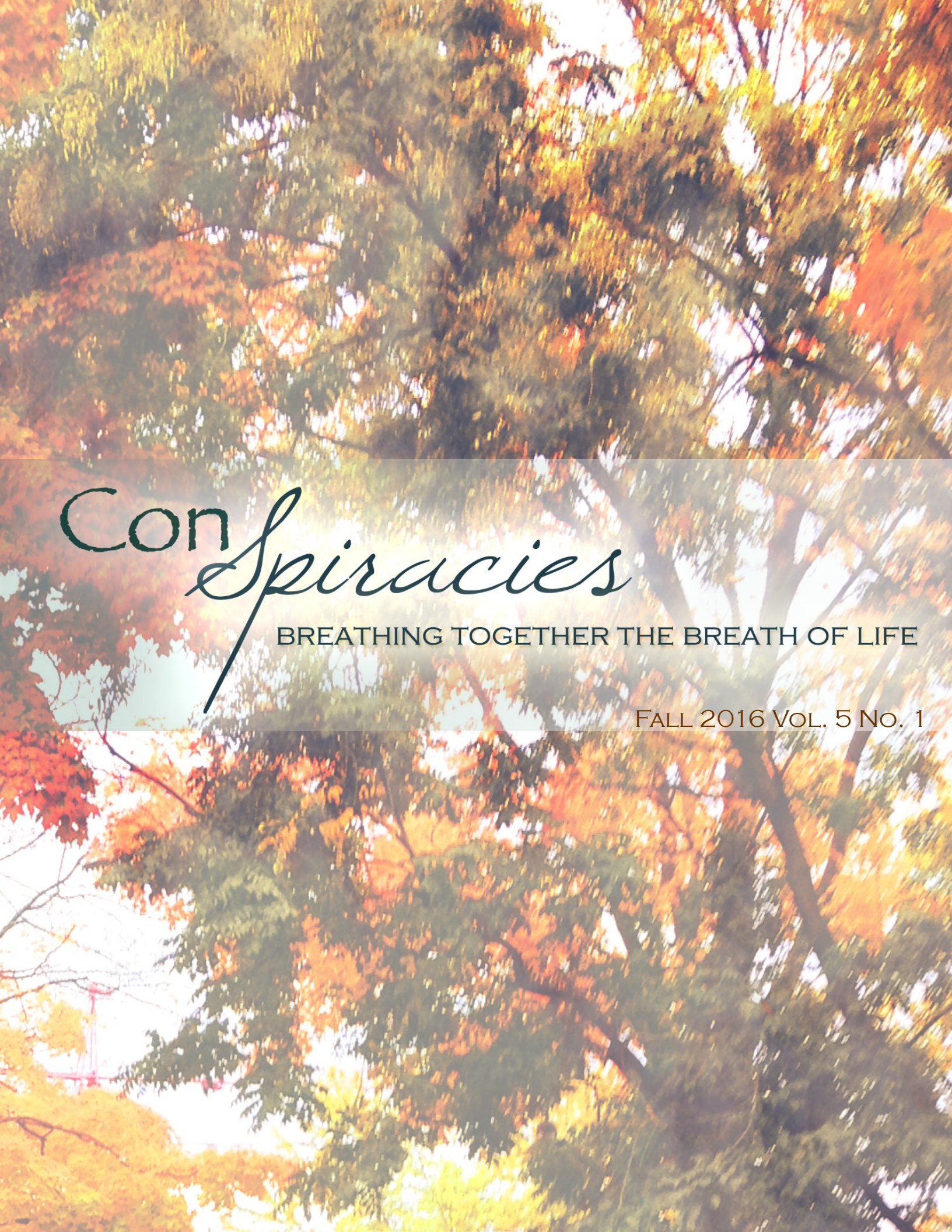




Con*Spiracies*

BREATHING TOGETHER THE BREATH OF LIFE

FALL 2016 VOL. 5 No. 1

Con*Spiracies*

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WILL THERE REALLY BE A MORNING?

KERRY MALONEY

HDS CHAPLAIN AND DIRECTOR OF RELIGIOUS AND SPIRITUAL LIFE

*Will there really be a "Morning"?
Is there such a thing as "Day"?
Could I see it from the mountains
If I were as tall as they?
Has it feet like Water lilies?
Has it feathers like a Bird?
Does it come from famous places
Of which I have never heard?
Oh some Scholar! Oh some Sailor!
Oh some Wise Man from the skies!
Please do tell this little Pilgrim
Where the place called "Morning" lies!*

-Emily Dickinson

A hauntingly beautiful [musical setting](#) of this plaintive poem by Emily Dickinson filled the air in Andover Chapel at this year's annual Seasons of Light celebration on November 29, 2016. Recorded by HDS's late musical director Harry Lyn Huff and Tom Bogdan, the song gave melodic voice to our communal grief and rudderless angst twenty-six days after our beloved Harry's sudden death and twenty-one days after the shocking, if not surprising, election of Donald Trump as President.

At the 2015 Seasons of Light service, we were gathered unwittingly on the eve of the San Bernadino massacre. The subsequent twelve months have only plunged us ever more deeply into the blood shed on that terrible day. We have found ourselves drenched in the publicly sanctioned hate speech of the Presidential campaign, particularly against Muslims, immigrants, people of color, and Jews; and now we are watching the appointment of a white supremacist and inept cronies to the Presidential cabinet. We are living with and raging against the continuing state-sponsored murder of and threats against black and brown people. We have heard with our own ears reports of the sexual assault of women by the occupant of the nation's highest office. We have grieved the terrorism committed by non-state actors in every country across the globe, not least in Orlando, Florida, where dozens of lgbtq people were slaughtered in June at the Pulse nightclub. We have watched in horror the terrorism of the permanent anti-terror police state advancing everywhere, glaringly evident in the war on indigenous communities protecting their water at Standing Rock. And we have watched in disbelief the state-sponsored terrorism of oppressive regimes and the imperial powers of war across the globe, yielding incalculable devastation and unprecedented numbers of refugees seeking safe haven and signaling ominous threats to the ideals of democracy and freedom everywhere.

By the end of 2016, those in privileged classes, religious traditions, and ethnic groups in the United States and Western Europe have found themselves/ourselves—at last, like most of the rest of the world which has suffered for centuries under the daily brutality of colonialist terrorism without much notice or empathy—entangled enough in that web to have been threatened with the genuine terror of despair. And if it wasn't clear before, by now it has become abundantly apparent: the real war against terror turns out to be fought in the heart.

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Hope demands ferocious spiritual and intellectual discipline. Practiced as a spiritual virtue, it can develop the soul's resilience; when assailed by trauma, something like healing may emerge, or when assailed by guilt, something like repentance may occur. Practiced as an intellectual commitment, hope can develop the mind's rigorous resistance; when confronted by propaganda, something like truth may break out, or when confronted by evil something like holiness may erupt. At Harvard Divinity School, we strive daily—even if with as much failure as success—to honor and to exercise the habits of mind and heart that might produce a hope stronger than despair, a love stronger than death. This issue of *ConSpiracies* provides a glimpse of those habits refracted through several writings, prayers, and sermons offered this semester by a few members of the HDS community.

“Will there really be a morning?” We sing this forlorn question into the night together as we grapple with our shadow side, which always produces the mayhem we summon, knowing that we're *all all* interconnected, we're *all* implicated. In a time when we seem as a nation to have lost our way—and maybe even our souls and minds—we are striving to remember that like all liberal arts institutions, HDS is uniquely called to be in the mind and soul business. Each of us. All of us. May we be helped by all we call Holy to live into and up to that calling.



HARRY LYN HUFF, 1952-2016

On November 3, 2016 hours after the observance of All Saints and All Souls Days in his Christian tradition, our beloved Director of Music Harry Huff passed into the arms of God. He had suffered a cerebral aneurysm on Monday October 31 and never regained consciousness. We cannot yet begin to fathom, let alone to chronicle, the immensity of the loss of this magical, beautiful genius—not only to the HDS campus but also to Old South Church in Boston, where he served as Minister of Music since 2007, and to the wider world. From Bach to Bacharach, Schubert to Sondheim, Pärt to Parton, Harry “Houdini” Huff was a lover and master of nearly every genre of music. He was also a master of teaching, a master of community, and a master of kindness. A true *maestro*. One of the most fitting and moving tributes to him, and one of the most succinct of the many eulogies written in the days following his death, was posted to Facebook by Zach Kerzee, MDiv '14 on the night Harry died. Zach's words go proxy for all our tributes, all our grief, and all our gratitude.



I received an email this morning letting me know that Harry Huff had suffered a brain aneurysm and was in the hospital. Minutes later as I

squeezed in a visit tomorrow, I got word that he had passed.

Harry meant so much to me at my time at HDS. Every time he saw me from across the chapel he would come and embrace me and smack a loud kiss on my bald head, never failing to call me "You beautiful boy, you." He would then grab me by the arm and push me... onto the steps near the piano to sing with the choir (whether I felt like it or not).

I've seen Harry pull together a random group of people, many of whom have never sung together before, and draw out music from that choir of strangers that would

bring down a room. And he would do it in ten minutes before Noon Service. Just magic.



Harry also changed the way that I thought about group singing. Now at Simple Church I only introduce new songs sandwiched between songs that

people know and sing well already, so that people feel comfortable and confident singing as a group. That generosity of spirit mixed with the desire to teach and take people where they wouldn't go on their own has changed me as a musician and a pastor.

I'll never forget the way that he would stomp his foot with a thunderous crash during "Keep Your Lamps Trimmed and Burning," or the way that he would take a picture of his constantly morphing choir each week, drawing out a smile with a high pitched "Tennessee" instead of "Cheese." ...

For the season you were in our lives, all of us were enriched, Harry Huff. We'll miss you terribly. We'll see you again.

You can read Harry's [obituary published by Old South Church](#) and visit the [Memorial Facebook page](#) established in his honor, where you can also catch a few recordings of him at the organ and at the piano.

Thank you and farewell, sweet Harry. May you conduct the choir of angels forever in eternal delight.



ANTI-RACIST PEDAGOGIES: A REFLECTION

TYLER SCHWALLER

MDIV '10, PHD CANDIDATE IN NEW TESTAMENT AND EARLY CHRISTIAN STUDIES



On September 30, 2016, in response to the ongoing state-involved murder of people of color as well as the white supremacist, Islamophobic, anti-immigrant, anti-queer, and misogynist rhetoric of the 2016 Presidential campaign, the Office of Religious and Spiritual Life and members of the HDS faculty held a two-hour community teach-in/speak-out on the steps of Andover Hall. Tyler Schwaller delivered these remarks. Tyler, whose dissertation is on slavery in early Christian life and thought, is also an ordained deacon in the United Methodist Church. His scholarship, teaching, and activism in and through the church intersect in concerns for foregrounding visions and practices of racial, gender, sexual, and economic justice.

When I was first asked to speak, particularly in my role as Departmental Teaching Fellow, I was both grateful for the invitation to participate, because I think this is incredibly important, and nervous about what I actually have to contribute. I care deeply about teaching. I care deeply about justice. And I care specifically about supporting and responding to the calls of the Black Lives Matter movement. But what particular expertise do I have for speaking on these issues?

Then I thought about how important it is for white people to talk about race, not because we have special expertise but because this is primarily our problem, a problem of our making and sustaining. Violence against black and brown bodies and the devaluing of black and brown lives stems from persistent and pervasive white supremacy, and if we who are white people truly believe that Black Lives Matter, we who are white need to address and work to dismantle what is, at its core, our problem. White supremacy is a white problem.

So how can we do that? What does that look like in particular at Harvard Divinity School? For starters, those of us who are white, if we sincerely do *not* believe in the supremacy of white folks, need to stop prioritizing, almost exclusively, the perspectives of white people in our teaching, research, and writing. We need to be intentional about interrogating our own whiteness, while we also listen to the voices of people of color. For my own writing on slavery in early Christianity, I have been reading a lot of work lately by black feminists, which has been inspiring and transformative (and has also made me think, “What was wrong with me that I did not read this sooner?!” *Whiteness*, I suspect, is the answer). These scholars elaborate how transatlantic slavery still haunts and marks black lives and bodies. At the same time, they argue that we can and should think about the ways people who are black creatively negotiate the circumstances of systemic racism and redeploy their bodies with spirited vitality toward black survival and flourishing. In contrast, like we see so often in Hollywood movies (*12 Years a Slave*, for instance), many white scholars of slavery (with some exceptions) have begun to do well enough naming enslavement’s brutality but have not become well enough attuned to, or perhaps have been willfully ignorant of, the capacities of the oppressed to act as subjects in their own right.

It matters that our historical and contemporary narratives emphasize both the exploitation and dehumanization of white supremacy, as well as the subjectivity and resilient humanity of black and brown lives. Reading Kimberly Juanita Brown’s *The Repeating Body*, to name one particularly powerful, brilliant book, has driven home for me Alexander Weheliye’s argument in *Habeas Viscus* that so much of the work we admire from white men, like Foucault and Agamben, has already been done—and done better insofar as it has potentially farther reaching and more precise

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critical insights—by black feminists. Yet white male thinkers like Foucault are the ones we typically foreground. We see this everywhere at HDS.

What if for every subject about which we teach and write we were to ask what persons of color have said on the matter? This is not to celebrate naively “the Other,” as if there is the norm and then the exception. Nor is it to exploit the labors, intellectual and otherwise, of people of color merely to prop up our own sense of enlightenment. Rather, it is to bring into the center voices that have traditionally been marginalized, as well as to engage the challenges these voices pose to dominant frameworks. We will be better academics as we take seriously, learn from, and respond to a broader range of perspectives, and, in turn, we will (hopefully) be better colleagues and friends as we cultivate awareness not only of multiple other experiences but also of our own biases and presuppositions, including our own intellectual shortcomings (because white people don’t know everything). If white people are to take responsibility for dismantling white supremacy, then white voices cannot reign supreme in our classrooms and on our syllabi.

For those of us who do or will teach, my wish for HDS would be that this would be a place that prepares us not only with practical skills for teaching but which challenges us to consider and to be able to articulate *why* we teach. bell hooks’s *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* should be required reading. hooks argues for an approach to education that transgresses racial, sexual, and class boundaries by insisting on acknowledging and valuing every person’s presence, understanding that “everyone influences the classroom dynamic, that everyone contributes” and that “these contributions are resources.” Now, maybe you don’t have the *same* pedagogical aims as bell hooks. But reading bell hooks and others who write on critical pedagogy, including our own Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, will force us to take responsibility for the things we *do* care about, for the fundamental reasons we consider it important to teach, or perhaps preach (again, not just *what* we teach but *why* we teach it).



Photo: Michael Naughton

If I am not teaching to transgress, why am I teaching? Whatever my motivations, how am I doing? Whose voices are heard in the classroom? Whose voices are missing, and why? Of course, it is not enough simply to ask these questions and stop there, but having such critical awareness would be a good start toward doing the hard work of making HDS a place where black and brown voices and lives are heard and do matter. Moreover, we who are white would do well to be humble to the criticisms of our colleagues who rightly call us out, taking such opportunities to learn and grow rather than being defensive, which too often ultimately serves to defend white supremacy. The times when friends of color have shown me that it is not enough simply to *think* the right things have taught me that I need to get over

1 bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 8.

ANTI-RACIST PEDAGOGIES: A REFLECTION

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feeling bad about being wrong (because sometimes, I'm just plain wrong and it does harm). I realize I need to follow my friends' lead to *do* what is right in seeking reconciliation and justice. Sometimes—often, in fact!—that means disrupting the status quo, valuing protest and dissent.

Those of us who are white have not often had to cultivate critical consciousness of our race and the effects of our modes of being in the world because our very lives and identities are generally taken as normative (to varying degrees depending not just on race but gender identity and expression, class, sexual orientation, ability, ethnicity, religion, nationality, and so forth—we *need to be intersectional in our analysis!*). So for us who are white to do this work for ourselves, because white supremacy is our problem to undo, let us begin by interrogating our own whiteness. To commend one great resource among many, the edited volume *Disrupting White Supremacy from Within* might be helpful as a starting place. Let us also be responsive to the challenges of our black and brown colleagues.

Then might we transform this institution from a place where persons of color primarily bear the burdens of educating the rest of us about the deleterious effects of systemic racism and violence. Then might this become a space where white people take responsibility for dismantling white supremacy so that all of us together, *especially* people of color, can thrive and go forth to change the world. May this be the legacy for the next 200 years of Harvard Divinity School, not so that we can celebrate an institution but so that we can celebrate the people who constitute it.



Photo: Michael Naughton

THE MIRROR OF ADVENT

REGINA L. WALTON

DENOMINATIONAL COUNSELOR TO EPISCOPAL/ANGLICAN STUDENTS AT HDS



The Rev. Dr. Regina L. Walton preached this sermon at the weekly Monday Eucharist of the HDS Episcopal/Anglican

Fellowship in Andover Chapel on Monday December 4, 2016, the second Monday of Advent. Regina's book of poems The Yearning Life won the inaugural Phyllis Tickle Prize in Poetry, and was published by Paraclete Press in 2016. She is pastor and rector of Grace Episcopal Church in Newton, MA, and Denominational Counselor to Episcopal/Anglican Students at Harvard Divinity School.

Text: Matthew 3: 1-12

My husband and I are hooked on the Netflix show *The Crown*, about the early years of the reign of Queen Elizabeth the second. One of the subplots throughout the first season concerns the aging Winston Churchill's inability to stand down as Prime Minister, and make way for younger leadership, even as he succumbs to several strokes and other health crises. (Churchill is wonderfully played by a plumped up and bent over John Lithgow.) In one episode, the houses of Parliament commission the modernist artist Graham Sutherland to paint Churchill's portrait for his 80th birthday. Throughout this episode, Churchill has several sittings with Sutherland, and he constantly

criticizes the artist for his insistence on realism in portraiture. Churchill wants a portrait that shows the prestige and power of his office, that depicts his nobility as a public servant for half a century—and yet somehow does not make him look old. When the portrait is finally officially unveiled, he does not want to acknowledge the seated old man, in all the vulnerability of age, as himself. Churchill rejects the portrait and has it burned—and yet, soon afterwards, he does stand down. Sutherland's portrait is considered a lost masterpiece—in part because those who saw it felt that it did capture something, perhaps not flattering, but deeply true about Churchill at the very end of his public career—there was power and insight and even pathos in this depiction of Prime Minister as frail and yet still defiant. Churchill and Sutherland argue in the show about respect: does respect require making someone look good, or is the deepest sign of respect reflecting back what truly is?

John the Baptist is a kind of modernist portrait painter. Every year he shows up at just this time, staging his annual intervention of inconvenient truth. The vision that he shows is painful to see—it is harsh and unflattering. And yet the scriptures tell us that people flocked to him to be baptized, including Jesus. Many were hungry for this truth, about themselves and their relationship to God. John is Prophet as mirror, showing the institution-builders of his

day where they had fallen painfully short. John is Prophet as bridge, standing between the two eras of Israel's history. He is both a traditionalist and a radical. He challenges the Jewish community with their own scriptures, with the heart of their own tradition. He indicts them with their own Torah. But then he offers them a way back to faithfulness, he offers them a way through the wilderness: he offers them repentance and baptism, and he points the way to Christ who is coming.

But to accept what he is offering, to come forward to be baptized, first requires taking a long, hard look at a very unflattering portrait.

"You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruit worthy of repentance." Remember that John is here yelling at people who have come to him to be baptized—not a pastoral move that is usually recommended! Pharisees and Sadducees are coming to him—the power of John's witness has compelled those with power and influence to seek him out. And he chastises them. He calls them to account. But he does this in order that they can begin again, so that they can experience the freedom of forgiveness. Part of repentance is seeing themselves as they really are, with all their privileges stripped away: with the status of their ancestry, their position, their status. The only thing that matters to God is:

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bearing good fruit, bearing fruit worthy of repentance. In other words, what matters is: the present, what is coming into being at this moment, not what was, not what used to be. And it is John's connection to the living heart of Torah, of tradition, that allows him to sweep away traditionalism. Radical honesty is part of authentic conversion.

I think many of us in the progressive church tend to see ourselves as John the Baptist in this story. And that is utterly missing the point. At this moment in our history, we are not the mirror-holders: we are in the mirror. We are in the painting.

As Christians, we are always hold dual citizenship; we are citizens of heaven, and of this nation. This is a John the Baptist moment in our country, as well. The last year and a half of this election, and the results of this election, have painted a searing portrait of who we really are as a country. And it is very, very difficult to face.

I think the only way to face what we have become, is to remember that somehow even now we are made in the image of God. Somewhere in this distorted image, is God's image. And even now, amidst gathering and strengthening forces of oppression, of hate, of scorn for the vulnerable, the presence of Christ is among us, the Holy Spirit is moving.

The Franciscan author Richard Rohr

writes, "*We hold the realization, seeing the dark side of reality and the pain of the world, but we hold it until it transforms us, knowing that we are complicit in the evil and also complicit in the holiness. Once we can stand in that third spacious way, neither fighting nor fleeing, we are in the place of grace out of which newness comes . . . we can stop building our kingdom and become usable in the kingdom of God.*" (Richard Rohr, *Everything Belongs*, 171.)

This place of grace that Rohr describes, to me looks a lot like the wilderness of John. It looks a lot like the place we are right now, as citizens of heaven very much in this world, this moment of America's history. The wilderness, in Israel's history, is a complicated place. It's the place of deliverance, from slavery to the Egyptians. But it is also the place of punishment, and wandering, and being lost and nearly in despair. For a long time. And yet it is further the place of revelation, of miraculous sustenance. There's no cheap grace in the wilderness.

It's worth noting that in the Bible, no one really wants to go to the wilderness; there's no "hiking and camping" in biblical times. The wilderness is a place people are compelled to go, by other forces beyond their control. Our first parents were driven out of Eden. The Israelites were fleeing the Egyptians. The Gospel of Mark says that after

Jesus' baptism, "*The spirit immediately drove him into the wilderness.*" Even Jesus, he didn't choose wilderness. He was driven there. He found himself there.

The wilderness is the place of reckoning. It is the place where our illusions are laid bare. But it is also a place where God is powerfully present, and a place from which we will be delivered by God.

This Advent, we are truly in the wilderness. As a country, reckoning with rising tides of injustice, oppression, hard-heartedness, exploitation, that threaten to swamp the boat of the republic completely. And as a Church, how to respond to this darkness with gospel light: when we have largely been ineffective at bearing fruit in our own day, and also profoundly unwilling to face our own decline in good time.

This is the bad news that we need to face—so that we can turn to the Good News. We are complicit in the evil—but God has made us complicit in the holiness, through the death and resurrection of Christ.

We are in the wilderness: but God always meets God's people in the wilderness. That appointment will be kept. On God's terms—not ours. With God's truth—not ours. This place where our illusions are laid bare is the place of grace and re-creation. In God's name, Amen.

ON GROPING, TRUMP AND JESUS

STEPHANIE PAULSELL

SUSAN SHALLCROSS SWARTZ PROFESSOR OF THE PRACTICE OF
CHRISTIAN STUDIES



Professor Stephanie Paulsell, Susan Shallcross Swartz Professor of the Practice of Christian Studies, preached this sermon at HDS's weekly Thursday Morning Eucharist in Andover Chapel on October 13, 2016. (She preached it again the next morning at Memorial Church's Morning Prayers. You can

watch that video [here](#).)

The lectionary text for October 13, 2016:

Meanwhile, when the crowd gathered by the thousands, so that they trampled on one another, he began to speak first to his disciples, "Beware of the yeast of the Pharisees, that is, their hypocrisy. Nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered, and nothing secret that will not become known. Therefore whatever you have said in the dark will be heard in the light, and what you have whispered behind closed doors will be proclaimed from the housetops.

Luke 12: 1-3

The first time an adult man grabbed a part of my body that I regarded as private, I was in the sixth grade. The man was the father of a friend of mine who had come to pick us up from school. I had gotten to the car first, and as we waited for his daughter to arrive, he grabbed a part of my body that no one had ever touched. He grinned at me as I were in on the joke, and then his daughter came out of the school, and they drove me home.

I never told anyone, not because I wasn't close to my parents, but because it was confusing and I felt ashamed, as if I had brought it on myself somehow. And gradually the memory of what had happened faded, leaving in its wake the constant low drone of danger that is part of the soundtrack of every woman's life. I don't remember thinking a lot about it; I don't think I wanted to think

about it. But I do remember making sure that I was never alone with that man again.

Every woman I know has stories like this. My mother does, my sister does, my daughter does. Most of these stories involve complete strangers: men on trains, on sidewalks, in libraries, on buses, the policeman writing the traffic ticket. In every case, the unwelcome crossing of the boundary of the body seems to come out of nowhere—as if whatever was holding the agreements of civilization in place had suddenly slipped, and a hand had shot through from the other side.

Last Friday, we all heard the things Donald Trump said about women: how he grabs them, how he kisses them, how they let him, because he's a star. He attempted to play it down as locker room banter. But it is, of course, much more than that. Speech like Trump's shapes a culture in which sexual assault seems normal. It functions the way racist speech functions, the way ridicule of LGBT people functions, the way disparagement of immigrants functions: it creates an environment in which it is easier to harm or violate or kill the people who are being objectified and diminished.

In the gospel of Luke, Jesus says that what we have said in the dark will be heard in the light, and what we have whispered behind closed doors will be proclaimed from the housetops. Access Hollywood's hot mic and our 24-hour news cycle fulfilled that prophecy this week. We all got to hear what Donald Trump said when he thought we weren't listening.

"It's just talk," he said in the last debate. But Jesus seems to care a lot about talk: it reflects what's in our heart—"for it is out of the abundance of the heart," Jesus says, "that the mouth speaks." It's not what goes into us that defiles us, he insisted; it's what comes out of us. Like the Buddha, who taught that "right speech" was an integral part of the path to enlightenment, Jesus

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teaches us that what we say when we think we are not being overheard matters. What we say in the dark is who we are.

I keep thinking: once this election is finally over, we can begin mending our broken country. And certainly it going to take all of us, lifting our voices in protest again violence and hatred in all its forms. It's going to take an uncompromising determination to reclaim the promise of our democracy and to commit ourselves wholeheartedly to providing the best possible education for everyone. It's going to require the hard work of finding one another across the seemingly insurmountable divides that rend this country and the even harder work of listening to one another. I read that when a crowd of supporters gathered outside of Trump Tower last Friday, a woman walked by and told one such supporter that she should go back to her trailer. We are going to have to do better than that.

We can't wait until the election is over to begin to mend this country. But how are we going to do it? This morning, maybe we can commit ourselves to doing something today. What can we do on an ordinary Thursday in October that would be healing? What can we do as we move around in our ordinary lives?

We know that the pinched, hateful language—about women, about Muslims, about African Americans, about immigrants—that we have heard from Donald Trump since this campaign began contributes to a culture of violence. We know that. We can see it. We can feel it in our lives.

But are we equally convinced that language that is spacious and creative and full of possibility, language that is compassionate and honest and loving contributes to a culture marked by justice and peace? For today at least, let's talk to each other as if we *are* convinced, even when we think we are not being overheard.



Photo: Kristie Welsh

BEARING WITNESS AT THE TOMB: BEING WHITE IN TRUMP'S AMERICA

WILSON HOOD
MDiv '19



Wilson Hood offered this reflection at the weekly Wednesday Noon Service in Andover Chapel on November 16, 2016, hosted by the Racial Justice and Healing Initiative (RJHI).

In my suburban neighborhood in North Carolina, I'd often see Trump signs on the lawns of my white neighbors. Seeing these signs usually filled me with a mix of emotions: annoyance at the continued existence of the Trump campaign and everything it represented, sadness at the complicity of my parents' neighbors in the campaign, fear about interacting with them as a queer person.

However, because this holy space requires radical honesty from all of us, I admit that I often felt another emotion when seeing these signs: a flickering sense of pride and arrogance that I was not one of "them," one of the "bad white people," one of the confederate flag-waving denizens of cable news and the comment section, one of the white people who slashed queer kids' tires in my high school parking lot and yelled racial slurs from the windows of school buses.

Awash in the pontificating of pollsters and pundits assuring me of the likelihood of Clinton's victory and of the starkness of the difference between me and the white people voting for Trump and his message of racial terrorism and fear, I convinced myself that this terrifying moment in our history would pass by soon enough.

Then, last Tuesday happened.

In the time since the election, as hate crimes and individual acts of violence continue to rock our communities in almost prophetic anticipation of greater structural violences to come, narratives have already begun to crystallize to explain away the seemingly impossible election of Donald J. Trump to the Presidency of the United States. One popular theory emerging in many spaces, and particularly in academic and

journalistic spaces dominated primarily by white writers and thinkers, is that Trump was the inevitable result of a "white working class" revolt. The argument goes that this group of voters, whose economic concerns in a rapidly deindustrializing labor landscape went largely unheard by the Democratic Party, decided to take a chance on a candidate who, amidst hateful and bigoted rhetoric and policy proposals towards immigrant communities, Muslim communities, and communities of color, promised them brighter economic prospects and a return to the "great" American economy and culture of the past 50 years.



Photo: Kristie Welsh

Many white folks who opposed Trump have used this narrative to either demonize poor white people as the sole cause of Trump's rise to power, or on the other hand have indulged classism by paternalistically insisting that these white voters, cocooned in their abject ignorance, innocently incited this national tragedy, as if Trump supporters were merely a group of neighborhood kids who accidentally broke a window while tossing a baseball.

While many white folks who are poor or working class did vote for Trump, post-election data tells us that the key demographic determinant of Trump supporters was not

BEARING WITNESS AT THE TOMB: BEING WHITE IN TRUMP'S AMERICA

WILSON HOOD
MDiv '19

income—indeed, the majority of people who made below under \$50,000/year did not vote for Trump—but rather race. Across lines of race and education, 58% of white voters voted for Donald Trump, including 63% of white men. 49% of white college graduates cast their vote for him as well.

Given this, I want to confront the harder spiritual truth of why we might be clinging to the “white working class revolt” narrative currently blossoming in the white-dominated center-left media ecosystem: because those of us who consider ourselves to be the “good” white people, those of us who read Toni Morrison and Junot Diaz in college and post Facebook statuses in support of Black Lives Matter and Standing Rock, cannot see or perhaps refuse to acknowledge, that we share the same legacy of white supremacy as those who gleefully and willingly cast their vote for fear and hatred. We cannot fathom that it was not only the poor white people of rural Michigan and West Virginia and North Carolina, interviewed with a mixture of horror and fascination by news anchors on CNN, but also our friends, our co-workers, our neighbors, our family members, our teachers, our future congregants in the faith communities many of us will eventually serve.

When RJHI asked me to share a reflection on being white and from NC at this moment in our nation's history, my mind instantly went to the homily delivered by our own Professor Matthew Potts following the results of the election. In his [homily](#), Professor Potts reminds us of the story in the Christian tradition of the women who went to the tomb following Christ's crucifixion. Unlike the male disciples, many of whom fled or refused to see the horror of what had been done to the body of their friend and teacher, the women showed up to embalm Christ's body and look upon the violent truth of what had taken place. And, in their act of showing up and acknowledging the depth and reality of that state violence, they took the first steps in bearing witness to resurrection.

As a white person from North Carolina, I am thinking about what it means to show up at the tomb in this moment. To not run away or hide like one of the disciples, but to bear witness to white supremacy and to refuse to look away from the history and ancestry of racial oppression and terrorism I share with the very other “working class whites” who suddenly seem to be solely responsible for everything I wish I could wash my hands of or pretend that I do not also benefit from.

And the truth is that our friends and colleagues of color living under the conditions of systemic racism in this country have been at the tomb for a long time. Last Wednesday, in this very room, I shared many emotions with all of you—grief, rage, despair, fear. But one of the emotions that was not shared universally by the people in this room was surprise. For many people of color, the rise of Trump and the legacy of white supremacy and domination his campaign rhetoric represents were not unthinkable or impossible, but rather a horrific and extreme confirmation.

Our siblings of color have been bearing witness at the tomb for a long time. It's time that we, white folks, all of us inheritors of an ancestry of white supremacy and racial terrorism across region, class, and education, join them, and prepare to ask ourselves, urgently and continually: what fantasies about our lives—our successes, our relationships, our understandings of identity and history and justice—are we willing to sacrifice in the act of constantly forcing ourselves to look upon the truth of the tomb? For indeed, the chances of all of our collective survival, and for our resurrection, depend upon it.

FIERCE DEFIANCE. FAITHFUL MEMORY.

MANDI RICE
MDiv '18



Mandi Rice—a yogini, writer, painter, wanderer, and churchgoer—offered the following

reflection at the Wednesday Noon Service in Andover Chapel on October 12, 2016, hosted by HDS Queer Rites.

Reading: Excerpt from “And so shall our Heels till the Earth” by Sunny Drake

This, my pledge to you:
For every crushed frilly boyhood, a thousand manly ruffles will take your place.
For every girl kidnapped into boyhood, a thousand constricting chains will be cracked.
For every femme called “too much”, a thousand more will be a thousand much-more-too-much.

For every fallen pansy, a thousand petunias will bloom on your grave. And your ashes will be mixed with magenta and painted on the lids of a thousand thousand warriors. War paint. Fierce defiance. Faithful memory. We will not only not forget: we will make the pavements on which you fell our runways, and we will mince! We will strut so fiercely, prides of peacocks will follow our flaming trails. We will saunter until the streets are streaked with silver glitter. We will ca-reen wildly in the highest of heels

without caution for what is “practical”, because we know that every ground-breaking invention, every unimaginable innovation, every revolutionary creation was born from ingenious impracticality.

And to the hedge makers who would wrestle away our sparkly delights, with stifled snickers or crushing blows, let us tell them this: Beware. You are right to fear us. We are dangerous. We are revo-lutionaries. We are healers. We are mums, dads, brothers, sisters, siblings, cousins, lovers, fighters, artists, visionaries. Some of our lace may be tucked only beneath our pants. Some of our tears fall only behind dry eyes. Some of our pink is worn only in the soles of our feet. But make no mistake. We are EVERYWHERE! And our parties are fun-er. Our battle screeches louder. Our dreams brighter. And our revolution will be the most Spectacular Fucking Glitterbomb you have ever seen!

This poem contains some of the few words that I remember from the aftermath of the Pulse nightclub shooting last June. I went to a number of memorial services trying to make some sense out of this tremendous act of violence—that, by the way, I just assumed was committed by a Christian until the media told me otherwise.

So while the television tried to tell us that our enemy was Islamic extremism, what I felt as a queer person is that my enemy is hate. And it’s the failure of courage from religious leaders of all sorts who allow this hate to continue in their congregations and in their own hearts.

I came to these multiple memorial services to imagine something bigger than revenge.

In the poem we just heard, the queer and trans poet Sunny Drake told me that my response could be a fierce defiance and faithful memory.

In the aftermath, what spoke to me were the poems calling for an enduring and embodied response. A creative response. A response that said, “We cannot forget, but we cannot wear black forever, either. What we need is magenta. We need magenta and we will paint it on our eyelids. And our very fierceness, our very beauty as human beings, our complexity, our aesthetics will be part of our resistance.

Queer creativity has often been in The Arts, with capital letters. In today’s service, our spirits have been fed by words from *Angels in America* and *Rent*, two plays from the queer cannon. We could add to that list *The Laramie Project*, a play that remembered the murder of Matthew Shephard. The anniversary of his death is today.

FIERCE DEFIANCE. FAITHFUL MEMORY.

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But the things we create and queer can be impactful on other stages as well. We are creative when we make a partnership or family or wedding in a new way. We are creative when we make families and children in new ways. Our daily lives become our sites of resistance and also beauty.

The creativity is lived out by those who organized memorial services including any number of queer clergy here in Boston. But it's also in the courageous acts of those queer clergy, not just to come out but to pursue ministry, to do what for many of them must have been defined as impossible. If this poem affirms for us that queer parties are funner and queer battle screeches are louder, it is because of this daring to imagine what could not be imagined before—and then daring to live it in our bones. The daring to dance it on our floors. Sing it from our choirs.

The daring to swallow it as pills or inject it as testosterone and let creativity live in our bodies — literally remaking us from the inside.

These creative acts are necessary for our survival. They also enrich the broader culture of which we're a part. They are a legacy to future generations.

I'm fond of a contribution from one of our black, queer Ancestors, James Baldwin. Baldwin said that to be

involved with God is to be involved with some overwhelming desire and joy which you cannot control which controls you. That is, to be involved with God is to feel something deeper at work and to feel it in your very desire. That your desires are not sinful, are not an accident, but in fact may be the deepest, gooddest, richest, truest, most fruitful parts of your being.

These could be any sort of desire, and where they don't belong is in a closet. They belong to the world as a gift to the world which is why you are in it. And I invite you to let that desire shine through. Let it be like it like the glitter that refuses to wash off, weeks after the party. That is why our revolution will be a glitter bomb. Not just because it is fabulous, but because it is a revelation of the sparkling beauty of resilience.

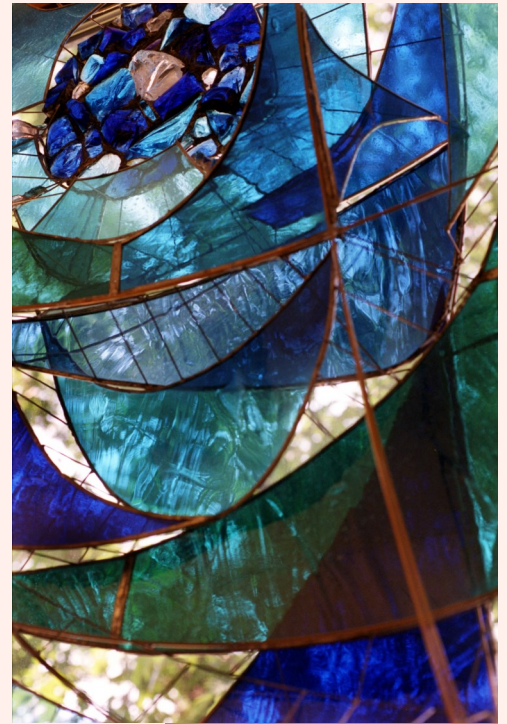


Photo: Stephanie Mitchell

THIS, I THINK, IS MINISTRY

DUDLEY C. ROSE

ASSOCIATE DEAN FOR MINISTRY STUDIES



Dudley Rose preached this sermon at the weekly Wednesday Noon Service in Andover Chapel, which was hosted by the Office of Ministry Studies on October 19, 2016.

Reading: from “Contradictions” by Adrienne Rich

The problem, unstated till now, is how
to live in a damaged body
in a world where pain is meant to be gagged
uncured ungrieved over The problem is
to connect, without hysteria, the pain
of any one’s body with the pain of the body’s world
For it is the body’s world
they are trying to destroy for ever
The best world is the body’s world
filled with creatures filled with dread
misshapen so yet the best we have
our raft among the abstract worlds
and how I longed to live on this earth
walking her boundaries never counting the cost

Nancy Richardson was the first person to serve as Associate Dean of Ministry Studies when the position I now occupy was first elevated to that lofty title. Nancy is known for her work in education theory, and in the feminist and anti-racism movements. Nancy is a mentor and friend, and the shape of the HDS MDiv degree still bears some important marks of her person and commitments. Stephanie Paulsell and I, who have followed her, are in her debt. I bring up Nancy today, though, not so much to honor her, though I do, nor for Marc Antony’s alternative, to bury her, for she is after all very much alive. I bring her up because in a book she wrote with Lynn Rhodes called *Mending Severed Connection* she introduced me to a few lines from the poem by Adrienne Rich that Stephanie read so beautifully.

*The problem, unstated till now, is how
to live in a damaged body
in a world where pain is meant to be gagged
uncured ungrieved over The problem is
to connect, without hysteria, the pain
of any one’s body with the pain of the body’s world*

THIS, I THINK, IS MINISTRY

DUDLEY C. ROSE

ASSOCIATE DEAN FOR MINISTRY STUDIES

The problem is to connect the pain of any one's body with the pain of the body's world. On the surface it may seem an impossible task. When I was ordained into the United Church of Christ the prevailing perspective was that as a person of privilege in a church of privileged people looking at my pain or that of my congregants was self-serving at best and was certainly no window into the pain of people who actually suffer in this world, people who suffer in many cases because of the privilege of me and other people like me.

And, of course the criticism was just, both morally and epistemologically. As W. E. B. Du Bois coined it in *Darkwater: Voices from Within the Veil*, white privilege casts a veil over things through which white folks cannot see and onto which they project their version of reality. In *Souls of Black Folks* Du Bois describes the double consciousness with which black folks deal with their veiled realities. Black folks, says Du Bois, on the one hand, know themselves as whites see them, because they must to survive, and on the other hand, they know themselves as they know their real black selves to be. Said differently, privileged folks cannot easily see the reality of the pain of another's body nor of another body's world.

The diagnosis rings true.

On October 11, after the most recent presidential debate, David Brooks wrote a piece in the New York Times. It's worth the read. It is full of insight. I was struck especially by something Brooks said about Donald Trump, for whom he feels honestly sorry. He said:

Trump continues to display the symptoms of narcissistic alexithymia, the inability to understand or describe the emotions in the self. Unable to know themselves, sufferers are unable to understand, relate or attach to others.

To prove their own existence, they hunger for endless attention from outside. Lacking internal measures of their own worth, they rely on external but insecure criteria like wealth, beauty, fame and others' submission.



Photo: Kristie Welsh

Said another way, people with narcissistic alexithymia not only cannot see others behind the veil, even they themselves are hidden to themselves. This may be the devastating truth about privilege. And hardly any of us in this room is without privilege.

This Catch-22 has made me wonder how wise and useful were the well-intentioned admonitions of my ordaining elders. Looking at and tending to one's self is simply enacting the privilege of self-absorption, they seemed to say. But, alas, what does it say to tell a young, perhaps equally well-intentioned beginning minister, whose insight is already blocked by the veil of privilege, not to bother to look because it will only make things worse.

Adrienne Rich offers us a way through, though surely it is not a path without danger. She tells us to lift the veil

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and look into ourselves, especially into our pain. Dangerous it is because it's easy to stop there. Dangerous it is for the very reasons we have been warned—self-absorption is but a step away, or maybe no step at all. Maybe the step away from the chasm is to begin to realize that when we look, we find wounds that our privilege cannot cure, wounds that in fact our privilege makes worse, wounds that may not be nearly as devastating as others have experienced, but wounds just the same, wounds that tell us at some deep level that pain is a universal human experience. This is not pain to compare. This is pain that can make us keenly aware that I am connected to the person the person sitting next to me, or in the next neighborhood, or in the newsfeed from a war zone, because I must know that they, too, are bodies in pain living in the pain of the body's world.

This all sounds so grim, yet it is not.
The best world is the body's world
filled with creatures filled with dread
misshapen so yet the best we have
says Rich.

'The best we have' sounds as though it's not good enough, second rate. Don't you believe it. When the body's pain is connected to the pain of the body's world something miraculous happens. Severed connections mend. To be connected is to be understood, and to be known is what heals the wounds of the body and soul. In First Corinthians Paul talks of that day when we will finally understand just as we have been fully understood. That day could dawn here and now, as Paul would have said it, even as it is not yet, it could be already.

A good friend of mine, maybe the best parish minister I ever knew, once said he attributed his considerable success to a deep-felt recognition that everyone who was in his congregation—dock worker, professor, black, white, brown, whatever sexual orientation, young, old, in between—every single one of them was raw. He helped make a place place where the pain was not gagged, and from it there erupted day after day in explosions of joy. This, I think, is ministry—to connect the pain of any one's body with the pain of the body's world and as the sparks fly as the wires connect, to witness erupting fireworks of joy, not denial, not false cheer, not some drugged numbness. It is to witness that when connected the body and the body's world, that world filled as it is with creatures and with dread, the best we have, is the world in which we long to live, of which we love to walk the boundaries never counting the cost. This, I think, is ministry. Amen.

RELIGIONS AND THE PRACTICE OF PEACE: A STUDENT'S PERSPECTIVE

JENNA ALATRISTE
MDiv '18



Jenna Alatryste is serving as an intern chaplain at HDS in 2016-17 through a field education placement. A member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Jenna is pursuing a vocation to chaplaincy. She has been deeply involved in the [Religions and the Practice of Peace Initiative](#) at HDS since enrolling in September 2015.

The world needs leaders who know how to love without boundaries and to serve across borders. Although the Religions and the Practice of Peace (RPP) Initiative at HDS does not list teaching people to “love and serve without boundaries and borders” among its objectives, I have seen it do just that. In the RPP’s new course, “Transformative Leadership and Spiritual Development,” students from Harvard graduate schools come together to engage in interfaith dialogue on peace-building and leadership. They also receive mentorship from great leaders with decades of experience who generously take time to share their wisdom. There are many words I could use to describe these Monday-night gatherings in Andover Hall; but if I had to choose one word, I’d choose “love”—that vague, oft-used yet so misunderstood, flung-about four-letter word.

In the Fall Term of 2016-17, I am serving as one of the Transformative Leadership and Spiritual Development course’s student facilitators. During this semester of facilitating, I have repeatedly asked myself what is required of a leader in order for her to respond wisely to the urgent challenges of this century. As I think about various crises in my own community and across the planet, it is difficult to know where to focus my thoughts and energies.

When I look to the past, remembrance of historical acts of hatred and violence gives rise to anger. When I think about all the work that has been done to help individuals, communities, and nations live in harmony—billions of

dollars poured into peace programs, failures piling on top of each other throughout years of negotiations—I feel a sense of uselessness. And when I think about the future, I fear. These patterns of response can paralyze the human will, and human ability, to act. Despair does nothing for peace—except, perhaps, remind us of our human need for hope.

What then should a leader think about? As I have observed the leaders who serve as mentors in the RPP initiative, I have come to the conclusion that they do not dwell too long on the past nor too long on thoughts of the future. Rather, they dwell in the present, and they do it in love. They think and breathe and feel and love *here* and *now*. And when they catch themselves *not* doing those things, they repent and refocus and go back to work. They tenaciously seek to love and serve in places where others will not go. And when they fail to love in those hard places, they do not quit. They try again and they hope to do it better. They glance back to the past just long enough to look to examples of fearless, love-filled leaders who have gone before them. They dream into the future just long enough to catch a vision of what might be. But they focus—they zoom in here and now—on the Divine. These leaders trust that the Divine will lead them to do what needs to be done—even when they don’t really know what that is.

The act of showing up in a space of not knowing is an act of generosity. And choosing to love in that space may be the best gift a leader can give.



Photo: Kristie Welsh

PROPHETIC GRIEF

SANA SAEED
MDiv '18



Sana Saeed is serving as an intern chaplain at HDS in 2016-17 in a field education placement. A Muslim and a Unitarian Universalist, Sana is one of many HDS students who claim multiple religious belonging in their preparations for ministry, public service, and scholarship. Prior to coming to HDS, Sana earned a Master's degree in conflict negotiation and peace studies while building an extensive portfolio in international peacebuilding in situations of ethno-religious tension as well as in youth ministry. An active member of HDS's Racial Justice and Healing Initiative, she is also serving as the Social Justice Chair of the HDS student government in 2016-17.

“Prophetic grief is more than crying and sighing and weeping and mourning.... Prophetic grief is planting gardens of healing in the midst of raindrops of blood. Prophetic grief is declaring to the world that love is stronger than hate, that God's grace is greater than our grief, that God's power is greater than our pain.” - Reverend Otis Moss, Jr.

Reverend Otis Moss, Jr's framing of what prophetic grief looks and feels like inspired me to start thinking about how can I hold a space for this type of a grief at Harvard Divinity School. The concept of prophetic grief is rooted in transformation. It requires us to hold onto the grief we carry weekly as we see black lives being lost and vulnerable communities being targeted. As our world becomes ever more tumultuous, we face a barrage of news stories and events that weigh us down, challenging our hope and resilience. We can either hate those we see as oppressors and become numb with pain or we can transform our struggle into a prophetic grief—a type of grief that disrupts our reality, calls us to question our conscience and asks us to use a greater, more holy and more radical love, a love that will move us to take actions big or small to break down the system, one revolutionary step at a time. As people of spirit who share this community, we can stand in witness together to commit to the transformational potential of prophetic grief and move towards prophetic hope.



Feeling this call, the Office of the Chaplain and Religious and Spiritual Life has begun holding a brief weekly vigil every Thursday at noon. In this vigil we invite everyone at HDS to join us as we stand together in witness to all that we carry. As we hold up each other up in this brief weekly vigil, we share steaming cups of comforting chai as well as blankets to keep us warm and on which we proclaim in writing on our backs what and whom we carry that day. This vigil helps us to reimagine what we can do with our spaces at HDS, brings us together for witness, and holds us in the embrace of a loving community. If you are interested in learning more or helping in some way, please contact Sana Saeed, sana_saeed@blue.harvard.edu.

WITH FAITH AND HOPE: SOMOS GENTE QUE LUCHA ("WE ARE PEOPLE WHO STRUGGLE")

ALFREDO GARCIA
MTS '17



Alfredo Garcia, an undocumented student, delivered this address at the HDS event "Unveiling the Stories of Dreamers at HDS" on Tuesday October 18, 2016. The event was hosted by the HDS Office of Student Life in the days prior to the U.S. Presidential election to address the anti-immigrant rhetoric and threats

that characterized the campaign.

I want to start by proposing the following question: Is it possible to endure life as an undocumented immigrant in the U.S., without faith or hope, under a permanent condition of uncertainty? Please keep this question in mind as I share my story.

I'm from a small town in rural Mexico. When I was a little kid, I used to sleep outside with my grandparents. We would look at the stars, and my grandmother would sing to me songs about Jesus. She introduced me to the Christian faith. I loved her and she loved me. She fed me when I was hungry, she would make me a *tortilla* every time I asked her. I was only nine when she passed away, I was devastated, I could not imagine living without her. But, even that she was no longer with me, I kept her gift, her sacred gift: The Christian faith she taught me. The faith that she gave me helped me endure the loss, it gave me the strength and hope that I would need to overcome life challenges. Such as being an undocumented immigrant in the United States.

Now, I can tell you all about all the challenges I faced as an undocumented student in high school and college, how hard it was to learn English, or being anxious for having to drive a car without a license. I can share how difficult it was to apply to college without papers, and to be stressed about my financial situation every year I was in college. However, instead, I'll talk about a decisive moment that encapsulates that which I believe to be the absurdity, yes the absurdity, of being an undocumented

student: Namely, pursuing higher education without being able to use your degree after graduation, due to the lack of a social security number.

My senior year in college, I found myself in a desperate situation. I was about to graduate with two degrees, but I did not have a social, which meant that I could not use my degrees. I was not eligible for the 2012 *deferred action* (D.A.C.A.), an executive order that gives undocumented students a working permit. I had missed the random deadline for two months. I was eligible for its expansion, which President Obama announced in 2014, but a federal court in Texas challenged it as unconstitutional, so it never became available. I did not know what it was going to happen to me. I was going to graduate, and I needed a social security number in order to be able to work. That meant that either I was going to work full time as a house painter, or I had to get accepted in a graduate program that would give me enough financial aid to continue with my education.

One evening, I went to Saint Mary's, my local Catholic church. I was the only one there. I went to the front row and kneel down, looking at the figured of the crucified Christ I began to share my burden. Due to my legal status continuing with graduate school seemed and felt impossible to me. Then, looking at the tabernacle, the place where the host is kept, I started to pray. I told God that I wanted to come to Harvard, but, I also asked Him to take me where He wanted me to be. The most rational conclusion for me was to give up on graduate school, *pero el corazón no entiende de razones* (but the heart doesn't care about reasons). I refused to give up. I chose to have faith, and to believe that somehow I would continue pursuing graduate education, even if it seemed impossible.

However, I found strength not only on faith, but also on my family. My dad has been working as a house painter for over twenty years and yet, he has endured everything life throws at him. He has endured low wages, and living alone here in U.S. without seeing my mother, my siblings

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and I for a long time. He has endured feeling sick and no having access to health care. He has endured being humiliated because he does not speak English. How can I give up if my dad hasn't given up on me? How can I give up if my dad hasn't given up on our family?

Everything that I have accomplished has been possible because of my parents. When I got an email from Harvard Divinity School, on March 16 2015, congratulating me because I had been accepted, and I realized that I was getting a full ride and a fellowship, I began to deeply hope that it was going to be possible for me to continue with my education. I would continue to work as a house painter every summer, but I was coming to Harvard. Most importantly, I knew I was coming here not only by myself. I was bringing my family with me. I was bringing their struggles and sacrifices, I was bringing everything they had suffered and endured, but also everything they had dreamed and hoped for.

My faith, and a family that gives me hope, is what keeps me going. My first semester at Harvard was full of excitement, but also full of challenges. The greatest challenge was a tragic event that happened to my family. Last November, my mother called me in the morning from Austin Texas, she sounded anxious and fearful, she was crying as she said to me: *mijo, mijo, se murió Toño, se murió Toño, Toño está muerto!* (Mijo, mijo, Toño has died, Toño has died, Toño is dead!) I could not believe what mother was saying. My brother-in-law had passed away in a car accident in Mexico, leaving my sister pregnant and with two children.

My mother told me that my sister's pain was hers, and she immediately decided to go back to Mexico to be with my sister, fully knowing that she was not going to be able to come back to Texas, her tourist visa had expired. She left last year with the conviction that one day, God would allow her to reunite with my father, my younger brother and I, who were staying in the U.S. to work and to study. My dad had crossed the border illegally in 1992 for the first time, when I was still in my mother's womb.

Once again, my parents were away from each other, like they had been for most of their lives after their marriage.

When I went back home after the first semester, I found my dad devastated, he knew he had to endure once again being apart from my mother, now we were also responsible for my sister and my nephews. It pained me to see my dad that way, it was like if he had lost his desire to live, my sister's loss and the absence of my mother deeply affected him, but there was not option other than keep going. After a lot of pain and struggle, after a lot of hope, but above all, after a lot of prayers, my mother was able to renew her tourist visa, and my parents were able to reunite this past summer. My brother and I were able to be with my mother once again.

However, although this was a beautiful moment of joy, it is not a happy ending. My father, my brother and I are still undocumented, my mother went back to Mexico to help my sister who is still healing from the loss of her husband, and my parents continue to be together from time to time. This is the situation of many undocumented families in this country, who have been separated or are vulnerable of being so, who are afraid to lose a loved one in their country of origin because they cannot leave the U.S. and come back. All of us have experienced loss, many of us have witnessed the sacrifices of our parents, but in addition to all this - undocumented immigrants find themselves in a permanent condition of uncertainty. We are people who struggle and suffer, people who commit sins, people who dream and work, but above everything else, people who can endure any adversity we may confront, as long as we have faith and we have hope.

You see, my dad is not a criminal, he is a hero, *un gigante en cuyos hombros estoy parado* (he is a giant and I'm standing in his shoulders). A giant who every days suffers because he is away from my mother, and whose suffering you can help alleviate, if you go to vote this

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coming election for a candidate that supports immigration reform, and does not have the silly idea of building a wall. I like to end with the following quote from my father.

“¿Si no nos ayudamos entre nosotros, entonces quién nos va a ayudar?”

“If we do not help each other, then who is going to help us?”



Photo: Kristie Welsh

UNVEILING THE STORIES OF DREAMERS AT HDS

DIANA ORTIZ GIRON
MDiv '17



Diana Ortiz Giron is an undocumented Christian student who studies Religion, Ethics, and Politics with a personal focus on immigration. She was born into a single-mother household in Tijuana, Mexico and was raised in the Los Angeles area along with her two older siblings. She delivered this address at the HDS

event “Unveiling the Stories of Dreamers at HDS” on Tuesday October 18, 2016. The event was hosted by the HDS Office of Student Life in the days prior to the U.S. Presidential election to address the anti-immigrant rhetoric and threats that characterized the campaign

I want to start off with an exercise. Take a few seconds to think about what you are most passionate about in life. This could be your family, a cultural value, a teaching from your religious tradition, a social justice cause, or a vocational calling. Hold onto this thought and keep this in mind as Alfredo Garcia and I share our stories.

We will begin with a conversation about language and framing as it pertains to the topic of immigration.

There are on average 11.4 million undocumented immigrants in the United States. These 11.4 million human beings have 11.4 million different stories about the way that they live undocumented. We come from all over the world, not just Mexico, speak all kinds of languages and believe in all sorts of religious traditions. The diversity in the undocumented immigrant community is so wide that there is no way you can tell if someone is undocumented simply by looking at them. Because being undocumented is an invisible identity that you would not know about unless someone trusted you enough to tell you.

Notice that I am not using the word “illegal” to talk

about immigration. While we hear it in the media and read it in our policies, the term “illegal” is a discriminatory label that is intentionally used to describe brown bodies, because, yes, immigration is a racial issue. We must recognize that “illegal” is not a neutral term, in fact it is used to criminalize the immigrant by creating an us-versus-them mentality and a good-versus-bad immigrant dichotomy. This allows “the we,” Americans, to dehumanize the other enough to generate a culture of violence against “the them,” undocumented immigrants. This culture of violence allows for the justification of institutional violence against “the them,” as in the case with private detention centers that mistreat and violate immigrants’ rights. Sometimes this culture of violence can even inflict direct violence against “the them,” as in the case with militia men who take matters into their own hands and kill immigrants at the US-MX border. I advise us all to challenge the use of derogatory language and to ask ourselves this question: If we all have broken some kind of law, whether it be jay-walking or underage drinking, why is it that immigrants are the only ones called “illegal” for breaking not a criminal law, but a civil law?

In terms of the construction of borders, why is it that a wall must be built to keep Mexicans away and not Canadians? Is it because Canadian undocumented immigrants are not considered a problem since they are mostly white or Asian and can speak English? Are Mexican undocumented immigrants not wanted by people like Trump because they are often uneducated, poor, brown-skinned, and Spanish-speakers? Though the majority of immigrants from Latin America are Christian, these other social factors perhaps make these immigrants “unfit” for American culture. This is just one example of the overlapping intersections between immigration and other social justice issues like race, class, and education.

Now I want to tell you why we have chosen to share our stories instead of giving you facts. Sometimes at immigration events, we spend a lot of time demystifying

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lies about undocumented immigrants. We do this to counter claims like “they take our jobs,” “they don’t pay taxes,” and “they don’t want to learn English.” Notice the “they” language. Other times we talk about the statistics about immigration and the economic benefits of legalizing undocumented immigrants.

Today, we will not approach the topic of immigration through a legal, political, or economic lens. Since we are at the Divinity School, we will approach the issue of immigration from a human and ethical perspective. By *human* I mean a living person with a story. I often say that when it comes to immigration we cannot afford to stay in the abstract realm because immigration is not only a theoretical concept, it is also, and most importantly, a personal issue that greatly affects the lives of real human beings, like both of us. Maybe sometimes it’s easier to talk about immigrants in terms of numbers because some of us are more comfortable reasoning the facts rather than facing someone going through the experience.

The last thing we hope to accomplish is to challenge the tendency to individualize narratives when we are in fact a part of extended communities, especially our families. So today we will not only talk about our struggles and breakthroughs as undocumented students, better known as “Dreamers,” but we will also talk about the intrinsic connections between our narratives and that of our families’ stories.

My Story

My story is not my own. It is my family’s story. In this segment I’m going to share three short stories, and specially focus on my mother and me. I have entitled the first one “A Bittersweet Ride.”

One morning during my junior year in high school, my mom offered to give me a ride to school. This was a special occasion because I usually rode my bike to school, but my mom had the day off so “yay” for me. Her offer

sounded even sweeter because I knew that my mom suffered from insomnia and that by taking me to school, she was sacrificing precious time to rest. The whole way to school I was thankful to not have to bike up the hill and had high prospects of actually being on time. As she was dropping me off, I leaned in to give my mom my usual kiss on the cheek and to receive her blessing. We were interrupted by a knock on her window and were immediately scared of what was to come. The police officer leaned in and told my mom that she had committed an illegal u-turn. My mom quickly looked to me for both clarity and boldness. We both knew that I would be the designated speaker for this situation, since she—despite numerous English classes—still felt intimidated by the language. Upon stating the traffic violation, the officer motioned to ask for my mom’s license and registration. We both knew she didn’t have one. She used to have one, but it had expired and they stopped letting undocumented immigrants renew it. My mom and I both understood the seriousness of this matter. In the midst of the officer’s request, she told me, “Dile que no me lo quite, que lo necesito!” “Tell him to not take it away, that I need it!” I was used to translating for her but not under such pressure. How was I supposed to translate my mother’s tears and worries as she instructed me to convince him to not take away our family’s car, our only mode of transportation. Despite my fear of law enforcement, I begged him for mercy, I implored for a second chance, “Officer please, my mother didn’t know that she couldn’t make a u-turn.” But the officer still took my mom’s car away and left her with two tickets in hand, one for the u-turn and one for driving without a license. I felt ashamed.

I felt angry. I felt guilty. My mom did not deserve to go through this, she just wanted to give her daughter a ride to school. This unexpected event left us both heart broken, discouraged, and even more afraid of the police. Now how was I supposed to go to school, how could I find meaning in my class assignments when I was overcome with grief and uncertainty about what this event meant for my family’s financial stability. Nevertheless, I was

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trained to put up a front and to work hard and persevere, just like my mother had taught me. Meanwhile my mom had to walk back home and think about how she was going to get the hundreds of dollars to pay the tickets and get her car out of the impound lot. She didn't blame me, and she also did not let this event stop her from ever driving again.



At one point or another we all have endured the dreadful consequences of unexpected events. Maybe you have not lost a car but have lost other things that were of great value to your family. Maybe you have felt the frustration that I felt to not be able to do anything to change the outcome. Or perhaps, you have felt the anger of being caught up in a broken system and the fear and insecurity when you are around law

enforcement. Like many undocumented immigrants who take the risk to drive without a license, my mother did not have any other choice. Other immigrants may choose to ride a bike, but my mother did not know how to ride a bike and walking to work was just too tiresome. She was a safe driver, never got speeding tickets, and never had been in an accident. She simply did not qualify for a driver's license.

To address this issue, my home state of California passed the Safe and Responsible Driver's Act under AB 60, which since 2015 allows undocumented immigrants in CA to

apply for a driver's license. I have a cherished picture of my mom and me with her first brand new car in 2015. She had always bought used cars just in case the police would take them away during unexpected pullovers or traffic checkpoints. But as soon as this policy kicked in, my mom quickly passed the test and got her license. This gave her the freedom to legally drive and thus motivated her to buy *un caro del año*, a brand new car. Knowing that she now has her license helps me to not worry from all the way across the continent here in Boston about the possibility of my mom ever being stopped by the police and possibly being deported, like others have. When I got my license three years ago thanks to DACA, it opened up many new opportunities. I could finally rent a Zipcar, pass through airport security without fear, and not have to awkwardly give my consulate ID when I made debit card transactions. Little things that people don't usually think about are often the things that constantly remind undocumented immigrants of what we can and cannot do. Honestly, when I drive a car, I still get nervous when a police car is behind me or even near me. My heart starts beating fast, but I have to constantly tell myself, "Don't worry Diana, stop worrying, remember that you have a license, you are not doing anything wrong. Just be cool." I think most of my driving trauma goes back to when I witnessed my mom's car being taken away. And though we have a policy in California to address this issue, such policies are yet to pass in states like Massachusetts.

My second story is entitled "Knowing your Rights."

"We're here to WORK!" were the chants of sixteen Pomona College dining hall workers that were fired on December 2, 2012. I was in the fall of my sophomore year and found myself demonstrating inside my school's dining hall along with 200 other faculty, staff, and students confronting management and campus security in solidarity with undocumented ex-employees who showed up to work despite being fired for not being able to show proof of proper documentation. These dining hall workers

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were in the middle of a labor struggle similar to the recent HUDS strike. We all knew that the firing of these workers was not a coincidence.

That morning I mourned, prayed, and felt the heaviness of the occasion. The tears that uncontrollably rolled down my cheeks reflected all the times I tried to hold my tears in class. Here I was, an undocumented student witnessing the unjust firing of undocumented workers. These workers were more than the work they produced; they were essential members of my campus community. They were my friends and some of them were my greatest supporters during the hardest moments of my first year in college. How could I feel safe in a campus that treated members of my community like this? Why were undocumented people so dispensable and why did it feel like we didn't have rights? We marched out of the dining hall and into the streets, where allies were ready to be arrested on behalf of these sixteen workers. I protested, I chanted, I marched alongside of these workers. I wanted to do so much more than just march, but unlike other activists I could not afford to get arrested because unlike them, I was also undocumented.

And despite the fact that I could not participate in the civil disobedience that followed, I approached a close Christian friend, who was among the soon-to-be-arrested group and told her, "Hermana, I am so proud of you. You know I would do it if I could." She tightly squeezed my hand and fiercely responded, "I'm doing this for you too, Diana!" I felt like crying and smiling at the same time, and so I kept marching and witnessed the brave actions of these allies. I knew my friend was doing it out of a deeply held religious conviction to put her faith into actions as she not only prayed for justice but also defended the rights of the oppressed.

I first heard about the workers' struggle for a union during my first semester in college. I was shocked to hear the workers' stories of having to work under pressure, suffering various work injuries, and being intimidated by

management. Honestly, it wasn't hard to convince me to support their cause because their stories were all too similar to my mother's experiences at work. She too suffered a work injury that severely injured her pelvis. She slipped on water and her employer did not want to take responsibility for the injury. She didn't have insurance, and she needed immediate medical attention. She was undocumented but she still had rights as a worker. She decided to apply for workers' compensation and to get legal help to sue her employer. My mother won the case and in turn was given the necessary amount of physical therapy. Unfortunately, many undocumented workers think they have no rights. Many don't speak fluent English and have limited access to legal resources. This creates the conditions for exploitation, violation of worker's rights, unattended injuries, and of course health and financial consequences for undocumented workers.

Don't we all want our parents to come back from work in a good mood? To know that our parents are treated with dignity and respect? To not have to see our parent work two to three jobs to make ends meet? Unfortunately, immigrants know far too well the meaning of labor injustice. We don't have to look very far from here, as HUDS workers are in the middle of a struggle for just wages and affordable health care. Many, but not all, are coming from immigrant backgrounds and would be encouraged by having more student support. I have another cherished photo, a picture of me marching in solidarity with the workers at my college. I marched that day and many other days because while I could not defend my mom in court or heal her injuries, I could at least be a part of someone else's mom not losing her job. I marched because I believed in the infinite value of these workers who were made in the image of God. I marched because these workers sometimes cared more about students' well-being than some pre-occupied professors. These workers were there day and night and still greeted students with a warm smile and a hug despite having a back pain. I knew they loved me as a student and so I had to correspond with acts of love by

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marching. Those moments of activism were sacred moments of personal healing and reflection. Demonstrations like these were the inspiration to many lifted prayers. I knew far too well from my mother's work ethic that they worked above and beyond what was expected to get the job done well; so I prayed for God to give them strength. I knew how much risk they were taking to publicly protest, so I prayed for God to give them courage and favor.

These workers and, of course my mother, have taught me the true meaning of work. When I complain about a headache or a back pain from writing my essays, all I have to do is remember my mother's tenacity to go to work despite not sleeping much and not feeling well. Somehow I knew that if my mother could get up to clean houses, wash dishes, and cook meals at age 40, then I should be able to muster the energy to write fifteen pages at age 20. My mother is still the hardest worker I know; and because of her, no one will ever be able to make me say that manual labor is a low-skill job because I bet you some of you don't have the skills to do what some undocumented workers do for a living.

My third and final story is entitled "Love and Respect."

As you can tell, I love my mom and being far away from her, is a great sacrifice for both of us. I'm here because of her sacrifices, and I can't wait to go back to home to California to celebrate with her "our" accomplishments, because as a single-mother she deserves all the credit. These days, there is a lot to be thankful for. But there was a time, when I did not want to go home, not because of my mother but because of my step-father. I remember a conversation that I had with one of the dining hall workers. The academic year was about to end and Maria, a dining hall worker, asked me if I was excited to go home. I honestly said, "Not really. I miss my mom but I don't miss my step-dad." She said, "Ay mija, if I could, I would take you home with me, but I've got three grandchildren to take-care of." We both, laughed but

that day the thought about my inevitable reality haunted me. Soon, I would have to once again face my step-dad's alcoholism, my family's financial bankruptcy, and my mother's broken marriage. That day I prayed for God to sustain me throughout my summer at home. Summer hadn't even started and I already couldn't wait for it to end. My college dorm was my refuge. I didn't have to hear my mom cry over a man who was a stranger to me. I didn't have to see her stress about money, I didn't have to see her serve him food, and I didn't have to wash his dishes.

My mom fought for her marriage. She gave as much sacrificial love as any Christian woman could give until she no longer could condone his sinful behavior. He started off emotionally absent then became psychologically abusive. Then he drained our family's income on his addiction and sometimes would not come home. This would drive my mom crazy. My brother and I could not intervene out of respect for our mother; however, when we became adults, we extended our support and told her that if she was ready we would stand by her. In their ninth year of marriage, he became physically abusive and this was what finally pushed my mom to leave. Sadly, I wasn't there for her when she left my step-dad two years ago, I was here in Boston. Knowing that she was suffering while I was in school made me question my decision to go far away from her. Fortunately, she had my older brother to lean on and of course she had God. My mom is a woman of faith who understands that God is her healer, her comforter, and her protector.

The story doesn't end there. Though my family has suffered from this devastating situation, we have also rejoiced. Soon after she left my step-dad, I was glad to hear that my mother sought help from an immigration non-profit in Los Angeles called CARECEN. I was even more enthusiastic when she decided to take action and to apply for VAWA (the Violence Against Women Act), which provides protection and a pathway for citizenship

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to battered noncitizens who are spouses or children to US -citizens or permanent citizens. The process was quick. The hardest part was enduring the interview because it caused her great distress to talk about her abuser. Just last month, my mom received her green card and is now an official permanent resident! It came at a great cost, but after all she had endured, she was finally able to go back to Mexico after 15 years of no return.

We all know that it's hard for any battered person to seek help, let alone undocumented women who not only fear their abuser but who also fear their protector, the police. While my mom was brave enough to leave and to seek help, it took her a long time to make this decision because for many years she didn't know if she would be able to sustain herself as an aging undocumented worker. When we were young, she was single and independent, but as she got older she was afraid that she would find herself unemployed and on the edge of homelessness. So she endured the abuse out of what she perceived to be necessity. I don't blame my mom for staying. I know about the complexities involved with one's abuser also being one's romantic partner. Other undocumented women stay because their abuser is also the father of their children, and if he is undocumented, they have to carefully consider whether or not they will file a claim against their abuser and deport the father of their children. These issues are messy and complicated.

We all want the freedom of mind that comes with being in a home that is full of peace and love. We all want our parents to be in safe and healthy romantic relationships. No one wants to be limited by their immigration status when they are in the middle of a life or death situation. No one wants to be afraid to call the cops for help when they need it. No one wants to fear deportation when they were seeking protection. Unfortunately, for a large part of my life, I did not want to be home and I worried about my mother's health and safety.

In addition, I came to understand the role that gender

plays in an immigrant's life when I learned about the various dangers that migrant women experience on their way to this country. Luckily my mom came with a visa, but other women--especially those coming from Central America--do not have this privilege because many of them don't qualify for a tourist visa. Instead they have to endure the physically dangerous and arduous road northward by migrating while undocumented. Unlike their male counterparts, these undocumented women are sometimes fleeing domestic abuse in their country of origin only to risk being sexually abused by a gangster in Mexico or sometimes even forced to become sex workers.

This is not hidden knowledge. Many Central American women take birth control in anticipation of their migration just in case they are abused. Many of them cut their hair and wear masculine clothes in hopes that they will pass as a male. Too often, when these women come to the US they don't know about the many resources available to victims of domestic and sexual abuse. These women, like my mother, are some of the strongest women you could ever meet. They have endured great suffering and only by the grace of God are they still smiling and living their life. These women are the mamas, the grandmas, the sisters, the aunties that sustain entire communities. They are valuable and deserving of love and respect, despite their immigrant status.

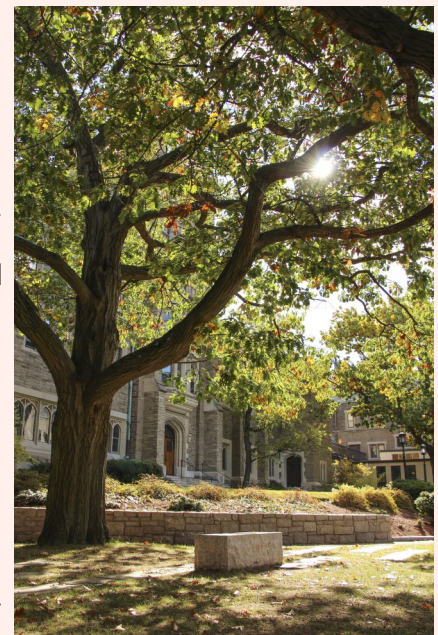


Photo: Kristie Welsh

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