



Elbows Deep

Ayanna Johnson Watkins

Lead Organizer and
Executive Director of MICAH,
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June 11, 2022
Alums & Friends Gathering
Chapel of the Holy Grail

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It is a question that I find myself living and wrestling with all the time. In this global pandemic, it has only gotten more pressing, this question—what goodness comes of this?

How, in the midst of this suffering, can we still find goodness, joy, hope, life? How is it safe to still love, make commitments, give birth, dream?

When George Floyd was killed on May 25, 2020, I was a few days from giving birth to my youngest child, now two years old. I had not been following the news, I had been timing contractions. So, I didn't realize, when I went into labor on May 30, that the world was on fire.

I didn't realize that on Saturday—because I was timing those contractions—that on Sunday, being Pentecost, the actual world was catching on actual fire. The prayer consuming my mind at the time was “Please God, let the epidural work this time.” When I woke up in the hospital the next day—a hospital nearly deserted because no visitors were allowed during the months after Covid began—I turned on the television and the first image my new baby and I saw was streets across the country filled with people protesting the unjust, fatal police brutality that took George Floyd's life.

While I was counting those minutes between contractions, George Floyd was using his last breaths to call for his mama. As I was pushing new life into the world, humans who couldn't take anymore, wouldn't take any more, were pushing their way into the streets of Minneapolis, Chicago, Philly, San Diego, DC, San Francisco, Detroit, Memphis. That day, forty cities in twenty states had curfews imposed. By the morning, twenty-three states plus the District of Columbia had activated National Guard troops assigned to manage protests. It was Pentecost, and the actual world was on fire.

What kind of goodness comes from this?

It is a question about the global pandemic, yes, and about police killing on our Black people. It's about mass graves outside New York City; it's about mass shootings and hate crimes, and mass shootings that become hate crimes. Buffalo, Laguna Woods, El Paso, Charlotte, Uvalde, Parkland, and Sandy Hook. It's about January 6. It's about \$5 gallons of gas. It's about abortions, and miscarriages, and parents



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House of the
University of Chicago**

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Letter from the dean

Many of us are caught in this moment between possibility and devastation.

Our graduates are poised on the edge of hope. They are also stopped by a world of grief, trauma, and senseless destruction. We look to these new leaders and scholars as we ask: Can this grief be answered? What new realities can be brought into speech and action? How will these graduates take up their vocations, not only on the other side of the convocation stage, but also in such urgent times?

These graduates now join a community of leaders who go before them. As this *Bulletin* reports, PhD graduate Joel Brown has been named President-elect of the Disciples of Christ Historical Society. Benny VanDerburgh and Lijia Xie have been named DDH's inaugural Theological Education Leadership Fellows; they begin their full-time fellowship year September 1. Sarah Zuniga and Aneesah Ettress, both 2021 MDiv graduates, were ordained in March and June.

In mid-June, many alums and friends returned to DDH at the invitation of the Alumni/ae Council. We enjoyed BBQ and told stories under the night sky in the newly renovated backyard. In the Chapel on Saturday morning, Ayanna Johnson Watkins sounded the theme, asking: What kind of good-

ness can come in such unimaginable times? Distinguished Alumna Award recipient Sandhya Jha explored how geography intersects with the question and how communities of resistance may give some answers. At the gathering, we shared food, joy, heartache, loss, fears, gratitude, and hope over breakfast tables and the communion table.

Many of us may find ourselves suspended between hard questions and the answers we long for. No pastor, scholar, or teacher alone can shift the future. But leaders can be readied to ask those questions, to foster courage and gratitude, to speak into the breach, to unravel deceptions, to engage the world deeply and theologically, to share life and bread, to bring people together.

Those who think, grieve, love, and lead among us can become attestations and enactments of holy goodness. This *Bulletin* also remembers the lives and work of alumni Ernie O'Donnell and Sam Pearson and former administrator Estelle O'Connor. It tells of a gift from the estate of the marvelous Ann Burns and of a new fund that honors Richard and Dolores Highbaugh, whose leadership, courage, and friendship have inspired and informed generations of Disciples.

As these pages make clear, the work of the Disciples Divinity House is shared, and gratefully so.

With gratitude, Kristine A. Culp, *Dean*



FROM LEFT Cetovimutti Cong, Convocation speaker Yvonne Gilmore, X.K. Ding, Monica Carmean, Emily Griffith, Benny VanDerburgh, Ross Allen, Joel Brown, Sarath Pillai, Dean Kris Culp. Hyein Park is pictured on facing page.



Convocation 2022 —“Extending Exodus”

As DDH marked the close of its 127th academic year on June 3, Yvonne Gilmore exhorted the graduates to re-read religion and “make the exodus movement legible.”



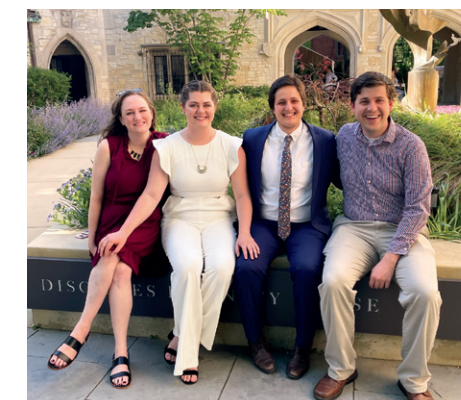
MA, MDiv, and PhD graduates were honored, including Disciples PhD graduates, Hyein Park, whose dissertation compares mysticism and theologies of suffering in Buddhist and medieval Christian women thinkers, and Joel Brown (see related article). Sarath Pillai, a longtime resident and recent Head Resident, will receive his PhD from the History Department with honors. All three anticipate receiving their degrees this summer.

Four Disciples Scholars are spring or summer MDiv graduates. Ross Allen will be ordained in the Kansas Region and is currently interning at the *Christian Century*. Monica Carmean is also a JD graduate of Georgetown Law Center. Emily Griffith, whose senior ministry project explored resources for mental health and spiritual care, will begin a chaplain residency program at Rush Medical Center. Benny VanDerburgh will be a Theological Education Leadership Fellow at DDH. Three members of DDH's interfaith residential

community are MA graduates: Cetovimutti Cong, X.K. Ding, and Jeffrey Sanchez.

Yvonne Gilmore, Interim Administrative Secretary of the National Convocation and Associate General Minister and President of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), was the speaker. Taking Hebrews 11:39-12:3 as her text, she spoke about “Extending Exodus” by re-reading religion, discovering community, and extending joy.

What makes the exodus movement legible? What gives us eyes to see and comprehend the promise of liberation historically? What makes the work of exodus legible in the Hebrew Bible, in our text, and in the world today? The subtext of our text is the practice of communal re-reading. It is re-reading religion that extends the exodus



CELEBRATING AND
SENDING FORTH

movement and makes possibilities for future flourishing legible to us and our communities of care and service....

The writer of the epistle to the Hebrews echoes promises, persons, and events from Israel's past as they search for a better country and face an impermanent future by faith. References to ancient promises, inheritance, and land of promise are often associated with the exilic period. A closer read suggests that the author is not invoking exile. Rather, exodus and wilderness wandering is the core narrative. By faith, the persons in the text never entered the rest that was promised. The writer of the epistle extends the exodus narrative and re-reads the people as being in search of a promise. Through their lived experience, Israel is re-narrated as a people at the border of a promise that has yet to be realized.

Extension isn't merely an act of continuity or replication. It's a constructive task. It's the practice of resurrection. Extending and re-reading is the work of making memory legible, legacy available, researching and writing with clarity and courage.

Joy extends exodus moments and the movement of liberation between and among us. Gwendolyn Brooks, the legendary poet from Chicago, shared a word of caution with a group of students, “Don't swallow. Chew!” Nourishment from food and the process of digestion is aided by chewing. Analogously, learning from experience is the product of chewing and conversation that doesn't evade but integrates complexity. The church is a theological community that must actively practice faith seeking understanding as it locates and relocates lived experience in our shared life.

You have already begun the work of re-reading religion in this House. As you go from this fellowship and growing habitation of theological imagination, ecumenical daring and visionary scholarship and leadership that we call the Disciples Divinity House, may you continue with the rigorous and liberating work of re-reading religion as you discover and extend exodus movements, and make legible the vocation of community everywhere you study, live, and serve. ✚



2021 MDiv graduate **Aneesah Ettress** (2019) was ordained on June 26 by the Central Rocky Mountain Region of the Christian Church at Evergreen Christian Church, Colorado. **Jack Veatch** (2017) and **Joan Bell-Haynes** (1995; trustee) presided, and **Yvonne Gilmore** (2001) preached. In June, Aneesah became the Academic Engagement Coordinator in the Feitler Center for Academic Inquiry at the University of Chicago's Smart Museum of Art.

Jeremy Fuzy (2012) and Sophie Day will marry on October 9 in Kansas City. They got engaged on Halloween—she was dressed as a Ghostbuster and he was a skeleton.



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Making and keeping history

2022 PhD graduate Joel Brown is called as President of the Disciples of Christ Historical Society.

He is particularly suited for its leadership at this moment. Brown prizes the importance of history in shared life, and he relishes the place of archival work in telling and writing history. He looks forward to contributing to “the important work that DCHS has been doing of preserving and telling our history, both lifting up those narratives that tell of our movement’s faithfulness and achievements, as well as reckoning with those parts of our story where we have fallen short and caused harm.”

His dissertation, titled *Preparing the Way: African American Women and Social Christianity in Turn-of-the-Century Chicago*, was advised by Curtis Evans. Brown also holds a ThM

from Brite Divinity School and MDiv and BA degrees from Abilene Christian University. He served as DDH’s associate for publications and programming and did a stint as the interim administrator. He was formerly the managing editor for the Martin Marty Center’s publication, *Sightings*, and of the *Religion & Culture Forum*.

The Historical Society’s offices and archives are in historic Bethany, West Virginia. Brown begins September 1. ❖



A magnificent spirit



A bequest comes from Ann and Ben Burns, whose lives themselves were uncommon gifts.

Although she knew she couldn’t attend in person, Ann Burns sponsored the tea for the opening afternoon of DDH’s 125th celebration in 2019. She died January 2, 2021, having celebrated her 100th birthday months before. This spring the Disciples Divinity House received a \$25,000 gift from her estate.

Born September 30, 1920 in Paris, Kentucky, Ann Wallace Horton Burns graduated from Transylvania College in 1942. Her life became connected with the Disciples Divinity House through Benjamin F. Burns. They met as students at Transy and married in 1944 after Ben completed his BD from the Divinity School as a Disciples Scholar. He served as

a Navy chaplain and then as pastor at the Waukegan and Austin Boulevard Churches. Ben counseled House Scholars as a pastor in residence and, with Joseph Sittler, taught preaching in the Federated Theological Faculty. In 1962, he was called back to Transylvania as Dean of Morrison Chapel. He was also a member of the Board of Managers of the United Christian Missionary Society and the pivotal Commission on Restructure.

Ann Burns was the first woman president of the Illinois Disciples of Christ (now the CCIW). She was a local and national leader for the Christian Women’s Fellowship, including as vice president of the International CWF from 1966–70. In Lexington, she became a mainstay of Central Christian Church. In her career as a teacher, she worked with under achievers; she returned to school at age 50, to receive a master’s degree from the University of Kentucky.

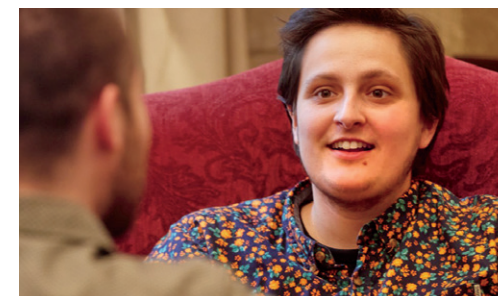
Ann couldn’t attend DDH’s 125th anniversary, but Ben and Ann had participated in the Centennial Celebration, and they had planned for an estate gift then. Ben often said his years at the Disciples Divinity House were the most creative time in his life, and his creativity was evident throughout his uncommon ministry. After Ben’s death in 2002, Ann continued to mentor and encourage the next generations at DDH—and everyone else she met. ❖

Inaugural Fellows announced

Benny VanDerburgh and Lijia Xie will be immersed in educational and non-profit leadership during the 2022–23 academic year.

They have been selected as the inaugural Theological Education Leadership Fellows. In addition to functioning as members of DDH’s professional staff, each will pursue a focused project designed to enrich the wider community.

Benny VanDerburgh has been named the M. Elizabeth Dey Fellow. His fellowship project involves developing a model of digitized mutual aid that will curate materials and spotlight trustworthy resources. He intends to pursue doctoral studies to examine critically the religious lives of movement workers and collectives. He is especially interested in early waves of HIV/AIDS activism outside of religious institutions. He received his MDiv degree from the Divinity School as a House Scholar in June. Last year



Presidential gavel passes to Pam Jones

At the April 22–23 Board of Trustees meeting, outgoing president April Lewton passed the gavel to incoming president Pamela James Jones. Special guests, food, and toasts were part of a celebration of April’s leadership through DDH’s 125th Anniversary and the pandemic. She continues as a trustee. New president Pam Jones is a MDiv and PhD graduate of the Divinity School, who previously served as Vice President and also holds a JD degree. Gaylord Yu is the new Vice President. Mareta Smith continues as Treasurer and Paul Steinbrecher as Secretary. ❖



he coordinated DDH’s chapel services, served as librarian and as the House Council co-president; he was also a pastoral associate at St. Pauls UCC, the congregation where he had completed field education. He is also a 2015 *magna cum laude*, Phi Beta Kappa graduate of Bates College with a BA in English and a 2019 MAPH graduate of the University of Chicago.

Lijia Xie anticipates receiving his MDiv degree from the Divinity School in August. He completed field education at Urban Village Church in Chicago. He is a 2017 *cum laude* graduate of Harvard University where he majored in Computer Science and minored in Statistics. After college he worked as a software engineer for eBay in New York City. Lijia’s fellowship project is to develop pedagogy and contexts for “revitalizing theological fluency for human flourishing.” He hopes to continue similar work in a PhD program, “a revitalizing of theology in the fraught arena of public discourse, a reclamation ... which I believe is indispensable to the flourishing of humanity and society.” He has been named the Bernard F. and Annie Mae Cooke Fellow. ❖



2021 MDiv graduate **Sarah Zuniga** (2018) was ordained to the Christian ministry on March 27 at Eureka (IL) Christian Church. **Yvonne Gilmore** (2001) preached and **Teresa Dulyea-Parker** (trustee) officiated. Sarah serves as Digital Content Specialist for Crossroads Antiracism Organizing and Training.



Congratulations to former Monday dinner chef, **Luke Joyner**, whose team made a winning pitch for a \$1.5 million grant from the City of Chicago to collaborate with the Claremont Academy in Englewood to design and build a playground.

Aaron Smith (2007) and **Laura Jennison Reed** (2008) have been elected Co-Presidents of the DDH Alumni/ae Council. Special thanks to outgoing Council President **Allie Lundblad** (2012) and Secretary **Dennis Landon** (1970), who led the Council through the disruption of the pandemic and served an additional year. They gave leadership to the wonderful Alums & Friends Gathering, June 10–11.



Newly elected to the Council as the classes of 2026 and 2027 are **Brandon Cook** (2010), **Tim Lee** (1989), **Aneesah Ettress** (2019), **Katherine Raley Alexander** (2008), **Cheryl Jackson** (2006), and **Carol Jones Sherman** (1979).

Andrew Langford (2007) was ordained to the ministry of word and sacrament in the ELCA on May 21. He serves Emmaus Lutheran Church in Eugene, Oregon, with spouse Rachel Langford.

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Honoring Richard and Dolores Highbaugh

A new fund, announced on Dolores Highbaugh's 95th birthday in April, honors her and her late husband. They are deeply Disciple, and that includes their decades-long relation to DDH.

Highbaugh ancestors were almost certainly present at Cane Ridge, one of the birthplaces of the Disciples movement. Richard Highbaugh's great-grandfather Scipio was born into slavery in Kentucky; by 1900, he brought his family to Indiana, where they bought land and homes.

Richard Highbaugh was born in 1920 in Irvington, Indiana, which began as a separately incorporated township five miles east of Indianapolis. The campus of what became Butler University was located there, and the Christian Women's Board of Missions built its College of Missions on the campus. In 1928, the "Missions Building" on Downey Avenue became the offices of the United Christian Missionary Society, and it served as the denomination's headquarters until 1996.

There were five or six households of the Highbaugh and Brown families in Irvington, and they were the only Black family who lived in the area until the early 1980s. Richard's first job was to assist his uncle, who was the weekend custodian in the Missions Building, by switching off the lights in the evenings. In the thirties, Black employees were not allowed to eat in the building even if they were the cooks, so, an aunt operated a tea room across the street where they could have lunch and take breaks. As Claudia Highbaugh observes,



her dad's family "supported the life of the building and the Negro employees."

There is a story about Richard initially not being admitted to the neighborhood elementary school. His mother protested the exclusion of Black children, and she risked danger by sitting on the steps of the school for a week so that her son could attend the school that he could walk to from home.

Richard Highbaugh became a Tuskegee Airman in 1943, with his younger brother Earl following the next year; Earl died in active

service in Italy. Richard attended Amherst College, where he was one of only three Black men in the student body, and then the University of Chicago for his MBA.

Dolores Jones's family migrated from the Jackson, Mississippi area, first to Detroit, and then to Chicago. In 1947, during Richard's business school days, he and Dolores were introduced by two mutual friends who were Airmen—and both named Hank. Richard and Dolores were married in Chicago in 1949.

After they married, Margrave Castleman, Richard's mother, directed them to the church on the Southside that would soon become Park Manor Christian Church. Margrave herself was an active leader in the Second Christian Church in Indianapolis under the leadership of Rev. R.H. Peoples.

At Park Manor, Richard was an elder and taught the Bible class for twenty years. He organized the first little league team in the city under the auspices of the church; it became part of the city's program. He started and ran the credit union in the church, a necessity when Black individuals were not welcome in the local banks, and the Cub Scout and Boy Scout troops, which offered an active community organization for boys from the neighborhood.

Dolores Highbaugh was also an elder and tireless in her work at Park Manor for fifty years. She gave important leadership in the Chicago Disciples Union including brave, transformative interracial initiatives; she worked with Disciples Women in the regional and general church, often breaking the color line alongside Sybel Thomas and Eddie Griffin. Her keen insight was sought in ecumenical venues and committees, where she was typically the sole lay woman among white male theologians and clergy. She served on the 1975–77 moderator team of the General Assembly of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).

In those years, and because Dolores insisted, Richard accompanied her to General Assemblies and got involved on the credentials committee. His presence at the assemblies encouraged



the denomination to secure appropriate facilities for persons who were disabled. He was the only person in a wheelchair at the General Assembly in Kentucky in 1971; by his last assembly in the 1990s, there were wheelchair accommodations and assistance. Richard Highbaugh died in 2006.

It was during the 1978 General Board meeting in Chicago that their daughter, Claudia, became the first Black woman ordained to the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), that is, the first ordained after the 1968 Restructure and Merger. Rev. Dr. Claudia Highbaugh has been a trustee of the Disciples Divinity House since 1999, and has served in higher and theological education at Yale University, Harvard Divinity School, and Connecticut College, as a trustee emerita and visiting professor at Ursinus College, and as a trustee of her alma mater, Hiram College.

The Highbaughs were proud that their children, Claudia and Burton, were graduates of the University's Laboratory Schools. "My parents considered both a life of faith and a first-rate education to be consistent goals for their lives and for the many young people with whom they created relationships," Claudia said.

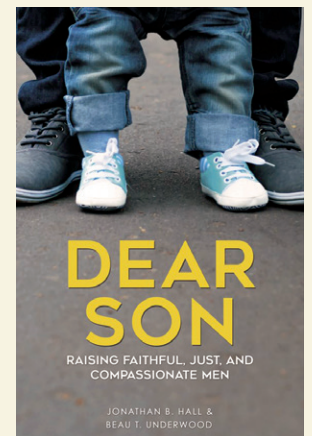
This new fund especially celebrates Dolores Highbaugh's pedagogical and intellectual

role at DDH. She has regularly attended programs and Monday dinners, and always has challenging questions for House Scholars (and the dean) as she nudges them to be educators for all people in the churches. Created with initial gifts of \$10,000, the Richard and Dolores Highbaugh Fund ensures that their profound example, commitment, and challenge are sounded for future generations of learners and leaders. ✚



Andrew Packman (2009) gave an address on "The Atmospherics of Theological Education," for a March 24 Convocation of the United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities, where he is Visiting Assistant Professor of Theological Ethics and Practical Theology.

Beau Underwood (2006) joined efforts with fellow Disciples minister Jonathan Hall in *Dear Son: Raising Faithful, Just, and Compassionate Men*, from Chalice Press. The book is framed as a series of letters from two dads to their young sons.



On February 21, DDH Scholar and PhD student **Virginia White**, who is co-pastor of Root and Branch Church, was joined by **Rebecca Anderson** (2007) founding co-pastor of Gilead Church Chicago, and **Erin James Brown**, Big Shoulders Church, Chicago, to discuss, "Creation amid Crisis: Ministry as the Practical Work of Transformation."



Marshall Hatch Jr., former DDH resident and co-founder and executive director of the MAAFA Redemption Project, was featured on WBEZ Chicago Public Radio in March as part of a collaboration with the Divinity School to reflect on two years of the pandemic. He focused on the “Sanfoka” window at the New Mount Pilgrim MB Church where he is one of the pastors.



On February 5, **Kate Gerike**, 2020 MDiv grad and former DDH resident, was ordained to the ELCA and installed as pastor of the Lysne and Salem Lutheran Churches in Hawley and Hitterdal, Minnesota.

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Alums and friends gather for the Distinguished Alumna Award

Author, speaker, community organizer, and Oakland Peace Center founder Sandhya Jha received the award on June 10.



Vy Nguyen, Executive Director of Week of Compassion, introduced Sandhya Jha. Alumni/ae Council President Allie Lundblad and Dean Kris Culp presented the award and read its citation. April Lewton, JoAnne Kagiwada, and other NAPAD colleagues added commendations. The event also featured a StoryHour hosted by Rebecca Anderson, art reflections by Aneesah Ettress, conversation with Cynthia Lindner and Kris Culp, and worship in the Chapel of the Holy Grail with a keynote sermon by Ayanna Watkins.

Each time we gather at the Disciples Divinity House luncheon at General Assembly and listen to the Distinguished Alumna/us for that year, I think to myself, “I wish I had that person as a classmate,” and I imagine the meals and conversations I would have had with them. Clark Gilpin, David Vargas, Daisy Machado, Clark Williamson—just to name a few recipients—have changed our thinking and ministry through their work. This year I am grateful for our Distinguished Alumna, Sandhya Jha, who was my classmate. She helped many of us think through hard theological issues back then, and continues to do so still to this day.

There were late night conversations and deep theological debates; conversations in the classroom bled into the pub room. But I will admit that it wasn’t easy either. Sandhya kept pushing many of us, especially me, telling me to work harder, to cook better food in the basement at DDH—all of which I am grateful for today. I needed a big sister to help me navigate the complexity.

In conversations at Monday Night Dinners or throughout the many rooms at DDH, Sandhya always grounded us in the community and in the potential of what our beloved community can and should be. I remember the very first meal I had with Sandhya when I came for a visit as a prospective student. We met at the Salonica Restaurant and talked about creation, the earth, the environment, how it is important to care for our planet and its people. But it was more than just about creation for Sandhya, it was also about making sure that the communities who can’t advocate for or defend themselves get

a chance to be advocated for as their water, air, and forests were being polluted and taken away.

Sandhya reminds us that there is always a power dynamic in every situation and community. When it comes to disagreements, ministers are sometimes advised to ask, “Do you want to be right or do you want to be in relationship?” This question, as Sandhya has consistently taught me, is wrong and does not help us to be in better relationship; for one thing, it assumes that everyone is on an equal playing field when we know that is not the case. For Sandhya, it is not about being right or being in relationship; it’s about being in right relationship. It is about honoring each other; it’s about understanding the ways in which systems of oppressions and power hurt people and that the hurt is not equal. It is about recognizing that, in order to create the beloved community that God calls us to be, we need to understand and dismantle the ways in which each of us have different power and privilege. We need to do that difficult, painful, long work of pushing one another and helping each other remember that the beloved community is worth fighting for.

As I think about recent events and the ways in which so much violence is tearing us apart, I am grateful that Sandhya has been so engaged, both intellectually and pastorally, in challenging many systems, organizations, churches, denominations, to live out fully what it means to follow Jesus in a way that helps us to dismantle racism and oppression. Her work and prophetic words were challenging twenty years ago when we had our first meal together at the Salonica. They are now even more important and needed at this time.

I am grateful that she is our Distinguished Alumna recipient this year, and I am grateful that we, as a community, have her as a conversation partner and, some of us, as our elder, in helping us to think through the complexity that hinders us from being the beloved community that we are called to be. Sandhya—thank you, for poking us and always challenging us, still. Congratulations.



Alum Council President Allie Lundblad with Sandhya Jha and Kris Culp

Nazareth, Chicago, Oakland

Distinguished Alumna Sandhya Jha reflects on communities, resistance, and the possibility of goodness.

by **Sandhya Rani Jha**

June 10, 2022

The question, “What kind of goodness comes from this,” gets tangled up in my head with that important and comforting-to-me phrase, “Can any good come out of Nazareth?”

I come from Akron, Ohio, with only narratives of what is wrong with it, and I am shaped by my father’s village of Tildanga, a tiny, mostly ignored and isolated village in West Bengal with limited futures and few ways out, and by my mother’s town of Airdrie in Scotland, whose main street is now populated solely by charity shops and bars since the pit mines nearby long since closed.

I am from a people of towns that no good could come of. And I love that Jesus and I have that in common.

I’m obviously overwhelmed by this award. I mentioned to Dean Culp that I felt a little like President Obama when, upon learning he had been given the Nobel Peace Prize, stated that he didn’t feel that he deserved “to be in the company of so many of the transformative figures who’ve been honored.” Upon learning of my selection, I immediately looked up the list of people who had received it in previous years, people I admire, some of whom have shaped me in major ways through their work or mentorship.



And because I’m me, I also noticed people who deserved it more than I did who didn’t get it before they died, particularly two of my heroes from the House, David Kagiwada and William Fox. Everything in me wishes there were a way for them to get this award because they answer the question, “Can any goodness come from this?”

I came across Dr. Fox’s brilliant history of Black Disciples of Christ when I was longing for a richer history than the most popular books had to offer. One of the greatest gifts I got as a House Scholar was to tag along for breakfast the morning after he came to hear Ayanna Johnson Watkins’s senior ministry project presentation. He said to Ayanna, Laura Jean Torgerson, and me that we were the future of the church. He really meant Ayanna, but it was nice of him to include Laura Jean and me.

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Kimberly Redding, Associate Professor of History at Carroll University, was a DDH resident for 2021–22. She spoke on April 25 about her research on Japanese Americans and church-community organizations in Chicago in the post-war period.

BRAVO! Disciples Scholar **Justin Carlson** appeared as Prince Siegfried in the University Ballet production of *Swan Lake*, April 30–May 1.



Chris Dorsey (2001), formerly president of Higher Education and Leadership Ministries of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), has been called as the next president of Disciples Home Missions.

NEWS IN BRIEF



McKinna Daugherty (2010) and Theodore Shinnars, who married in a “mini-mony” in 2020, are celebrating their wedding on July 22.

Congratulations to **Colton Lott** (2016; trustee) and Kelsey Cobbs, who will marry on October 1.

Mark Lambert (2011) wrote “Reckoning with Re-education: Christianity’s Role in Native American Boarding Schools” for *Sightings* on July 6. A post-doctoral Teaching Fellow at the Divinity School, he will teach “Indigenous Religions, Health, and Healing” in the College in Winter 2023.



Graduating House Scholar **Ross Allen** wrote “The Mystical Significance of Jesus’ Resurrection” for the April 13 issue of the *Christian Century*.

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Dozens converged to honor Sandhya Jha, share meals and worship, converse and tell stories on June 10–11.

ALUMNI/AE & FRIENDS GATHERING



Jha CONTINUED FROM PAGE 9

I asked Yvonne Gilmore what she’d want me to lift up about Dr. Fox, who was one of her predecessors in the National Convocation. Here are her words: “The thought leadership of William K. Fox expanded the theological imagination of DDH and the wider church. As he observed, ‘[In] an era when census data and mass media referred to Blacks as *nonwhite*, actually this meant *nonbeing*. This concept of nonbeing was one of the factors contributing to the omission of any significant reference to Blacks in American histories.’”

She continued, “His analysis and theological reflection on ‘nonbeing’ and its registers between the church and the House made space for untold and liminal stories, registers of being, and a community of hope beyond hope.” In 1941, he became the first Black Disciples House Scholar. He served congregations, edited the *Christian Plea*, became Administrative Secretary, and co-authored *Journey Toward Wholeness: A History of Black Disciples of Christ in the Mission of the Christian Church*.

David T. Kagiwada, who entered DDH in 1951, founded what is now NAPAD, North American Pacific and Asian Disciples. His widow, JoAnne Kagiwada, an attorney and nonprofit executive,

served faithfully and challengingly, on our DDH board from 1984–2018; she has kept the DDH West crowd, particularly Vy Nguyen and myself, in line for the last fifteen years as well.

Rev. Kagiwada, after surviving the US concentration camps for Japanese Americans, recognized a calling to the work of justice. He initially came to Chicago for a social work degree, but realized his questions were spiritual. In his ordination papers, he noted, and you’ll see from this why he’s one of my heroes, “I want to bear witness to the goodness which finds its source in the God of our Lord Jesus Christ.... It is a ministry which involves *judgment as well as healing* [emphasis added]. It is to this task that I commit energies, talents, vision, and life.” And he did, connecting with Korean American pastor Soongook Choi and modeling racial reconciliation and advocacy for a place at the table in the Disciples, a table that is open but has a lot of unspoken table rules.

They are my heroes because of what it would have meant to be here as men of color. I often think about what they may have faced and navigated—and how they opened the doors for people like me. They made it an easier place for me to be. Although not necessarily always an easy one.

I had an amazing student minister at First Christian Church of Oakland, who dealt with so much heartbreak as a Black man over the racism at his west coast seminary that he quit after two years. He told me he was considering finishing his MDiv and said, “You always have such great things to say about your experience at the University of Chicago; should I go there?” I said to him, “*All* seminaries are racist. The University of Chicago isn’t *less racist*. It worked for me because I knew it was racist going in. Your heartbreak has to do with the fact that your school pretended it *wasn’t*.”

It evokes that question of our day: What good can come of this place that wasn’t meant for people like us? What kind of good can come of this place where most of my Black friends faced harassment from UCPD, one of the largest private police forces in the State of Illinois; where students did not always treat Black staff with the dignity and worth they deserved; where the group called Minorities in Public Policy Studies clung to each other to survive the culture of the place we were so proud to attend....

“Can any good come out of Nazareth?” pointed to the inadequacy of a place, the inferiority of a place, but I wonder if the question can be posed equally to a university whose place in the world has hinged, historically, on *othering*.

Obviously, the reason my student had heard me speak so highly of this place was because of the community that formed so we could navigate and survive and even thrive.

I reflect gratefully on a place where my colleagues helped me confront the anti-blackness that still lurked in my commitments to racial justice; where my peers introduced me to Indigenous and Latina feminist and womanist scholarship when even Reinhold Niebuhr wasn’t enough; where when I said I needed a spiritual discipline but couldn’t find a spiritually rigorous devotional, Dean Culp introduced me to the genius of Howard Thurman; where only months later, I was supported in an internship at All Peoples Christian Church that changed the whole trajectory of what ministry I realized was possible, and where I got to meet DDH Distinguished Alumnus Dan Genung, who gifted me with his own copy of Howard Thurman’s *Jesus and the Disinherited* that had offered him spiritual sustenance in his decades of innovative, hard, front-lines ministry as founder of that church.

As I sit with this question of “what goodness can come of this,” I keep hearing the clear answer, “the goodness is community... but it

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Ken Brooker Langston (1985), Disciples Justice Action Network (DJAN) and Disciples Center for Public Witness (DC4PW) executive, was honored for his work in racial and economic justice with the Christian Church Capital Area Bridge-Builders Award on January 16.



Doug Collins (2013) gave the Baccalaureate Address at Eureka College on May 6. He is Senior Pastor of First Christian Church of Tacoma, Washington.

In June, MDiv alumna **Laura Jean Torgerson** (2002) successfully defended her PhD dissertation at the Graduate Theological Union. It considers Nicaraguan Pentecostal biblical interpretation. Starting July 1, she will be Visiting Assistant Professor of New Testament/Louisville Post-doctoral Fellow at Berkeley School of Theology.



Three Disciples Scholars presented their Senior Ministry Thesis projects at DDH.

On May 2, **Ross Allen** presented “‘A Parable of Communion’: *La communauté de Taizé* and the (Im)Possible Hope of a Future Ecumenism.”

On May 20, **Benny VanDerburgh** discussed “‘Movement Religion’ in the Young Lords Organization of Chicago.”

That same day, **Emily Griffith** presented “Out of Our Minds: A Theology of Madness for Spiritual Care.”



Santiago Piñón (1998) has been selected for the MSI Aspiring Leader fellowship at Rutgers University. The program engages mid-career leaders from education, non-profit, and business sectors in an effort to prepare the next generation of Minority Serving Institution presidents.

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Jha CONTINUED FROM PAGE 11

takes work, because for now, it’s still a community of resistance.”

The question focuses on this particular moment in which we find ourselves—this moment of pandemic, of insurrection, this moment where disabled and senior and fat people are considered disposable as we re-establish the pace that capitalism requires of us. I wonder if each of us has our own answer, also related to community, possibly also related to communities of resistance.

The beginning of the pandemic was a horror show for people working on the front lines. I watched partner organizations of the Oakland Peace Center close down feeding programs because all their volunteers were senior citizens at greatest risk, while the need for food programs spiked as day laborers and others watched their income wiped out in the blink of an eye. Night shelters closed down, encampments grew, people whose health or age required them to shelter in place faced an excruciating level of isolation.

At the Oakland Peace Center, we didn’t know what to do. We started a community garden because there were so many gig workers in our neighborhood with no money for fresh produce. We closed our doors to almost all programming to keep each other safe. And, in true University of Chicago spirit, we started a book club, The Beloved Book Community.

People I had organized alongside for years and people I had never met but were neighbors and donors and local activists showed up to discuss *A Black and Latinx History of the United States*, *The City We Became*, *Emergent Strategy*, *Our History is the Future*, and *Minor Feelings*. They showed up to study the Storytelling Project Model to analyze stock stories, hidden stories, resistance stories, and transformation stories. They showed up for good author videos and good questions.

Maybe three books and five months into the pandemic, I realized we had shifted from showing up out of desperation to showing up for community. It was the moment when I asked what had come up for folks in small groups. Tami said, “Keilani said something amazing; would you be willing to share?” And the group started inviting each other to share their wisdom. No one named the shift. I hadn’t



changed our group discussion protocols. They wanted to *lift each other up*.

I’m not sure it’s enough goodness, but for me, it was a tangible moment of goodness coming from an awful time.

When I finally got up the courage to tell people about the award (today was when I told people), a colleague of mine finally said the thing that made me at peace with this overwhelming accolade: “God keeps lifting you up; praise him!”

It was my colleague Terri Butler, who helps her church, True Vine Ministries, organize vigils at every street corner where someone in Oakland was killed. There are enough murders that sometimes the vigils are months after the murders. For Miss Terri to re-center me on who to praise meant a lot.

When she gets asked, “What kind of goodness comes from this?” she has an answer. Her answer is that goodness comes from community coming together and saying “Enough.” That goodness comes from people of faith praying in the streets and not just in their sanctuaries, praying with their actions and not just their words. That goodness comes when the bullets stop flying and people can experience the fullness of peace.

I think Miss Terri would say goodness comes from us, and not enough of it has come yet... and so we continue to exhort each other and praise God for making us the people who can exhort each other.

To me, this is the goodness that DDH has been and continues to be: a place where we can exhort each other to create greater goodness, and in the process experience it.

May we all encounter enough of that goodness that we may continue to create so much more. Thank you. ✦

Watkins CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

who have to bury their children. And don’t get me started on the natural disasters.

What kind of goodness comes from this world we barely recognize, and yet this world some of us have been clawing, clawing, for others to see for eons? I should just tell you now that I have no answer for this question. If you came today hoping that I’d wrap this up for you, I’m really sorry to disappoint you. I don’t got it. I don’t got it when my kid asks how come chickens have wings but can’t fly. I don’t know that either.

Instead, in true DDH fashion, I came to sit next to you at the proverbial breakfast counter and wonder aloud with you. To consider what the ancients have said, what the ancestors have taught us, how the elders try to guide us, and how the children lead us. What the spirit is saying to the churches, what the wisdom in this room is.

Paul’s letter to the Romans, in particular, the last part of the eighth chapter, is a text meant for a people that understand suffering. It is meant for a people who understand a world that feels like it’s coming for them. Paul says, you’re not the only one who sees this: all creation cries out, waiting for the freedom, the fulfillment, the glory we already deeply believe is there. It’s not an easy thing to wait for glory, for freedom, for fullness to be revealed. It’s not easy to trust that it’s even there waiting for us.

A poem by Nikki Giovanni refers to a quote from Rosa Parks, pre-Montgomery bus boycott, where she says it just seemed like everything was getting worse. I feel that sense of things getting worse right at the center of my chest. But if I’m honest, I also get some slight comfort that Rosa Parks felt like everything was getting worse. Maybe these unprecedented times are actually preceded. When Rosa Parks felt like everything was getting worse, then, in one of the most well-known ways in history, she played a part in it getting better.

And we know that in all things, God works for the good of those who love him.

Romans 8:28 is a well-loved, often-quoted scripture in my faith circles. But it’s also one that’s really hard to quote with any kind of exactness because there are several decent ways to turn the Greek into English here. I’m going to give you the breakfast counter version of this exegesis.

When I hear a few of the ways that it has

been translated—“We know, that in all things *God works* for the good of those who love him,” and “we know that *all things work together* for good to those who love God,” and “we know that *in all things God works together* with those who love him to bring about what is good”—I hear two things. This is a text that starts with “we know.” (Apparently, all we know is that the first words of the text are “we know.”) Secondly, there is no passivity in these different versions of good coming about. Somebody, some thing, some god, is working.

The mothers of the movement, the mothers of Black children killed by police or gun violence, they responded to the untimely, unjust deaths of their children—Trayvon Martin, Breonna Taylor, Hadiya Pendleton, Tamir Rice, Michael Brown, Sandra Bland, Oscar Grant, several others—by stepping into the spotlight to fight against the systems and forces and humans that ultimately killed their loved ones. *Working together for good*.

The children’s book, *Islandborn*, tells the story of the Mirabal sisters whose resistance and whose state-sanctioned murder marked the beginning of the end of a dictator’s reign. Juno Díaz turns it into a story about heroes that my five-year-old daughter cannot get enough of. *Working, working for good*.

Like Marquita Bradshaw, my Memphis neighbor, whose family and neighbors from the neighborhood she grew up in suffered mysterious cancers, behavioral disorders, and other illnesses for generations before discovering that the culprit was not as they were told—their poor diet and their lack of self-control—but instead it was polluted land, air, and water from the nearby Memphis defense depot that was leaking military waste. Marquita Bradshaw went on to start the environmental justice non-profit Sowing Justice. In 2020, she became the first Black woman to win the Democratic nomination for US Senate in Tennessee, and, to win any statewide nomination in any party in Tennessee. *Working together*.

I am not saying that the suffering of Marquita, that the suffering of others, is redemptive somehow. It is not OK that mothers lost their children so that now this good can come from it. Those are lies. They are lies that have been used to perpetuate oppression and abuse for eons.

What I am here to say is that we serve a God who refuses to let our suffering be the end



Heike Springhart, friend of the House and former dean of the Theologische Studienhaus at Heidelberg Universität, was installed as bishop of the *Evan-gelische Landeskirche* in Baden on April 10.

Sandhya Jha (2001), **Yvonne Gilmore** (2001), **Tim Lee** (1998), **Santiago Piñón** (1998), and **Terri Hord Owens** (1999) spoke at the Kirkpatrick Conference, *Visions of Wholeness: Systemic Racism, Antiracism, and ‘Reconciliation’ in Our Shared History and Tradition*, held in Tulsa, March 18–19. It was organized by the Disciples of Christ Historical Society.



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of our story. We serve a God who refuses to clock-out when tragedy strikes. We serve a God who will not give up working for good even when we do. Even when we must. God keeps working. And God is not interested in our bare-knuckles survival, God is working for our deep and gorgeous and thriving life. *For I know the plans I have for you, to give you hope and a future.*

I'd like to tell a story from a visit to Thistle Farms in Nashville. Its program provides housing and occupational alternatives for women leaving trafficking and other forms of the sex work industry. Our group of Bethany Fellows, new Disciples pastors, was given a tour of the facility by a woman who I will call Jennifer. Jennifer was a client of the program, and now a tour guide. She showed us around the place: the gift shop that eventually became the social enterprise that helped to fund Thistle Farms, as well as the workshop and factory where the products that were sold in the gift shop were made—candles, journals, hand-pressed paper, the whole thing.

Jennifer found the program by stumbling into a church one day—a church sanctuary that happened to have the doors open, which is a rare thing in our time. She stumbled in and began to pray, the pastor found her and talked with her. After several of these back-and-forth visits, the pastor told her about Thistle Farms. “It’s really hard to get in, but I’ll do my best to get you into the program.” Jennifer replied, “Listen, if I don’t get into this program, I’m going to die. If I go back out there, I’m going to die.”

The pastor picked up the phone and called. Thistle Farms miraculously had a placement that night. Jennifer signed up. One of the first things that happened was a series of appointments. She visited a doctor, and it was determined that she had hepatitis C.

The doctor said, “I’m going to treat you, but first you have to have a waiting period. I need to know that you’re serious about getting well.” He’d worked with enough of the women in this program, and the treatment for hepatitis C is very complicated and precise. I guess this doctor decided that he wasn’t going to waste his time

helping her get better if she wasn’t serious about healing. (I have a lot of thoughts about that, but those are for another sermon.)

But, Jennifer trusted that there was something in this for her. She knew that if she went back out there, she would die. She remained with the program. She would follow up with the doctor at six months for treatment.

When it came time to get her work place-ment in the program, she really wanted to make candles. Candles looked like so much fun. You’re melting wax, you’re setting candles, you get to play with essential oils.... Instead, she got assigned to make paper, the paper that would go in those journals that were sold in the gift shop.

Jennifer did not want the paper-making job. It was disgusting. All these sinks filled with milky white liquid and the remnants of weeds, thistles in fact. But, she couldn’t go back out there. She took her work assignment and thought, “Maybe if I keep this up, I’ll be promoted to candles one day.” She started making paper, and she hated it, just like she thought she would. It was messy, it was milky, not glamorous at all. Just sink after sink of milky plant pulp that had to be fished out, mashed together, laid out to dry. Then it was back to another sink of this disgusting milky liquid. Elbows deep. The milky liquid, the thistles, day after day after day after day, after month after month, which finally became the sixth month when she could go back to the doctor and earn her healing treatment.

She goes to the doctor. The battery of tests begins. The doctor runs tests, and gets a quizzical look. He comes back, gets more tests. More quizzical looks. Comes back and finally says, “There’s no hepatitis C in your system.” He goes so far as to check the records to make certain that he’s dealing with the same patient that he saw six months ago. It was the same Jennifer. This time with no hepatitis C.

She’d find out later that milk thistle has detoxifying powers. It is a natural and powerful antioxidant. And day after day, in the disgusting milk thistle liquid, elbows deep in this sinkful of mess, making paper, she was being healed. She was being cured.

I believe in miracles. Some days more than others. What I hear in that story now, is that even now, elbows deep in Covid-19, elbows deep in the craziness of parity, elbows deep in pain and loss and fiery anger at the injustice of children dying at the hands of police or self-made vigilantes, or mothers dying in childbirth that could have been prevented if abortions were legal. Elbows deep—somewhere in here is healing.

I don’t have answers for what kind of goodness, I just have moments of seeing healing manifest around me in this work. Of seeing Fred, an 80-year-old United Methodist minister, who is elbows deep in the work of justice now, because he feels like he should have been back in 1968 when he was pretending like he couldn’t see what was happening. Of hearing the story of Sabrina Fulton, Trayvon Martin’s mother, who wanted more than anything not to go to George Floyd’s funeral. She had some strength rise up within her that said, “I want them to know they’re not alone. That you do survive this, and that you have me now, and we have each other.” She went to the funeral.

It’s in the moments of remembering. When I had my second child, George Floyd died. When I had my first child, Deidre Jones died days later. I came home and totally fell apart in tears—how can I enjoy my new baby when my best friend is gone? And now, her baby, who I was there to see be born, is seventeen and has a girlfriend. He is cute and clever and wise and being an awesome big brother to his little brother, making sure that they never forget the most awesome mom in the world they shared.

Don’t have answers. But I do have truths. *For I know the plans I have for you, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. And we know that in all things, God works together for our good.* God works together, with us, who love him, for good.

I pray that these moments and these truths will continue to revive you as you go, elbows deep, in this messy, disgusting work of justice-doing. Know that even as you work, you just might be being healed. Amen. ❖

IN MEMORIAM

B. Ernest O’Donnell died May 28 in Fort Worth; he was 91. Peace, justice, and ecumenism were enduring commitments in his life and ministry. He served local congregations in Rogers, Arkansas, and in Dallas, Longview, and, for twenty-one years, First Christian Church of Richardson, Texas.

Born in 1931 in Johnston, Pennsylvania, Ernie O’Donnell grew up in Tucson, Arizona. As a youth, he joined the First Christian Church there and experienced the formative mentorship of its minister, Harold Lurger. Ernie attended Chapman College (now University) on a full scholarship. After graduation in 1952, he entered the Disciples Divinity House and the Divinity School.



In 1955, after receiving the BD degree and being ordained, he served at the Hazel Green Academy in Kentucky, All Peoples Christian Church in Los Angeles, and with the WCC InterChurch Service to Greek Villages in northern Greece. In 1959, he was called to the staff as youth minister of what is now the Southwest Region, and he met Judy Crow. They were married in 1960, and raised two sons, Kelly and Sean. Their partnership included Judy’s own MDiv and DMin degrees and congregational ministry, as well as international travel and involvement at University Christian Church in Fort Worth after their retirements.

He co-founded the Dallas Peace Center and was active in the Disciples Peace Fellowship. He served two separate terms on DDH’s Alumni/ae Council, including as its President from 1988–89. They established the B. Ernest and Judy Crow O’Donnell Fund at DDH. He is survived by Judy, their sons, and four grandchildren.



Estelle V. O’Connor served as DDH’s Administrator from 1971 until her retirement in 1990. She died on April 24; she was 94. She worked closely with Deans Blakemore, Browning, and Gilpin to give oversight to DDH’s building, accounts, and daily life. “She brought a lively energy to work with her each and every day,” Clark Gilpin said. A longtime resident of Palos Heights, Illinois, she volunteered at Palos Hospital for forty years and was a longtime member of the Palos Woman’s Club and Palos Golf League. We remember Mrs. O’Connor with fondness and gratitude, and extend sympathy to her family. She is survived by three children, Thomas (Laura), Jim (Renee), and Elizabeth (Mark) Ford, eight grandchildren, and twenty great-grandchildren, and two sisters. She was predeceased by her husband, Thomas V. O’Connor, and two brothers.

Samuel Campbell Pearson, Jr., was “a scholar, teacher, administrator, and colleague of uncommon insight, effectiveness, and humanity,” as his 2001 Distinguished Alumnus Award said. He died on June 10 at home in St. Louis; he was 91. He was Professor Emeritus of Historical Studies at Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville where he taught for many years in addition to serving as Dean of the School of Social Sciences from 1983–95.

He was born in Dallas, Texas, on December 10, 1931, to Samuel and Edna

Pearson. In 1951, after earning his BA *cum laude* from Texas Christian University at the age of nineteen, he also matriculated to the Divinity School and the Disciples Divinity House. He earned BD and MA degrees, and, in 1964, a PhD degree. He held a commission as chaplain in the Navy and served on active duty from 1954–56. He wrote on the history of Christianity, and received two senior Fulbright appointments to lecture on American History in Chinese universities. After retirement, he taught in China under the auspices of Global Ministries and edited *Supporting Asian Christianity’s Transition from Mission to Church: A History of the Foundation for Theological Education in South East Asia* (2010).

Mr. Pearson was an important figure in the life of the Disciples Divinity House and in Disciples higher education. From 1956–60, he was the Assistant to Dean Blakemore and DDH’s National Representative. He later served on the Alumni/ae Council and the Centennial Planning Committee. He wrote monographs on the Disciples movement and the Disciples Divinity House. He was a member of the Board of the Division of Higher Education (now HELM), a life member of the Disciples of Christ Historical Society, and a member of and archivist for the Association of Disciples for Theological Discussion. Union Avenue Christian Church minister and friend Thomas V. Stockdale once



remembered him as “a constant, sometimes frustrated, but relentless voice for every compassionate and enlarging project we undertook.”

He is survived by Mary Alice Clay Pearson and their sons, William Clay and John Andrew (Pamela Jorden). Memorial gifts may be made to the Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville Foundation, Southern Poverty Law Center, or to the Disciples Divinity House.

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AHH... BACKYARD LIFE!

Scenes from DDH's backyard, now completely renewed thanks to the amazing vision of Ernest Wong, founder and principal of Site Design. So many stories, study breaks, and meals yet to share in this beautiful space.

