

The background of the entire cover is a vibrant, textured oil painting. The top half features a sky with bold, expressive brushstrokes in shades of blue, purple, and orange. A white dove, carrying a small green olive branch in its beak, is depicted in flight, positioned above the title. The bottom half of the painting shows a bright, glowing sunset or sunrise over a body of water, with the sun's rays creating a shimmering path of light across the horizon and reflecting on the water's surface. The colors transition from deep blues and purples at the top to fiery oranges, yellows, and reds near the horizon, and finally to cooler blues and greys in the water at the bottom.

A Path of Peace

2024 Devotional Guide for A Season of Peace

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Presbyterian Mission
**Presbyterian
Peacemaking Program**

A Season of
Peace
2024

A small white dove with an olive branch, identical to the one at the top of the cover, positioned to the right of the text.



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Introduction

Every fall, the Presbyterian Church's Peacemaking Program extends an invitation to join with people of faith from around the country and the world for *A Season of Peace*, a month-long pilgrimage designed to deepen the pursuit of peace for congregations, small groups, families and individuals. This season is a time of growth, encouragement, challenge, inspiration and education that invites you to consider your own relationship to peacemaking and justice.

In the culminating chapters of the *Epistle to the Hebrews*, the author ratchets up the exhortations and reminders. "We are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses" (12.1), they write. This heavenly band shines forth "the peaceful fruit of righteousness" (12.11), and by their example, they extend both encouragement and a challenge: "lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees, and make straight paths for your feet" (12.12–13). This year's *Path of Peace* takes up this call in a distinct way. Each day, we offer a vignette of a Presbyterian who contributed to the civic and spiritual well-being of our church and world and made a significant impact on the common good here or abroad. Some battled injustice; others broke down barriers and dividing walls. Many advocated for marginalized communities and made room for them within the church. Each offers us an example of how peace can be pursued in tangible ways.

Our focus on particular individuals also invites one disclaimer. The *Season of Peace* is not unlimited. We weren't able to include every Presbyterian worthy of note. The list is not exhaustive, ranked or perfectly representative of all the Presbyterians whose examples shine forth for our consideration and emulation. The priesthood of all believers and the kingdom of heaven are, after all, notoriously resistant to our ordinary habits of ranking and classification. But these vignettes are representative of the many saints who have come before us whose lives can encourage and edify us. This fall in particular is a tense and tender time in our church, country and world. Our hope is that these reflections will spur personal, spiritual and moral growth while also serving as a sorely needed balm and a breath of fresh air. May they provide a counter-narrative of good news, true hope and stirring inspiration that moves us all to work together along the path of peace for the well-being of all of God's beloved Creation.





Sunday, Sept. 8 — Joseph Metz Rollins

You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything but is thrown out and trampled under foot. — Matthew 5:13–16

Ours is a time of momentous Supreme Court decisions, public protests and churches caught trying to navigate deep political divides while remaining faithful to Christ's call. The tumult of the present can tempt us to think these are unprecedented times. We should resist that temptation if for no other reason than because giving in to it would prevent us from remembering the Presbyterians whose work and witness came in times just like these.

In 1954, as the Supreme Court heard arguments in *Brown v. Board of Education*, the Rev. Joseph Metz Rollins was planting Trinity Presbyterian Church, a Black Presbyterian church-start in Tallahassee, Florida. He had moved to Tallahassee in response to a request from the Southern Presbyterian Church's board, which had promised to fund the ministry. Throughout 1954 and 1955, Rollins' work was progressing well. The growing church community was meeting in his home, and in 1955, he was actively making plans for a permanent church building.

Deep racial divisions in the Presbyterian Church intervened. In December 1955, Rosa Parks famously refused to give up her seat on a Montgomery, Alabama, bus, sparking the yearlong Montgomery bus boycott. The bus boycott movement quickly spread, and by May 1956, Rollins was actively helping to spearhead the boycott of the Tallahassee bus service with the Inter-Civic Council, where Rollins served as treasurer. News of the boycott and Rollins' work with the Inter-Civic Council found its way back to Southern Presbyterian higher-ups who were deeply committed to the politics of racial segregation in the church and in civic life. They quickly moved to scuttle Trinity's capital campaign and their contributions to Rollins' salary while simultaneously slandering Rollins and insinuating that the church's financial problems were the result of his mismanagement. By early 1957, Trinity dissolved its relationship with the Presbyterian Church in the United States and requested to join the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).



While his colleagues' response to his leadership in Tallahassee cost him his job and his church's institutional support, Rollins' life is a testimony to his determination. He remained devoted to both the Civil Rights Movement and the Presbyterian Church. In 1961, he was arrested in Jackson for participating in the Freedom Rides. In 1963, he was hit in the head by a rock while protesting in Nashville. By 1964, he had moved to New York to accept a position with the United Presbyterian Church, and then in 1967, he became the first executive director of the National Committee of Black Churchmen, where he worked to advance racial awareness within churches. He returned to the pulpit for the last chapter in his storied career and retired honorably from the Presbytery of New York in 2005. He died in 2009, but his memory can very much live on in us today if we so choose.

Call to Action:

- Watch a short snippet from [Rollins' interview with The History Makers](#).
- Read Rollins' 1956 sermon "[Being Faithful to Christ's Command](#)."
- Read the famous 1966 "[Black Power](#)" statement from the National Committee of Negro Churchmen.

Prayer:

God, you call us to tireless commitment to your way, your truth and your just will for all. The burden rarely feels light, so we thank you for those we share the journey with — for their example, for their companionship, for their prayers. Teach us to be salt and light for one another. Amen.





Monday, Sept. 9 — Howard Rice

*Listen to my words, O Lord;
attend to my sighing.*

*Listen to the sound of my cry,
my King and my God,
for to you I pray.*

*O Lord, in the morning you hear my voice;
in the morning I plead my case to you and watch. — Psalm 5:1–3*

Without much controversy, we could brainstorm a core list of Christian activities. The directness of much of Jesus' teaching helps. We are to aid the needy; to protect, care for and advocate for the marginalized; to worship God with all of ourselves; to gather together to spiritually nurture one another; and much more. Each of us has some spiritual gifts that incline us toward some of these personal ministries more easily than others. And so, we often take up public identities based on the spiritual gifts we most readily embody. The result is a patchwork church body made of retreat leaders, executive pastors, public demonstrators, lay ministers, ecclesial bureaucrats, political agents, wise counselors, parish pastors and so on. These identities help us focus our limited energy and skills in order to maximize our impact. They also tend to reward us for letting many other forms of spiritual practice slip out of sight. It is, after all, difficult to master more than a few, and they can be hard to combine.

The Rev. Howard Rice offers us an example of someone with a unique ability to adapt himself to a wide range of Christian ministries and spiritual forms of life. Rice, born in 1931, was a 1956 graduate of McCormick Seminary. After a short first call in Minneapolis, Rice returned to Chicago to pastor the multiethnic and bilingual Emmanuel Presbyterian Church. His tenure there overlapped with dramatic demographic changes in Chicago's surrounding neighborhoods. Pilsen, the southwestern Chicago neighborhood in which Rice pastored, rapidly became home to Mexican American families squeezed out of north Chicago neighborhoods by the University of Illinois' redevelopment. At the same time, riots in nearby west Chicago neighborhoods following the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s assassination accelerated white flight out of Pilsen and into the distant western and northern suburbs. By all accounts, Rice held together his multiethnic church by earning his congregants' trust and intentionally building space for the church's members to confront and earnestly work through the United States' broader political turmoil together.

Rice's ministry in Chicago was cut short by an early diagnosis of multiple sclerosis and the steadily increasing symptoms it brought. At the recommendation of his medical care team, Rice began looking for jobs outside the Midwest. He faced significant ableism while on the job hunt, despite the fact that he only required a cane to walk at the time. Eventually, he was extended an opportunity to work as a chaplain and professor of ministry at San Francisco Theological Seminary and moved west in 1968. In the early 1970s, he encountered Morton Kelsey's *The Other Side of Silence*, passed along to him by one of his students. The book changed his life, sparking a three-decade-long interest in spiritual practices, disciplines and renewal movements. He was especially interested in recovering spiritual resources from the Reformed tradition that had been overlooked, as well as forging for Presbyterians and other Reformed Christians modes of distinctly Reformed spiritual practice inspired by the spiritual practices of Christians from other communions.

Rice's academic work shows careful attention to joining spirituality with the political activism he had long embraced as well as his own experience as a wheelchair user and recipient of ableist marginalization and discrimination. Rice was eventually called to



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serve as the moderator of the 91st General Assembly of the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America. He died in 2010 at the age of 78 and is remembered as one of the earliest and most influential practitioners of spiritual disciplines and spiritual formation in Presbyterian circles.

Call to Action:

- Check out Rice's major works, [Reformed Spirituality](#), [Reformed Worship](#) and [The Pastor as Spiritual Guide](#).
- Read [The Other Side of Silence](#), the book that shaped Rice's interest in spirituality.

Prayer:

God, you endow us with more possibilities than most of us dream to fulfill. Inspire and transform us by the example of those who find in all of life's newness endless opportunities to know and love you anew. Amen.



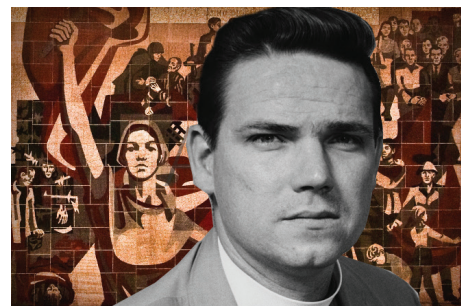


Tuesday, Sept. 10 — Charles Yerkes

When the ear heard, it commended me, and when the eye saw, it approved, because I delivered the poor who cried and the orphan who had no helper. The blessing of the wretched came upon me, and I caused the widow's heart to sing for joy. I put on righteousness, and it clothed me; my justice was like a robe and a turban. I was eyes to the blind, and feet to the lame. I was a father to the needy, and I championed the cause of the stranger. — Job 29:11–16

The Reformed tradition to which the PC(USA) belongs has a long history of intellectualism. After all, Jesus claims that the greatest commandment of the law is to love God with heart, soul and mind. Charles Thompson Yerkes offers us an example of how devotion to God with one's whole self can unfold in surprising ways.

Born in Lincoln, Nebraska, in 1931, Yerkes grew up largely among conservative evangelical Presbyterians in California's Bay Area. After studying French at Stanford, Yerkes joined the military and served as an intelligence officer, interrogator and translator on the East German border. His service was short-lived, and he soon returned to the States to pursue a degree at Princeton Theological Seminary and get ordained. After seminary, Yerkes answered a call to inner-city ministry in New York, where he would spend the 1960s and '70s working for churches, the Board of Christian Education, the Urban League Street Academies and with a special presbytery ministry for the imprisoned.



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At 49, Yerkes returned to school to pursue a doctorate at Union Theological Seminary. His dissertation aimed to work out the resonances between Bonhoeffer's theology and the philosophical Marxism of Louis Althusser. Yerkes' two decades of ministry in New York City had led him to Marxism, and his doctoral career marks his efforts to wrestle with the tension between his theological and political commitments. He was self-aware that efforts to do this work were widespread, though he described his own theological journey as culminating "a step or two beyond the 'liberation theologians' of our day."

Eventually, Yerkes' ministerial, theological and political experiences came together, and his career came nearly full circle. In the summer of 1982, he was appointed as a liaison to the Federation of Protestant Churches in the German Democratic Republic, where he helped interpret and report on East German Protestant life under communism. He focused on East German movements for peace, especially movements opposing nuclear proliferation. In the early 1990s, Yerkes returned to the pulpit to serve a church in northeast Germany. His call there was short-lived. In May, he wrote to PC(USA) staff that he was one of "the one-in-14 citizens in lower Manhattan who are infected with the immunity-deficiency virus. I have sheltered other victims for some time, but neither I nor anyone else believed I would join them. I did." He died in December 1993 in California, in the care of friends.

Call to Action:

- Read [Yerkes' report on the peace movement from East Germany](#).
- Read Dr. Joyce Marie Mushaben's ["Swords to Plowshares,"](#) an account of the peace movement in East Germany.

Prayer:

God, send us your Spirit so that we may put on your justice and righteousness like clothes. In so doing, draw us near to those in need, and keep their needs and their lives first in our minds so that we might serve them first with our hands. Amen.

Wednesday, Sept. 11 — Vera and Darius Swann

There they strengthened the souls of the disciples and encouraged them to continue in the faith, saying, "It is through many persecutions that we must enter the kingdom of God." And after they had appointed elders for them in each church, with prayer and fasting they entrusted them to the Lord in whom they had come to believe. — Acts 14:22–23

Civic life in America travels on long wavelengths, and their long downward trends often prompt us to question whether the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was right that "the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice." The author of Acts was a keen observer of similar trends. In his telling of Paul and Barnabas' ministries across Antioch, Iconium and Lystra, the author repeatedly notes the hardships these early congregations faced. In the passage from today, Paul and Barnabas are backtracking their earlier travel itinerary and finding discouraged and persecuted believers along the way. The pair make a point of encouraging and bolstering these communities before moving on to do the same in their next destination. Elsewhere, Paul will describe his own ministry in these years in similar terms as a time of personal persecution and constant battles with discouragement. Where do we turn when we grow doubtful and despondent?

Consider the lives of Vera and Darius Swann. A daughter of Cheraw, South Carolina, Vera grew up in the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church. She later married Darius Leander Swann, and the couple followed a call to become the first Presbyterian African American missionaries to India. They worked and taught at Ewing Christian College in what was then Allahabad. The two had special gifts for the dramatic arts, and they used theater and dance in their evangelism. Vera simultaneously taught Bible, organized the Jamna Christian Basic School and founded a shelter for homeless children.



However, the couple is best remembered for their activism in the U.S., which began in 1964 when they returned to Charlotte, North Carolina, to work at Johnson C. Smith University (JCSU). The couple vigorously launched themselves back into local politics. They mobilized university students and helped lead the JCSU student group's voter registration efforts, protests, fasts and marches. In the summer of 1965, they were beaten by KKK members during a march.

After the high court handed down their decision in *Brown v. Board*, the city of Charlotte quickly moved to undermine a court-approved school integration plan by consolidating the city's school districts. Facing an effectively resegregated school system, Vera and Darius signed their son James up for a majority white school in their neighborhood. When their son was sent home with a letter from the school principal instructing them to enroll him elsewhere, the couple sued the district with support from the NAACP legal defense fund. The case worked its way up to the Supreme Court in 1971, where the court upheld the legality of busing to achieve integrated schools. In the meantime, Vera led the Charlotte-area Church Women United to mobilize Black domestic workers' demands for a living wage.

For nearly three decades, the program of school busing that the Swanns helped establish and defend made Charlotte's schools some of the most integrated in the country. During these years, the city took immense pride in their schools and the integration they had achieved. In 1984, while campaigning for reelection, President Ronald Reagan gave a speech in Charlotte that criticized the city's integration efforts, calling them "a social experiment that nobody wants" that "takes innocent children out of the neighborhood schools and makes them pawns." The remark bombed, and the local paper ran a statement from its editorial board the next day that declared that "Charlotte-Mecklenburg's proudest achievement of the past 20 years is not the city's impressive skyline or its strong, growing economy. Its proudest achievement is its fully integrated schools."



As often happens, progress recedes, and gains once hard-won are slowly eroded. Today, many of Charlotte's schools are once again fully segregated. Others have seen precipitous, if not total, declines in racial diversity. What then? Perhaps just this: The Swanns offer us an example that fighting for the country we want and our children deserve is not something for us to leave to them. It is a calling for us all to share.

Call to Action:

- Read the Supreme Court's 1971 decision in [Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education](#).
- Read "[Loving Our Neighbors: Equity and Quality in Public Education \(K-12\)](#)," the 2010 report from the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy to the 219th General Assembly.

Prayer:

"Ever present God, you called us to be in relationship with one another and promised to dwell wherever two or three are gathered. In our community, we are many different people; we come from many different places, have many different cultures. Open our hearts so that we may be bold in finding the riches of inclusion and the treasures of diversity among us. We pray in faith." — Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.



Thursday, Sept. 12 — Maggie Kuhn

Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" She said to him, "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world." When she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary and told her privately, "The Teacher is here and is calling for you." And when she heard it, she got up quickly and went to him. — John 11:25–29

It's no secret that as a denomination, the PC(USA), like its other siblings in the mainline, has grown increasingly old in recent decades. According to our most recent figures, a third of PC(USA) members are over 70, and almost 60% of all members are over 55. On the one hand, it might seem odd for a church whose average age has moved toward later life to think of the elderly as particularly marginalized. On the other hand, as a church increasingly made up of those advanced in years, the particular plights commonly experienced later in life and the question of how to live well in old age take on increasing importance.

In 1970, Maggie Kuhn found herself thrust into this work. Forced into mandatory retirement at the age of 65 after a long and successful career of advocacy and education at the YWCA, YWCA-USO, and the United Presbyterian Church's Boards of Education and National Missions, she found herself out of a job before her life's work was done. In that same year, she founded the Gray Panthers, a social movement inspired by the Black Panthers and comprised of other retirees who banded together to assert the rights of older citizens and think deeply about how to live well into old age. Together, they shared Kuhn's idea that old age was not a pasture into which retirees should be put out to face their growing irrelevancy and incapacitation in isolation. Rather, old age should, like the rest of life, be lived in deep commitment to a better future and in deep relationship and solidarity with those of all ages. So, alongside their advocacy on issues like pension rights, retirement housing and age discrimination, which predominantly affect the elderly, the Gray Panthers mobilized to pursue peace, social justice and civil liberties broadly.

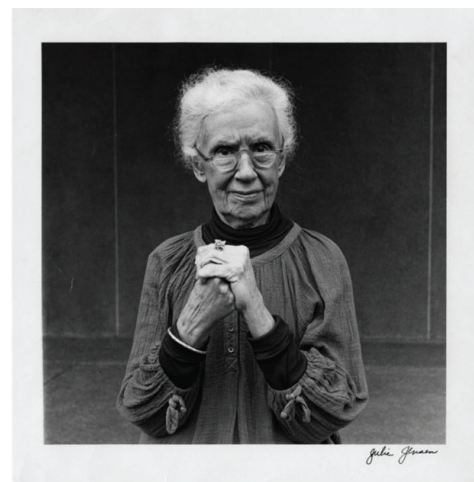
Her remarks in an interview given in 1983 at the age of 78 to the Presbyterian Church's television journal Video One capture well her spirit, message and challenge to us today. "In my old age," she comments, "I can live a lifestyle of outrage — outraged all the time!" Harnessing and directing this outrage, she suggests, should bring us — young and old — together in our work for a better future. "We've all got to learn to live together. And I would love to see grandfathers and grandmothers for peace around the world marching with their grandchildren, and if they don't have grandchildren who are nearby, with other grandchildren and with the young. What a different world it would be."

Call to Action:

- Watch the [full interview Kuhn gave to Video One](#) (begins at 18:10).
- Read [Kuhn's autobiography](#).
- Read [Dr. Susan J. Douglas' profile of Kuhn and the Gray Panthers](#) for The New York Times.
- Connect with [a local Gray Panther chapter](#) and see what advocacy they are currently working on near you.

Prayer:

God, you give love and life in abundance for the whole course of our creaturely existence. Attune us to the rich callings and transformative work you intend for our later years. And keep us deeply engaged with and committed to one another across our differences in years and life experience. Amen.



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Friday, Sept. 13 — Elijah Parish Lovejoy

O Lord, open my lips,
and my mouth will declare your praise.
For you have no delight in sacrifice;
if I were to give a burnt offering, you would not be pleased.
The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit;
a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise — Psalm 51:15–17

In recent years, we Presbyterians, like many other American communities, have been grappling again with our history of participation and complicity in the shifting American regimes of racial domination. Many of our churches, colleges and seminaries have examined the particularities of their own histories, and at the denominational level, [our Center for the Repair of Historic Harms](#) is helping to chart a way forward toward restitution, justice and true Christian community. As we reconsider our past, we have the opportunity to elevate forgotten saints.

The Rev. Elijah Parish Lovejoy was born in Maine at the dawn of the 19th century. After college, he lived and worked in St. Louis, first as a teacher and later as an editor. By 1832, he discerned a call to become a minister, and he returned east to study at Princeton Theological Seminary. There, he devoured the curriculum, graduating from the three-year divinity program in just 14 months. He was ordained into the Presbyterian Church shortly after his graduation from Princeton Theological Seminary.



Lovejoy's biographical details suggest that he was a man who emerged from seminary with immense energy for transformative ministry. He returned to St. Louis and founded the St. Louis Observer, a religious abolitionist newspaper. At the same time, he served Des Peres Presbyterian Church as their pastor. Lovejoy's abolitionism was vigorously resisted by many in his community. Missouri had been granted statehood by Congress in the same year as Lovejoy's home state of Maine — Missouri as a slave state and Maine as a free state. On three separate occasions, pro-slavery advocates destroyed his printing press. The situation seems to have been untenable. Three years into his ministry, Lovejoy moved his family across the river to Alton, Illinois, because Illinois was a free state. There he founded another abolitionist paper, the Alton Observer, and took a call to Upper Alton Presbyterian Church.

Sadly, Illinois did not prove safer for Lovejoy than Missouri. A little over a year after the family's relocation, a mob of pro-slavery advocates attacked the warehouse in Alton, where Lovejoy had sought to hide his new printing press and a trove of abolitionist materials. When Lovejoy arrived at the warehouse to try to ward off the mob, he was shot and killed. The mob then destroyed the press and threw its pieces into the river. White juries refused to find members of the mob responsible for the murder or property destruction.

Lovejoy has often failed to receive the remembrance his courage and example deserve. We can help set this right. He was an important prophetic figure who was not only right about slavery in his day but also right about the lasting effect it would have on the United States. In 1835, he wrote in the St. Louis Observer that "slavery, as it exists among us ... is demonstrably an evil. In every community where it exists, it presses like a nightmare on the body politic. Or, like the vampire, it slowly and imperceptibly sucks away the lifeblood of society, leaving it frail and disheartened to stagger along the road of improvement." Remembering him today may indeed be part of the help we need as we work to imagine and realize a faith that is as committed to God's justice as God's grace.





Call to Action:

- [Watch historian Will Ford's visit to Alton, Illinois.](#)
- If your cursive is good, [read some of Lovejoy's handwritten sermons.](#)

Prayer:

God, beyond our wildest imaginings, guide us in your ways and strengthen us in your work. Help us pursue the right as you give us to see the right, striving to finish the work we are doing. Amen.





Saturday, Sept. 14 — Milton Arthur Galamison

*All the kings of the earth shall praise you, O Lord,
for they have heard the words of your mouth.
They shall sing of the ways of the Lord,
for great is the glory of the Lord.
For though the Lord is high, he regards the lowly,
but the haughty he perceives from far away. — Psalm 138:4–6*

In the spring of 1965, a month before civil rights activists endured the Bloody Sunday beatings on the Edmund Pettus Bridge, the Rev. Milton Arthur Galamison was leading a multi-coalition protest of New York's segregated public schools. Galamison was then serving as the pastor of Siloam Presbyterian Church in Brooklyn, New York. The church is the third-oldest African American Presbyterian church in the U.S., and at the time, his congregation was home to over 2,000 members.

By the time of these protests, Galamison was nearly 20 years into his ministry in New York. Galamison, a graduate of St. Augustine's College in Raleigh, North Carolina, and Princeton Theological Seminary, had served Witherspoon Presbyterian Church in Princeton for a year before taking the call at Siloam Presbyterian in 1948. There, Galamison's activism began close to home. He was adamant that the Black and Puerto Rican citizens of Brooklyn shared a common cause, for their children were jointly shut out of equitable schooling. So, Galamison worked to build Black and Puerto Rican coalitions that could challenge the local school boards. In 1955, he was elected chair of the education committee of the Brooklyn branch of the NAACP. But this did not mean that his church took a back seat. Rather, the church organized a grassroots Parents' Workshop, which it housed and which functioned as a model for how local neighborhoods could band together to oppose educational discrimination.

Eventually, Galamison's coalition-building amassed enough grassroots and organizational democratic power to begin successfully pressuring the New York City Board of Education to integrate schools. Over the course of the mid-1960s, he organized student strikes and a constant series of community protests, including the famous Freedom Day boycott. The board was forced to pass a multi-year plan to address segregation in the schools. Unfortunately, Galamison's work was left largely unfinished. Despite being appointed to the city's Board of Education in 1968, Galamison did not see his vision for New York City's schools come to fruition. The Civil Rights Act of 1964, passed a few months after Galamison's school boycott, contained loopholes that enabled New York City to avoid integrating its schools. Today, its schools remain among the most segregated in the country.

Galamison offers us a sobering reminder that our best efforts and most devout pursuits of justice can fail. When they do, we are left wondering why — why God allows such injustice, and why justice remains so difficult, elusive and exhausting to pursue. In a sermon from Sept. 20, 1963, Galamison offers this bit of wisdom: "To those looking with envious eyes at the ill-gotten gains of corruption, the Psalmist does not offer a solution, he does offer an affirmation. The affirmation is simple: Because God reigns, the prosperity of the wicked cannot last. In his own time, God will give every man according to his just deserts. WAIT AND BE HOPEFUL. TOMORROW WILL COME."



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Call to Action:

- Read [a recent report](#) about the status of racial segregation in New York City's schools.
- Explore the ongoing work of the [NYC Alliance for School Integration and Desegregation](#).

Prayer:

God of all and Lord above all rulers and kingdoms, you contain many mysteries that we cannot fathom. When the bigotry and injustice we see seem entrenched, immovable or even rewarded, remind us to have faith and to keep hope. Send us your Spirit so that we may confess that we will wait for the Lord, for tomorrow will come. Amen.

Sunday, Sept. 15 – George and Jean Edwards

“You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, ‘You shall not murder,’ and ‘whoever murders shall be liable to judgment.’ But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgment, and if you insult a brother or sister, you will be liable to the council, and if you say, ‘You fool,’ you will be liable to the hell of fire. — Matthew 5:21–22

Our current state of deep political polarization is vividly on display this fall. And yet state violence and willingness to resort to war are two of the few issues that defy party identification in the U.S. Hawks and doves can be found across the ideological spectrum, though hawkish foreign policy has dominated modern American foreign policy. In fact, until American troops completed their withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021, a quarter of all Americans had never seen a time when the country hadn’t been at war. For almost 60% of Americans, the country has been at war for at least half their lives.



So, too, strict opposition to war and state violence has never been widely popular in the U.S. A century ago, the Supreme Court rejected an appeal for asylum because it deemed the applicant’s pacifism antithetical to the requirements of American citizenship. Enter George and Jean Edwards. The two met at a Southern Presbyterian Church camp in the 1930s and later reconnected at a church conference held after the conclusion of World War II. Both shared a vibrant faith and an unwavering commitment to Christian pacifism that served as the foundation of their life together for the whole of their 63-year marriage.

The two both worked for Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary, George as a professor of New Testament and Jean as a faculty secretary. But their lives unfolded as a shared ministry that reached far beyond their professional service. Both shared in the work of mobilizing their community for peace, and the couple’s personal life involved great acts of civil disobedience. Together, they founded the Louisville chapter of the Fellowship of Reconciliation, the nation’s oldest and largest pacifist organization, and served another dozen local peace and justice organizations. They were active advocates for peace in their local church and presbytery. Beginning in 1980, they refused to pay the roughly 50% of their tax bill designated for the military, instead including a letter detailing the abuses of the military industrial complex and advocating for Religious Freedom Peace Tax Fund legislation. The decision would ultimately prompt George’s retirement from the seminary in order to shield it from any public embarrassment associated with the couple’s civil disobedience.

Today, their influence lives on in the lives and ministries of those they encouraged and for whom they served as a profound example of Christ’s call to work tirelessly for peace and justice.

Call to Action:

- To learn more about the Edwardses, read the Rev. Rhonda Mawhood Lee’s [*Through with Kings and Armies: The Marriage of George and Jean Edwards*](#).
- To benefit from the Edwardses’ legacy, watch a lecture from [their named lecture series at Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary](#).
- Engage in the programming and support the work of the [Louisville Fellowship of Reconciliation](#).

Prayer:

God of love and Lord of all, when the way seems dark and the problems that surround us appear intractable, remind us of the example of those who have come before. Encourage us by their witness and comfort us by the way their lives testify to your longstanding support and care for them. May it be so for us, too. Amen.





Monday, Sept. 16 — Delores Williams

Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind: . . . "I will question you, and you declare to me. Will you even put me in the wrong? Will you condemn me that you may be justified? Have you an arm like God, and can you thunder with a voice like his? Deck yourself with majesty and dignity; clothe yourself with glory and splendor." — Job 40:6–10

Many of the saints we have remembered so far in this *Season of Peace*, and many of those we will remember in the coming weeks, were moved by their care for their neighbors, friends and colleagues. Their love for those around them helped spur them to pave new ground in the pursuit of peace and justice. This is also true of today's saint, Dr. Delores Williams. Her deep love and concern for the plight of Black women moved her to a life of educational ministry that materially improved the lives of her peers. So, too, Williams offers us an example of something more: a calling to pave a way for those not yet here, to make possible for unnamed future generations what should have been possible for her.

Williams was born in 1934 in Louisville. Despite living in the heart of American Presbyterianism, Williams grew up in a Seventh-day Adventist household. Another part of her upbringing was her experience of segregation in the Jim Crow South. She once recalled that she had been interested in people's reactions to the horrific and unjust experiences of segregation, even as a child. In this context, her mother instilled in her the wisdom to "always keep your pocket handkerchief singing. Remember to take care of yourself; remember to make your own way and your own money so you can have your own say."



In her early years, Williams worked as a reporter for the *Louisville Defender*, a local Black newspaper. In 1958, she married Robert Williams, a Presbyterian minister, and joined the Presbyterian Church. The two were active in the Civil Rights Movement and participated in marches in Alabama, Tennessee and New York.

Williams came to theological education in midlife. She attended Union Theological Seminary in New York, which was then the intellectual heart of Black liberation theology. There, she founded the Black Women's Caucus and taught at Drew University in Madison, New Jersey, while finishing her doctorate in theology. Shortly after graduation, she was appointed associate professor of Theology and Culture at Union.

Williams is best known for her groundbreaking book of theological womanism, *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk*, which marshaled everything from poetry, history and Black ethnography to explore Black women's relationship to God in light of their particular history of racial subjugation. The book quickly became one of the foundational classics of womanism. In 1996, she was promoted to the Tillich Professorship of Theology and Culture and became the first Black woman at Union to hold a named chair. Her students remembered her as a skilled and deeply caring professor, and she was an engaged civic activist. While teaching at Union, she trained in community organizing and worked extensively with Harlem Initiatives Together.

Above all, Williams' life offers an example of how making a way out of no way can pave a path for those to come. Her work and example in theological womanism continue to serve as an inspiration and lodestar for many who are today able to navigate a much different culture of theological higher education thanks to her.





Call to Action:

- Read Williams' classic [Sisters in the Wilderness](#).
- [Read about Williams' legacy](#) through her impact on her students at Union Theological Seminary in New York.

Prayer:

God, you go before us. Before we were, you created light and life, earth and dirt, with us in mind. In your Son, you went before us into death in order to bring us into redeemed life with you. Help us remember your groundbreaking work as we honor its resemblances in the lives of those like Dr. Delores Williams. In their lives and work, help us see your leading hand and guiding light. Amen.





Tuesday, Sept. 17 — Murphy Davis

*The Lord sets the prisoners free;
the Lord opens the eyes of the blind.
The Lord lifts up those who are bowed down;
the Lord loves the righteous.
The Lord watches over the strangers;
he upholds the orphan and the widow,
but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin. — Psalm 146:8–9*

American politics is awash in religion and always has been. These days, the religious political partisans that rise to national media attention largely do so because their religion is fundamentalist and their politics illiberal. It is only natural to wonder again, as Americans so often have, whether religion and politics should mix. As we consider our own response as people of faith and engaged citizens, it's worth remembering those who combined politics and Christian practice in radically different ways.

The Rev. Murphy Davis offers us one such example. Raised in Louisiana and North Carolina, Davis was an engaged activist from early adulthood through her early death from a rare cancer at the height of the pandemic. While a college student at Mary Baldwin College in Staunton, Virginia, Davis worked to hone her deep commitment to justice and her growing opposition to the Vietnam War. From college, Davis proceeded to Columbia Theological Seminary to continue mining the riches her faith held for the justice work that captivated her. She was a first-rate student and was awarded a doctoral fellowship for work in Church History and Women's Studies, which she left to instead pursue ministry and activism full time.



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From 1976 on, Davis and her partner, Eduard Loring, shared a holistic life of ministry and mercy. Both Presbyterian pastors' social interests were wide-ranging, focusing especially on abolishing war and the death penalty, creating housing for unhoused people, and advocating for the rights of the racially dominated and economically oppressed. Davis is best remembered for her work in Atlanta on homelessness, which earned her a reputation as the Presbyterian Dorothy Day. She and Loring founded the Open Door Community in Atlanta in 1981, an intentional community where they lived and worked together alongside unhoused and housing-insecure people.

Murphy was also an outspoken critic of the death penalty and an engaged minister to death row inmates. Her advocacy on behalf of those sentenced to death earned her renown within the Georgia correctional system and served as a powerful example to other clergy. An accomplished author, Murphy wrote a biography of civil rights activist Frances Freeborn Pauley and a complicated, multi-genre book exploring her own battle with concern, end-of-life care and America's broken medical system. The book was published shortly before her death in 2020.

Call to Action:

- Watch [Davis' 2020 interview](#) about her last book.
- Read Davis' [Surely Goodness and Mercy: A Journey into Illness and Solidarity](#).
- Learn more about the [death penalty laws where you live](#).

Prayer:

God of the forgotten and invisible, remind us to seek you where you can be found — among the least. Instill in us the energy, wisdom, and most of all, the compassion that discipleship requires, and keep our hearts tender and merciful. Amen.





Wednesday, Sept. 18 — Rachel Carson

Jesus answered them, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain, but if it dies it bears much fruit. Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor. — John 12:23–26

Summer has just gone. As in previous years, spells of intensely hot days and summer wildfires have provoked us to reflect on our planet's health. We worry about the well-being of the people and places we cherish, and we wonder about our own place in a world speeding toward climate catastrophe. At times, the immensity of the problem and the sacrifices it requires tempt us to despair. At times just like this, we should remember the environmentalists whose lives and work prepared for us a world much better than we otherwise would have gotten.

Rachel Carson was born in a deeply Presbyterian part of Pennsylvania to Scots-Irish migrants who had generations-long Presbyterian roots. Her dad was a lifelong Presbyterian pastor. After earning degrees in English and biology at the Pennsylvania College for Women, Carson moved to Maryland in 1929 to pursue a graduate degree in zoology and genetics at Johns Hopkins. Her studies emerged from and fed back into a lifelong love of the natural world, and after graduation, Carson went to work for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. There, she studied and wrote on ocean life and coastal ecosystems.

In 1945, Carson became aware of and deeply concerned over the use of DDT. A scientist, she studied its effects on ecosystems and wildlife. By the late 1950s, as DDT was increasingly becoming an issue of public concern, Carson offered her expertise to advance lawsuits challenging the animal and public health effects of DDT's widespread use. Carson's arguments in this period became increasingly pointed. In 1962 she published *Silent Spring*, a book arguing that DDT and similar chemical agents were miscategorized as "pesticides." In her view, they were better understood as "biocides" because of their ability to disrupt ecosystems and kill off whole species. The book proved influential and provided fuel for the budding environmental movement. It also provoked a sharp backlash from the pesticide industry, which sought to discredit her scientific work and question her professional integrity. Nonetheless, the federal government was forced to review its pesticide policy, and Carson testified before Congress on her findings. Carson died of cancer in 1962 and was posthumously awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1980 by President Jimmy Carter.



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DDT is just one of many chemical agents engineered in the 20th century that have contributed to ecological disaster. Some "biocides" have become so widespread that scientists are unable to find blood samples of any living creatures — human or animal — that do not already contain them. As we reflect on the many environmental challenges we face, may we remember also the possibility of real change. DDT was banned in the US in 1972, thanks in part to Carson's research and advocacy.

Call to Action:

- [Read about the impact Carson's *Silent Spring* had](#) on the public controversy over DDT in the United States.
- Explore the [Rachel Carson Council](#) and their work to honor and extend the impact of Carson's public advocacy.
- Read Carson's [testimony before Congress](#) from 1963.

Prayer:

God of all that lives and moves, we often vacillate wildly between the two poles of human existence: dust destined to return to dust, and people destined for resurrected life in the kingdom of God. Yet all that we are belongs to you. Help us to hold these realities together: body and soul, being and blood, breath and spirit. As we do, draw us back to healthy and flourishing relationships with all of your Creation. Amen.



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Thursday, Sept. 19 – Sally and Bear Ride

About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. Suddenly there was an earthquake so violent that the foundations of the prison were shaken, and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were unfastened. When the jailer woke up and saw the prison doors wide open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, since he supposed that the prisoners had escaped. But Paul shouted in a loud voice, "Do not harm yourself, for we are all here." — Acts 16:25–28

One sure way to boggle the mind is to read the history of the American space program alongside our history of civil rights. Four years before the Voting Rights Act of 1965, Alan Shepard became the first American to reach space, where he spent just over 15 minutes. Four years after the Voting Rights Act, the U.S. successfully landed an astronaut on the moon.

Two Presbyterian sisters offer us a snapshot of another facet of the relationship between aerospace exploration and civil rights. Born and raised in southern California, Sally and the Rev. Dr. Bear Ride grew up in a devoted Presbyterian family. Their parents were both elders at First Presbyterian Church in Encino. In 1978, Sally was selected by NASA to enter spaceflight training, and Bear was ordained as a Presbyterian minister. Bear would go on to serve as the pastor of Claremont Presbyterian Church for roughly a decade. Sally is best remembered as the first American woman in space for her 1983 flight on the Challenger shuttle. Four years later, the General Assembly of the PC(USA) voted to retain a ban on gay ordination.

Sally and Bear were both queer. Sally briefly married fellow astronaut Steven Hawley before reconnecting with Tam O'Shaughnessy, a childhood friend who would become her lifelong partner of 27 years. In the meantime, Bear served for decades as a lesbian pastor in a denomination that refused to recognize her loves and full humanity. Over those many years, Bear was a vocal critic of the church's policy, and she actively organized and participated in marches, protests and educational events. In 2000, she was arrested during the Souforce demonstration at the 212th General Assembly. She has also served as co-moderator of More Light Presbyterians, a nonprofit that fought for the ordination and marriage rights of queer congregants. In 2008, Bear married Susan Craig, her partner of 12 years, also an ordained Presbyterian minister. Nearly four years later, the PC(USA) finally recognized the marriage and ordination rights of LGBTQIA+ Presbyterians. Sally died in 2012. Bear is a retired Presbyterian clergy person.



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Call to Action:

- Listen to Bear's [oral history interview](#).
- Check out [Sally and Tam's books](#).
- Watch [Tam's video reception](#) of Sally's Presidential Medal of Freedom.

Prayer:

Loving God, you have given us enormous potential: the potential to race to the heavens to behold the immensity of your universe, and the potential to make the simplest differences between people into reasons to brutally mistreat one another. Give us the power and the grace we need to become what you would have us be. Amen.



Friday, Sept. 20 – The Social Welfare Committee of the 1933 PC(USA) General Assembly

*While I kept silent, my body wasted away
through my groaning all day long.
For day and night your hand was heavy upon me;
my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer.*

Selah

*Then I acknowledged my sin to you,
and I did not hide my iniquity;
I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord,"
and you forgave the guilt of my sin. Selah — Psalm 32:3–5*

1933 is a year that needs little introduction. In January, Adolf Hitler was installed as chancellor of Germany. In February and March, waves of mass arrests swept Germany. Before the end of March, Dachau Concentration Camp began operating. Even despite the ongoing Great Depression, back in America, war mongering and fear of war swirled, so attention at the year's General Assembly in Columbus, Ohio, naturally turned to war and Christian conscience.

At the Assembly, the Social Welfare Committee offered a list of recommendations. They endorsed prohibition, criticized graphic movies and comics, and then addressed the demands Christian faith makes in light of war and violence. Their discussions and deliberations culminated in a document that is impressive for its moral clarity and prescience. Careful to distinguish the church from the state, they reminded the denomination that "the Church must produce the peacemakers," for the "nations have made a business of producing warmakers." They endorsed a just war framework that held that military might "ought never to be used except for the purpose of resisting invasion" while simultaneously calling on the U.S. to "set an example to the world by adopting a program of progressive disarmament."



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But we should remember them for their theological vision as much as their policy provisions. At the heart of their reading of the gospel, the committee found themselves bound "to teach the coming generation of the cost and curse of war, to saturate them with a passion for peace, to cultivate in them the conviction that the world will be more blessed by friendships than by battleships." Likewise, they criticized the way the nation's commitment to war vastly outstripped its commitment to the poor and economically disadvantaged, writing bluntly that "the Christian Church must be the most swiftly moving of all organizations to challenge whatever cripples or dishonors life, to insist that no economic emergency justifies human oppression."

Nearly 100 years later, their exhortations and recommendations ring out with startling relevance, and they provide a model for how to pair theological seriousness with concrete policy recommendations.

Call to Action:

- Read more of the committee's [Assembly overtures and theological rationales here](#).

Prayer:

God, we in the mainline who are so inclined toward committees and bureaucracies know their limits, frustrations and failures. Remind us that these things can be profound instruments of your prophetic word. Where we gather, you promise to be. Where we work together to hear and follow your word, come among us and guide us by your grace. Amen.



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Saturday, Sept. 21 — David Bailey Sindt

Then Jesus cried aloud: "Whoever believes in me believes not in me but in him who sent me. And whoever sees me sees him who sent me. I have come as light into the world, so that everyone who believes in me should not remain in the darkness. I do not judge anyone who hears my words and does not keep them, for I came not to judge the world but to save the world." — John 12:44–47

To be a Christian is to be in community with others attempting to do the same. This is often the source of profound joy and profound pain. But everyone has their own story of faith and the church or churches in which they have found a home. Sometimes these stories are familiar. Think of converts full of zeal, wedded to a romantic picture of the church that wooed them. Or think of the longstanding members whose relationships with a church have gone through highs and lows.

The Rev. David Bailey Sindt's story tacked closer to the latter of these patterns. Born in 1940, Sindt grew up in Presbyterian churches in Minneapolis, where he experienced a moving and engaging faith that would grasp him for his whole life. Feeling called to ministry, he attended McCormick Theological Seminary and was ordained in 1965 by the Presbytery of St. Paul. But Sindt was also gay, and the homophobic policies of the Presbyterian Church meant that it was impossible for him at the time to be an openly gay man and remain a clergy person. So, by 1971, Sindt had left his fledgling call, earned a Master of Social Work, and accepted a position with Chicago's Department of Children and Family Services.



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At the same time, Sindt began participating in the Chicago Gay Alliance and joined Lincoln Park Presbyterian Church. The church embraced him in the fullness of his person, and in 1972 they called him to serve as their assistant pastor and empowered him to establish an outreach ministry to the local gay community. This, the first Presbyterian call issued to an openly gay man, was twice rejected by the Presbytery of Chicago. Sindt chose to express his understandable frustration and alienation within the church by organizing for change. At the 1974 General Assembly, he held up a sign that read, "Is Anyone Else Out There Gay?" Behind the scenes, he was also channeling his frustration into grassroots organizing. He had undertaken a letter-writing campaign to sympathetic Presbyterians, and the interest he garnered enabled him to form the Presbyterian Gay Caucus (later called the Presbyterians for Lesbian/Gay Concerns). Through his leadership, the organization created a network of queer folks and allies throughout the church who offered support and mutual aid to one another while advocating for full membership, ordination and marriage rights for LGBTQIA+ folks.

Sindt's life was short. Like so many gay activists of his generation, he contracted AIDS and died early in December 1986. But like so many shining exemplars from the church's past, his life offers us a high bar. What he accomplished and stood for in his 46 years of life is a reminder of what is possible if we let our love for what the church can and should be prevent us from becoming complacent with or discouraged by what it is and has been.

Call to Action:

- Encounter the [digitized artifacts of Sindt's ministry](#).
- Listen to a [1972 sermon Sindt delivered at Lincoln Park Presbyterian](#).

Prayer:

God, when we gather together, we often profess to believe in one holy, catholic church. A profession, it is also an aspiration and a prayer, one we sometimes offer up doubtfully and desperately, hoping that you will make it true despite our best efforts to the contrary. Please do. Make it true. And buoy us with the faith of those whose vision of your holy community transcends what our eyes now see. Amen.



Sunday, Sept. 22 — Jean Kim

You must understand this, my beloved brothers and sisters: let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger, for human anger does not produce God's righteousness. Therefore rid yourselves of all sordidness and rank growth of wickedness, and welcome with meekness the implanted word that has the power to save your souls. But be doers of the word and not merely hearers who deceive themselves. — James 1:19–22

Born in 1935 in an apple orchard in remote North Korea, the Rev. Jean Kim grew up as a displaced person in what would become South Korea. At the age of 11, her family escaped south by foot in the depths of winter as political turmoil engulfed the Korean peninsula. At 35, she moved again, immigrating to the U.S., where she became a Presbyterian pastor and social worker in Washington state.

Kim was deeply moved by the plight of unhoused people. After nine years of ministry and still reeling from the tragic death of her 17-year-old son, she founded the Church of Mary Magdalene, a nondenominational church and housing ministry that provided shelter for women. In her telling, the idea for the ministry came to her in a dream given to her by God, who instructed her to plant a “living cross that represents all who Jesus is: his absolute love, care, compassion, forgiveness, sacrifice, emptying, sharing and hope for the most poor, homeless and excluded ones.” Her devotion and aptitude for this ministry helped the church’s shelter outreach grow, and the organization lives on today as [Mary’s Place](#), a shelter provider in Seattle’s King County that provides over 140,000 overnight stays and 420,000 meals every year. During this period, Kim also worked as a homeless advocate for the General Assembly Council, where she used her own life experience as a refugee and immigrant to help congregations understand homelessness as a social crisis that was solvable.



Photo courtesy of the Jean Kim Foundation for the Homeless Education.

Kim regularly married her deep love of Christian spiritual traditions to her work. She branded her work and ministries with the color purple because of the Lenten traditions of penitence. For Kim, homelessness was a social sin that the United States and the American church were complicit in allowing. She was also a pioneering practitioner in intersectional ministry who understood the impact systemic racism had on creating and perpetuating homelessness in America. She worked tirelessly to share her hard-won expertise through speaking engagements and writing. She authored 13 books on homelessness, its causes and what Christians ought to do about it.

Call to Action:

- Watch the [interviews Kim gave to Korean American Story's Legacy Project](#).
- For Pacific Northwest readers, explore [Mary's Place](#) and consider getting involved in their ongoing work.

Prayer:

God, in the beginning, you spoke into existence a world full of space and abundant life for all your creatures to share. And yet today, a few have so much, and so many lack even a home to call their own. Move us by that Word which you also spoke, the Word that was the light and life of all people, who took on flesh and came to a world where he too found himself without a home or a bed. Move us to love those he loved, to live for them as he did so that all of us together can share the world of abundance you richly lavished upon us. Amen.



Monday, Sept. 23 – Eugene Carson Blake

And the crowds asked Jesus, "What, then, should we do?" In reply he said to them, "Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none, and whoever has food must do likewise." Even tax collectors came to be baptized, and they asked him, "Teacher, what should we do?" He said to them, "Collect no more than the amount prescribed for you." Soldiers also asked him, "And we, what should we do?" He said to them, "Do not extort money from anyone by threats or false accusation, and be satisfied with your wages." — Luke 3:10–14

In this Season of Peace, it might seem strange at first blush to highlight a Presbyterian minister who offered a lecture at Princeton Theological Seminary titled "Militant Christianity," in which he urged his listeners to remember that "to think of Christians and the church as an army of soldiers is on the whole right and useful." But the theological militarism that this minister had in mind was a far cry from the brutish and violent movements that have also deployed this metaphor and rhetoric.

The Rev. Eugene Carson Blake was born in late 1906 in St. Louis to a conservative Presbyterian family. Blake would carry forward his family's Presbyterianism while leaving behind their political inclinations. A graduate of Princeton University and Princeton Theological Seminary, Blake experienced his theological studies as an encounter between his faith and the question of what sort of witness and leadership the church was calling for in the dawning era of political upheaval and social change.

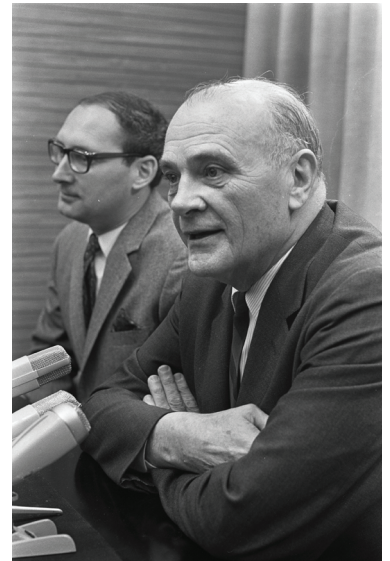
After serving churches in New York City and Albany, Blake accepted a call to Pasadena Presbyterian Church, one of the largest Presbyterian congregations in the U.S., with 3,500 members. The church continued to flourish under his leadership, and his newfound stature helped him rise through the ranks of denominational leadership. From 1951 to 1966, he served as the United Presbyterian Church's stated clerk. During these years, he was also president of the National Council of Churches and a delegate to the World Council of Churches.

Blake was both a skilled leader and a Christian thought leader in an era desperate for a fresh hearing of the gospel. He was an early and vocal critic of racism and racial segregation and was a pivotal figure in the Civil Rights Movement. He helped to organize the March on Washington with the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and led the formation of the interfaith lobby that helped secure the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. At the same time, Blake cared deeply about the souls of the mainline churches in America and the Presbyterian churches in particular. He sparked ecumenical conversations that led to the consolidation of many mainline and Presbyterian denominations, and he helped contribute to the 1967 confessional revisions of the Presbyterian Church. He was also an active member of the anti-war movement and a tireless critic of the Vietnam War.

Ministers and seminary professors are no longer summoned to take the train to Washington, D.C., to consult our nation's political leaders. But that does not mean that Christianity is no longer a vital and contested feature of our shared civic life. As he did to his audience at Princeton Theological Seminary, Blake would remind us today that Christian faith involves struggle — for justice and against those who would perpetuate evil.

Call to Action:

- Listen to the rest of [Blake's lecture at Princeton Theological Seminary](#).
- Listen to Blake's [1963 sermon "Law and Order and Christian Duty"](#)





Prayer:

In the words the Rev. Eugene Carson Blake delivered to those who had marched on Washington, we pray, Lord: *"We come — and late, we come — but we come to present ourselves this day, our souls and bodies to be a living sacrifice holy and acceptable to God, which is our reasonable service, in a kind of tangible and visible sacrament which alone in times like these can manifest to a troubled world the grace that is available at the communion table or high altar. We come in prayer that we, in our time, may be more worthy to bear the name our tongues so fluently profess. We come in faith that the God who made us and gave his Son for us and for our salvation will overrule the fears and hatreds that so far have prevented the establishment of full racial justice in our beloved country."*
Amen.





Tuesday, Sept. 24 — Katie Geneva Cannon

*Do not put your trust in princes,
in mortals, in whom there is no help.
When their breath departs, they return to the earth;
on that very day their plans perish.
Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob,
whose hope is in the Lord their God,
who made heaven and earth,
the sea, and all that is in them;
who keeps faith forever;
who executes justice for the oppressed;
who gives food to the hungry. — Psalm 146:3–7*

This year, campuses of higher learning made the news for their political turmoil. Student demonstrations and occupations opposing Israel's genocidal response to the Oct. 6 attacks became an item of national debate. Many of the responses expressed concern over higher education generally, which many suggested had become bastions of progressive orthodoxy that were increasingly hostile to conservative points of view. Lost in the debate over this stereotyped view of higher education was the extent to which the students' actual demands challenged this understanding of America's higher educational culture. Would bastions of progressive orthodoxy financially invest in genocidal regimes and request the arrest of their own students? And where do our own institutions of theological higher education fall in these debates?

One important way to begin to think through these important questions is by considering the pioneering career of the Rev. Dr. Katie Geneva Cannon. Born in 1950 and raised in a deeply segregated community in North Carolina, Cannon was the daughter of two Presbyterian elders. From an early age, she excelled in school, and in 1967, she was her high school's salutatorian. She pursued a degree in education from Barber-Scotia College before following her call to ministry to the Interdenominational Theological Center (ITC) in Atlanta and Union Theological Seminary in New York.



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Cannon's theological education involved a steep, uphill struggle. When she matriculated at ITC, the campus had no bathrooms or dormitory accommodations for women. So, while asserting her voice in the classroom, she also had to contend with an institution materially designed without her in mind. Cannon would share this story with close friends, who took from it the message that "Black women called to ministry were on trial. The church and its theological seminaries were not expecting or accepting that Black women would ever hold the office of pastor, priest, preacher or prophet. Katie was all of those and more." Despite all this, Cannon was the first Black woman ordained in the Presbyterian Church.

From ITC, Cannon continued on to Union Theological Seminary, where she originally pursued a doctorate in Old Testament. Her Old Testament professors there nearly ended her academic career early by refusing to write a positive letter of recommendation to the Fund of Theological Education, which was financing Cannon's studies. In a twist of providence, Beverly Harrison convinced Cannon to transfer into the study of Christian ethics and helped make a place for her at Union. Christian ethics proved fertile ground for Cannon, so much so that the discipline would later be remade as a result of her contributions to it.

For the rest of her career, Cannon would go on to be a founding luminary of womanist theology and ethics, a school of





theological reflection that aimed to treat the lived experience of Black women as a source of theological knowledge worthy of consideration and capable of reshaping the warp and weft of Christian claims. After serving on the faculties of Temple University, the Episcopal Divinity School and Harvard Divinity School, Cannon took up a post at Union Presbyterian Seminary in 2001, where she remained for the rest of her teaching and writing career. She left behind a stunning body of academic writing that continues to guide the frontier of theological reflection today.

Call to Action:

- Catch up on the ongoing work Cannon inspired by engaging with [the Katie Geneva Cannon Center for Womanist Leadership](#).
- Listen to Cannon's 2003 address at Princeton Theological Seminary, "[A Montage of Mercy](#)."
- Listen to Cannon's 1992 sermon "[Prophets for a New Day](#)."

Prayer:

God, at times we listen for your voice in the affirmation of those who know you well. Their encouragement can be the Spirit's guidance to us. At other times, we fail to discern your will. Undeterred, you call those you would have in your service, drawing prophets and leaders like the Rev. Dr. Katie Geneva Cannon into your work in the world. As they elbow their way past our obstinance, help us to see in the struggle an opportunity to hear anew your gospel and to reorient ourselves to your ongoing work in the world. Amen.





Wednesday, Sept. 25 — Maria Fearing

For he will command his angels concerning you
to guard you in all your ways.
On their hands they will bear you up,
so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.
You will tread on the lion and the adder;
the young lion and the serpent you will trample under foot.
Those who love me, I will deliver;
I will protect those who know my name. — Psalm 91:11–14

As election uncertainty swirls all around, I find myself returning to deep theological themes that mark so much of God's work in Scripture. God's perseverance, provision and providence help comfort and console, even if so much remains fragile and seemingly hurtles toward disaster.

Like so many of God's chosen people, Maria Fearing's life bears these hallmarks and recalls the promise that our God is the living God. Born to Mary and Jesse near Gainesville, Alabama, in the summer heat of 1838, Fearing was, of course, also born into slavery. As a child, teen and young adult, she worked as a house servant for her mistress Amanda Winston and spent time with the mistress' children. Winston taught her children and Fearing the Presbyterian catechism and told them stories from Scripture. But Fearing most gravitated toward the stories Winston shared of the travels of missionaries in Africa.



Alabama Department of Archives and History

Fearing's free life began after emancipation at the age of 27. Her father and the rest of the family adopted the surname of a previous owner, Fearing. Maria Fearing's pursuits betray a love of learning and a deep interest in theology. She learned to read and write and worked her way through the Freedmen's Bureau school in Talladega, Alabama, in order to become a teacher. For several years, she taught in rural schools in Alabama, just east of Birmingham.

One day in her early 50s, Fearing attended a speaking event at Talladega College. There, William Sheppard, a Presbyterian missionary, spoke about his work and directly attempted to recruit audience members to return with him to Congo. The invitation set in motion an idea that would define the remainder of Fearing's life. At 56, she applied to work with the Presbyterian missionaries in Africa. First denied, she was eventually approved under the condition that she pay her own way and support her own work. So, Fearing sold all she had — her house and her belongings — to pay the fare to sail from New York to Luebo and make the 1,200-mile journey inland to the mission station.

The mission field gave Fearing the opportunities she needed to flourish. She learned the Baluba-Lulua language and worked to translate the Bible into it from English. She shared the gospel in local villages and helped organize an orphanage for girls and victims of the slave trade. She also drew on her experience as a schoolteacher to promote literacy, numeracy and theological education among the local girls. At 78, she finally retired and returned to Alabama, where she lived until her death in 1937.

Call to Action:

- [Read more about Fearing.](#)
- Check out a [surviving photograph of Fearing's Congolese students.](#)

Prayer:

God, the birds may not worry, reap or sow, but we seem to know some things they don't. The world gives every impression of being out of control. What do you have in store for it? For us? As we wonder and worry, send your Spirit to also help us look upon all you feed and fed, guide and guided, and sustain and sustained. As you did for them, do also for us. Amen.



Presbyterian Mission
Presbyterian
Peacemaking Program



Thursday, Sept. 26 — Jaime Wright

When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, Jesus went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” — Luke 4:16–19

Think back on the recent election lost by a far-right populist whose indignant supporters stormed federal government buildings one January day in an attempted coup d’état. Are we both thinking of Brazil’s 2022 general election runoff, in which Jair Bolsonaro lost to Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva?

The recent political turmoil in Brazil, like that in the U.S., recalls earlier decades. In the mid-1960s, Brazil’s democratic government was overturned by a successful military coup that resulted in two decades of military dictatorship. This was the context in which the Rev. Jaime Wright served as a Presbyterian missionary in Brazil. Born to Presbyterian missionaries in Brazil, Wright came by the work honestly. After finishing college in Arkansas, Jaime earned a master’s at Princeton Theological Seminary, was ordained by the Presbytery of Fort Smith in 1950, and accepted a call to the Presbyterian Church’s Central Brazil Mission.



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Back in Brazil, Wright went to work building up the local church’s leadership and ownership over their national denominational organization. When the military seized power in 1964, Wright’s brother, Paulo Stuart Wright, a leftist serving as a state legislator, immediately went into hiding, where he would remain for eight years. In 1973, Paulo resurfaced and was promptly “disappeared” by the Brazilian military. Documents would later show that Paulo, like so many other suspected dissidents, was tortured and murdered.

Paulo’s death shaped the next two decades of Jaime’s ministry. His work supporting the local Presbyterian churches in Brazil continued. But in 1979, he also accepted an invitation from the Archdiocese of São Paulo to join Cardinal Paulo Evaristo Arns and other concerned ministers to work on a secret project to expose the Brazilian military’s regime of torture, murder and forced disappearance. Over five years, the team secretly copied government records, building a case against the military on the basis of their own internal reports of these heinous activities. They published their findings in the 1985 book *Brasil: Nunca Mais* (“Brazil: Never Again”), which Wright translated into English the following year as *Torture in Brazil*. The report enabled Brazil’s fledgling democratic resurgence in the late 1980s to face the horrors perpetrated by the military dictatorship and work to reestablish and safeguard fundamental civil rights.

Call to Action:

- Read Wright’s [Torture in Brazil](#).
- Watch the [documentary about Wright’s torture report](#) (in Portuguese with English subtitles).

Prayer:

God, your apostle taught us to refrain from the temptation of thinking that we may “do evil that good may come” (Romans 3.8). You love what is good. You abhor what is not. Where we witness what must absolutely be condemned, give us the courage to say with Wright and his co-conspirators, “No” and “Never again.” Amen.





Friday, Sept. 27 — James Atwood

About that time no little disturbance broke out concerning the Way. A man named Demetrius, a silversmith who made silver shrines of Artemis, brought no little business to the artisans. These he gathered together, with the workers of the same trade, and said, "Men, you know that we get our wealth from this business. You also see and hear that not only in Ephesus but in almost the whole of Asia this Paul has persuaded and drawn away a considerable number of people by saying that gods made with hands are not gods. And there is danger not only that this trade of ours may come into disrepute but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis will be scorned, and she will be deprived of her majesty that brought all Asia and the world to worship her." — Acts 19:23–27

While recounting Paul's travels and ministry, the author of Acts pauses in the passage from today to reflect on the economic and political ramifications of Paul's work. The spiritual transformations that Paul brought to Ephesus and "Asia" had drawn adherents from other religious communities. If Luke is to be believed, Paul's success in these areas had macroeconomic consequences. Demand for silver idols was severely down, and the silversmiths and other artisans were gathering their collective political power to resist Paul's message.

Passages like this often seem, at first blush, far removed from modern life. Shrines, idols and local deities — these seem like artifacts from another time. But our regular encounters with the Hebrew Bible help to remind us that idolatry is a pernicious temptation. No doubt we contend with many modern idols today, but the Rev. James Atwood would have us remember that few are as distinctly American as gun violence. A Presbyterian pastor, author and gun violence prevention advocate, Atwood devoted his life and ministry to common-sense gun control. The issue was one that had touched him personally. He joined the board of the Coalition to Stop Gun Violence shortly after one of the charter members of his church was shot and killed during an armed robbery.



Atwood was no stranger to guns. He was an avid hunter who nonetheless deeply believed that the United States' current gun laws were a failure. Atwood had a gift for working with and organizing like-minded people of faith and conscience. He helped to found Heeding God's Call, a faith-based gun violence advocacy group, and he was active as a longtime member of the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship.

In 2018, Atwood received the Presbyterian Writers Guild's Distinguished Writer Award. He used the occasion to reflect on his decades of advocacy around gun violence prevention. Gun violence, he professed, is "the greatest moral, ethical issue," though he admitted that he felt alone in this commitment in the 1970s and '80s. He concluded on a more hopeful note. Taking stock of the current political climate on guns, Atwood pointed to changing attitudes, especially among the young. "We've never had a real sustained movement, but we've got one now," he said.

Time will tell whether Atwood was right about this broadly. Atwood died in June 2020 from Covid. What is certain is that the Presbyterian Church's longstanding commitment to gun violence work owes much to Atwood's decades of ministry and advocacy, and that Atwood prepared opportunities for Presbyterians and other people of faith to join the movement he had long awaited.

Call to Action:

- Catch up on last month's inaugural [James Atwood Institute for Congregational Courage](#).
- Plan a [Decade to End Gun Violence event](#) and apply for PC(USA) Peacemaking grant aid.





- Consider how to get connected to gun violence work through the [Presbyterian Peace Fellowship's toolkit](#).
- Get involved in [Heeding God's Call's ongoing work](#).
- Check out Atwood's excellently titled book, [Gundamentalism](#).
- Read Kristin Goss' [Disarmed](#), a recent diagnosis of gun control movements in the U.S.

Prayer:

God, our hearts are so often broken and heavy from the news of yet another shooting. We reach again and again for words to capture our sense that this suffering, this destruction of sacred life is opposed to all you hold dear. Help us to sustain our anger and our sorrow, to direct them productively toward the peace that you promise. And remind us that even now your peaceable kingdom is breaking in among us. Amen.



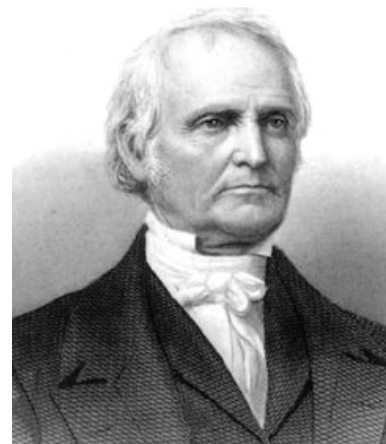


Saturday, Sept. 28 — John Rankin

At daybreak he departed and went into a deserted place. And the crowds were looking for him, and when they reached him they tried to keep him from leaving them. But he said to them, "I must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God to the other cities also, for I was sent for this purpose." — Luke 4:42–43

In these months of fevered electioneering, our nation's growing polarization is daily on display. If you are anything like me, you have felt even some of your dearest relationships strain over the past decade under the eroding sense of civic trust and comradery that has come packaged with the increasingly bitter turns in our national politics. Perhaps it helps to remember that at other times when our politics has been as or more divided, people of faith found ways to live flourishing lives, tending to the contested relationships they inhabited while nurturing the life-giving relationships that were also possible.

John Rankin was born in 1793 in Tennessee, then a slave state, to a devout Calvinist family. His family was openly against slavery, especially his mother. Rankin felt called to ordained ministry and became a Presbyterian minister in 1817. His deeply held anti-slavery commitments alienated him from his ministry peers in Tennessee. Eventually his colleagues strongly urged him to leave, and Rankin moved his family northward to Kentucky and eventually across the river to Ohio.



They settled in Ohio at a time when it was transitioning from an American frontier to an established state, but the town of Ripley, where they lived, was well-known for its street fights and shootouts. Rankin quickly earned local renown for a series of anti-slavery letters written to his brother, which were published in the local paper.

Conflicts with neighbors and slave catchers eventually led the Rankins to move to a more secluded house on a hilltop in town with views of the river border. From there, the family took up a shared ministry of aiding fugitive slaves, guiding their travel into and onward through Ohio, and putting up lights from the house to signal to them when it was safe to cross into free Ohio. The ministry was a family affair. The Rankins raised their children by teaching them how to help guide fugitive slaves along the Underground Railroad. Their ministry also forged deep and abiding relationships with like-minded fellow citizens. The familial and relational nature of their work is partly memorialized by their home, now a protected historic site and museum for the Underground Railroad.

Call to Action:

- Read Rankin's [*Letters on American Slavery*](#).
- Stop by the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center next time you are in Cincinnati and watch *Brothers of the Borderland*, a film about Rankin's work helping to free slaves.

Prayer:

God, we expect some level of strife and alienation in the public square even as we lament it and work to promote civic friendship across great disagreement. But we are surprised to find that difference and disagreement are as common, as alienating and often as vicious within the church. We who gather in your name have so much difficulty seeing eye-to-eye. Raise our eyes to you, that by attending to your ways, we might find common cause with one another. Amen.



Sunday, Sept. 29 — Gordon Chapman

With our tongues we bless the Lord and Father, and with it we curse people, made in the likeness of God. From the same mouth comes a blessing and a curse. My brothers and sisters, this ought not to be so. — James 3:9–10

At the close of the 20th century, many reflected on the devastating modern World Wars that had drenched the world in blood and established the geopolitical order that would shape the next century. Many hoped that the long-awaited social progress modern civilization promised would be better achieved in the 21st century, thanks to the lessons of the 20th. In 2001, following the terrorist attacks on American soil, American foreign policy instead fell into the grips of national hysteria and Islamophobia, and the ensuing quarter-century that followed was largely defined by fruitless international conflict.

In this sense, the 21st century has been less different from the 20th than many had hoped. In the winter of 1941, the Japanese successfully executed a surprise attack on Pearl Harbor that similarly plunged the United States into war and xenophobic hysteria. The result then was a massive campaign of forced relocation and internment of Japanese Americans. At the time, Presbyterians felt powerless to prevent the deportations and internments, but that did not mean they sat idly by.

One major national response was led by Presbyterian minister the Rev. Gordon Chapman. Informed by his long service as a missionary in Japan, Chapman had deep connections to the American Japanese community and established the Protestant Church Commission for Japanese Service in response to Executive Order 9066, which mandated relocation and internment. Formed initially in response to the plight of fellow ministers facing deportation and internment, the commission's work grew as the policy of forced relocation expanded. They established churches in the internment camps, cared for the congregations whose members and ministers were interned, and, toward the end of the policy, conducted a widespread campaign to help Japanese Americans return to their lives. Chapman served as the executive director of the commission from its inception to its dissolution in 1945, after the policy's closure.



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Call to Action:

- Read then-Presbyterian Historical Society Executive Director Beth Hessel's work on the [Presbyterian response to Executive Order 9066](#).

Prayer:

God, we are fleshy, fragile and vulnerable. Why? Many say these are gifts we bear in our bodies and souls, lasting signs of our dependence on you for every good and gracious gift that sustains us. They are, in other words, opportunities for us to share intimacy with you. But it is not easy work for us. In our fragility, we feel scared as often as we feel secure in your providence. In our vulnerability, we preemptively harm others so that they cannot harm us, rather than trusting in your protective care. Remind us to live according to what we believe: that though we are fleshy and frail, you live and move among us, caring for our every need. Amen.

Monday, Sept. 30 — Norman Mattoon Thomas

Paul said, "And now, as a captive to the Spirit, I am on my way to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and persecutions are waiting for me. But I do not count my life of any value to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the good news of God's grace." — Acts 20:22–24

Socialism had a national moment a few years ago when Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders was campaigning to be the Democratic Party's 2020 presidential nominee. In the heat of that campaign season, the term proved extraordinarily malleable. Some used "socialism" as a slur meant to conjure the legacy of repressive communist regimes. Others employed it to name something they found attractive about the welfare states in Europe, especially Scandinavia. Few seemed to know much about socialism's long history in the U.S. Fewer still suspected that socialism's U.S. legacy is deeply intertwined with Presbyterianism.

But the story of socialism in America is also the story of a curious Presbyterian minister named the Rev. Norman Mattoon Thomas. Born in 1884 into the family of another Presbyterian minister, Thomas grew up largely in Pennsylvania before attending Princeton University in 1902. He was not one of those young people who knew where their path would lead. After graduation, he was unsure of what career to pursue, so he took up the family trade and worked as a settlement worker at the Spring Street Presbyterian Church and Neighborhood House in New York City. This was the first major transformative period in Thomas' life. The utter poverty and squalor of the urban slums in New York at this period of time radicalized him, and he committed to working in social ministries — setting up boys' clubs, caring for the poor and mediating in family disputes.



At first, he committed to doing this work from a base in the church. He enrolled at Union Theological Seminary in the city, studied under Walter Rauschenbusch, and just before graduation, he was ordained as the associate pastor of the wealthy Brick Presbyterian Church. His tenure there was short, as Thomas left almost immediately to return to the city's poorest neighborhoods. He took a series of very poorly paid calls at churches in East Harlem while supporting and organizing local social ministries.

The outbreak of the first World War was another pivotal moment in Thomas' life. Thomas had come to think that Christianity was incompatible with war and violence, so he joined the Christian pacifist Fellowship of Reconciliation and the American Union Against Militarism in 1916. He rose to be a secretary of the former and an executive board member of the latter and lobbied in Washington, D.C., on behalf of conscientious objectors. His penchant for civil liberties grew from there, and he, Crystal Eastman and Roger Baldwin established the National Civil Liberties Bureau, the precursor of the American Civil Liberties Union, in 1917.

1918 was the final pivotal year in Thomas' development. His antiwar work was highly unpopular in the church, and he eventually resigned his church leadership roles in 1918 in order to save his churches' financial stability. That same year, Thomas' brother was imprisoned for being a conscientious objector and sentenced to life imprisonment. Before the year was over, Thomas joined the Socialist Party of America.

Over the coming decades, Thomas was a tireless advocate for civil and economic justice and the Socialist Party of America's presidential nominee from 1932 to 1948. He supported striking workers, fought the Ku Klux Klan, and vigorously resisted fascistic and corrupt politicians in New York and New Jersey. Above all, he remained active in the antiwar movement and became a leading advocate for universal disarmament.



Call to Action:

- Read more about [Thomas and his work](#).
- Read Thomas' 1936 essay, "[Is the New Deal Socialism?](#)"

Prayer:

God, we who hate confess our hate and ask for your forgiveness. Warm our hearts with compassion and help us pursue peace. Grant us your wisdom as we seek your kingdom by turning our cheek and walking another mile. And we pray for the people whose hatred has led to death. As you did with the apostle Paul, would you encounter them on the road? Would you, with your very presence, transform threats and murder into lives lived for you? — [Grace Claus](#)



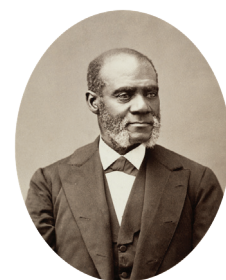


Tuesday, Oct. 1 — Henry Highland Garnet

Once when he was in one of the cities, there was a man covered with leprosy. When he saw Jesus, he bowed with his face to the ground and begged him, "Lord, if you choose, you can make me clean." Then Jesus stretched out his hand, touched him, and said, "I do choose. Be made clean." — Luke 5:12–13

When we look back on the social movements from the past that we most admire, it's easy to thin out their memory and think of them as monolithic movements. In contrast, our contemporary efforts feel scattered, feeble and confused. Do we lack the moral clarity required to see real progress? Do our ideological or even personality differences keep us from organizing and mobilizing like our predecessors did?

History can disabuse us of these temptations. The Rev. Henry Highland Garnet was born as a slave in Maryland in 1815. When he was 9, his family was granted permission to travel for a funeral and capitalized on the opportunity to secure their freedom. They settled in New York City in 1825, and Garnet was educated at the African Free School on Mott Street. From an early age, Garnet became interested in the abolitionist movement. In his teens, he and some school friends founded a club, the Garrison Literary and Benevolent Association. Its name, honoring a controversial abolitionist, prompted school intervention, and the friends were asked to change the name. They kept the name and changed their venue instead, and the group flourished. Their first meeting drew over 150 Black attendees under the age of 20.



Garnet would continue along this path and become a famous speaker and essayist on the subject of abolition. He also became a Presbyterian minister and served Liberty Street Presbyterian Church and the First Colored Presbyterian Church (Shiloh Presbyterian Church) in New York. He gave his most famous speech in 1843, titled "An Address to the Slaves of the United States of America." It provides a glimpse into the abolition movement at the time. In it, he decisively declines the tradition of abolitionist reflection spearheaded by Frederick Douglass and others who aimed to persuade white Americans and slaveholders of the evil of slavery. Instead, Garnet wrote directly to Black American slaves and worked to convince them to rebel against their masters.

Garnet is also a curious figure. He later came to an abolitionist stance that endorsed colonization, which was largely unpopular among the Black community. In 1850, he moved to England to speak and write about abolition and then moved to Jamaica as a missionary in 1852. Like many white Western colonialists, he believed that Africa should be redeemed by Christian civilization, and he pursued this goal as the president of the African Civilization Society. Toward the end of his career, Garnet became the first Black person to deliver a sermon in the halls of Congress, though it was not in session at the time. He delivered it less than two weeks after the passage of the 13th Amendment, which outlawed slavery.

Garnet's life and career are important because they are profoundly human. He helped free fugitive slaves and dismantle American slavery. He also believed that Africa was in need of a great Christian civilizing project. Not every great model from the past gets everything right. Garnet was wrong about colonialism, but he was right about slavery. And he helped press in abolitionist circles the question of whether regimes of racial domination like America's licensed violent self-defense. He can serve as a hopeful reminder today of what God can accomplish through and despite us if we offer what we can.

Call to Action:

- Read Garnet's ["Address to the Slaves of the United States of America."](#)

Prayer:

God, the truth is that your ways are easy to know and love in the abstract but hard to sort out and pursue in their details. We need your help. Gift us with others committed to struggling together to discern and know your will. Guide us by your Spirit as we do so. Amen.





Wednesday, Oct. 2 — Charles Stelzle

The Pharisees and their scribes were complaining to his disciples, saying, “Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?” Jesus answered them, “Those who are well have no need of a physician but those who are sick; I have come to call not the righteous but sinners to repentance.” — Luke 5:30–32

Some of the terminology is new. For example, an enormous amount of media attention and punditry has been expended in recent years on “the gig economy.” But many of the fundamental economic and vocational problems in industrialized nations are now as old as industrialization itself. Low wages, unsafe and dehumanizing working conditions, job insecurity — the list of perennial problems is long. At times, this or that country makes strides to improve some of these factors. At the same time, over the past half century, we have seen a rapid acceleration in the wealth gap, especially in the U.S., where the top 1% of income earners take home over 25% of the total yearly wages earned.

The Rev. Charles Stelzle’s lifelong work advocating for and ministering to poor and working-class folks can offer us some much-needed guidance as well as help place our contemporary struggles in a much wider frame. Born in 1869 to German immigrants in New York City, Stelzle joined the labor force at the age of 8, working part-time stripping tobacco leaves in a sweatshop. At 11, he dropped out of public school and worked as a cutter in an artificial flower shop to help support the family after the death of his father.



In his mid-20s, Stelzle was called to ministry and began working as a layperson for Hope Chapel, Minneapolis, a downtown Presbyterian mission to the inner city of the sort that he had grown up attending in New York City. Missions like these were falling out of fashion at the time as the mobile, middle- and upper-class members of the mainline churches that sponsored them increasingly moved out of the inner cities. Stelzle’s background made him well-suited to the work of reaching the low-income working-class residents of the neighborhood, and he had a special gift for reaching working boys employed in trades like newspaper sales and boot shining. He was ordained shortly after turning 30.

Frustrated by some of his early ministry experiences, Stelzle appealed directly to the Board of Home Missions of the Presbyterian Church, which in 1903 authorized him to pursue a “special mission to workingmen.” The work flourished rapidly, and just years later, Stelzle had become the superintendent of the Department of the Church and Labor, the first official church agency to pursue an aggressive social gospel campaign through the efforts of a paid secretary. He traveled widely, preaching and speaking on the church’s responsibility on labor issues. He collected his sermons, speeches and opinion pieces into books in order to help middle- and upper-class churchgoers better understand the plight of the working poor.

Call to Action:

- Read Stelzle’s [The Church and Labor](#).
- Read The New York Times’ [1927 entry featuring Stelzle’s preaching](#).

Prayer:

God, in Jesus, you made no secret of your love for the poor. You identified with those shut out of and exploited by systems of economic advantage. While as members we come from all economic backgrounds, as a church we are, awkwardly, rich and struggle to love as you did. Help us remember the weight of our responsibility and the inadequacy of our excuses. Grace our hearts to love the work you set before us; move our hands to get involved in it. Amen.



Thursday, Oct. 3 — John A. Mackay

The scribes and the Pharisees were watching him to see whether he would cure on the Sabbath, so that they might find an accusation against him. Even though he knew what they were thinking, he said to the man who had the withered hand, "Come and stand here." He got up and stood there. Then Jesus said to them, "I ask you, is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the Sabbath, to save life or to destroy it?" — Luke 6:7–9

In an academic essay published in 1964, James Smylie, professor of church history at Union Presbyterian Seminary, listed some of the hallmark features of what had become known as "McCarthyism." The term, he wrote, "conjures to the mind legislative usurpation of judicial process, dossiers of unreliable and misleading rumor, denunciations based upon unsupported accusations and innocent associations, charges leveled without regard to context and shifts in historical circumstances ... intimidation for political advantage, and above all, suspicion." This depressing list of mid-century political innovations has the appearance today of being closer to U.S. politics as usual.

Born in Scotland in 1889, John A. Mackay graduated from the University of Aberdeen in 1912 and then crossed the Atlantic to pursue theological education at Princeton Theological Seminary. Upon graduation, he moved to Spain to prepare to be a missionary of the Free Church of Scotland to Latin America. He served assignments in Peru, Uruguay and Mexico before accepting a position as secretary for Latin America and Africa of the Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church. From there, he would become Princeton Theological Seminary's third president in 1936. He served for 24 years as president and professor of ecumenics, during which time he also held leadership roles in the Presbyterian Church, the World Council of Churches, the International Missionary Council and the World Alliance of Reformed Churches.



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Mackay used his platforms to pursue ecumenical partnerships, to build up the spiritual vitality of mainline Protestantism and its institutions, and to condemn forces he thought were inimical to his work. McCarthy's political tyranny was one notable target of Mackay's criticism. Mackay wrote an influential essay titled "A Letter to Presbyterians," which The New York Times reproduced in full and reported on its front page. In it, Mackay denounced McCarthy's demagoguery and the spirit of civic suspicion that McCarthy's inquisitions spread, and he insisted that Presbyterians hold fast to the gospel's social witness and its loyalty to truth as "the common basis of true religion and true culture."

In a career already replete with lessons for our present moment, Mackay's leadership in the church's resistance to McCarthyism stands out as especially timely. When political leaders try to play us off one another for electoral advantage at the expense of our civic fabric and spiritual well-being, we should remain committed, as Mackay remained, to the gospel's overriding social witness and the truth that God secures.

Call to Action:

- Read Mackay's famous "[A Letter to Presbyterians](#)."

Prayer:

God, when we gather together in prayer, we often remember our neighbors around the corner and down the street. We pray for our local siblings of faith, and for our fellow citizens. In the face of all that aims to alienate us from those we live alongside, hear these prayers and bring your unifying Spirit into our town halls, our ballfields and our coffee shops. Help us to love well those we share our lives with. Amen.





Friday, Oct. 4 — Peggy Howland

Then he looked up at his disciples and said: "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled. Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh. Blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven; for that is what their ancestors did to the prophets."— Luke 6:20–23

Today's lectionary reading from the gospel is the Beatitudes, according to Luke's telling. It is a fitting passage to read as we reflect on the life, ministry and witness of the Rev. Peggy Howland. The 12th woman to be ordained as a Presbyterian pastor and the first to serve a church with over 200 members, Howland rejected 40 calls to be an assistant minister to a man before finding a call that would ordain her as lead pastor. During her career, she was a trailblazing advocate within the church for those who were marginalized.

Sometimes a person's accomplishments and witness are best told in prose, with the weight of their work and accomplishments unfolded in historical detail. Howland's are perhaps best told through the memories of those whose lives she changed. And there are too many of them to name, as you can see in the nearly unending praise and stories collected for her obituary in 2021.



Reflecting on Howland's example as a longstanding member of the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship, the Rev. Emily Brewer described the difference Howland's advocacy on behalf of women and queer folks made for her own ordination experience. Former General Assembly Moderator Rick Ufford-Chase recalled Howland's tenacity. "She was out there on the frontlines demonstrating," he said, "giving her all for the cause of justice and peace and full inclusion in the world. She accomplished far more than we should expect of any reasonable person."

These reflections give the impression of a person whose work was an extension of her person. So, it perhaps comes as no surprise that in an interview she gave as a retired clergyperson in her 80s, Howland told her interviewer that she was "still working hard on racism and sexism and gun totin'. God has given me a new mission. It makes me smile."

Call to Action:

- Familiarize yourself with the ongoing work of the [Presbyterian Peace Fellowship](#).
- [Navigate the timeline](#) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)'s long struggle to achieve full LGBTQIA+ inclusion.

Prayer:

God, how would we know how to pray if you had not taught us? And likewise, how would we know how to follow you with reckless commitment to your calling without the example of those like the Rev. Peggy Howland? You teach us and lead us by your own example and those of the saints you send among us. For all this, we praise and thank you. Amen.





Saturday, Oct. 5 — Jack Mathison

"But I say to you that listen: Love your enemies; do good to those who hate you; bless those who curse you; pray for those who abuse you. If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also, and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. Give to everyone who begs from you, and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again. Do to others as you would have them do to you." — Luke 6:27–31

Dizzying acts of forgiveness routinely make the headlines. The families of the Emanuel Nine confronted Dylann Roof at his murder trial with their pain and their forgiveness. The Amish families who had lost daughters in a schoolhouse massacre in 2006 embraced the shooter's family and extended forgiveness. These acts of grace are astounding, almost otherworldly.

The Rev. Jack Mathison had his own similar story. Born in Wisconsin in 1925, Mathison enlisted with the U.S. Army Air Corps as an 18-year-old. He trained as a navigator and flew with a B-24 heavy bomber crew that saw active deployment to Italy and Germany in World War II. In November 1943, his B-24 was shot down over Germany's southern border with Austria. All 10 crew members parachuted to safety and took refuge in a vacant alpine hostel for weeks until they were captured by a German forester who marched them out of the mountains and turned them over to the SS. They were transported by train to Stalag Luft I, a massive prisoner-of-war camp on the Baltic Sea. There, he and his fellow crewmembers lived out the last of the war before being liberated by Russian troops.



In the years after the war, Mathison earned a bachelor's and began a career with U.S. Gypsum Co. before being recalled to active duty as a navigator instructor in the Korean War. After his discharge, Mathison felt compelled to tie up loose ends, and he returned to Germany and found his way to the home of the forester who had captured him. As he told it, Mathison knocked on the man's door, and the two men threw their arms around one another like long-lost friends.

After military life, Mathison returned again to school, this time at Union Theological Seminary in New York. After graduation, he was ordained into the Presbyterian Church and served calls in Ohio, Kansas, Illinois, Tennessee and Chicago. During his tenure as a pastor, he was a tireless advocate for measures to stop gun violence. He died in 2022, just hours after the massacre in Uvalde, Texas, a timing that his family found oddly fitting.

Call to Action:

- [Watch the documentary](#) examining the Uvalde police response.

Prayer:

God, your grace is so lavish, so mysterious and so contrary to our commonsense intuitions. Puzzle us with the radical saving power you bring. Inspire us to risk our own lavish and counterintuitive imitations of your work. Guide us through the holy puzzlement of your ways. Amen.





World Communion Sunday, Oct. 6 — Mary Jane Patterson

Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body.” — Colossians 3:14–15

Today marks World Communion Sunday and the culmination of *A Season of Peace*. Over the past many weeks, we have examined just a few of the great many saints who have graced our church and who have now joined the great cloud of witnesses. Some of the saints we have remembered are well remembered. But many lived extraordinary callings that have been largely forgotten in the swirl of history. The point of this series has not been to lionize these saints. Their work and ministry speak for themselves. But for them to speak, we must listen and remember. So, for our last entry, I want to lift up one more saint from this latter category whom we should take care not to forget lest we lose the guidance her example can offer us today.

Mary Jane Patterson was born in 1924 in Marietta, Ohio, an overwhelmingly white part of the state at that point in time. Still, she recalled her childhood fondly, thanks, in part, to her growing up in an integrated town. But following high school graduation, she moved to Columbus, where she encountered some of the most extreme forms of segregation and racial discrimination the country had to offer. The experience drove her to engage with the early Civil Rights Movement, which was gaining momentum in the 1940s.



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After studying philosophy and accounting, Patterson briefly worked a series of odd jobs before her church recognized her leadership potential and asked her to become an elder. At the same time, she was an active member of the NAACP, helped organize local participation in the March on Washington, and participated in voter registration efforts during “Freedom Summer.”

The Presbyterian Church recruited her to become a missionary to Kenya in 1965, where she educated young women and girls for several years. In 1968, she returned to the U.S. following the assassinations of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Robert Kennedy Jr. to serve as the Presbyterian Church’s representative to the National Council of Churches’ “Crisis in the Nation” Project. In the ’70s, Patterson accepted an invitation to become the associate director of the Presbyterian Church’s Washington, D.C., office, where she eventually became the director. She was the first Black person of any gender to hold either position. Alongside her advocacy on civil rights, education, environmental justice and food security during this time, she also helped found and lead the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice (RCRC). She died in the spring of 2009, leaving behind a towering legacy of justice work with the Presbyterian Church.

I hope you have been encouraged and challenged by Patterson and also by those saints we have remembered this season. As we gather together on this World Communion Sunday with believers of all communions and creeds, may we remember their example as we band together to continue their work of peace.

Call to Action:

- [Read the 2004 interview](#) Patterson gave recounting her life’s work.
- Read more about [the history and impact of the RCRC’s brochure, “We Remember.”](#)

Prayer:

God of peace, your will for us involves much more than the absence of violence. In your word, you tell us that you want nothing less than to share the fullness of your overflowing goodness with us. This is real peace. We give you thanks today for Mary Jane Patterson and for all those whose example has helped reveal this vision more fully to us. We give you thanks for the inspiring example of their work and ministry. Strengthen our resolve and give us your grace so that we might live up to the hopes they had for us. Amen.

