Elbows Deep

Ayanna Johnson Watkins
Lead Organizer and Executive Director of MICAH, Memphis Interfaith Coalition for Action and Hope, and Alumni/ae Council member

June 11, 2022
Alums & Friends Gathering
Chapel of the Holy Grail

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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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 Liia Xie have been named DDH’s inaugural Theological Education Leadership Fellows; they begin their full-time fellowship year this September. September’s Boba 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 goodness can come in such unimaginable times? Distinquished 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 Emie 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 Highbough, 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

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). Sarah 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 Church (Disciples of Christ) 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 movement.

Convocation 2022 — “Extending Exodus”

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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 DDH has been doing of preserving and telling our history, both lifting up those narratives that tell of our movement’s faithful- ness 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 a PhD 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 publications, 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.

Burn was a first woman president of the Illinois Disciples of Christ (now the CCW). 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 achieve a master’s degree from the University of Kentucky.

Ann couldn’t attend DDH’s 125th anniver- sary, but Ben and Ann had participated in the Centennial Celebration, and they had planned for 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 Fellowship 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 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.

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

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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 Chicago Public Academy in Englewood to design and build a playground.
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 Indianapolis, 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, and it served as the denomination’s headquarters until 1996.

There were five or six households of the Highbaughs and Brown families in Indianapolis. The campus of what became Butler University was located there, and the Christian Women’s Board of Missions built its College.

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 and the denomination’s color line. She worked with Disciples Women in the regional and general church, often breaking the color line. Her keen insight was sought in ecumenical venues and committees, where she was typically the only Black woman on a committee.

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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 Castlemaker, 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 and the denomination’s color line. Her keen insight was sought in ecumenical venues and committees, where she was typically the only Black woman on a committee.

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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.
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/ac Council President Allie Lundblad and Dean Kris Culp presented the award and read its citation. April Lewton, JoAnne Kagiwada, and other NAPAO colleagues added commendations. The event also featured a StoryHour hosted by Rebecca Anderson, art reflections by Aneesah Ettrees, 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 Saloni-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 oppression 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 Saloniacs. 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.

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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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 thoughtful leadership of William K. Fox expanded the theological imagination of DDH and the wider church. As he observed, ‘[i]n 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 1984–2016; 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 his heroes because of what it means to be here as men of color. I often think about what they may have faced 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 UCOP, 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 Alumus Dan Genung, who gifted me with his own copy of Howard Thurman’s The Christ 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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The program engages Griffith of Chicago.' 

"Movement Religion" in the Young Lords Organization

On May 20, Benny VanDerburgh discussed "Movement Religion" in the Young Lords Organization of Chicago. That same day, Emily Griffifith 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 Kegon 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.

Three Disciples Scholars presented their Senior Ministry Thesis projects at DDH. On May 2, Ross Allen presented "A Parable of Communism" to the commu-
nauté 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.

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takes work, because for now, it's still a commun-
ity 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 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 com-
munities of resistance.

The beginning of the pandemic was a horror show for people working on the front lines. Watched partner organizations of the Oakland Peace Center close down feeding programs because all their volunteers were senior citi-
zens 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 shelter closed down, encamp-
ments 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 story stones, 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 out of desperation to showing up for community. It was the moment when I asked what we can do for folks in small groups. Tami said, "Keliain 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 over-whelming 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 Oak-
land was killed. There are enough murders that sometimes the vigils are months after the mur-
ders. For Miss Terri to re-center me on who to praise meant a lot.

When she gets asked, "What kind of good-
ness comes from this?", she has an answer. Her answer is that goodness comes from commu-
nity coming together and saying "Enough."

That goodness comes from people of faith praying in the streets and not just in their sanc-
tuaries, praying with their actions and not just their words. That goodness comes when the bullet stops 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 exhale each other and praise God for making us the people who can exhale each other.

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

May we all encounter enough of that good-
ness that we may continue to create so much more. Thank you.}

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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 get it. I don't get it when my kids ask how come chickens have wings but can't fly. I don't know that either.

Instead, in true DDH fashion, I came to sit for the first Black woman, historian, poet, Martin, Briony 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 the dictator's reign. Juno Diaz 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 mystery oans, 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 some-
how. 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

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What I am here to say is that we serve a God who refuses to let our suffering be the end
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, I pray that these moments and these truths will continue to revive you as you go, knowing that in all things, God works together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to his purpose. (Romans 8:28 NIV). And now, her baby, who I was there to see at George Floyd’s funeral. She had some 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, just that I have just moments of seeing healing manifest around me in this work. Of seeing Fred, an 80-year-old United Methodist minister, who is elves 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 can 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 later. I came home and totally fell apart in tears—how can I enjoy the 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.

Samanuel Campbell Pearson, Jr., was a scholar, 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, and president of the Illinois Historical Society for twenty years in addition to serving as Dean of the School of Social Sciences from 1983–95. He was born in Dallas, Texas, on December 30, 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 Represen- tative. 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, was a member of the Board of the Division of Higher Education (now HELM), a member of the Disciples of Christ Board of Trustees, and a member of and archived for the Association of Disciples for Theological Discussion. Union Avenue Christian Church minister and friend Thomas V. Stockdale once remembered him as “a constant, some times 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.
SUMMER 2022

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.