Editors’ Note

How will the church respond to what is shaping up to be a significant challenge, if not crisis, in care for the elderly over the next decades? It’s no secret that the population of the United States is aging rapidly. In Minnesota alone, the number of adults over the age of 65 is projected to triple in the decade between 2010 and 2020. In that same time period, the number of adults in the state between the ages of 20 and 55 will shrink. By 2020, for the first time in history, the population of seniors will outnumber school-aged children. And Minnesota is by no means an anomaly: it represents typical forecasts of demographic patterns throughout the American population.

In addition to the consequences of the “baby boom” in the post-World War II period, much of the growth in the number of senior citizens in western countries like the United States is due to improved health conditions and medical treatment. But medical treatment presents its own problems. It’s expensive, and frequently it compels difficult decisions about treatment for the elderly and those at the end of life. Further complicating this picture is the large number of baby boomers (around one-third) who have given no thought to how their needs will be met in the event that they will require some kind of long-term care.

The church must pay attention to these startling demographic and technological trends. With a mission to care for widows and orphans in the spirit of Christian compassion, the church needs to be prepared to accompany a growing number of people—members and non-members—as they age and die. By helping people wrestle with what it means to be human, including what it means to live well and die well, the church has a unique and crucial role to play at the end of life.

This issue of Bearings seeks to provide resources to the church by examining caregiving, dying, and death from a Christian perspective. As a hospital chaplain, Karen Hanson offers a pastoral perspective on caregiving at the end of life. David Wood, a seasoned pastor, considers words he might say to a dying person—words that acknowledge the sobering reality of death but also testify to God’s enduring presence. It’s a sensitive and under-discussed issue, especially in mainline churches. Relying on his experience as a physician and hospital administrator, Glen Miller shares reflections and advice on dying well. And Jenell Paris reviews Richard Lischer’s stirring eulogy about his son, who died from cancer as a young man.

At the Collegeville Institute, we care deeply about Christian perspectives on caregiving, illness, dying, death, and grief. One of our board members, Mona Hanford, has become a passionate advocate for caregivers and the bereaved. In February, Mona was interviewed by PBS’ Religion & Ethics. The episode, “Coping With Loss and Grief,” can be found online at www.pbs.org. Alongside Mona, we hope that the church speaks with an informed and confident voice as it offers comfort, meaning, and hope to the sick and the dying as well as those who love them. We offer this issue of Bearings with that hope in mind.
Editors’ Note

Not an End but a Graduation
An Interview with Glen E. Miller

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Dr. Glen E. Miller is a retired physician and hospital administrator. Glen and his wife Marilyn lived in Calcutta, India, for seven years while Glen served as Director of the Mennonite Central Committee. Because of common concern for the poor, he was in regular contact with Mother Teresa and the Missionaries of Charity. In the fall of 2011, the Millers resided at the Collegeville Institute while Glen participated in the resident scholars program. Glen recently authored a book about intentionally preparing for a “good death.” The book, Living Thoughtfully, Dying Well: A Doctor Explains How to Make Death a Natural Part of Life, was published by Herald Press (March 2014). Along with Jep Hostetler, former Collegeville Institute resident scholar (Fall 2012), Glen also runs the website www.livingjoyfullydyingwell.com. We asked Glen to discuss his motivation for the book, as well as key insights about what it means to die well.

The need to prepare for death took center stage for me personally after my cardiac arrest in September, 2010. With a medical history of two previous heart attacks, bypass surgery, and a pacemaker, I could no longer ignore my significantly reduced life expectancy. For my own sake, I set out to find information about preparing for death. In the process of collecting research and gathering stories, I realized that many other elderly people were not adequately prepared to die. The book became a “how-to guide” for preparing for death.

As a former doctor and medical administrator, what are the key things you learned that illuminate medical treatment of the elderly and of dying well?

When I started practicing medicine 55 years ago, essentially everything I could do for a patient came out of my doctor’s bag. Medical technology was almost nonexistent. It was only in my first year of medical school...
that CPR entered the scene, and when I first started practicing I was the only doctor in my community who had any experience with CPR. Since then all sorts of medical advances and medications have come along. Over the past generation we have seen the medicalization of not only our healthcare system but also our social interactions. We perceive a medical solution for almost any problem, and we place what I would consider to be an inordinate amount of trust in technology. Because of all this we tend to over-treat medical problems. We have such an array of treatments that we often don’t even consider not pursuing treatment. We have lost the balance between extending life with medical interventions and prioritizing the quality of a given life. We see tragic cases that highlight this imbalance, cases in which someone who is obviously dying is having his or her life extended amidst incredible amounts of pain and without any benefit to anyone. While advances in medicine are remarkable, they open a Pandora’s box of problems.

We now live in an era of managed and medicalized deaths. While approximately 80 percent of people say they want to die at home, the majority of them die in the hospital. And our obsession with long life makes us prone to extend the dying process. In crisis situations doctors are often directive, with the goal of preserving life. In the urgency and emotion of the moment, families are likely to go along with a doctor’s directives without considering previous conversations with the patient or the patient’s stated wishes. In the current medical environment we see a tendency to do anything possible to keep death at bay.

**In this context, what does it mean to die well? What is a good death?**

To understand what makes for a good death, it is useful to contrast a good death with a bad death. The worst death that I can imagine for myself is to be hospitalized in the Intensive Care Unit, sedated, tied to the bed, without access to family, and without any possibility of dying naturally. By contrast, I’ve seen a number of good deaths, especially among my family members. Those people I have known who died a good death died at home, surrounded by their friends and family, aware of what was happening around them.

“We have lost the balance between extending life with medical interventions and prioritizing the quality of a given life.”

While we cannot control our own deaths, dying well as an elderly person requires planning. Advance directives are very important. By allowing patients and their families to consider what to do in a crisis before the crisis is upon them, advance directives facilitate good decision making. Once medical decisions are made, especially near the time of death, patients and their families should agree to avoid second guessing such decisions. A good death is built around intentionality, not only with regard to medical decisions but also to relationships. People can die well by creating good memories with their loved ones before they die, and by prioritizing important relationships in their lives. For my brother, who died at home, the last weeks of his life were a virtual parade of people who came to see him. My brother expressed his gratitude to his loved ones for their contributions to his life, and they did likewise. He ended his life filled with thankfulness.
Why do so many elderly people and their families neglect the task of planning for death? What makes preparing to die so difficult?

We live in a death-denying culture. We don’t like to think about the impending deaths of our loved ones or of ourselves. Often, it isn’t until something tragic happens, such as a cancer diagnosis or a heart attack, that we confront the reality that life does have an end, and specifically that my life will have an end. Once mortality awareness has settled in, we can begin to have some meaningful conversations with our loved ones about end-of-life decisions. We can begin to see death as natural rather than as morbid or taboo.

For the family members of elderly people, another difficulty is that nobody wants to feel responsible for “not doing enough” or for “pulling the plug.” It is difficult for family members to commit themselves to honoring their loved one’s wishes, especially if that means not pursuing medical treatment.

You write that there are things worse than death. What do you mean?

After my cardiac arrest, I was disoriented and confused for two days. I could engage in conversation and so forth, but I had no short-term memory. I’d ask the same questions over and over. I wouldn’t want to go through something like that on a long-term basis. I would not want my life extended if I couldn’t relate to my surroundings and to other people. At that point, if my heart were to stop, I would not want to be resuscitated. If my breathing were to stop, I would not want to be put on a ventilator. If my kidneys malfunctioned, I would not want dialysis. If I were to become cognitively impaired, I have instructions in my advance directives to turn off my defibrillator. If my heart were to stop, it would not be restarted and I would die a natural death.

Let me be clear that with regard to my aversion to life-extending measures in instances of cognitive impairment, I am speaking specifically about people who are near the end of the lifespan. Not children, youth, or young adults. I recognize that incurable disease and cognitive impairment are qualitatively different in the prime of life than in advanced age, and that the loss of children or young adults is excruciatingly painful. While the deaths of elderly people still bring a sense of sorrow and loss to their loved ones, death is perhaps less of an enemy to elderly people. When I was visiting Saint John’s Abbey, an elderly monk said to me, “When the bus comes for you, get on the bus. You will know when the bus arrives.” He understood that when it is time to go and God calls, there is no need to delay.

What advice do you give to people making preparations for death?

I encourage people to complete advance directives, not in isolation but in collaboration with family members and others who might be making decisions for them. Families play a very important role in many cases; 80 percent of elderly patients are not able to make their own decisions in a time of medical crisis. In order to make informed choices during such times elderly people and their families need to
educate themselves and plan ahead. For myself, I have written down my wishes for what should be done in particular circumstances. My advance directives list conditions in which to pursue treatment and conditions in which to withhold treatment. If I have a terminal illness or treatment would be too onerous, it shouldn’t be undertaken. Part of preparing for death is determining how to balance interventions and life-extending treatment with quality of life.

I also encourage people to think about their legacy and how they want to be remembered. Do you want to be remembered as a person who nagged, complained, and perceived yourself as a victim? Or do you want to be remembered as a loving parent, a welcoming neighbor, an affirming friend? Preparations for death should be emotional and spiritual as well as physical.

You encourage people to “lean forward” as death approaches. What do you mean?

Once a diagnosis has been made—once it is clear that life is coming to an end—there are several options. One is to feel like a victim and become bitter about approaching death. A second is to accept that death is looming and to use the remaining time intentionally, perhaps even making it the best time of life. When people are asked what they would have done differently in life, typical answers are that they wish they would have taken more risks, developed deeper relationships, more fully explored their creative side, and injected more joy and laughter into their lives. It isn’t too late to consider these priorities as death approaches.

Leaning forward also has a very practical dimension. For my wife and me, leaning forward as death approaches has meant giving family mementos and keepsakes to loved ones we know will treasure them. Preparing a will and getting financial records in order are other ways to lean forward into death. I’ve seen widows or widowers endure weeks of frustration because they didn’t know where records were kept or didn’t know passwords for electronic records. I don’t want to do that to my family.

“Often, it isn’t until something tragic happens, such as a cancer diagnosis or a heart attack, that we confront the reality that life does have an end, and specifically that my life will have an end.”

Leaning forward means making the most of the time that remains to one, and making life easier for loved ones who go on living.

Living Thoughtfully, Dying Well is written to appeal to a broad audience, but your book is also forthcoming about your own Christian faith and how it informs your approach to death. How do you see the role of faith at the end of life?

It makes sense to me that if there is another life after this life, that life will feature beauty, peacefulness, freedom from suffering and pain, and integration. Holding that view, if I am elderly and suffering I might find less of a need to seek every medical intervention possible and instead recognize that I am headed to a better place. I can forego some measures that might extend my life if I can foresee a better situation and am ready to make the transition to it.

Beyond beliefs about life after death, faith
communities provide all sorts of support to people as they die—spiritual support, material support, touch, presence. Clergy and other people of faith can somehow represent the presence of God to the dying patient. They offer the sacraments. They can facilitate opportunities for reconciliation, confession, and forgiveness, helping people find peace with God and other people before they die.

**How do you conceive of dying as a spiritual event?**

Doctors can sometimes operate like mechanics fixing cars. They see isolated body parts, rather than whole people. When I was a patient, my doctors did a very good job of explaining my medical condition. But sometimes I wanted them to just look me in the eye and say, “And how are YOU doing?” I wanted them to recognize that I am more than my heart, lungs, and kidneys. When we conceive of death as a spiritual event, we can move beyond a mechanical frame of mind. When we conceive of death as a spiritual event, we can be receptive to the assurance of God’s unconditional love and provision for life after this life. When we conceive of death as a spiritual event, we can see death as a transition from this life to another—not an end, but a continuation. Unlike the medical model that views death as failure, death can become more like a graduation.
One January day I met my brother Dave and his wife, Deanna, at the Mayo Clinic, where we learned that the cancer that afflicted him had progressed so aggressively it could no longer be managed or contained. We sat together in a quiet corner and struggled to absorb the information that had hit us with the force of a body blow. We had hoped that participation in a clinical trial would shut Dave’s cancer down, but that had failed. Later, as we shared the Lord’s Supper in the back of the lab’s waiting area, something began to shift for the three of us. Hope for the outcome we wanted began to fade, and in its place hope in God’s promises for a life beyond death began to emerge. I had walked with Dave through his two-year cancer journey, but on this wintery day I realized I was accompanying him on a journey into the unknown—beyond the knowledge of any of us, including the doctors.

To accompany is to keep company with someone—to walk with him. It is also to play a supporting role on a musical instrument for someone taking the solo part—someone, for instance, singing a song. As a hospital chaplain and a church musician I accompany people in both senses of the word. In church, playing the organ or piano, I serve the vocalist and the song, creating a supportive space for the song to emerge, listening carefully and following where it leads. Sometimes I pick up the theme and play what I have heard or give it a slightly different spin. Sometimes the vocalist takes the song in a new direction and I follow as best I can.

The same skills figure in Christian caregiv-
ing. Caring means playing a supportive role. It involves being actively engaged, being present here and now, listening carefully to people, paying attention to both the lives they live now and the lives they have lived, helping their song to emerge in its fullness even if they are at the end of their lives.

As a musical accompanist I sometimes have strong feelings about how a song should be performed. In most cases, though, my task is to listen and to respond appropriately, not to exert my own sense of what should happen. The same holds true for my work as a chaplain among the sick and dying. In my experiences with a man named Arne, for example, both the directive and non-directive side of accompaniment came into play. I deeply desired to help Arne reach a state of peace before he went into a difficult and risky surgery. He was estranged from his only living family member, a brother who lived on the family farm. Arne lived alone in the city, and in the dim evening light of a stark hospital room his unsettled thoughts turned toward home. I suggested that we could attempt to reach his brother, and he agreed to try. But the phone number we found was no longer in service, and he could think of no one else to call.

The next morning I stopped by pre-op to look in on Arne. He said he had dreamed that night of the old days on the farm, of his parents and his brother, and he was at peace. A dream rather than the reality of brotherly reconciliation wasn’t the resolution I had hoped for, but I had to accept that this was Arne’s song and that he seemed satisfied. Arne died a short time later in the hospital, unable to recover from the surgery. I was grateful that he died in the company of doctors, nurses, and chaplains who had come to care for each other even as they extend their care to patients and their families. We frequently join with faith communities in end-of-life care as well. Recently a woman who was trained as a Stephen Minister in a local congregation did wonderful work by simply being present with a patient, modeling for his active spouse, his caregiver, how to sit in companionable silence. Caregivers can also facilitate times of sharing among family members and friends as a loved one approaches death—times in which words of gratitude, love, forgiveness, and promise can be shared.

In my experience, approaching the end of life is much easier for patients and families who are clear about the goals of end-of-life care. People generally want to be comfortable; they want to withdraw or withhold life-sustaining treatments when death is imminent; and they want to be at home, if at all possible. Discussions about this, called “advance care planning,” are crucial. In my work I frequently facilitate discussions about values, hopes, and beliefs about the end of life with patients and their loved ones. From these discussions

“Hope for the outcome we wanted began to fade. Hope in God’s promises for a life beyond death began to emerge.”
come advance directives that guide end-of-life care.

Maryanne was 55, hospitalized in intensive care and on a respirator. She was terminally ill, and as her health care directive made clear, she did not want to be on a breathing machine at the end of her life. But when she developed pneumonia she accepted short-term respirator support in the hope that she could overcome the infection. But she could not be weaned from the respirator. When she was asked if she wanted to have the respirator withdrawn, she nodded. The attending physician balked at this decision, even though it was what the patient and her family wanted. An ethics consultation was called, mainly to help the physician come to terms with Maryanne’s decision. Under hospice care, Maryanne went home with her family.

This happened several years ago, when physicians commonly believed that if something could be done medically, it should be done. Today, with advance care planning discussions, it’s much more common for physicians to agree to limiting medical interventions based on the patient’s own goals and values.

Here in my region fewer people are dying in the hospital and more are dying at home or in a skilled nursing facility with hospice care. In hospice, comfort care that manages pain and anxiety, combined with integrative healing arts such as reflexology, massage, music, and pet therapy, all contribute to the patient’s sense of well-being and peace. The healing team, consisting of family and friends, chaplain or faith-community minister, social worker, doctor, nurse, and aides, can accompany patients to their life’s end with care and compassion in a healing environment.

When curative care no longer made sense, my brother Dave was admitted to home hospice. His “song” became an actual song as he neared the end of his life. Just a few days before he died we were talking about songs he would want sung at his funeral. Deanna and I went over several suggestions, all of which Dave approved. He drifted off to sleep, and we walked into the kitchen. All of a sudden his booming baritone rang out, “On Christ the solid rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand.” We went to his bedside and listened as he sang the entire verse. This was clearly Dave’s song, and it became part of his legacy when we sang it together at his funeral.

The gift of accompaniment is the essence of the incarnation. “I fear no evil, for Thou art with me.” Perfect love casts out fear in the act of walking with one another at birth, through life, and at life’s end.

Karen Hanson is chaplain at Mayo Clinic Health System in Red Wing, Minnesota, and the director of worship and music at United Lutheran Church, also in Red Wing. Karen was a participant in a 2013 summer writing workshop, Posts, Tweets, Blogs, and Faith, at the Collegeville Institute.
Losing My Mother

“They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid Him.”
(John 10:13)

I’ve lost my mother, careless daughter,

misled her, left her behind.

I’ve let them take her to a place I cannot find—

the morgue, the coroner, the crematorium.

And now my mother who was beautiful, is done.

I’ve lost my mother. Like a sheep,

but number one, not ninety-nine.

Like a coin. But the most valuable and fine.

Like the pearl I owned but is no more mine.

Like my mind.

Angela O’Donnell
Excellent books have been written about the meaning, purpose, and practice—the theology—of a Christian funeral. These books help pastors think carefully about what to say to those who have gathered to mourn the death of a loved one. But few of those gathered for a funeral are facing the imminent end of their own earthly existence. For pastors the questions “What do I say to those who are in the final months, weeks, and days of their lives? What do I say about life beyond the grave to people who are about to die?” are as important as knowing what to say at a funeral. We posed these questions to David Wood, a seasoned pastor who currently serves as senior minister of Glencoe Union Church in Glencoe, Illinois.

What do I say to the dying? My first response to this very difficult question is, it depends. Death, while universal, is exceedingly particular, not only given the uniqueness of each person, but also given very particular contexts and sets of conditions. Physical conditions vary. So do the kind and quality of the relationships that characterize the person I’m talking to. The spiritual states of people facing death are as unique as their fingerprints. These are only a few of the conditions that make the situation so complex. This complexity makes it far easier for me to tell you what I said to particular people as they were dying than it is to generalize and report what I say to everyone who is dying.

At the same time, as a Christian pastor, I come with a set of convictions that do not depend upon individual circumstance. Even that statement strikes me as probably more confident than warranted by my persuasions. Just so you don’t misunderstand, the problem is death, not my wobbly convictions, or so I tell myself.

I admit freely that I know much less now than I used to. As a consequence I probably say much less at the bedside of the dying than I used to. In my early days of ministry I was far less reflective, and far more receptive to an authorita-
tive script that had been informally passed on to me by the evangelical culture of my upbringing. Heaven awaits us all. Death transmits us to an actual place in which abides a Presence—God—and which is populated by all those who have gone before. This “all” was made up of all those who had named, explicitly and faithfully, the Lord Jesus Christ as their personal Lord and Savior. It all seemed straightforward and uncomplicated.

As bizarre as it might sound, I remember being dismayed by the deep level of grief folks displayed at the funerals of loved ones whom I, and others, had judged to be clearly within the fold of the faithful. For those who did not fit into that category there was hell. Hell was not discussed often and I was never so bold as to assign anyone to the abyss of absolute abandonment or a more active torture, depending on your construal. But there was an understanding, largely unspoken, that such a possibility was real for all those beyond the fold.

That was then. Now, death looms so much larger and possesses a much greater mystery for me. It’s more like a brick wall than a tunnel leading to light. On the face of it, conclusive. My varied experiences of death—from holding someone’s hand as she died, to standing around the bed with a family as their loved one died, to watching my own mother die, to

“The Christian claim of death as enemy and the resurrection of Jesus as victory does not resolve the mystery of death. It wraps it in an even deeper mystery.”
praying with a semi-conscious person who died minutes after I left the room—have only deepened my sense of mystery. No two situations are alike, though the ending is always the same. What to say in a situation that’s at once profoundly personal and inescapably universal?

The resurrection of Jesus remains a central part of my confession of faith, in part because I cannot grasp Christianity’s expansiveness or durability without it. We pastors and biblical scholars can’t explain the resurrection, but it is extremely difficult to account for Christianity as a historical, culture-shaping phenomenon without it. The Christian claim of death as enemy and the resurrection of Jesus as victory does not resolve the mystery of death. Rather, it wraps it in an even deeper mystery.

As the one standing at a bedside, the closer I am to the point of someone’s actual death, the more in the dark I feel—the more ignorant, the less authoritative. I begin to realize that the one who is dying is leading the way. I am not the confident pastor out in front with my words of comfort and encouragement. Even more, as that liminal space between being alive and being dead approaches, I become an outsider. I am being left behind in the minority we call the living. That’s why I’m uncomfortable with any talk that makes it sound as if I know exactly what the dying person is actually experiencing.

I am an outsider when it comes to death and dying. Does dying feel like going over a cliff? Does it feel like everything that is visible in the eye of the mind or of the body is fading away into darkness, as if one were being sucked into a black hole that does not reflect light or life but simply evacuates it? Is it more like fighting off sleep, aware that giving way will mean never again waking to oneself or anyone else? Does it offer some sense of light, of life, of possibility that makes the ending of one’s earthly existence seem increasingly appealing? Do the unknowable answers to such questions depend in any way on the physical, emotional, or spiritual condition of the person dying?

As an outsider I also ask what it can mean for someone to be “ready to die.” It’s not usual to hear talk about whether or not the one who is at death’s door is “ready to go.” But who could possibly know when someone else is ready to die?

It’s common for loved ones surrounding the dying to say, “It’s ok to go now.” According to this line of thought, some folks may prolong the process of dying because they feel obligated to the living to stay alive. If this is so, the primary role of the living may not be to express grief at the pending loss of the loved one, but to suspend grief (even mask it) for the sake of the one dying. But rarely, if ever, is releasing a person to death a response to communication from the person who is actually dying. Typically, when these words are said to one who is dying, the dying person is beyond the ability to speak. I have often wondered if the dying experience those words less as comfort and assurance and more as something akin to abandonment in their darkest hour. The fact is, we don’t know. In effect, such encouragement places the living in the role of coaches to the dying, acting as if
we knew what we were talking about. I wonder if we don’t say these words more for our own sake than for the sake of the one who is dying.

Because I have said so much about particularity and mystery and ignorance, you might conclude that I think it’s best to say nothing to the dying. Indeed I do think there’s some wisdom in that inclination. But, there are definitely words to be spoken, many of which require enactment as much as, if not more than, speech.

The Bible provides no death scenes that give us a script to follow. Narratives of death are not uncommon, but they are not deathbed scenes that give us variations of last words spoken to or by the dying—except for one: Jesus’ “seven last words” from the cross. These words speak of the experience of utter spiritual and relational forsakenness (“My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?”), physical suffering (“I thirst”), trust (“Into your hands I commend myself”), compassion for the living (“Woman, behold your son”), resolution (“It is finished”), reconciliation (“Father, forgive them . . .”), and hope (“This day, you shall be with me in paradise”). Not a bad litany of prayers, actions, and words to guide the dying, or better, to instruct us who seek to accompany the dying as they approach death.

But as for words spoken to, as opposed to by, the dying, we have no biblical script to follow. What we do have are abundant words about God’s relation to the dying and the dead. Those words are perhaps the most important any of us can speak to someone who is dying. Even though we may inhabit these words, they are not our own. Their authority does not depend on our firsthand knowledge of what the dying are experiencing. These are words that do not so much speak of the experience of the dying as they speak into their experience. They are words more about God than about death or dying:

From Psalm 139,

Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there! If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me. If I say, “Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light about me be night,” even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is bright as the day, for darkness is as light with you.

“There is no script other than the one that arises in the midst of the Presence and the presence of one to the other.”

Or this from the Apostle Paul in the book of Romans:

For none of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself. For if we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord. So then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord’s. For to this end Christ died and lived again, that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living.

These are but two of the texts I would draw upon. Of course, biblical words are not the only words to be spoken. Depending on the
situation, there are many other words—pastoral words—that will be spoken in conversation and in prayer. But there is no script other than the one that arises in the midst of the Presence and the presence of one to the other.

There are also actions to be performed that we trust communicate beyond words: holding a hand, signing a cross on a forehead, kissing a cheek, or anointing a head with oil. Knowing if, when, and how to enact such rituals is discerned in the moment. So much depends on being present in and to the moment and becoming an instrument of the Presence that, by faith, we know to be nearer to any of us than we are to ourselves, to paraphrase Meister Eckhardt. Whenever I enter the room of a sick or dying person, I seek first to remember that I am not introducing a Presence: I am joining the Presence already there. It is the Presence that will remain even when mine is gone and, most important of all, will be Present when death has come.
Lischer, a pastor, theologian, and professor at Duke Divinity School, has a compelling writing style. Even his book's acknowledgments deserve a close read. There he recounts that the few people he told about his intention to write this book tended to respond with pursed lips, “as if they knew something about the dangers of remembering that I didn’t understand.” He goes on writing despite these dangers, and the result is a profound gift to his readers.

As the book’s title suggests, its organization relies on and assumes familiarity with the Stations of the Cross. The book's sections, “The Fountain”, “The Labyrinth”, “Sanctuary”, “Cross”, “The Caves”, and “The Rock”, show the author pausing at, dwelling in, and moving on through the stations of loss and grief. Lischer masterfully joins the particular and the universal, detailing the specificity of his son and family in a way that invites readers to connect, empathize, and reflect on their own experience.

Theologically, the book is careful and wise, never preachy or didactic. There are crosses, churches, and scriptures, but many more daily incarnations of the sacred in meals, babies, touch, and memory. Faith is portrayed neither as a tool of rational explanation nor as a pietistic impulse of the heart, but as a way of living and being in which both rationality and emotion have their place. Lischer has said that good preaching says what needs to be said, and no more. He holds to that ideal as a writer, saying just enough about grief and faith to express his pain, to allow readers to access their own, and to reach toward transcendence in loss and mourning. At times he offers recommendations for churches. For example, he encourages liturgy to welcome everyone. “The liturgy of life offers the kiss of peace to everyone, including the pale, the scabrous, and the very skinny. We name and lament our diseases before God and do not conceal our bodies. We are not ashamed.”

Stations of the Heart is eloquent and poetic not only because Lischer is an excellent writer but also because he seems unafraid of depth, whether the depth of love, loss, faith, or even fear. At one point during Adam’s decline, Lischer finds himself taken hold of by something new, an unnatural energy like adrenaline. He calls it hope. He remembers the biblical promise, “Hope maketh not ashamed” (Romans 5:5), and declares, “I will not be ashamed of my hope. It wasn’t that I believed Adam would be cured, but in defiance of all the evi-
dence I was positive he would survive and our family would remain whole.” Adam dies, but his father doesn’t regret moving beyond his fear of hope, “which is nothing other than the fear of death.”

When I finished the book I looked at the author’s photo on the back cover and said, “Thank you.” This book would be valuable if shared only with Adam’s widow and daughter, but readers, too, will find it a gift that evokes gratitude. It should be read by anyone who has ever lost someone, and by anyone who has ever loved someone. Lischer opens with a description of a father’s love, and concludes, “Love is a harsh comforter, because only love makes genuine loss possible. You can’t lose what you never loved.”

Jenell Paris is professor of anthropology at Messiah College in Grantham, Pennsylvania. She was a resident scholar at the Collegeville Institute during the fall of 2013. Richard Lischer led writing workshops at the Collegeville Institute during the summers of 2010 and 2011.

This barrier-free, side entry bathtub, manufactured by MasterCare, is designed to care for seniors and/or physically challenged individuals who may live in a residential care facility, such as a nursing home, assisted living facility, or hospice care home. The tub’s design includes a rotating, full-length door that allows for easy transition into and out of the bathtub. It also provides gentle hydro-massage for each person’s comfort.
Christian and Muslim Leaders Push an End to Modern-Day Slavery

In a rare display of interfaith collaboration on a global scale, leaders of the Roman Catholic Church, the Church of England, and al-Azhar (a prominent Sunni Muslim organization based in Cairo) signed a joint statement in March calling for the end of human trafficking within 20 years. The statement declared that “physical, economic and sexual exploitation of men, women and children” traps up to 30 million people worldwide in slavery, and it called for practical and spiritual action to combat the injustice. Signatories established the “Global Freedom Network” and promised to “slavery-proof their supply chains and investments and to take remedial action if necessary,” pressing governments and businesses to do the same. They also called for a world day of prayer for victims of slavery.

Bishop Marcelo Sanchez Sorondo, who signed the document for the Vatican, told journalists that cooperation on human rights issues among Catholics, Anglicans, and Muslims could help build closer ties between the faiths. Relations between al-Azhar and the Roman Catholic Church became strained in 2011 after then-Pope Benedict condemned attacks on Christians in Egypt, Iraq, and Nigeria and called for better protection of religious minorities in those countries. Mahmoud Azab, who signed the joint statement on behalf of al-Azhar’s Grand Imam Sheikh Ahmed el-Tayeb, noted that following Pope Francis’ appointment last year, al-Azhar sought opportunities to rekindle friendly relations with the Vatican. Opposition to human trafficking proved to be a unifying stance for both groups.

Archbishop Sir David Moxon, representing the Church of England, shared a statement from Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby, who heads the Church of England, at the signing. Welby described the joint statement as proof of a struggle among people of faith against networks of cruelty and entrenched evil. Lauding the collaborative efforts of the three religious bodies, Welby wrote, “We are now being challenged in these days to find more profound ways of putting our ministry and mission where our faith is; and being called into a deeper unity on the side of the poor and in the cause of the justice and righteousness of God.”

The Global Freedom Network will be based at the Vatican and led by Antonia Stampalija. Goals of the Global Freedom Network include getting the G20 to condemn modern-day slavery, persuading 50 major corporations to commit to ridding their sup-
Godless Church Splits

Less than a year after its founding, the Sunday Assembly, which calls itself a “godless congregation,” broke into factions due to rifts among its leaders. Formed in London last year and drawing global attention, the Sunday Assembly soon grew exponentially, opening franchise congregations across England, Scotland, Ireland, Canada, the United States, and Australia.

In October, three former members of the Sunday Assembly in New York City founded a breakaway group called a Godless Revival, citing the Sunday Assembly’s “problem with atheism” as the reason for the rift. Lee Moore, one of the leaders of Godless Revival, alleges that Sanderson Jones, cofounder of the Sunday Assembly, instructed the New York City congregation not to use the word “atheism,” to downplay connections to the atheist community, and to meet in a churchlike setting instead of the bar where services began. Jones counters that his advice was simply intended to broaden the appeal of the Sunday Assembly to people other than strict atheists, and to create a family-friendly environment for services.

Moore, who claims that his group was informed by Jones that they were no longer welcome at the Sunday Assembly, says that the Godless Revival will be more resolutely atheistic than the Sunday Assembly. According to Moore, the Sunday Assembly devolved into a “humanistic cult.”

Under the slogan “Live Better, Help Often, Wonder More,” the Sunday Assembly began with the goal of providing secular people with the benefits of church without the burdens of belief. Originally dubbed as an “atheist church,” the Sunday Assembly started marketing itself as irreligious, though eager to include everyone. As the Godless Revival schism illustrates, however, atheists who desire a firmly atheist church may not be satisfied with this general sense of irreligiousness.

As the Sunday Assembly has also become more institutionally established it has also raised the ire of “nones” who are suspicious of organized religion. Creed or no creed, the Sunday Assembly and other lesser-known groups like it are following a well-trodden course of religious organization across traditions. The excitement that marked the organization’s beginning becomes routinized, conformity essential, and dissent intolerable. Organizational survival takes precedence over organizational mission. Whether or not the Sunday Assembly will be able to meet the demands of institutionalization and successfully cater to the diversity among religious non-believers remains to be seen. In the meantime, their experiment in religiosity devoid of religion will continue to attract attention.
Daily Offices: The Last Day

3 AM MATINS
The hospice aide tells us
She said the end-words:
   I want my shoes.  
   I want to go home.  
And then, because it is the eve
of the day she has been waiting for:
   What time is it?  
   What time is it?  

5 AM LAUDS
Her breath has shallowed.  
Her eyes have narrowed to pindots,  
lids lizard over irises  
that in one startled glance  
turn suddenly, strikingly blue.

7 AM PRIME
Diapered, she holds fast  
to her sippy cup  
syllables standing in for words:  
Wa. Wa.

9 AM TERCE
My father lies on his back  
on his new twin bed,  
brought in three days ago.  
He sleeps  
through the bubble and burp  
of the oxygen tank,  
his face an ashen oval.

NOON Sext
All falls away but love.

3 PM NONE
It is almost time –  
4:35 pm –  
the moment 68 years ago  
when she and Dad descended  
the steps of the church  
where they were married.

6 PM VESPERS
After begins.
The hospice nurse  
turns off the oxygen.  
An abyss of silence  
severs the room.

9 PM COMPLINE
The hospice aide has cleaned her.  
She has been taken away.  
We leave Dad to this night.  

Bo Niles

Bo Niles began writing poetry after a long career as a magazine editor. “Daily Offices: The Last Day” is from a suite of poems about her mother’s death in her first chapbook, intimate geographies, published by Finishing Line Press (2012). She and her husband live in New York City, and are members of the Episcopal Church of the Heavenly Rest. Bo attended the Collegeville Institute’s Believing in Writing workshop in summer 2013.
News of Institute Scholars

Mersha Alehegne’s (Fall 2012) book *The Ethiopian Commentary on the Book of Genesis: Critical Edition and Translation* (Harrassowitz, 2011) was reviewed by James C. VanderKam, professor of Hebrew Scripture at the University of Notre Dame, in the *Review of Biblical Literature* (June 12, 2013).

John Barbour (Summer 2006, 2007), a member of the Believing in Writing workshop, has published *Renunciation: A Novel* (Wipf and Stock, 2013). He writes that in the workshop “I was working on a family memoir but transformed it into fiction. It’s come a long way since then, but the conversations at the Collegeville Institute were an important step in the process, and I continue to be inspired by workshop facilitator Michael Dennis Browne’s wisdom.”

Rachel Basch (Summer 2009) won the William Van Wert prize for the first chapter of her novel *The Listener*. A longtime resident of Newtown, CT, Rachel wrote a piece about the shootings at Sandy Hook Elementary School for *n+1* (Spring, 2013).


William J. Everett (Summer 1973), who’s latest book is *Turnings: Poems of Transformation* (Resource Publications, 2013) writes, “It’s been 40 years since my sojourn by the lake, but the [Collegeville] Institute remains alive in my field of vision.”

Ruth Everhart (Summer 2012, 2013), in her memoir *Chasing the Divine in the Holy Land* (Eerdmans, 2012), recounts both her physical and faith experiences as she traveled through the Holy Land as part of the Pilgrimage Project documentary. Her journey was transformative, leading her to understand that “even upon my return home, I must not cease to be a pilgrim.”

Kenneth Garcia’s (Summer 2013) *Academic Freedom and the Telos of the Catholic University* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2012) won the College Theology Society’s “Best Book Published in Theology in 2012” award.
David Giuliano (Summer 2011, 2013) has published several articles in the United Church Observer. “Spiritual Whiplash” (December, 2012) speaks about living between the joy and the heartache of the Christmas season. “From the Ashes” (February, 2013) is about the redemptive nature of fire to forests and, metaphorically, to the spiritual life. “To the Children of the Church Set Loose in the World” (December, 2013) began as a piece David wrote at the Collegeville Institute’s Apart and Yet A Part writing workshop last summer.

Karen Hering (Summer 2011, 2012) published Writing to Wake the Soul: Opening the Sacred Conversation Within (Beyond Words, 2013). She will facilitate a writing workshop, Awakening Theological Imagination in the Congregation: A Spiritual Practice of Writing with Karen Hering, at the Collegeville Institute, May 27–31, 2014.

Jep Hostetler (Fall 2012) summarizes his research during his residency at the Collegeville Institute in the article “A Funny Thing Happened to Me on the Way to the Monastery” (Center for Mennonite Writing 5, no. 4, 2013). The article can be accessed at: http://www.mennonitewriting.org/journal/5/4/funny-thing-happened-me-way-monastery/. Jep, along with Collegeville Institute resident scholar Glen E. Miller (Fall 2011), recently launched a new website www.livingjoyfullydyingwell.com.

Mary Lou Judd Carpenter (short-term scholar) wrote Miriam’s Words: The Personal Price of a Public Life (CreateSpace, 2013), a compilation of selections from the 2,000 letters and other private writings of her mother, Miriam Barber Judd, wife of missionary and Minnesota Congressman Dr. Walter H. Judd. The collection gives an insightful account of the private price paid for public service. Mary Lou writes, “My 23 weeks at the Collegeville Institute were foundational to this project, and I am very grateful!”


Deborah Lewis’s (Summer 2013) reflection “Praise the Lord…and Pass the Crackerjacks” aired on Charlottesville, Virginia’s WVTF radio station. Deborah writes, “This was one of the things I pledged to do as a ‘next step’ following up on my writing workshop week in Collegeville.” The piece can be heard at: http://wvtf.org/post/praise-lord-and-pass-crackerjacks.

Richard Lischer (Summer 2010, 2011), in his published book, Stations of the Heart: Parting with a Son (Knopf Doubleday, 2013), focuses on how his son lived out his last summer with the utmost honesty and faith.

Kristen Marble’s (Summers 2011, 2012) article “Bloomberg’s Right: That’s Just the Way God Works” was featured in the Huffington Post, and can be accessed at: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/kristen-marble/bloomberg’re-right-thats-ju_b_4468344.html.

Peter Marty (Spring 2007, Fall 2008) contributed the article “Closing in on Death” to the the The Lutheran (November 2013), the online magazine of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. The article cites Richard Lisher’s book Stations of the Heart: Parting with a Son, and can be accessed at: thelutheran.org/article/article.cfm?article_id=11691.

Diane Millis (1996/97), former resident scholar and current consultant in the Collegeville Institute’s Called to Life seminars, contributed the following articles to Presence: An International Journal of Spiritual Direction:
“Welcoming and Engaging New Contemplatives through Appreciatively Focused Conversations” (Vol. 19, no. 2, 2013); and “Cultivating Compassion through Group Spiritual Companioning” (Vol. 18, no. 3, 2012).


Ann Floreen Niedringhaus (Summer 2006) published her second anthology, Bound Together: Like the Grasses (Clover Valley Press, 2013). Sharon Chmielarz (Summer 2006, 2008) reviewed the book and wrote a cover acknowledgement. Ann writes, “Thank you so much for the encouragement that I received from workshop facilitator Michael Dennis Browne during my writing workshop. Since the workshop, I had Parallel to the Horizon published (Pudding House Publications, 2007), and am presently submitting to first book contests my full length manuscript, That Uncharted Terrain.”

Angela O'Donnell (Summer 2008, 2012, 2013) writes about her recently published book of poetry, Waking My Mother (WordTech Communications, 2013), “I am grateful for the support I received from the Collegeville Institute in the form of a week’s writing residency. [This book] is in celebration of all of our mothers!” Additionally, Angela’s article “The Sacrament of Story” was published in America magazine (11/25/13).


Brian Pinter (summer 2012) has published an article about the life of Jerome Murphy-O’Connor, O.P. in America (November 19, 2013). It can be accessed at: http://www.americamagazine.org/content/good-word/jerome-murphy-oconnor-op-life-well-lived.

Matthew Rich (Summer 2011), author of the book A Week from Next Tuesday (Wipf and Stock, 2013) wrote to thank the Collegeville Institute “for the space and encouragement to write!”


Susan Yanos (Summers 2011, 2012) writes, “One of the great things that happened during my workshops at the Collegeville Institute is that I started writing poetry for the first time. I will always be grateful to the Collegeville
Institute for the encouragement and time to explore this new genre.” Susan published the following poems during 2013: “O Come, O Come” in Presence: An International Journal of Spiritual Direction (March, 2013); “God Who Sent the Dove Sends the Hawk” (Saint Katherine Review); and “Stories Told of Me” in The Atrium: A Journal of Academic Voices, an electronic publication of Ivy Tech Community College of Indiana.

Isaac Villegas (Summer 2012), along with Alex Sider, authored Presence: Giving and Receiving God (Cascade, 2011).

Fritz West (short-term scholar) published On the Historical Development of the Liturgy (Liturgical Press, 2011). Fritz writes, “[This book] was brought to completion when I was a short-term resident scholar in the fall of 2008. That period of time was just the push I needed to call closure to this project, which began in 1999. I thank you for that opportunity, and for my continuing relationship with the Collegeville Institute.”

Relocations

Martin Copenhaver, summer writing workshop facilitator, was appointed president of Andover Newton Theological Seminary, Newton Centre, Massachusetts. He begins his tenure June 1, 2014.

Lallene Rector (Fall 2000) was named president of Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary, Evanston, Illinois, on May 16, 2013. She began her term on January 1, 2014.

Jennifer Ward (1999/2000) was named provost and dean of the college at Centenary College of Louisiana in Shreveport, Louisiana. Her appointment will begin on July 1, 2014.

For updates

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Collegeville, MN 56321

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Remembering
Thomas Lanier Hoyt, Jr.

Thomas Lanier Hoyt, Jr., age 72, senior bishop and 48th bishop of the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church, died on October 27, 2013 following a brief illness.

Bishop Hoyt received his B.A. from Lane College, a M.Div. from Phillips School of Theology of the Interdenominational Theology Center, his S.T.M. from the Union Theological Seminary, and a Ph.D. degree from Duke University. He was awarded the Doctor of Divinity degree from Trinity College, Rust College, Lane College, and the Interdenominational Theological Center.

He wrote more than 35 articles for professional journals and publications, and was involved in the Collegeville Institute consultation that resulted in the writing of the influential Stony the Road We Trod: African American Biblical Interpretation (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992).

Bishop Hoyt was a theologian, preacher, pastor, visionary, teacher, husband, father, and friend. He is survived by his wife, Ocie; two adult children, Doria and Thomas III; one grandchild, Ayana; his sister; two brother-in-laws; one sister-in-law; one aunt; and numerous cousins, nephews, and nieces.

PHOTO COURTESY OF UNITED METHODIST NEWS SERVICE
A tribute by Patrick Henry, executive director of the Collegeville Institute from 1984–2004

Thomas Hoyt, Jr. served on the board of directors of the Collegeville Institute from 1977 to 2001, and was subsequently elected an honorary life member. In 1984 he lived at the Collegeville Institute as a participant in the Resident Scholars Program.

I first met Thomas in the mid-1970s, when he participated in the Collegeville Institute’s inaugural summer consultation program, “Confessing Faith in God Today,” a sustained conversation that over a six-year period involved 34 persons and resulted in the book God on Our Minds (1982). He was already on the board when I became executive director in 1984, and thus was one of my bosses. We worked together on many other projects, most notably the consultation that produced Stony the Road We Trod: African American Biblical Interpretation (1991), a book that changed the field of biblical studies.

Two memories in particular—one of something I heard him talk about, the other of something I actually saw—stake out the territory of God’s world that was Thomas’ home.

He loved to tell a story I heard several times, and that is published in the introduction to Stony the Road We Trod:

My father was a pastor for 40 years. When I was growing up, sometimes he and I would be the only ones at the weekly prayer meetings. He would ask me to sing a song and pray, and then he would do the same. “Didn’t we have a glorious time!” he would say on the way home. Sometimes I did not want to be there. But we did have a glorious time.

The young Thomas learned early on the bracing truth of Jesus’ declaration that “Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them.” And there weren’t even three—just two, but that was enough. The older Thomas was teaching his son that a glorious time doesn’t require multitudes; song and prayer are sufficient—and it’s okay now and then not even to want to be there.

I believe what Thomas learned in those prayer meetings was essential preparation for my other territory-defining memory.

On November 6, 2003 I was privileged to represent the Collegeville Institute at Thomas’ inauguration as president of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA for a two-year term, 2004-05. He said on that occasion that he welcomed the opportunity to reach out for justice and reconciliation through the work of the National Council, whose 36 Protestant, Anglican, and Orthodox member communions comprise some 140,000 congregations and 50 million congregants.

The service on that day at Anderson United Methodist Church in Jackson, Mississippi, was, to be sure, a glorious time—a congregation of several hundred, celebratory speeches by gifted preachers, eloquent prayers, and music with energy and beat. But I suspect that Thomas would say that this time, launching him into responsibility for 50 million Christians, was no more glorious than those times when it was just two Thomas Hoyts, Sr. and Jr., singing and praying.
Recalling how she was introduced to the Collegeville Institute, Susan says, “My family and I moved back to Minnesota in 1985, when I accepted an invitation to become associate pastor at Gloria Dei Lutheran Church in St. Paul.” After Susan settled into her new position, Gloria Dei’s then senior pastor invited her to attend one of the Collegeville Institute’s spring board lunches. She went and met “fascinating people who were talking about interesting topics.” At the luncheon Susan was introduced to then executive director Patrick Henry, and the two remained in contact. Patrick soon invited Susan to consider joining the board of the Collegeville Institute. “Although it was a couple of years before I agreed,” remembers Susan, “Patrick’s encouragement, along with Paul Youngdahl’s praise for the Collegeville Institute, kept me attending the spring gatherings and learning more about the Collegeville Institute’s mission and vision. So, as is often the case, it was through personal invitation and exposure to the folks who are a part of the work, that I said ‘yes’.” Laughing, Susan adds, “You know, nobody could resist Patrick Henry!”

From the very beginning of her board tenure Susan resonated with the Collegeville Institute’s ecumenical focus. She notes, “I am pleased with the thinking that emerges at the Collegeville Institute.” Susan believes that central to ecumenism is the longing to be connected to something that matters. Not only does ecumenism allow us to make those connections, but it also expands our understanding of God in the world. “If we just stayed within our little Lutheran communities we might miss out on the possibilities of growing in our own faith. The more we are connected to and remain in conversation with others who have a different perspective, the better off we are,” she says.

Throughout her years of service on the board, Susan has watched the expansion of the Collegeville Institute’s programming efforts, and she is excited about what she sees. “There are so many things happening right now that catch my attention,” she says. “In particular, I’m excited about the new Fellows Program which gathers together young pastors from the Twin Cities area. The Fellows Program pushes and challenges these pastors to build up their sense of how they can become strong civic leaders and public theologians.” She continues, “I’ve always admired the resident scholars’ pursuits that challenge the mind, and now I’m excited that we’re also offering programs that allow people to connect their deep passions about art, writing, or music to theological truths. It feels like we’re operating out of a very collegial, cooperative model. You put all of this together and I know why there’s a waiting line to be a part of these experiences.”

Ordained in 1982, Susan was the first woman in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America to be called as a senior pastor to a large Lutheran congregation. After almost 30 years of active ministry she retired from Gloria Dei, and then was called back into service this past year as interim pastor of St. Anne’s Lutheran Church in London, England. She, along with her husband, Jim, spent almost ten months helping to revitalize and relocate the St. Anne’s community. Now, with that commitment behind them, they hope to do some more traveling. “Our aim is to get on the road and see some of the places we’ve always wanted to visit. Thus far we’ve had a great retirement,” Susan says.

Retirement also means that Susan and Jim have extra time to visit their children, Erika and Hans and their families, all of whom live in New York. In addition to
their travels, Susan and Jim also enjoy walking and cooking. “We’re just getting back to cooking things beyond big holiday meals. Now we like to cook things like soups and foreign dishes. We enjoy French cooking, in particular.”

Another of Susan’s passions is theatre. Her Bachelor’s degree in Speech and Theatre Arts and her background in directing children’s theatre productions and teaching high school drama lead her to conclude that “the theatre is a fabulous place to be.” She also loves reading and says that retirement is a glorious gift of time that allows her to read some wonderful pieces of literature. While she was living in London, Susan got hooked on Hilary Mantel’s novels. Barbara Kingsolver’s *The Lacuna* is another favorite. Susan says that Kingsolver’s novel resonates with her “in part because of all the time I’ve spent in Mexico and Central America on mission trips.”

For about ten years Gloria Dei worked with a mission called San Lucas Tolimán, a Roman Catholic mission on the shores of Guatemala’s Lake Atitlán. “The lead priest, Father Greg Schaffer, became one of my dearest friends,” Susan says. She is excited about what’s happening through the mission. “In the village of San Lucas Tolimán, I’ve witnessed some of the best ecumenical work I’ve ever seen. The people have a fabulous understanding and practice of mixing Mayan traditions with Roman Catholicism. And it’s remarkable to see how Christian belief and worship practices intertwine with the region’s people, history, and culture. These kinds of ecumenical and interfaith partnerships help build a greater sense of God’s people in the world. And in terms of ecumenical and interfaith work, the more we see ourselves not as isolated Christian communities but as part of the rest of the world, the better off we will be and the more authentically we will represent who we say we are.”

A few years after Patrick Henry became the executive director of the Collegeville Institute, he, along with then-board chair Jim Shannon, wrote to me asking if I would be interested in serving on the board. Because of my deep respect for Jim and my friendship with Patrick, I wrote back saying, ‘Although I don’t know anything about ecumenism, I would be thrilled to be on the board.’”

Despite Grant’s self-deprecating claim, he did know something about ecumenism, and the pursuit of Christian unity made sense to him. Furthermore, he recognized that his own lived experience prepared him well for understanding both ecumenical matters and issues of religious and cultural diversity. “In my acceptance letter I wrote that I was the only Protestant kid in a Catholic neighborhood. And that I went to a solidly Jewish high school as one of the few non-Jewish kids. And that I lived in a neighborhood which was almost entirely African American as one of the few white kids.” Grant recalls that Jim Shannon’s response was highly supportive. Jim assured Grant that Grant had a fitting background for serving on the board, and that he was sure Grant would learn how to spell ‘ecumenism’ correctly!

Even now, after being on the board for more than 20 years, Grant recalls that when he attended his initial board meeting on the Saint John’s University and Abbey campus he fell in love with the place. “Now, whenever I go to a board meeting, I always spend a couple of hours sitting out by Lake Sagatagan breathing in the beauty of the place. The spiritual dimension of the Saint John’s campus is refreshingly open and respectful of various faith traditions and approaches to spirituality. It seems like a gift from heaven to be able to go to the campus a couple of times a year and be with the whole board and staff—people for whom I have tremendous respect. Being involved with the Collegeville Institute continues to be pure joy,” Grant says.
juvenile delinquents are exactly like you and me, which is to say they want the same things all of us do: safety, belonging, and respect. Sam had a very different idea of how juvenile institutions should be run. He was a genius at creating an environment that promoted a sense of safety and of family. He created a place where all could belong, at least for a period of time. And he created an environment where respect was given to all who did well in school, became good athletes, or learned a trade. The bottom line is that Glen Mills sends more kids to college right from juvenile hall than all the other juvenile institutions combined in the state of Pennsylvania.”

With a B.S. in mathematics, an M.S. in computer science, and a Ph.D. in counseling and child development, Grant has taught research design, mathematics, and computer science on the undergraduate and graduate levels. He has also authored two books and several dozen articles in the fields of juvenile corrections and behavioral healthcare. One of his books, Without Locks and Bars: Reforming Our Reform Schools (Praeger, 1989), is about the model and effectiveness of Glen Mills Schools.

When asked about his favorite books or authors, Grant responds with this story: “When my wife Gay was alive and guests would come to our house, they often commented on the hundreds of books they’d see on the bookshelves. In response, I would often say, ‘Well, between me and Gay, we read well over a couple hundred books a year.’ This, of course, was true, but what the guests didn’t know was that I read three of those books, while Gay read the rest!”

Another current aspect of the Collegeville Institute that pleases Grant is its fiscal soundness, largely the result of securing several grants. As someone who has served as principal investigator for over 25 federal grants throughout his career, Grant recognizes that grant monies provide much needed funding for significant and vital work. Grant is the founder and CEO of Polaris Health Directions, a provider of computer-based behavioral health assessment and treatment support systems for mental health, chemical dependency, and other medical issues. The grants he secured have funded a variety of social science research programs leading to the development of important specialty care assessment systems.

Discussing his professional career, Grant states, “One thing I feel very proud about is the 10 to 12 years I spent doing research on the justice system and, in particular, juvenile corrections. I was very fortunate to be able to do a lot of that research in the Glen Mills Schools, America’s oldest juvenile correctional institution, located in Glen Mills, Pennsylvania. When I became involved as part of my dissertation research for my doctorate, the place was like so many other juvenile institutions. It was a terrible place on a whole lot of levels and had awful programs. It was deep in debt and was almost ready to close.”

Grant recounts the story of Glen Mills Schools, noting that the hiring of Sam Ferrainola as its new executive director was a turning point for the institution. “Sam, who is one of the most remarkable persons I’ve met in my life, had a strong conviction that the large majority of juvenile delinquents are exactly like you and me, which is to say they want the same things all of us do: safety, belonging, and respect. Sam had a very different idea of how juvenile institutions should be run. He was a genius at creating an environment that promoted a sense of safety and of family. He created a place where all could belong, at least for a period of time. And he created an environment where respect was given to all who did well in school, became good athletes, or learned a trade. The bottom line is that Glen Mills sends more kids to college right from juvenile hall than all the other juvenile institutions combined in the state of Pennsylvania.”

Given his long tenure on the board, Grant has witnessed a lot of changes in the Collegeville Institute’s programming initiatives. He finds it exciting that today’s programs have a greater impact on the “people in the pew.” “The kind of programs that the Collegeville Institute currently focuses on really touch the lives of the people in the churches,” Grant notes. “Although the consultations that were held in earlier years were of tremendous importance in terms of the scholarly work done on eucumenism, they seemed to have had minimal impact on what was really going on in the world of people going to church on Sundays. I’m thrilled that through the Resident Scholars Program we continue to bring qualified scholars to the campus, while at the same time we coordinate programs that have much more direct applicability to the life of the average Christian.”
In Memoriam

+ Wayne K. Clymer – November 2013 – Board Member
+ Thomas Hoyt, Jr. – October 2013 – Resident Scholar and Honorary Board Member
+ Laverne Anne Phillips – August 2013 – Board Member
Homecoming

Ho, everyone who thirsts,
Come to the waters;
And you who have no money,
Come, buy wine and milk
Without money and without price.

—Isaiah 55:1

I come. I’ve been working my way to this
Since the womb. But leaving is hard,
Emptying my pockets of wallet and passport,
Leaving the bright lights, leaving the sights.

Pre-advent tamaracks show the way,
Exploding from green to gold, bursting
Into flares marking the way home,
Laying down, needle by needle, gold carpet.

I grew up on conifers,
Evergreen fir and pine and spruce.
Tamaracks are an annual surprise,

Opening the woods to winter light,
Invitation to a less that is more.
I loosen my grip, slow my pace, coming home.

Eugene Peterson

Eugene Peterson is a pastor, scholar, author and poet. He has led a number of Collegeville Institute writing workshops, and is the author of over 30 books. He and his wife, Jan, live in Lakeside, Montana. This poem, used with permission, first appeared in Holy Luck (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2013).
In its emphasis on the unity of God’s diverse people, the importance of interdisciplinary and collaborative work, and the inseparable relation between thought and action, the Collegeville Institute remains an energetic and growing institution of research and leadership formation that occupies a unique position in religious America.

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