

# The Spirit of Social Hope

Spring Institute for Lived  
Theology

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[a collection of essays]

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## INTRODUCTION

On behalf of the Project on Lived Theology at the University of Virginia, I welcome you to the first annual Spring Institute. I trust that our days together this week will not only be stimulating and instructive but also refreshing. Thank you very much for your willingness to take part in our inaugural gathering.

Over the past five years, as it has been housed in the Department of Religious Studies at this university, the Project on Lived Theology has been about the business of encouraging theologians and scholars of religion to embrace theological life as a form of public responsibility. At the same time, we have sought to include practitioners and activists in our research programs and events, not just as guests of the academic guild but as a vital part of theological conversation and formation, as performers of faith and sources of theological insight, and as friends. The participation of practitioners and community builders also shifts the focus of discussion from internecine theological and doctrinal debates (though these will certainly flare on occasion, as they should) to the concrete ways in which social hope and healing take shape in particular communities. Rarely do academics and activists, theologians and pastors, scholars of religion and community builders, sit down together and treat each other as equals, but we do so here. We have discerned a hunger among many scholars and practitioners for the opportunity to reconnect the enterprise of theology with the lived experience of particular communities; and it has been our mission to provide a public space in which that task can be pursued through intense and diverse collaboration. Welcome to this venture.

We take as our theme this year “The Spirit of Social Hope” and consider the Holy Spirit’s liberating and energizing presence in human experience and in creation. One of the most exciting aspects of Jürgen Moltmann’s work is the way it illuminates a path beyond the impasse of liberal and confessional theology, a path that begins with the reconnection of theology and lived experience. “The possibility of perceiving God in all things, and all things in God, is grounded theologically on an understanding of the Spirit of God as the power of creation and the wellspring of life.” This is a most generous orthodoxy, encouraging a greater attunement to the Spirit’s breadth and depth in experience and creation, an embodied spirituality grounded in the Triune God.

The *Source of Life*, which we are reading for the Institute, and the larger volume from which it is based, *The Spirit of Life*, are probing, carefully-developed theological studies, which, at the same time, have the remarkable effect of opening the reader to the world. Indeed it is that very gift of opening, and of being open, that identifies the shape of the Spirit’s liberating and energizing presence in experience and creation. In exquisite detail and in sometimes ecstatic prose, Professor Moltmann shows us how the Spirit means freedom, healing, wholeness, generosity, hope. “If we are seized by the Spirit of the resurrection,” he writes, “an undreamed-of love for life awakens in us.”

I look forward to our conversations and exchanges this week, as we explore together how the Spirit of the resurrection and an undreamed-of love of life energize and sustain social hope and redemptive activity in the world.

**Charles Marsh, Director, Project on Lived Theology**

**Sarah Azaransky**  
**Graduate Student in Religious Studies**  
**University of Virginia**

The doctrine of the Third Person of the Trinity understands God/Spirit to be everywhere present, revealing God in all that is, and healing our material world. Women activists and feminist and womanist theologians perform work of the Spirit, healing and transforming communities.

Before graduate school, I conducted a year of fieldwork about feminist peace activism in Northern Ireland, Israel and the West Bank, and Sri Lanka. I recognized women peace activists as theologians, making sense of how their religious commitments should play a constructive role in democratic life. These women activists were rarely taken seriously as politicians or theologians, yet they were both – transforming notions of what is political and of who gets to speak theologically.

In graduate work at the University of Virginia, I am focusing my dissertation on Pauli Murray. Murray was involved in the 20<sup>th</sup> century's significant movements for social change in civil rights, feminism, and the church. Throughout her life, Murray advocated for human rights and modeled the effectiveness of creative nonviolent resistance, but histories of the civil rights movement rarely mention her. Although she was an early advocate of a cooperative relationship between Black theology and feminist theology, she is rarely considered a womanist fore-mother. Like feminist peace activists I witnessed, Murray is often overlooked as a political theorist and as a theologian.

Theologians have often considered the Holy Spirit in feminine terms, exemplified as the life-bringing force in Genesis and in the conception and baptism of Jesus. Feminist theologians have resisted a facile connection between Spirit and the feminine, however, in order to move away from traditional confluences of the feminine with immanence or materiality. When I compare the Spirit's work with women's work whom I have witnessed and whom I study, I intend to underscore that these 'women's work' is the work of the Spirit because it is justice work. It is my hope that when we consider the Spirit as revelatory, these women's work will be revealed as historically, politically, and theologically significant.

**Larry Bouchard**  
**Religious Studies Department**  
**University of Virginia**

My work involves intersections between literature, theological ethics, and hermeneutics. My work on tragedy bears on how we think about – or resist thinking about – God, especially as creator. My more recent explorations of integrity and drama, with an emphasis on self-emptying into the forms of others (in their suffering as well as their joys), have implications for "imitating Christ." And as I think about a new long-term project, I notice that my teaching in narrative fiction and interpretation theory might be informed by thought about the Holy Spirit (and hopefully by the Holy Spirit!).

We usually think of "understanding" as a desideratum – everyone wants to understand and be understood, and one could approach any number of novels, story, and plays that explore that desire. But suppose the Holy Spirit speaks more to the absence of understanding, or even to misunderstanding? Might the Spirit blow between our fragments or "gaps," not closing them so much as sustaining them, holding them open (as threatening as that might seem to us)? Might the Spirit have more to do with connections that are misconnections, from the usual point of view? Might the Spirit light upon vectors of knowing or encountering that are "other than" understanding?

I hope and think I am rather open-minded about these questions, now, because frankly I have never studied the doctrine of the Spirit systematically. Although encountering the Spirit (in misunderstanding) would be welcomed this April, I'd also welcome any new, straightforward understandings other participants have to share.

Jacqueline Bussie  
Religious Studies Department  
Capital University

In Living Color: The Holy Spirit and Social Hope

We live in a divided world. As a professor of theology and Christian ethics, the divisions in my classroom are palpable and painful. Are you red or blue? Gay or straight? White or of color? Christian or non-Christian? Rich or poor? American or un-American? Liberal or conservative? Many young people these days form their identity not by asking 'Who am I?' but instead by asking, "Who am I not?" or worse, "Who do I hate?" African-American womanist Bell Hooks believes that 'either/or' dichotomous thought is the "central ideological component of all systems of domination in western society." Hooks has taught me something important: our dichotomies mask our hierarchies. We highlight differences usually to reaffirm that our side of the dichotomy is not merely separate, but superior. *Ad hominem* arguments pervade our campus, our churches, our politics. Sometimes I worry, is the social hope that I possess pollyannaish?

I must answer no, because sometimes I catch glimpses of the Holy Spirit breaking into my life and classroom. An example: after a Muslim guest speaker comes to our class, a student engages in deep self-criticism, and confesses that he has unfoundedly harbored hatred and anger toward all Muslims post-9/11. Another student writes an e-mail stating that as a result of our class dialogue, she now hears both sides so well that she questions her previous views on the 'ridiculousness' of pacifism. A friend remarks that her worldview was dramatically changed by Reinhold Niebuhr's observation that war is always fought between sinners and sinners, and never between sinners and the righteous. And my list could go on. The point is of course that the Holy Spirit disrupts hierarchical, dichotomous thought and its counterpart, hate. The Holy Spirit is alive whenever and wherever labels shatter and at long last we see one another not through a glass darkly, but face to face – as partner human beings. The Holy Spirit is there where self-critique happens, and we grasp the truth that we are guilty of using 'us vs. them' dualisms to oppress or silence those who are not-us. The Holy Spirit is at work whenever we genuinely hear others and can imaginatively walk a mile in their shoes. The Holy Spirit reveals to us the literal truth of Galatians 3:28: "There is no longer Jew or Greek; there is no longer slave or free; there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus." The Holy Spirit brings the liberating, living color of Christ to a world otherwise rendered black-and-white with human constructs.

In my own life, when I was preaching on Amos recently, the Holy Spirit revealed to me that I was guilty of creating a hypocritical dualism between justice and mercy. I realized that as Christians, we pray often for justice, which we equate with retribution or vengeance. But we pray for justice only for our enemies. Do we pray for justice for ourselves, pleading, "God, please judge me! Please, O God, deliver me unto justice, unto exactly what I deserve!?" When I asked this in my sermon, everyone laughed because no one prays like that. Instead we pray, "God, please forgive me." For ourselves, we always pray for mercy and forgiveness. For others, justice. Why this double standard? Whenever we begin to hold ourselves to the same standard that we hold others, I believe the Holy Spirit has arrived.

The Holy Spirit, as part of the Trinity, reveals to us that God's very self is relational; therefore, the Holy Spirit teaches us that to be human (*imago dei*) is to be in relationship – both with one another, and with God. Being in relationship with one another is difficult and scary, God knows, and our glaring failures to relate – war, racism, heterosexism, sexism, nationalism – are enough to drive us to despair with regards to social hope. But even in our hardest times of suffering, doubt, and despair, there is reason to hope, for we are never left comfortless. The Holy Spirit sustains our relationships with God and each other even in the moments when we are too weak to do it ourselves, by interceding for us "with sighs too deep for words" (Romans 8:28).

**William Danaher**  
**School of Theology**  
**University of the South (Sewanee)**

With many others, I have welcomed the renewed emphasis on the Holy Spirit in contemporary theology. I have appreciated contemporary retrievals of the role of the Spirit within the relations of the divine persons in the Trinity, and, more pertinently, the renewed appreciation for the way the Spirit inspires the prophetic witness and evangelistic mission of the church. The reception of the Spirit by the disciples signals the completion of Christ's incarnation as well as marks the beginning of the church. Thus, the Spirit mediates not only the presence of God, but also gives us the power to live according to the abundance and grace of the divine economy established by God's triune redemption of the world.

The Spirit communicates the generosity of God, and this generosity properly grounds appeals to social justice. As a seminary professor, I often encounter students who want to be prophets like Amos, calling for justice to roll down like waters (5:24). Missing from these clarion calls, however, is a full appreciation for the analogy – the image of water rolling down like a river suggests infinite abundance, a river running through parched land. Thus in Isaiah the messianic promise: “The Lord will guide you continually, and satisfy your needs in parched places, and make your bones strong; and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters never fail” (58:11). Water, of course, is not only a symbol of justice, but it is also a symbol of the Spirit – hence Jesus' description in John of “living water,” and the church's use of water to signify the spiritual “rebirth” of the Christian as an ecclesial, and not merely biological, person.

Having said this, however, my own theological reflection is expanding to focus on the way the Holy Spirit convicts us of sin and brokenness. The locus classicus of this doctrine is in John, where the Spirit is referred to as the “Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him” (14:17a). Within Puritanism, this doctrine was filed under soteriology, as the prevenient grace that prepares the soul for conversion. But a better place is within the more general category of reconciliation and atonement – that is to say, the personal and social work of the church requires the recognition that we have been blind to our own sinfulness in the course of our fledgling attempts at living the Christian life. As Bonhoeffer notes in *Life Together*, this blindness can take the form of our own projections of the ideal church and ideal theology, which causes us to miss the challenges of living authentically with others. The Spirit's conviction of sin is also at the root of acts of reconciliation, which require the acknowledgment of wrongdoing by the offender before the victim and community, so that the restoring of right relationship becomes possible. All of this stems from the Spirit's mission of testifying to Christ's work of redemption on the cross, from which comes wholeness and healing.

**Ashley Diaz**  
**Graduate Student in Religious Studies**  
**University of Virginia**

March 19, 1958

Yesterday, in Louisville, at the corner of 4<sup>th</sup> and Walnut...suddenly realized that I loved all the people and that none of them were or could be totally alien to me. As if waking from a dream – the dream of my separateness, of the “special” vocation to be different.. And what more glorious destiny is there for man, since the Word was made flesh and became, too, a member of the Human Race! I am still a member of the Human Race! Thank God! Thank God! I am only another member of the human race, like all the rest of them. I have the immense joy of being a man! <sup>1</sup>

A few weeks before I began working in the South Memphis housing projects, the first young woman with whom I had become friends met me on a curb outside of Streets, where we would normally meet for tutoring. Our friendship had grown far past our weekly sessions and in recent months, I found myself in Cleaborn Homes, where she lived, more often than at school. What brought us to sit on the curb that afternoon, though, rather than in the tutoring room, was Christina’s new pregnancy. She would be starting the ninth grade that year.

In the teary silence between us, I tried to arrest my emotions by scanning through a mix of theological reassurances interspersed with mental catalogs of neighborhood teen pregnancy programs. God was a good God and cared so deeply for Christina, despite the clamorous voices of the world that might speak otherwise. Surely, there were ways I could structure my days to take care of the baby after the birth, and Metropolitan Inner Faith Association (MIFA) would maybe provide assistance with diapers, bottles, clothes? He works all things for His glory and somehow, I would have to help her envision getting this child into HeadStart in a few years...

Christina’s hand on my back drew me from a well of contemplation (despite their reputation for self-absorption, I would find in the coming years that teenagers have an uncanny theological sensibility). With a spirit that rose from a place deep inside of her, she said words I will never forget. “I know I sinned, but God took my sin and is giving me this new life inside me. You and I are going to be okay.”

Thus, the words of this 14 year old woman invited me along with her to encounter redemptive newness and peace, and then the creative work that could emanate from this place. As she so gently corrected me, I was not so very different from her that she needed me to fix her life. Christ died for that. On that afternoon, a particular, new hope arose from beneath the ashes of my otherness; we required each other’s presence, and would continue to in the coming months and years. The hope that Merton rejoices in is the hope that would issue his reconnectedness to a world in need of social justice. It is hope that gives us permission to participate with fullness in the daily lives of others in unity with the Holy Spirit. I understand this to be social hope.

Finding this hope has required that I render my anxious guard on “my work,” as it uncovered me in an excluded community in South Memphis and as I have slowly unearthed new pieces of it in a graduate community. As a Christian, I pray that my anticipation of the life to come, my prayers of supplication, and my knowledge of myself before God are all chastened by a Jesus of the flesh. I believe that social hope, real hope, is located in continued renewal of incarnational joy – to that which was God’s joy – of being “like all the rest of them.” As Christ reconciled us to God, we were redeemed by His receiving the life and voice of the other, enacted in completion so that we, strangers to God, might truly become friends.

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<sup>1</sup> Hart, Patrick and Jonathan Montaldo, ed. *The Intimate Merton: His Life From His Journals*. Harper Collins: San Fransisco, 1999.

**Marilyn Dimock  
Southeast White House  
Washington, DC**

Three passages from the Gospel of John underlie my understanding of the Holy Spirit's involvement in the privilege that I have of spending time both relationally with the disenfranchised and helping the natural leadership of a community think about the policies that take the disenfranchised into consideration: John 4: 24, "God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth;" John 8:31-32, "If you abide in My word, then you are truly disciples of mine and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free;" and John 16:13, "But when He, the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come." My prayer – as I choose to walk among the disenfranchised helping to meet material needs and as I have the privilege of relating to those "in power" – is that it be through the Holy Spirit that actions take place and words are given.

Mother Teresa has been a contemporary model of this. You see the evidence of the Holy Spirit in the lives of the sisters in touching both the heart of the dying and abandoned and influencing the President of the United States. They make this daily prayer, by Cardinal Newman:

"Help me speak your fragrance wherever I go.  
Flood my soul with your Spirit and life.  
Penetrate and possess my whole being so utterly that my life may only  
be a radiance of yours.  
Shine through me and be so in me that every soul I come in contact  
with may feel your presence in my soul.  
Let them look up, and see no longer me, but only Jesus!  
Stay with me and then I will begin to shine as you shine,  
so to shine as to be a light to others.  
The light, O Jesus, will be all from you; none of it will be mine.  
It will be you, shining on others through me.  
Let me thus praise you in the way that you love best, by shining on  
those around me.  
Let me preach you without preaching, not by words but by example,  
by the catching force, the sympathetic influence of what I do,  
the evident fullness of the love my heart bears for you."

How else can total justice and freedom take place? This week I had the privilege of personally hearing the stories of the genocide taking place around her from the wife of the former Ambassador of Burundi to the UN, Belgium, France, etc. In 1997 the Holy Spirit led her and a friend to begin practical "reconciliation retreats." As a group of twelve or so from opposing tribes are invited to spend three days together, the ultimate truth of the need for repentance and then forgiveness is revealed. True justice and freedom spring forth as repentance and forgiveness is embraced in the hearts of the participants.

Contemporary author, Donald Miller, in "Blue Like Jazz" says, "...jazz music was invented by the first generation out of slavery. I thought that was beautiful because, while it is music, it is very hard to put on paper; it is so much more than a language of the soul. It is as if the soul is saying something, something about freedom. I think Christian spirituality is like jazz music. I think loving Jesus is something you feel. I think it is something very difficult to get on paper. But it is no less real, no less meaningful, no less beautiful. The first generation out of slavery invented jazz music. It is a music birthed out of freedom." This is as close as I can come to expressing the relationship of the Holy Spirit to the work of meeting the needs of those who are treated unjustly and lack freedom.

**Scott Dimock**  
**Southeast White House**  
**Washington, DC**

Acts 1:8 – “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you.”

For the believer, life is described in II Corinthians 5:7, “We walk by faith not by sight.” It is the unseen, not the seen, that really counts in God’s Kingdom. The Holy Spirit is the unseen power that has been the motivating and sustaining role for my life in Christ as I have worked in the city. I am now serving an area east of the Anacostia River in Washington, DC. It is called the “forgotten part of Washington, DC” because of the lack of services - one grocery store for 110,000 people, no sit down restaurants...

The Holy Spirit teaches (John 14:26, 16:13), leads (Romans 8:14), comforts and counsels (John 14:16, 26), and intercedes (Romans 8:26). These and other activities of the Holy Spirit are important. But for me the most exciting and greatest gift of the Holy Spirit is the empowering attribute. This is especially true as I have tried to serve in this forgotten part of DC.

This power is both an initiating power and sustaining power as I reach out to a community disadvantaged both spiritually and materially. The initiating power is that power to step out and begin new work that brings life to others. I am going against the grain of the sand (Job 33:4) to settle in an area of Washington, DC with great needs. With no programs, no plans and no money such a settling in the land seemed insane, except that we went to be the presence of Jesus, to be used by the Holy Spirit, and prayed to have the eyes to see (II Corinthians 4:18, Hebrews 12:20) the needs and to serve like Jesus served.

In a community that is 97% African-American with average household income of a little more than \$17,000 a year, the name of the game is “survival.” How can we not only help the people survive but empower individuals to carry on and give back to the community except through the power of the Holy Spirit?

The sustaining gift of the Holy Spirit is absolutely essential to a community that is very susceptible to the instant gratification mentality that includes throw-away relationships. There is little trust or understanding of the God that cares for believers for an eternal lifetime and stays in contact for the lifetime on earth. One such commitment to community is the “Friends” mentoring program that starts with the most at-risk children in the first grade (spending four hours of one-on-one time per week with each child) and continues until high school graduation. The mentor has to depend on the power of the Holy Spirit to carry her through this commitment (we do understand that the mentor may change, but the commitment is still there).

Much of the time spent working with the “working poor” is long, hard and not often evidenced. This is where the Holy Spirit motivates and rewards me with a glimpse of the Kingdom. For example, one day an attractive African-American woman came to the door of the SE White House on a mission. She was a street smart author who had served some time in jail. She was working for the Washington Post and came to the Southeast White House to write an article on the fact that many whites were at the Southeast White House in an area that is 97% African-American. As she charged through the front door she shook my hand and

barked at me, “Who owns this place?” followed by a tirade of questions only a reporter would ask. The associate who met her at the door with me quickly answered the first question – “Jesus does.” My thought was right answer, wrong timing. So for the next fifteen minutes I answered the questions as best I could while touring her through the almost hundred year old house. At this point she grabbed my elbow and looking at me, eye to eye, and said, “I owe you an apology. I am really sorry that I came in here with a real attitude.” I told her I noticed and that I forgave her at which point she said, “I have not felt peace in my twenty years in Washington as I am feeling right now.”

For all of us that work at the house, this was a confirmation that Jesus is present. When Christ was with the disciples in the upper room, He promised the Holy Spirit, “whom the Father will send in my name who will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you, ‘Peace I leave with you, my peace I give you’” (John 14:25-27). Where Jesus is present, where the Holy Spirit is working, there is peace.

**Liz Emrey**  
**New Beginnings Christian Church**  
**Charlottesville, Virginia**

### A Community of Beloved Strangers

As we began our first worship service, a bald-headed stranger wearing gold sunglasses and a silk shirt walked into the downtown day care center we were renting. Marvin had just been released from prison because he was dying from pancreatic cancer. He was looking for a church and a new life. Walking past several large church buildings, Marvin felt led by God's Spirit to come through our door, and we have never been the same since.

We thought that our worship service was very informal, but it was not informal enough for Marvin. In the midst of my pastoral prayer, Marvin raised his hand and asked, "Can I say a few words, Pastor?" Without waiting for a reply, Marvin walked up to the microphone and started sharing his testimony. He asked us to pray for him and to help him share God's love with his family and all of his neighbors who lived near 10<sup>th</sup> and Page, the most dangerous neighborhood in our city. Thus began our re-envisioning of who we are and what God desires our church to do.

We learned through Marvin and the many other addicts and alcoholics who have come to our church that we need to "Let go and let God." We need to constantly be asking God what we should be doing and how we should do it. Consequently, prayer has become the life breath of our community. We now have eight weekly or bi-weekly Prayer /Bible study groups that meet at different members' homes. These small groups become family to one another, seeing God's word through each other's eyes, "bearing one another's burdens" <sup>1</sup> and celebrating one another's blessings.

Led by the Spirit, we have refused to do the predictable and dared to do what seemed impossible. We decided not to invest in a building, but rather to use most of our money to help those who could not pay their rent, electricity, car payments, court fines, dental bills, glasses or medical needs. We would help not only our own members, but anyone in the community who needed our help. God would have to take care of us and provide an appropriate place to rent for Sunday worship.

When our church was first started, we interpreted Jurgen Moltmann's principle of diversity <sup>2</sup> to mean that we should be an inter-racial church that is open and affirming to homosexuals. But the Holy Spirit's vision was greater than ours. Through our doors have come people living with HIV/AIDS, victims of ritual sexual abuse, refugees and travelers, contemporary hobos who jumped trains as they ran from one bad situation to another.

These "strangers" have changed what it means for us to be a church. We now identify ourselves by who we are, not where we worship. Our worship service is not dominated by the pastor, but by the members and visitors, who lead the prayers and share their testimonies as they feel led by the Spirit. We do not help the needy; we are the needy, freely sharing the resources that have been given to us by God with one another.

We have torn up our "strategic plan," and are learning to live in hope, trusting that the One who has gathered us together will guide us. The Holy Spirit is transforming our church into God's church one step at a time.

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<sup>1</sup> Galatians 6:2

<sup>2</sup> Jurgen Moltmann, *The Source of Life*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), p. 60.

**Ambrose Faturoti**  
**Johnston High School; Town Teen Program**  
**Johnston, Rhode Island**

And I'm simply saying that more and more, we've got to begin to ask questions about the whole society. We are called upon to help the discouraged beggars in life's marketplace. But one day we must come to see that an edifice which produces beggars needs restructuring. It means that questions must be raised.

-- Martin Luther King, Jr., in *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?* (1967)

In my understanding, the Holy Spirit works mainly to convict me of the “feeling” of work for the Kingdom. This is not to say that this work is homogenous in form or solely emotional. Rather, I believe the Holy Spirit has used individuals and experiences in my life to affix the goal before me of Shalom to which I believe I am always striving and in which I am always investing. Mainly, this Person works to establish a connection between me and disadvantaged/oppressed/poor persons; between myself and humanity at the margins of society. The Holy Spirit also helps me to understand that the work I do on their (our) behalf is inherently valuable and the end of this work is always already guaranteed by Christ’s death and resurrection.

This conviction stems from my belief in Christ’s account in John that the Holy Spirit has been sent to guide us to all truth and to bring all things to our remembrance. I think this point is perhaps the most important for me. As I have studied and worked, I have come to believe that many of the problems we face in our country stem from poverties of conscience and memory. America is a country of varied histories and identities, many of which accuse its current success. Whether we speak of Japanese Internment, Amerindian slaughters, the Alamo, or slavery and the black American uplift movement, the many histories and identities of so-called Americans at the margins narrate a historical poverty of conscience in America.

In view of all this, I believe that remembering courageously is indispensable for principled work of the Kingdom. Principled memory demands that we critique systems, institutions and persons that facilitate oppression even when they present moral/ethical arguments for why their particular manifestation is permissible. It cautions me always to judge these ideas by the mandate to privilege human life over private interest and market moralities.

Lastly, the Holy Spirit encourages me to look for its manifestation in all of creation. My concept of “spiritual gifts” convicts me that as “the body” we are only “fitted and held together” by what “every joint supplies.” If we do not look for the Spirit’s manifestation in all people and encourage their contribution to our concept of God, we will not be able to realize the depths of God’s revelation concerning work for justice. Ultimately, the Holy Spirit commits me to questioning for the sake of improving the quality of our lives together.

**Van Gardner**  
**Episcopal Cathedral of the Incarnation**  
**Baltimore, Maryland**

Very often, during the celebration of the Eucharist, I have the opportunity to stand in the back of the church praying with those who come with some special request and watch as our congregation moves forward to gather at the Lord's table. They stand in a long line, young and old, male and female, gay and straight, people of different races, languages, and economic conditions, infants in arms, and elderly people who need a hand up the two steps to the altar. They file by the baptismal font and many - including the youngest - touch the water and make the sign of the cross. They gather around the table with hands open and receive the Holy Communion while we sing a simple Taizé style chant such as *Veni Sancte Spiritus - Come, Holy Spirit*. As pastor I have the privilege of knowing something about the lives of many of these people. I know their hurts and hopes, their dreams and disappointments.

In that moment the "fellowship of the Holy Spirit" becomes more than a familiar expression. It becomes a reality. Something gathers us together across all of our differences. I believe it is the work of the Spirit that stirs in us a desire to be in communion with God and one another. By the power of the Holy Spirit we are no longer a bunch of people who happened to attend the same church service; we become a community in Christ.

This new community becomes both a sign and an instrument of social hope. We are located in a major urban center plagued with poverty, poor public education, drugs, and rampant violence. The divisions between rich and poor, black and white and latino, privileged and dispossessed, are all around us. Our "fellowship in the Spirit" serves as a visible sign of God's intention for peace and reconciliation in the world. In a denomination (Episcopal/Anglican) that is currently experiencing a great deal of internal dissention and disunity, we hope to be a visible witness to the power of the Spirit to unite people across their differences.

I see this fellowship in the Spirit as a "foretaste" of a future hope that is in God. We live in anticipation of the perfect peace of God's kingdom. I rejoice in the fact that the community of faith continues to affirm what the world denies. We affirm that every human life is created in the image of God, redeemed by the love of God, and that God will have the last word. The Holy Spirit gives us hope by allowing us to live now in anticipation of that ultimate fulfillment.

The Holy Spirit creates hope through the empowerment of the faithful. We come to the table to be fed in order that we might feed others. As Bishop Simms put it, "This is always the quiet work of the Holy Spirit, and the foundation of leadership is to awaken trust in the Spirit — to open people to the presence of the Holy Spirit within themselves and in one another." I have seen first hand how awakening trust in the Spirit empowers people to become signs of Christ's love in the world. I see in our community an African refugee who has been empowered to start a ministry for other recent immigrants. There are people who have been so moved by the Spirit of God and the plight of children in our city caught in violence that they have begun a "Peace Center" for inner city children. There are those who have joined with people from other churches to advocate for more just and equitable public policy for the disadvantaged in our city.

The Holy Spirit gathers us at the table, creates unity in our diversity, makes us a sign of peace and reconciliation, and sends us out empowered by the same Spirit to be witnesses to hope in the world.

**Melissa Herwaldt Riches**  
**Action Without Borders/Idealist.org**  
**Charlottesville, Virginia**

As someone who works at a capacity-building level with nonprofit organizations, this is a difficult question. In response to Mark Gornik's book, I agree that too often I fall prey to thinking and speaking only of "best practices," "organizational development," and "core competencies." Or, more practically, I think and speak only in bottom-line terms – about not being able to effectively staff group homes, or sell Generation Y on composting toilets, or convince indigenous tribes to use modern medicine. Yet once I am caught up in a framework of social change uninformed by a divine plenitude, I am sucked into a status quo which drains my energy and deadens my vision. It is not that secular humanism does not accomplish exciting, worthy, or innovative things, because I have seen too much and I know better ("Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me"). Still, writing personally, in my own work I find that only the Spirit can move me beyond my own lethargy, whether to catch visions from unexpected people ("your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams") or to infuse the everyday mundane with a fullness and a joy ("These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full. "). So I can lead yet one more board meeting, send one more e-mail, take one more justified criticism, or reach out one more time to the Other. Perhaps more importantly, only the Spirit can regularly undo my small notions - about the Creator, humanity, evil, suffering, mercy, justice, community, and the Church - like a hook undoing the buttons of a corset. In the Spirit, the buttons are unhooked and the corset comes undone – so the real Lover can arise.

**Eddie Howard**  
**Charlottesville Abundant Life Ministries**  
**Charlottesville, Virginia**

When I think about my role at Abundant Life Ministries in light of the scripture, “we must help the poor, the widow, and stranger,” I believe that to be able to do so I must not only see it as a means to reach out, but as a means to reach within the heart of God. Jesus said in Matthew, “What you have done for the least of these brothers of mine you have done for me.” This helps me to realize that the social condition of my neighborhood is not the deciding factor of who God is in our lives, the fact that Jesus called us brothers (and sisters) keeps me on the task at hand through fasting and praying for direction and empowerment to go forward and accomplish these duties of helping the poor and the needy, meeting the people where they are and not where I want them to be.

Titus 3:14 says, “For our people must learn to help all who need their assistance, that their lives will be fruitful.” This brings up a question for me: Who then will teach us and direct us if we must first learn how to go forward with this ministry according to our calling? I believe one of the best teachers is the man of God who has not wavered from sound doctrine through trials and endurance of these trials by the endowment of the Holy Spirit. The Book of Nehemiah is an encouraging example of how to see His promises fulfilled, by holding fast to what God has spoken and despite trials we must face; this is applicable to Christian community building. Mark Gornik’s illustration from Nehemiah helped me to realize how, when we depend on God to supply and send us resources, there is no lack. He describes this so vividly through his story of how the building of the wall brought community together. Even when people were dehumanized, alienated and ostracized, there was no lacking in manpower. I believe the power of God working through the gifts and talents of man played a major role in calling out and mobilizing the people, thus solidifying the scripture, “if it be of man it won’t last, but if it be of God who shall stop it?”

In building the city today and reaching out into the neighborhood, we have a responsibility to seek the heart of God. “Be careful for nothing but in all things through prayer and supplication make your request known unto God, and the peace of God which surpasses all understanding will keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” If we are to seek the peace of the city, we must go forward with the peace of God in our own lives so that we will not become weary in well doing. This brings us back to the fruit of the Spirit. Without the unction and moving of the Holy Spirit in Christian community building, our labor is in vain, because the Holy Spirit is not leading us. When taking a close look at the gifts of the Holy Spirit, we must see that they are there in order for the body of Christ to complete the work of spreading the Gospel through the tools recommended to the builders. Whether it be evangelism through the feeding of the poor and needy or through Bible clubs or counseling, we must use the tools we’ve been given. Through sharing and living God’s word through evangelism and acts of service, I have seen God’s kingdom and the community where I live grow tremendously as people are drawn by the Holy Spirit. I believe that the Spirit has been using Abundant Life Ministries’ acts of service – through programs, meeting practical needs, and living out God’s love – to build a foundation in my community so that the church can be built on that foundation. The great commission rests on the hope of making disciples, teaching and baptizing in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, which I believe implies seeking God’s heart through serving the needs of others in my community.

**Willis Jenkins**  
**Graduate Student in Religious Studies**  
**University of Virginia**

In my academic research in environmental ethics, talk about the Holy Spirit appears everywhere. As Christians try to work out a faithful response to the earth's distress, avenues for hopeful, constructive practices often seem to lie in more fully experiencing the Lifegiver, the Spirit who broods over the void during creation. The Spirit is associated with water, wind, wombs, and wilderness – to physical places we associate with mystery and fecundity, with origins and retreats. As the church struggles to figure out how following Jesus involves environmental practices, it seeks anew the One who attends the life between Jesus and the Father-Creator. Yearning to discover how to make practical sense of the wounded lands in which the church-body lives and preaches, Christians are drawn toward the One whose presence we experience between Christ and Creator.

The Holy Spirit's connection with Christian environmentalism accords especially well with the innovative, locally-emergent projects found in church groups around the world. Prayer-group tree-planting in Tanzania and Uganda, ecclesial forest protection in Brazil and the Philippines, fair-trade organic food cooperatives organized by missionaries and even ecological monasteries – these kinds of Christian practices are new and unexpected creative expressions of faith which the church is compelled to say must be works of the Spirit. Hope for renewing the earth (and the church) bubbles up from them.

In my “practitioner” mode working in Episcopal missions programs, I find myself repeatedly coming back to reflect on that association of ecclesial creativity with the Spirit. Mission programs and volunteers are often drawn toward the apparent presence of the Spirit moving beyond surprising, even scandalous boundaries. The most hopeful incarnations of church-community seem to be those which incorporate cross-frontier movement, in witness to the power of God to restore and reconcile all things. An important part of the experience of the Spirit is the ongoing re-invention of the church.

But those missional incarnations also require the most from our imaginations, skills, and courage. Attempting a truly new thing in the church, starting a new project or creating an alternative social space, we often find ourselves at once compelled by God's call to do so and at the same time formed by our own imagination, capabilities, experiences, and even moods. Talking about our mission projects as embodied responses to the Spirit's gift-giving presence in the world allows us to at once follow in faith the movement of God and take risky responsibility for their design and process. That was Desmond Tutu's secret with reconciliation: even as he proclaimed God's forgiveness he knew we each must realize it, laboriously so, with much risk, imagination, and contextual fragility. The Spirit who prepared a way for Jesus in the wilderness of John and the womb of Mary prepares also a way for creative followers of Jesus, showing how the alienated world already hosts God's presence, making it already a place of hope.

**John Kiess**  
Graduate Student, Faculty of Divinity  
University of Cambridge

For several years I worked in the Prospect neighborhood, a low-income community in Charlottesville. Like most contexts of poverty, Prospect is known by outsiders for what it lacks: jobs, good housing, capital, education, decent healthcare. It is perceived in terms of scarcity. Scarcity is a kind of first assumption, the point of departure from which well-meaning community development efforts begin. “This is what is missing, and this is how we’re going to fill it.” Scarcity assumes a privileged role, defining the start positions, the bedrock reality from which growth springs.

I have come to think of the Holy Spirit as God’s eternal and unequivocal response to the myth of scarcity. As the gift that is eternally given between the Father and Son, the Holy Spirit is the ecstatic love that unifies the divine fellowship, overflowing out of the divine communion in history to unite God’s creatures. God’s starting point is abundance. There is more than enough in the gift-giving of his inner life, and this “more than enough” characterizes his work in creation. We see nothing and think scarcity, but God encountered nothing and saw the seeds of an entire universe. His abundance sprang even where there was nothing. The universe he created is saturated in this abundance, and while sin attempted to replace abundance with scarcity, Christ restored it in his redemption. The Holy Spirit, as Barth and Bonhoeffer teach us, is at work in the world actualizing the reality that Christ accomplished when he took all the world unto Himself in His death and resurrection. The Spirit coordinates fallen reality with the reality of Christ, principally in the Church, “the point in the world where the world may know itself in truth and reality,” and out in the world, bringing the world to a subjective apprehension of the abundance that already objectively characterizes the world at its most fundamental level in Christ.

The hope the Holy Spirit offers is also its challenge: to understand human social relations, justice and community development in terms of abundance. This means no casual reckoning with the profound material hardship and violence that characterizes life in the deprived areas in which Christians work. But it means reckoning with this need in the knowledge and truth that abundance is the grain of the universe, our point of departure. There is enough. We start with the gifts God has already given: his son, Jesus Christ, and His Church, Scripture, Eucharist, Baptism, fellowship, hospitality, wisdom, prophetic insight, language, love, and relationships. The Holy Spirit restores our vision and enables us to recover the giftedness of creation, each other, and the things we take for granted, which, if we have eyes to see, are abundant. From abundance God begins. As Christians, so do we.

**Chuck Mathewes**  
**Religious Studies Department**  
**University of Virginia**

The most important fact about history is its perpetual character as surprising. While there is a level of predictability to our experience, a regularity to the rhythms of the quotidian, the larger experience of history seems governed by a swerving sovereign whose sole principle is to flummox all expectations and anticipations, at times it seems with a willful perversity. We may be sure we will need to eat, that we will spend time with our loved ones, that we will walk to the office the same way most mornings; but no one can tell us what will happen in the world next month or why it will happen. When we write history, we write to explain where we come from; but insofar as we imagine that knowing the past will help us better guide the future, historiography is largely a rationalization, the ultimate "Monday morning quarterbacking" experience – a series of lies we tell ourselves to reassure ourselves that we know what is going on.

It seems to me that any attempt to make sense of the relationship between the Holy Spirit and social hope should begin from the recognition of history's unpredictability; for, properly speaking, hope is our response to that unpredictability. Hope is how we inhabit our present, while being attuned to how the future is given to us, as a gift, by a gratuitous God; and the Holy Spirit is that gift and creates our capability to receive it.

Certainly there are viable, ruthlessly secular candidates for the right explanation of history's perpetual character as surprise; perhaps the nexus of human causality is simply too complex, or perhaps we simply do not yet properly understand the fundamental dynamics – psychological, material, meteorological, whatever – governing human history. But I find all such candidates unworthy, for various reasons. Instead it seems to me that history is governed by an agency not our own, that it has a coherence and purposiveness that elicits confidence not so much in the immediate future as in the shape of history as a whole – a confidence that history has a significance and a value that cannot be obliterated.

Such a hope is not wholly or simply a comfort, at least to sin-riddled people like ourselves; the idea that history is not governed by us, but is governed by another, produces in us something like a feeling of terror. Bernard Williams speaks of the ancient Greek tragedians' picture of divine governance as evincing a profound "lack of style" and being more disturbing for all that. I would say that the Christian God's always surprising governance is more terrifying than disturbing.

Hope so understood funds engagement for social justice in several different ways. First and most obviously, it affirms the legitimacy of the inchoate assent to the world which is part of every human's existence. But, second, it also opposes the various stultifying deceptions we collectively tell ourselves in order to full or numb that assent. Hope's power, that is, lies as much in its resistance as in its recognitions. Finally, hope has a hesitancy about it – a hesitancy not regarding its expectation of the new, but of our capacity to comprehend the new, at least before the eschaton. Indeed, we should stop trying most basically to "forsee" the future at all, for that is ultimately to attempt to anticipate what God will do, to become like God; instead we should just see the future for what it is – the gratuitous gift of God.

**Jenny McBride**  
**Graduate Student in Religious Studies**  
**University of Virginia**

Romans 8:15-27 describes human beings, along with the rest of creation, groaning, which is the expression of a longing that cannot be put into words, as we wait in eager expectation for the redemption of ourselves and our world. The groaning is an intuitive acknowledgment that things are not as they should be. During the two years that I spent at the Southeast White House, a community ministry in a low-income neighborhood in southeast DC, I was introduced to the idea of, and encouraged to become, an urban contemplative—one who prays to and meditates on the Spirit but is led into deeper intimacy not primarily in silence, solitude and disengagement but precisely by letting the people, chaos and noise, the restlessness and even the violence draw me into a deeper worldliness in which the Spirit dwells. In other words, the urban contemplative seeks the reconciling and peacemaking Spirit in the midst of the world. In Bonhoeffer's words, she "must drink the earthly cup to the dregs and only in doing so is the crucified and risen Lord with [her], and [she] crucified and risen with Christ." Romans 8 tells us that the longing and the groaning that is characteristic of a broken heart is simultaneously our confident hope, that all will be made well. The Spirit of worldliness refuses to give the world over to its fallenness and sees in faith what it will be: risen and made new in Christ.

This Romans passage also teaches that we participate in the work of the Spirit, that we are caught up and become, in a certain sense and without losing our humble distinctiveness as creatures, a part of the Trinity's circle and movement of love and healing. "The Spirit testifies with our spirit that we are God's children" who share in God's sufferings and share in God's glory (v. 16). This image of participation rescues us from the fear that our efforts towards social justice and mercy are in vain. Our hope is founded in the faith that we participate in and with the already present and active Spirit.

I write this in Lent, in Holy Week, and am reminded of and drawn into the Spirit's work in the Ezekiel passage about dry bones (37:1-14). In the midst of a world full of death, suffering and injustice the Spirit leads us to answer the question, "Can these bones live?" We are called to answer in faith whether this fragmented world of which we are a part can be made new and whole. As finite human beings who often do not know how much redemption to hope for in our daily work we answer, "O Sovereign Lord, you alone know." With this the Spirit says, "Prophecy to these bones and say, 'This is what the Sovereign Lord says: I will make breath enter you and you will come to life.'" I have come to see that my present calling as a student of theology includes a prophetic endeavor. I am to use theological reflection to name and denounce present societal sins, to call us sinners to repentance and to speak comfort and hope to those who consequently suffer. In this way, in the power of the Spirit, I speak of life "willed and guaranteed by God," as Adrienne von Speyr wrote in her meditation on Romans 8, *The Victory of Love*. The Spirit fosters in us a longing that includes both grief and hope: we at once grieve the pain of our broken world and broken selves and humbly yet confidently hope "for what we do not yet have" (v.25).

**Alex Mejias**  
**Law Student**  
**University of Virginia**

As a law student in Charlottesville, VA, I often enjoy a comfortable distance from the real-life situations that I study. In that mindset it is easy to objectify the individuals and groups who come before the courts seeking justice and relief. There are, however, moments when the reality of the human brokenness that I see strikes hard on my heart and mind. In these moments, the systemic nature of human suffering brings a sense of despair and powerlessness. What can the law do to alleviate the burden of injustice? What can I do to bring peace where there is only violence and brokenness? These are questions that may seem odd coming from a future lawyer. Strange as they are, they simply reflect the limited nature of the law.

Law can impose penalties upon deviant behavior as it strives toward the creation of a humane society. But law cannot make you love your neighbor. Law can make the rules for fair play but it cannot make communities coalesce through healthy communication and dialogue. We need the law in order to live together, but the mere presence of the law does not fulfill our highest aspirations of human dignity and peace. To be at peace, something else must be present that exceeds the demands of the law. Until individuals, families, neighborhoods, cities, and states begin to change their values we will remain hampered by the status quo which erodes our hope in “the creation of the beloved community.”

Personally, I am in desperate need of social hope everyday. As I read about injustice, inequality, and oppression it is extremely difficult to maintain a sense of hope. There have been times when I have felt numb and cold. There are other times when I have been enraged. And something has died within me. The idealistic and utopian visions of how my individual work would bring healing to the world have faded into the tragic realization of my powerlessness. Yet, within the darkness and death hope has arisen in me despite myself. I cannot say that I understand how the Holy Spirit works and moves within our hearts. I can only explain my inexplicable hope as a gift from God through the Holy Spirit.

The law offers limited hope because it cannot bring life where there is death. And though just laws are necessary for social hope and peace, they are hardly sufficient. What our society (and our world) needs is not better laws, but better people. The question must be rephrased from “what we need” to “who we need.” We need new people and we need to become new people. This is the very promise that the Holy Spirit brings: that we will be recreated and infused with life through the Spirit’s breath. The Bible tells of the prophet Ezekiel’s vision of the valley of dry bones. In a moving account Ezekiel prophesies to the bones and then to the “breath”: “Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe into these slain, that they may live” (Ezekiel 37:1-14). As this passage displays in dramatic fashion, our hope may be grounded in the life-giving breath of the Holy Spirit. Insofar as my hope in the law is limited, my hope in the Spirit is boundless.

**Bekah Menning**  
**Project on Lived Theology**  
**University of Virginia**

In 2003, I spent four months living, learning, and working in a predominantly Zulu township south of Durban, South Africa. In the Zulu language, as in the biblical languages, the same word is used for both “wind” and “Holy Spirit”; the Zulu word is “umoya”. It seems fitting: both wind and Holy Spirit are unseen, unheard, and intangible, yet both contain the power to bring forth change, sometimes subtle, sometimes profound.

While living in South Africa, I was asked to coordinate gatherings between youth of the black church I attended in the township and youth of a white church of the same denomination about five miles away. (Does this segregated scene sound familiar?) Though the initiative did not seem so unusual to me, it was quite extraordinary to all the South Africans involved. At the end of the initial gathering, the pastor of the black church, who is also a leader in the township and in national religious circles, calmly exclaimed that this was something that had never before happened in that part of the country. We both agreed that, though the event was organized by human hands, it was the movement of the Holy Spirit that resulted in an unexpected cohesiveness among the youth and a genuine openness to learning about one another. Experiences of the intense presence of the Spirit are rare for me, but that night, as the youth gathered in a circle with their arms around each other for a closing prayer, I felt the presence of God more keenly than I ever had – the promise of change, life-giving change, permeated the room, and surged in my soul.

I am aware that this sounds a bit “kumbaya-ish”, as I’ve heard some refer to such descriptions. And I am aware that genuine change takes far longer than an evening of feel-good activities and black and white arms around each other. But there is a hope that comes from the potential for life-giving change, and from change itself – a hope that grounds faith. It is this hope that sustains us on the long path to lasting change. So that when we become discouraged about how much longer the long path still is, there is the reminder that the Holy Spirit, since the beginning of time, has worked in mysterious and often surprising ways. And there is rest and peace in the hope that the Holy Spirit, umoya, will continue to move in and among us, stirring our foundations, sending ripples across stagnant waters, filling empty places, and renewing our lives and our communities.

**Carter Paden**  
**St. Peter's Episcopal Church**  
**Chattanooga, Tennessee**

I have been a parish priest for the past 20 years, and I am not a developed theologian. I fear my remarks will sound rather prosaic and jejune in our academic setting. Perhaps these remarks will point out, rather than explicate, where I have based my thoughts.

“I believe in the Holy Spirit, the giver of life.” My experience of the Holy Spirit is that it is always pointing us to Our Lord, Jesus. Jesus is the way, the truth and the life, and the Holy Spirit is always calling us to look at Him and to face the Truth. No one can say “Jesus is Lord” except the Spirit points us and enlightens us to make that confession, that observation.

To write of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Church then becomes a discussion of the Trinity and how it functions. As a priest exposed to suffering, it has often been problematic to speak with too much confidence about how the Spirit is working. Rather “I greet him the days that I meet him, and bless when I understand.” A seasoned Christian once told me that one cannot manufacture the Holy Spirit, because it “blows as it will,” but that one should be sensitive to discern where the Holy Spirit is at work “in spirit and in truth” and to join one’s self to it.

The Holy Spirit is evidently in reconciliation. Its spirit is one that draws people into unity and harmony - into shalom and peace. The bridge to peace involves more than justice; it requires confession, repentance, amendment, forgiveness and sacrifice. The spirit of mercy holds up the bridge and points us to Jesus and his Cross. I am interested in the work of the Holy Spirit to give us the will and mind of Jesus which draws us together and away from the “demon of ideology” which is stalking our world.

Practically, then, I have been concerned with the issue of justice and retribution. At one time in Tennessee, under Gov. Alexander, if the current trends of incarceration had continued at that time, one half of the population would have been incarcerated in less than 50 years (with the other half, I suppose, guarding them). I discovered the Victim-Offender Reconciliation Program (VORP) which had just come to Tennessee. Since 1987, twelve programs have been developed in our state to address these issues supported by legislation passed and funded in 1992.

The other area of conviction is the disparity between rich and poor. For ten years (1994-2004), I served as treasurer to the Children’s Medical Missions of Haiti (CMMH), an organization supporting a hospital in Leogane and a clinic and school for the physically challenged in Port-au-Prince. It is an organization which brings life and sustains life. (“Why the ribs of the earth exist frail as dust/ If but the Lord wearieth”).

**Stan Runnels**  
**St. John's Episcopal Church**  
**Laurel, Mississippi**

The story of the Samaritan woman at the well provides an illustration of the relationship between the Holy Spirit and social hope for me. Aside from the existential declaration by Jesus, "God is Spirit and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and truth" – suggesting a integration of the relationship of spirit to expressed faith (truth) – the action of Jesus actually entering into an extended dialogue with a 1) Samaritan 2) woman and 3) an outcast in her own community expressively animates the power of the Holy Spirit to encounter the hopeless and provide hope. For me, this encounter clearly points to the integral linkage between the animus of the Holy Spirit and the life of faith; a linkage that affects change in the world around it. A life of faith, filled with a sense of the Holy Spirit of God as the source of both life and faith, will move toward creating space for hope in the world. As is clearly evident in the story of the sheep and goats in the 25<sup>th</sup> chapter of the Gospel of Matthew, such a life animated by the Holy Spirit creates social hope, especially amongst the least, by exercising a faithful life without guile or deceit.

For me, during my ministry and even before, it is the ongoing struggle to understand the higher calling of faithful living inspired by the Holy Spirit that compels and propels a believer toward just and righteous living not so much in relationship to God, but to God's whole creation. More concretely, it is the catalyst toward seeking to serve God's people, especially those on the borders of society. It is only in the linkage of lived faith and the Holy Spirit that the notion of the Holy Spirit came to have meaning at all for me. Surrounded by a more pentecostal conception of the Spirit which seemed to misuse the Spirit as some mysterious gift selectively bestowed upon certain "inspired" persons for purposes of prestige, power, and authority, I avoided even thinking about the Spirit as a component of God's being. Only as I began to realize the power of the Holy Spirit to move us beyond the limited vision of human constraints, did I appreciate the importance of the Holy Spirit as a necessary expression of God's being, an expression that provides not power or authority but a holy call to holy living for the "du".

Theological convictions change as do the collective categories of justice and mercy (e.g. once it was considered both just and merciful to retain slaves; theological convictions of the time affirmed this). Without question, there must be a relationship between theological convictions and works of justice and mercy (Paul's antinomian dilemma). The challenge is to do the work of theology in every generation, to discover not only the *credo* to which we are called, but also how those beliefs manifest themselves in our world in ways that express adequately our apprehension of justice and mercy. For instance, at one time theological convictions supporting a "minimum wage" led to political actions that manifested justice and mercy to those who benefited from such a wage increase. Today, in a changed economic reality, should our theological reflections on work limit us to a minimal pay threshold unrelated to livability? Does such a theological conviction adequately express justice and mercy (social hope) to those on the income borders of our society? Alternatively, are we called to consider other paradigms by which we rethink our theological convictions and expressions of justice and mercy? Of course, the reality of religious and intellectual inertia looms large. Thus, the prophetic voice – never well liked, but always needed.

**Peter Slade**  
**Graduate Student in Religious Studies**  
**University of Virginia**

To make any claims regarding the Holy Spirit's relationship with my work seems presumptuous to say the least. Indeed, if I have learned anything as a community worker and a student of theology it is that to speak of God's activity is a risky business.

Over a decade ago I read J.V. Taylor's *The Go-Between God: The Holy Spirit and the Christian Mission*. It is his description of the Holy Spirit active in the world, whether the church is there or not, that still informs my work today. According to Taylor, we can detect the Spirit's work where we find hope brought to the hopeless, justice to the oppressed and good news to the poor. The Spirit of God "blow [s] where it chooses" and it is up to the church – her activists, theologians, priests and prophets – to "hear the sound of it" (John 3:8).

The paradox is that it is the Holy Spirit who enables us to hear where the wind of the Spirit is blowing. For Christians, the Spirit – as well as being the comforter and advocate – is the Teacher. The Spirit teaches us the things that belong to Christ. Jesus explains to his disciples, "[The Holy Spirit] will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you" (John 16:14). The Spirit's declarative work teaches us not only what is Christ's but also who is Christ's.

The Spirit declares that the church on earth belongs to Christ. Jesus' prayer in John's gospel is not "on behalf of the world," rather it is for the disciples whom God gave to Christ "from the world" (John 17:6-11). My work, if it is to have any relationship with the Spirit, must not ignore the church. I try to examine the witness of particular Christian communities with all their contradictions, frustrations and sin, believing that somehow they are caught up in the life of the Trinity (John 17:21).

The Spirit does not seal the church off from the world – as the church engages with the great commission and goes into 'all the world' she finds the Spirit has preceded her and is already working.

Just as Christ is the man for others, the Spirit declares that the other belongs to Christ. My work is open to the Spirit when I hear the sound of the church, not closed off from the other in fear of change and contamination, but open to the world in the hope of Christ. If through my writing and teaching there is any encouragement for the church to be the church for others – recognizing that the Spirit is already working with the poor and oppressed – then there is a relationship between the Holy Spirit and social hope in my work as theologian/scholar. I hope there is, but it is not for me to say.

**Becca Stevens**  
**Magdalene, Inc.**  
**St. Augustine Episcopal Chapel, Vanderbilt University**

### Consider the Trout Lily

If it is true that one can contemplate the universe in a blade of grass, then it must be true that we can contemplate the eternal in a single moment; a moment like when the Holy Spirit moves in us or around us and we feel grace buckle our knees in gratitude. I felt such a moment this spring when, after years of looking at the woods around here, I saw a trout lily by a trail. I wanted to leave and bring my friends and show them the flower. I wanted to pick it, knowing it wasn't going to live more than a day, and save it between two pages of poetry. The lilies looked like they were woven into the very fabric of the earth and that their purpose was simply to behold the beauty of creation in silent praise. The flower itself has amazing detail and precision in its construction of five yellow petals that are pealed back to reveal a spotted center. Its sleek and spotted leaves resemble the rainbow trout that grace the rivers of Tennessee. When I saw them they covered about half the hillside.

For this spring they symbolize the moment that holds all the moments. They symbolize the perfection of the Holy Spirit and how thankful I am that I am in the world and awake. It makes sense to me that these are the kind of flowers Jesus talks about in the gospel of Luke. When Rome was occupying his native land and he was near the end of his life, Jesus tells his followers not to be anxious and to think of lilies. The Lilies that Christ spoke of were probably like the anonymous and beautiful flowers that grow like grasses all around us in waste lands, woods, and marshy banks. It is no surprise that we name our children after them, place them in stained glass and make them the flowers of Easter. Legend tells us they were in the garden of Gethsemane as Jesus wept, that they lived in the woods outside the tomb, and that they were the witnesses to the resurrection. They connect us to the eternal moment of love.

And so lilies have been living in my head for weeks. There was a procession of calla lilies on a hillside in Ecuador where every year about twenty five of us go to run a clinic at a small school we opened nine years ago. It is easy to see them there because so much of life is the same as it was hundreds of years ago. In a moment of silence it is easy to feel swept up in the beauty and tenderness of that country where poverty and abundance share the same air. It is there that you can feel life and death hanging in the balance and that we are vulnerable and earthly. And lilies were on the altar here at St. Augustine's recently as Clemmie walked veiled down this Aisle. She graduated from Magdalene, a residential community for women with criminal histories of prostitution and drug abuse, about four years ago. It was a program we founded in 1996 as a witness to the truth that in the end love and grace are more powerful than all the forces that drive us apart and to the streets. As she was walking up the aisle I thought how it is true that our past and futures fade in the moments we surrender to love. In those moments the Holy Spirit dances and breathes in us and we are beautiful. It was the moment between the dream and the coming true and we all watched her in awe and silent prayer.

Howard Thurman always said there is no way to understand God apart from nature. We know that it is where we come from and where we go as dust. It is what keeps the breath in our bodies and makes us long for living in peace. It is why Jesus preached about sowing seeds, mustard seeds, wheat, and lilies. They bring us to our hearts where the most radical transformation happens as we fall in love with the whole sacramental world into which Jesus came.

So I am considering the lily and remembering that we are beautiful and precious. I am considering the earth that holds them and trusting creation will catch us when we die. God in the Holy Spirit has gilded the lilies and let us sit in a moment of complete rapture with angels.

**Joe Szakos**

**Virginia Organizing Project  
Charlottesville, Virginia**

My departure from the institutional church began at a young age when the Roman Catholic bishop in my hometown's diocese refused to forgo the interest for a few years on a loan the diocese made to our working-class parish to build a new school. Instead of getting a little breathing room to catch up on the debt load, the bishop's decision caused great emotional and spiritual pain to many. Justice?

Many years later, we were relocating to another city, and I was stung again when our family – with two beautiful pre-school mixed-race daughters in tow – was very coolly received at church. Sadly, the congregation was originally founded by African-Americans, but whites had taken over, with little, if any, room for people of color. Peace?

Professionally, I have been a community organizer for more than 25 years in Chicago, Kentucky, Hungary and Virginia. Troubled that the congregation-based approach ignored important constituencies (like the unchurched, the very poor, and gays and lesbians), I have found myself working in places that tend to fall at the bottom of the priority list for major congregation-based networks – rural, small town, Appalachian.

In the community organizing I have done, I have learned many, many lessons. Here are two:

(1) Faith has been an incredible motivator for some people with whom I have worked. “We are going to win this struggle,” an elderly Appalachian gentleman in a remote community told me. “It’s right there in Isaiah,” he said confidently. Despite incredible odds, the depths of his convictions and his stamina for long-term social change were unbelievable.

(2) The solutions to many of the community problems that I have seen lie in the hands of people who attend church regularly but seem to have a complete disconnect between their work lives and their spiritual lives: coal operators who exploit workers with unsafe conditions, university officials who look the other way when their dining room contractors pay wages so low that people working full-time are living in poverty, or real estate developers who are after fast cash and want their families to “live comfortably” while making the availability of affordable housing an impossibility for many other families.

**George Telford**  
**Pastor/Theologian**  
**Institute for Reformed Theology, Union-PSCE, Richmond, Virginia**  
**Charlottesville, Virginia**

In all my life, and in my work as a pastor-theologian, I have believed in “the general power of the Spirit,” which links the purposes of God with the goal of human maturity, and puts both believers and unbelievers on a common trajectory towards a new humanity in the world, of which Christ is the first fruit. The working of the Spirit is in and through all humanity, toward a transformation and fulfillment of all human beings, and the earth as well. I believe that when all the intrinsic possibilities of social hope for justice have been played out, God’s fresh possibilities for deliverance break out by the action of the Spirit.

I understand the church to be a household of faith that discerns both the ecclesial and the transeclesial work of the Holy Spirit. It gives visible expression and sacramental utterance to God’s promised healing of the whole human race. It knows that the issue is the mission of God, and that it is called to discern, by the Spirit, what they are to do to be an embodiment of the real presence of Jesus Christ in their place, what kind of people they should confess themselves to be, and what kind of discipline and ethos, practices and courage are required to enable them to speak the truth to power.

The Spirit is at work both in the church and in the public world. We live in both worlds. What is formed in the church is not merely ecclesiastical faith and practice but the whole array of public social activity – occupational, educational, economic and political – represented by the actual lives of church members, all their private and public activities, all their worship and all their works for justice and mercy.

Therefore, we work through the church for justice and mercy in multiple contexts, in faith that the church will eventually be supplanted by a global society bearing the marks of the reign of God. We support resistance in the public world to the powers of evil, and live out solidarity with all the forces of hope, in faith that other human beings may be at least partially drawn with us, by the Spirit, into the moral practices that represent God’s purpose for the human future in our present time and space.

Any strategy for being part of the mission of God in this way must be based on cultural, economic and political analyses of what is going on in the world locally, nationally and internationally, and on some vision of what is happening to human beings today. There is another formation that is powerful and pervasive in the contemporary world, a world of global systems, the market system being the most important with which human beings are trying to deal. Its values powerfully shape the lives of all human beings. It is urgent that we form people in a different way of seeing the world, and that we understand “the People of God” to be much larger than the church.

**Greg Thompson**  
**Reformed University Fellowship**  
**Charlottesville, Virginia**

I am a pastor. This means that my vocation is born of both a mournful engagement with the guilt and corruption of the world and a hungry yearning for its restoration. My animating desire is the exposure of sin and injustice, the restoration of the broken, and the renewal of communities, even cultures. It is – as it has always been – a vocation drenched in hopeful expectation for the resurrection of all things.

My tools for this vocation, however, are strange and local tools: word and prayer, wine and bread, hospitality and service; things that are, in themselves, so powerless in the face of such widespread ugliness. And there are times when in the face of darkness the opening of a book, the breaking of bread, the singing of songs, the setting of a table seems so limited and foolish. Can it be that these things really do stand at the heart of the revolution of beauty?

And so there is at the heart of my life a dissonance between the unmeasured vastness of the need and the intrinsic (and purposeful) weakness of my resources. Because of this there is a sense in which my entire vocation is built around an utter dependence upon the work of the Holy Spirit. I frankly have no other option, nor do I see the possibility of such. Either the Holy Spirit works in time and space to undo the brute facts of fallen existence, or there will be no undoing.

Having said this I should also say that my understanding of the nature of the Spirit's work – upon which I am so dependent – is woefully cursory. I need to learn more of this One who stands behind and before all of our common labors toward redemption. And so I join you in hopes of doing so.

**Corey Walker**  
**Religious Studies Department**  
**University of Virginia**

### The Risk of Critical Theological Thinking

“Questioning opens up possibilities of meaning [. . .] to ask a question means to bring into the open. The openness of what is in question consists in the fact that the answer is not settled.”

-- Hans George Gadamer, *Truth and Method*

I am of the opinion that “[t]here is an implied theology operative even within the ‘non-theological’ sections of my intellectual labors. Indeed, without what the critical theorist Max Horkheimer called a ‘theological moment’ – that is, the space for critique, openness and renewal within [intellectual life] – no matter how skillful, [intellectual work] in the last analysis is mere business.”<sup>1</sup> In pursuing what Horkheimer terms the “theological moment” within the discourse of theology, I have come to advocate a project that prefers a deliberate and considered critical theological thinking in place of traditional conceptualizations of theology. Critical theological thinking privileges a multiplicity of processes of inquiry into mundane and everyday sites that present innumerable spaces for doing theology under erasure. In other words, critical theological thinking cancels out the hegemonic construction of theology while maintaining the possibility for its redeployment with different categories and under radically different circumstances. This project lives in the tension between the known and the unknown in order to exploit the in/finite opportunities of pursuing the Im/possible.

From this perspective, to contemplate the relation of the “Holy Spirit” and “social hope” in our present moment requires that that we radically shift the theological terrain. Indeed, to take the meanings of these constructs as always already self-evident and understood is to extend a particularly acute and virulent epistemic violence. Instead, I offer the following remark by Karen Bloomquist as an alternative site for contemplation and interrogation:

Evoking the memory of suffering, especially that which contradicts ‘the American Dream,’ is the crucial link between critical theory and theology, the political and the personal, emancipation and redemption. A socio-political theology enables a breaking through of the sense of fatedness, the raising of critical consciousness, and thus the empowering of subjects for transformative social praxis.<sup>2</sup>

By suggesting this passage for reflection, I wish to temper the desire for clarity and transparency that is so much interwoven with the construction, production, and distribution

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Villa-Vincencio, *A Theology of Reconstruction: Nation-Building and Human Rights* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 3.

<sup>2</sup> Karen L. Bloomquist, “Toward a Theological Engagement with Working Class Experience,” *Word and World* 2 (Summer, 1982), 270-276.

of traditional theology. To begin a process of critical theological thinking in this instance requires us to proceed by way of an ethic of opacity. That is, to introduce and extend a point first made by Charles Long, a posture that recognizes the “inexhaustibility of the opaqueness” of the minor and marginal aspects of existence, the quotidian if you will, that forms the very foundation of the possibility of theology proper.<sup>1</sup> In reference to the Bloomquist passage, the question for our consideration becomes: “How do we cultivate a critical theological thinking that understands that our theological concepts and categories always already introduce the object, but yet we nevertheless feel compelled to try to make theological sense of our world?”

George Bataille offers the following instruction, “Every time we give up the will to know, we have the possibility of touching the world with a much greater intensity.”<sup>2</sup> A critical theological thinking informed by an ethic of opacity gifts us the opportunity of opening our theological horizons to that which cannot be appropriated and apprehended by traditional theological formulas and systems. We can begin to engage and understand the world in all of its strange familiarity.

My theological project does not offer stock answers in as much as it opens up new avenues for questions and opportunities for exploration. We eschew rigid systems of theology that have outpaced our ability to wrestle with the messiness of the everyday. This process of theological inquiry is but a humble attempt to contemplate things that are ultimate without guarantees. Such is the risk of critical theological thinking.

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<sup>3</sup> Charles Long, *Significations: Signs, Symbols, and Images in the Interpretation of Religion* (1986; Aurora, CO: The Davies Group, 1995), 204.

<sup>4</sup> George Bataille, *The Unfinished System of Nonknowledge*, ed. Stuart Kendall and trans. Michelle Kendall and Stuart Kendall (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 115.

**Paul Walker**  
**Anglican College Ministry**  
**Charlottesville, Virginia**

I believe that any hope we have for social change is based entirely in the work of the Holy Spirit. This is true for the Spirit's work in the world outside the agency of the Church as well as for the believer's complete dependence on the Spirit as the agent of social change.

The Spirit is not restricted to the visible or institutional church – God is free to act however and through whomever he chooses. Therefore, we see the Spirit at work in the world wherever the fruits of justice and peace are established.

Yet, the primary means by which God works in the world is his church, marked by faith in Jesus Christ and empowered by the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit who regenerates sinners and liberates them from the stultifying and burdensome oppression of the law.

This work results in totally new creatures who are able now to love the creation they had wished to dominate and abuse prior to the Spirit's work of conversion. Now, by grace alone, the Spirit grows his fruit in them: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control. The expression of this fruit in the life of the believer is the grace filled battle with the demonic tyranny of the world's powers and the inevitable victory of the Kingdom begun by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The Spirit is the originator, motivator, and finisher of any work for social change in the world.

**Matthew Whelan**  
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The Catholic community in the El Chile region of Honduras, where I lived and worked for two years, taught me more about the Holy Spirit's presence in the struggle for life amidst death – and the social hope engendered by that presence – than any other church community in which I have participated. High up in the mountains of central Honduras, El Chile was comprised of farming families who produced maize and beans for subsistence, and coffee for cash income. I arrived there as they were in the grip of privation: Hurricane Mitch had recently struck, a natural disaster unlike any residents had ever known. Its wind and water tore full-grown trees out of the earth with root-structure still intact, altered the course of rivers, and washed away harvests. Around this time, the price of coffee was likewise falling on the world market, devastating local livelihoods, and contributing to the exodus from the Latin American countryside. As if these disasters were not enough, two years of back-to-back drought affected the maize and bean crop, and for many families, there was no harvest.

Within these circumstances of generalized hunger and need, when an earthquake struck El Salvador in 2001, the Catholic community's response was the outpouring of generosity: They gathered from amongst themselves a sack of maize and another of beans – collected pound by pound – and petitioned the local diocese to ship the food to the needy in El Salvador. Alex Reniery, one of the church leaders, reflected on these events during his Easter Vigil homily on John 8:12. He took us outside into the night, and we formed a circle. He then passed out candles, which we began to light. With the wind, it was a struggle to keep the candles lit. But eventually we stood facing one another – light illuminating our faces – and he spoke to us about how Christ's light helps us to see the faces of others and respond to their needs. It is under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, he said, that we incarnate that light in our lives together as church, in a world that threatens to extinguish it. I by no means wish to suggest that this community did not have its share of problems and sinfulness. But its continual expressions of compassion and companionship – epitomized in giving the maize and the beans from their own mouths – witnessed to the movement of the Holy Spirit among its members and provided hope of what is possible.

The Spirit's creative presence could likewise be discerned in their struggle to refashion their agricultural practices. Community members maintained that much of modern agriculture, in its excessive use of agrochemicals, its virtual elimination of fallow periods, and its complete dependence on a few seed varieties, encourages us to eat, not from the gifts of creation, but from creation itself. In contrast, we attain the abundance that enables us to “live long on the fertile land” (Deut. 4:40) not through extraction and pushing production to the limit, but through reciprocity and the vigilant practices of land stewardship. They taught me to envision agriculture – and its attendant systems of processing, distribution, and consumption – within the wider theological landscape of the health of our relationship with creation, God, and one another. Clasp my hands in prayer with them felt like, to paraphrase Barth, the beginning

of an uprising against the forces that dismember our world and testified to the Spirit at work in the "renewal of the face of the earth" (Ps.104:30). But it also left countless questions in my mind about our present relationships to those who produce our food, and the new communities that remain to be formed to invite them to the table.

**Richard Wills, Sr.**

**May 2005 Graduate, Religious Studies Department  
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### Pneumatology, Social Justice and the Individual

Is the Holy Spirit really interested in the question of social justice, and if so, to what extent is social equity thereby effectuated, and moreover, how? While few would disagree with the Johannine claim that "God is love" there are those who seem less certain about love's relationship to social justice. It should follow that a theology premised upon the fact of God as love must then also assume the active presence of the Holy Spirit, who, in love, seeks to bear witness to the world in a manner consistent with God's chief character. While, at bottom, love is essentially relational and, therefore, primarily concerned with the renewal and restoration of ruptured relationship, i.e. via the redemptive work of Christ, it may be argued that love is also sociological in nature inasmuch as it also considers the extent to which authentic loving relationships are fundamentally holistic in their scope of concern.

Beyond this broad affirmation of assumed social interest, the remaining difficulty is in determining the level or levels at which the Holy Spirit may choose to negotiate the issues of social concern on humanity's behalf. Walter Rauschenbusch's primary critique in this regard was that the church and its theologians held to a view that was far too individualistic to be of sufficient collective consequence in this area of social advocacy and transformation. Their preoccupation with the sin and salvation of the individual had eclipsed a view toward the equally tragic corporate sins committed against societies disenfranchised. Inconsistent with Reinhold Niebuhr's later assessment of "Moral Man and Immoral Society" he maintained that the Holy Spirit was in fact interested in converting the corrupt systems that fostered and furthered social destitution, as well as the individual. Needless to say, similar questions regarding the Holy Spirit's relationship to social justice exist today.

In more than a few ecclesial circles, the underlying theological assumption is that the adverse social circumstances waged against the individual somehow represent the consequence of their breached relationship with God. Hence, salvation and social justice become a byproduct of the health, wealth and prosperity package that is offered when one entrusts one's life to God and is thus empowered by the Holy Spirit to overcome life's many adversities. At bottom, the idea of surmounting injustice is hooked to the individual's newfound authority to "name it and claim it" or by moving into "the next level, season, and or destiny." In each case the "breakthrough" is realized in keeping with God's purpose for and the Holy Spirit's empowering of the individual. Needless to say the modern day Civil Rights Movement would not have been inspired nor sustained by this type of rugged individualism. If in fact, the Holy Spirit, as that expression of God's loving witness in the world, is really interested in the world's larger social concerns, as Martin Luther King, Jr. suggested, the more compelling question may be to what extent the church shares this concern and is willing to cooperate with God's desired activity in human history.

**Craig Wong**  
**Grace Urban Ministries**  
**San Francisco, California**

The Holy Spirit breathes the Church into being, and the Church embodies the hope of the gospel in the world. This simple statement captures our congregation's central theological conviction that the Spirit's relationship to "social hope" can only be properly understood ecclesialogically. "Embodiment" also implies that gospel hope is intrinsically social, that is, the gospel is about deliverance from that which has torn humanity apart. In other words, the church bears witness to the gospel because it lives its life together in ways that a fallen world is incapable of. Therefore, not only is social hope impossible apart from the Holy Spirit, but it also follows that there is no hope for the world apart from the Church.

This Church-centered understanding of the Spirit-Mission relationship comes from over twenty years of sloggng it out as a young congregation under the leadership of a pastor whose own spiritual upbringing and ecclesial context found him longing for better things for the American Church. Perplexed by the relative apathy of the evangelical mainstream during the civil rights movement, Reverend Bob Appleby committed himself to pastoral work that insisted on gospel integrity for the church's identity, community life, and mission. His vocational journey brought him from his hometown of East Palo Alto, California to various South Bay coastal communities, and eventually to San Francisco. From a Cumberland Presbyterian Chinatown-based church, he and ministry associate, Sharon Huey, led a new plant in 1983 called Grace Fellowship Community Church (GFCC). GFCC committed from its inception to ask two questions: "What does it mean to be the Church?" and "What does it mean to be the Church in San Francisco."

Believing that the Holy Spirit promises to instruct the Church in truth and righteousness gives us confidence to engage theologically with these twin questions of Church and mission. Practically speaking, this means that we take the congregational discipline of biblical or theological study seriously, building in weekly time to gather as a whole congregation around scripture, books (Hauerwas, Willimon, Clapp, Weber, to name a few), and the seasonal reflections of Advent and Lent. Reading is vitally important for our pastoral staff, and is encouraged as well at the congregational level through quarterly writings and book reviews. This "word-centered approach" assumes the work of the Spirit in shaping, judging, up-ending our categories of what it means to be Christian, what it means to be the Church in the world. We assume this to be true in Sunday worship, where the Spirit uses the spoken, sung and liturgically rehearsed word to re-orient us around that which is true.

If the Spirit of God has His way with us, we assume that we will be positioned in ways diametrically opposed to the "wisdom of this age," graciously forcing us to recognize our idolatries, our capitulation to the powers and principalities that hold the American Church, of which we are a part, captive. It assumes that "things are not the way they are supposed to be," that we live amidst fallen structures that oppress and crush people, and that the Church is

tasked to live justly and mercifully in such a world. Therefore, our various acts of service, whether it be after-school tutoring, job training, health services, or advocacy among the immigrant poor, are not "faith-based" acts of charity but rather subversive expressions of Christ's victory over the powers of sin and evil.