

AN EVENT SPONSORED BY THE LOUISVILLE INSTITUTE

FAREWELL TO INNOCENCE

INEQUALITY, INJUSTICE, & THE CHURCH'S
RESPONSE TO COVID-19



PROJECT CURATE
FALL 2020 REPORT

2020 AT A GLANCE

The Louisville Grant Team's focus during early spring was on finalizing details for a consultation to take place in April. In addition to reviewing relevant literature and having robust conversations around engaging congregations in conversations about social justice, the Grant Team began piecing together the logistical components of a morning consultation with individuals in the community. The Grant Team focused on the theme of "Filthy Faith" which would explore ideas of justice and decolonization in the context of Christianity.

Around the time the team was finalizing details for the consultation, the United States and the world were entrenched in the global pandemic caused by COVID-19. While this forced the team to postpone the initial consultation due to social distancing guidelines, the pandemic motivated them to rethink the approach to the theme of "Filthy Faith" and include discussions around the disproportional impact COVID-19 has had on Houston communities and congregations. The Louisville Grant Team saw this as a spark of opportunity amidst a terrible era to bring people into conversations around inequality when they would otherwise not be so open. The team worked through the constrictions of the pandemic and was successful in hosting an online convening titled *Farewell to Innocence: Inequality, Injustice, & The Church's Response to COVID-19* on May 28, 2020.

After a successful event, the team has continued their mission in driving conversations around themes of social justice, colonialism, and Christianity and the role of contemporary North American Churches in social movements.

COLLABORATIVE TEAM





VIRTUAL REALITY

At the onset of this project, the Louisville Collaborative Team knew there would be many challenges and obstacles ahead. However, nothing could have prepared the team for COVID-19 and its global, regional, and local impacts.

Oppression and the need for social change does not stop just because the world does. Our team was compelled and enthusiastic to continue the work and adapt to a new virtual norm utilizing each team member's own unique skillset to accomplish the goals of the project.

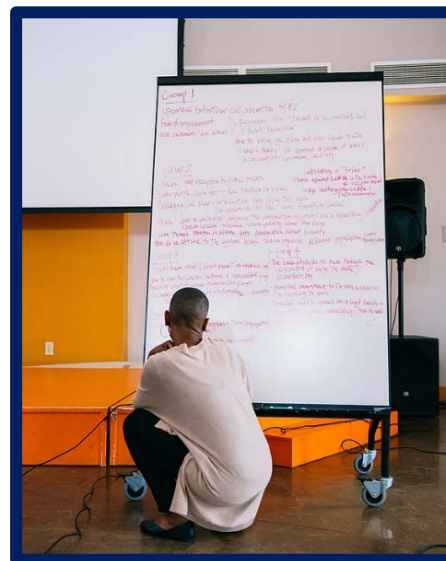


**Farewell to
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This virtual event was part of a larger collaborative project “Reimagining Public Theology and Community Engagement: The Role of Churches in Current Movements for Social Change,” funded by the Louisville Institute. We recognize that amidst a rising tide of white nationalism and pressing issues related to immigration and detention, voting rights, policing and incarceration, LGBTQ exclusion, sexual assault, and anti-black racism, North American churches **must** seek to develop competencies, now more urgently than ever, that will enable them to support and stand in solidarity with those on the front lines of emerging struggles for social equity and justice. Through facilitating spaces like this one—and through listening and hearing the stories of those in our communities, our hope is to better understand how churches are responding (or not responding) to pressing social issues and what resources they might need to respond constructively to social issues and movements in the US.



FAREWELL TO INNOCENCE
INEQUALITY, INJUSTICE, & THE CHURCH'S RESPONSE TO COVID-19

MAY 28
11:30 AM - 1:30 PM

ZOOM ONLY:
ID AND PASSWORD TO FOLLOW
YOUR ONLINE REGISTRATION

REGISTER AT
[BIT.LY/FARE2PC](https://bit.ly/fare2pc)

REV. HANNAH TERRY DR. RUDY RASMUS REV. JUAN HUERTAS DR. VINCE BANTU
DR. RACHEL SCHNEIDER DR. CLEVE TINSLEY DR. MATTHEW RUSSELL

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Farewell to Innocence pleaded, with the conviction, that there is a vital need for North American churches to think ‘beyond’ our traditional registers, reimagining public ministry for the common good. As a group, we sought to learn how churches are responding to and/or are being shaped by the expansive visions of justice, equality, and inclusion articulated in today’s social movements.

At the same time, we also saw the vital need for faith communities to wrestle with current realities. Sadly, many churches struggle, both internally and externally, with how to effectively contribute to wider quests for human rights and flourishing. Others vigorously resist re-imagining what it means to live out their deepest faith values and commitments. But to not engage in this work risks credibility to the liberating gospel message at the center of the Christian vision. That is why this project, and events such as this one, also seek to create collaborative spaces where church members, church leaders, community organizers, activists, scholars, and theologians can engage with one another and where churches can learn how they might be able to contribute to conditions for collective flourishing as they engage with pressing realities around them. We desire for this space where congregations can honestly engage and deeply listen to what social movements like Black Lives Matter or MeToo have to teach them about creating more hospitable, equitable, and inclusive communities of faith.

Farewell to Innocence: Inequality, Injustice & The Church's Response to COVID-19

We would be grateful if you could take two minutes to share your thoughts in the short survey below.

1. Did you attend the virtual Farewell to Innocence event on May 28th?

Yes

No

2. How is your church community responding (or not responding) to pressing social issues tied to COVID-19?

3. What resources does your church need to respond constructively to social issues and movements in the US?

FEEDBACK

As a collaborative team of scholars, activists, and pastors, research and feedback from congregations and other constituents is very important for our progression through this project.

Three core questions were asked of the participants after the event:

1. How is your church community responding (or not responding) to pressing social issues tied to COVID-19?
2. What resources does your church need to respond constructively to social issues and movements in the US?
3. Amidst a rising tide of white nationalism and systemic oppression, what (if any) conversations are your congregations having around this topic?



1

How is your church community responding (or not responding) to pressing social issues tied to COVID-19?

"We are currently working to create a resource list, create a space for discussion and create small and large group classes and forums to raise awareness and educate."

"Still feeding people in our community through the food pantry run at our church. Having online conversations about social justice issues."

"Continuing the food pantry, online worship, starting a hybrid small group worship service, required wearing masks at church, but providing masks to those who need them, Blessing Box for non-perishable foods and other needs is available for folks fill or to take what they need, starting a course and discussion groups on whiteness, racism, and building a church and society committee to streamline and mobilize our Methodist witness in the public square."

"My church community does not seem to be particularly engaged in the issue"

2

What resources does your church need to respond constructively to social issues and movements in the US?

"Ideas for structured conversation which makes room to hold space and hear stories. We've got lots of books and blogs and videos to watch. Need ways to helpfully engage in dialogue."

"The issue of charity and saviorism especially when COVID highlighted the inequalities on the reservations (food desert, inadequate healthcare, some homes without running water). Some orgs that we've been in contact with are eager to give without thinking through how the logistics may affect the tribal communities."

"A call to risk taking. We are a social justice averse church. It's tiresome."

"More events like this one from PC. Hearing from Houston leaders inspires and motivates and offers a time to reflect about directions to take."

"Continued access to forums like this one for collective education."

3

Amidst a rising tide of white nationalism and systemic oppression, what (if any) conversations are your congregations having around this topic?

"We are having conversations around what it is, confronting that all people have prejudices, and working to help everyone identify ways they can engage and be active."

"There has been very little congregational conversation about this...but we have several in our congregation who are deeply committed towards this topic."

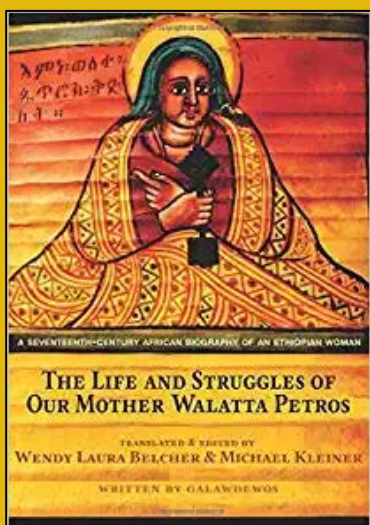
"They aren't not afraid to say, "Black Lives Matter", but don't necessarily act it."

"Very few, many of which are laced with the defensiveness that comes from white fragility."

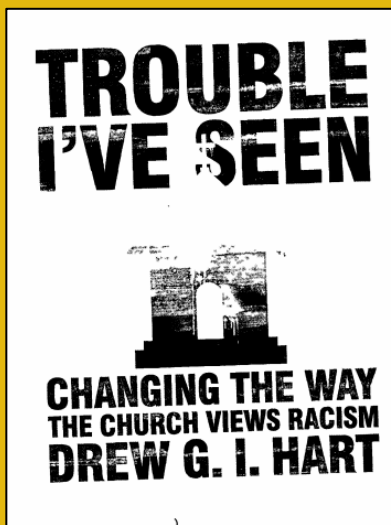
**It has never
been enough
here in
America and
we have
participated by
our silence and
in action.
But that will
not be the case
any longer.**

Respondent #12, Farewell to Innocence

FURTHER READINGS BY THE LOUISVILLE COLLABORATIVE TEAM



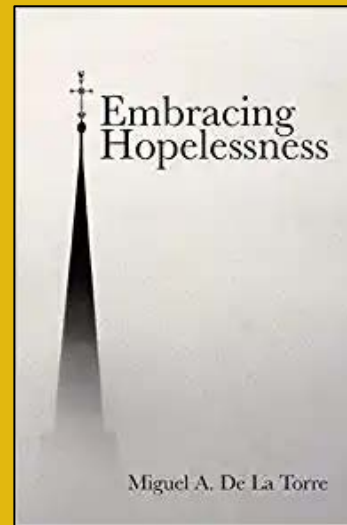
The Life and Struggles of Our Mother Walatta Petros (1672) tells the story of an Ethiopian saint who led a successful nonviolent movement to preserve African Christian beliefs in the face of European protocolonialism. When the Jesuits tried to convert the Ethiopians from their ancient form of Christianity, Walatta Petros (1592-1642), a noblewoman and the wife of one of the emperor's counselors, risked her life by leaving her husband, who supported the conversion effort, and leading the struggle against the Jesuits. After her death, her disciples wrote this book, praising her as a friend of women, a devoted reader, a skilled preacher, and a radical leader. One of the earliest stories of African resistance to European influence, this biography also provides a picture of domestic life, including Walatta Petros's celibate life-long relationship with a female companion.



What if racial reconciliation doesn't look like what you expected? The high-profile killings of young black men and women by white police officers, and the protests and violence that ensued, have convinced many white Christians to reexamine their intuitions when it comes to race and justice.

In this provocative book, theologian and blogger Drew G. I. Hart places police brutality, mass incarceration, antiblack stereotypes, poverty, and everyday acts of racism within the larger framework of white supremacy. Leading readers toward Jesus, Hart offers concrete practices for churches that seek solidarity with the oppressed and are committed to racial justice.

What if all Christians listened to the stories of those on the racialized margins? How might the church be changed by the trouble we've seen?



Hope, as an illusion, is responsible for maintaining oppressive structures. This book struggles with a God who at times seems mute, demanding solidarity in the midst of perdition and a blessing in the midst of adversity. How can the Creator be so invisible during the troubling times in which we live—times filled with unbearable life-denying trials and tribulations? The book concludes with a term De La Torre has coined in other books: *an ethics para joder*—an ethics that "f*cks with." When all is hopeless, when neoliberalism has won, when there exists no chance of establishing justice, the only choice left for the oppressed is to "screw" with the structure, literally turning over the bankers' tables at the temple. By upsetting the norm, an opportunity might arise that can lead us to a more just situation, although such acts of defiance usually lead to crucifixion. Hopelessness is what leads to radical liberative praxis.



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