



# Interwoven Congregations™ Quarterly

A journal of insight and expression on the road to racial justice and healing

Issue 5: May 2022

## From the Editors

Our May issue features a conversation with the co-moderators of the Presbyterian Church USA, Elder Elona Street-Stewart and Rev. Gregory Bentley. Elder Street-Stewart is synod executive of the Synod of Lakes and Prairies and is the first native American to serve as a PCUSA co-moderator. Rev. Bentley pastors Fellowship Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, AL and is a past president of the National Black Presbyterian Caucus. We conducted this interview in January 2022. - *Pat Jackson and Roxane Rucker*

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## PCUSA Co-Moderators Elder Elona Street-Stewart and Rev. Gregory Bentley



Photo by Rich Copley at the 224th General Assembly

## **A Conversation with the PCUSA Co-Moderators**

***On decolonization, the 7 Rs to racial healing, and a look at the church and justice for indigenous communities***

### **Interwoven Congregations**

**Quarterly (ICQ):** Welcome and thank you Elder Elona Street-Stewart and Rev. Gregory Bentley for joining us for this conversation as the co-moderators of the Presbyterian Church U.S.A. We want to begin by asking what led you in 2020 to seek to serve as co-moderators and why did you choose to run together?

**Elder Elona Street-Stewart:** We did not know each other. Our willingness to stand for a nomination came about when the pastor of Liberty Presbyterian Church here in the Twin Cities in Minneapolis, Rev. Aleka Galloway, said to both of us, "You need to know each other!" and that's how we connected. Gregory and I then realized that we were like siblings.

We both have long histories of being actively engaged, addressing issues of justice through education, housing and employment. And that's what really drew us together, being able to say that our people have always been active in community and in the church.

**Rev. Gregory Bentley:** Elona is right on it. It wasn't an accident; it was providential. We had a mutual friend who said



Photo by Rich Copley

“Y'all need to connect. God may be calling y'all for such a time as this.” My first thought was “I don't really want to be bothered with this.” But I reached out to Elona and the spirit just spoke and moved. It was like our lives were running on parallel tracks. We were very intentional about this not just being a ceremonial type of thing but to really do what we could to join God's transformative and redemptive work and to move the denomination closer in alignment with God's word.

**ICQ:** Did you have any priorities in mind as you as you thought about your service to the church?

**Elder Street-Stewart:** Yes, the [Matthew 25 vision](#) for the church. My synod became the first synod that joined this movement within our denomination. Even as Gregory and I were getting acquainted, I kept saying to him, “So what should we focus on?” And he was clear, “Right here. Matthew 25.”

**Rev. Bentley:** We were clear. The Matthew 25 vision is so compelling and is really guiding the work of the Presbyterian Mission Agency. It is focused on how do we best make the three foci of building congregational vitality, dismantling structural racism and eradicating systemic poverty live at every level of our denomination. And I must say it's picking up steam. We've had a lot of congregations, presbyteries and now synods signing on. So, I think people are realizing that this is a move of God. And we need to get on board with it. So we're excited about how it's going.

**Elder Street-Stewart:** Gregory and I, in the work that we're doing in our communities and church, saw how connected this is -- It's almost like a bloodstream. If we're not taking care of these issues of eradicating poverty and racism, and then making sure that people are nurtured and valued, there will not be a future of the church. People often ask us, “So what's going on in the church and with Matthew 25?” And our response is, “*Actually, why don't you tell us what you're doing?*” It's not just a program to sign up. These are things that you should already be engaged in now and wherever you are. What differences are you making around these issues of life-giving responsibilities to address the issue of racism and poverty? We are not going to shy away from that.

**Rev. Bentley:** Those three foci (antiracism, antipoverty, congregational vitality) have to be at the core of congregational life if our congregations are going to thrive. I often tell the story that Booker T. Washington told of this ship that was lost at sea. They had gone days without water and they were getting delirious. Then they saw another ship off in the distance and the captain shouted to the other ship “*Water, water we need water!*” The other captain shouted back “*Cast down your bucket where you are.*” Little did they realize that they were no longer in the ocean, but they had sailed into the

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*“Too often we ask, ‘What is the church doing?’ Well you are the church ... I'm more concerned about what you're doing, where you lay your head every night.”*

— Rev. Bentley

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mouth of the Amazon river. So they had to just cast down their buckets where they were. Too often we ask “*What is the church doing?*” Well, you are the church; your congregation is the church. I'm more concerned about what you're doing, where you lay your head every night.



Photo by Randy Hobson

**ICQ:** You have both spoken of “our communities.” Tell us about your communities.

**Elder Street-Stewart:** I'm an American Indian. My tribe is the Delaware Nanticoke. And so my community would be the tribal nations here in the United States and the broader community of indigenous people. We're just finishing winter here which is storytelling time all across the globe with indigenous people. And so I'm feeling so full of enriching stories that I've been hearing all winter. That's my broader community -- people of color, and diverse communities within not only the Presbyterian Church, and

**Rev. Bentley:** I think about what Howard Thurman said, “A [person] has to feel at home somewhere before they can feel at home everywhere.” Before you can become cosmopolitan, you have to be grounded in some particularity. So for me, I'm a black man who is a Christian, who has been shaped by the southern experience, shaped by the southern Freedom Movement, particularly SCLC and SNCC. But that's a starting point, not an ending point. As I interact with people outside of my initial tribe, that expands and I grow larger. But I can't take on wings if I deny those roots. It is because of those strong roots that I can engage in a constructive way with everybody else.

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*“Early on we took the image of the Sankofa ... [to] represent our being the co-moderators ... This African tradition of the Sankofa bird is reaching back, taking what was so precious ... and carrying that forward for survival.”*

— Elder Street-Stewart

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**Elder Street-Stewart:** Early on we took the image of the Sankofa as the image that would represent our being the co-moderators, out of our two traditions, Native American and African. This African tradition of the Sankofa bird is reaching back, taking what was so precious like that egg from the past, and carrying that forward for survival. We've also drawn the bird standing in the Mississippi, this sacred water that feeds our entire continent. Native people believe that water is sacred and full of spiritual energy. The Mississippi is part of all the tributary rivers across this nation. We must be there to support and nurture them to give them those things from the past, that they can carry with them in the future.

other faith communities. In the broader community, my neighbors are my relatives.

**ICQ.** Following up on the Matthew 25 initiative, can you give us a sense of how many of the presbyteries and congregations have signed on thus far? I'm glad to hear it's picking up steam, but are you also encountering some resistance?

**Rev. Bentley:** Oh yes. Anytime you're trying to contain new wine, you have to get some new wineskins sometimes. So yes, some people are so invested in what *is* that they don't want to even consider what *can be*. But I don't think it is of such magnitude as to derail the direction in which we're going.

**Elder Street-Stewart:** In our denomination, over a thousand congregations and mid-councils have signed on, and a number of organizations, like Presbyterian Women. But this is bigger than just the Presbyterian Church. In a recent edition of the Reader's Digest is a fabulous article about a doctor in Nebraska, who offers people an option through Matthew 25 to pay off their medical bills through community service. He said "I'm so captured by this spirit of Matthew 25 that whatever you do for the least of these you do it in Christ's name."

**ICQ:** How have you been engaging the broader church in this time of Covid 19? We're aware of your fabulous podcast "Good Medicine" and a program called "Restorative Actions." Could you tell us about these initiatives?

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*"We offered 'Decolonizing Wealth' ... as an all-church read ... let's decolonize all that we're doing — our theology, our image, our education, our church worship, and use indigenous wisdom to restore wholeness."*

*— Elder Street-Stewart*

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**Elder Street-Stewart:** We truly believe that we are spiritual beings. And so healing what has been broken is essential to who we are. Early on [in our moderatorships], we offered the book

["Decolonizing Wealth"](#) by Edgar Villanueva to the church [through our podcast "Good Medicine"] as an all-church read. That concept, out of an indigenous framework, says let's decolonize all that we're doing -- our theology, our image, our education, our church worship, and use indigenous wisdom to restore wholeness. Honestly, we could have taken all day for each podcast episode guest, it's so exciting.

"Restorative Actions" came out of some work within my own Synod of Lakes and Prairies when we were looking at the economic justice for new paradigms of reparations. Our synod treasurer



*Photo by Rich Copley*

came up with the concept of examining our financial assets and surrendering what was unearned but acquired through supremacy. We are not calling it reparations in our Synod because reparations really is a matter on a much larger governmental scale. And so the restorative action that we're doing now is to say, let's surrender a portion of our wealth. It's not like taking everything away. We still have our capital operations that we're supporting. But these dollars that we had on reserve, let's look at them and establish trusts with the Presbyterian Foundation, two of them -- one specifically for indigenous people and one for African American people. They will be community driven, community managed, community decisions. And so there's a wonderful [website](#) that we have around Restorative Actions with a curriculum to go along with that. Folk need to get comfortable with the fact that you can actually transfer some of that wealth -- your real estate, pension funds, your capital assets. All of those things came from either stolen land or stolen labor. And there were systems in place that denied indigenous and African American people from being able to acquire and accumulate that wealth and pass that on to the next generation. We're really frank about this discussion and this commitment.

*(Continues on page 6)*

# GOOD MEDICINE



*with Elona Street-Stewart & Gregory Bentley*

A key platform that Elder Street-Stewart and Rev. Bentley have used is their “Good Medicine” podcast where they explore the theme of decolonization. You can access the [archive](#) of all 16 episodes. (A guide to each of the episodes follows below.) The entire collection makes for an excellent course of study for an individual or small groups!

**Episode 1** Opening episode in which Elder Street-Stewart and Rev. Bentley frame this podcast series using Edgar Villanueva’s text “Decolonizing Wealth, Indigenous Wisdom to Heal & Restore Balance” (10-14-20, begins at 8:10)

**Episode 2** “Decolonizing our Consciousness” with Rev. Jim Bear Jacobs (11–11-20)

**Episode 3** “Decolonizing Congregations” with Daniel Wolpert (12-9-20, begins at 5:50)

**Episode 4** “The Decolonized King — The Real Legacy of MLK Jr.” (1– 13-21, begins at 0:35)

**Episode 5** “Decolonizing Theological Education” with Rev. Matthew Williams (2– 10-21, begins at 0:45)

**Episode 6** “Decolonizing Image” with Robin Hickman-Winfield (3-10-21, begins at 0:55)

**Episode 7** “Decolonizing our Politics” with Rev. Kobi Little (4-14-21, begins at 2:10)

**Episode 8** “Decolonizing our Memory” with Ruby Sales (5-12-21, begins at 1:15)

**Episode 9** “Decolonizing our Pedagogy” with Dr. Patricia Akosua Lesesne (7-14-21, begins at 0:35)

**Episode 10** “Decolonizing our Congregational Ministry” with Rev. Lukata Mjumbe (8-11-21, begins at 0:20)

**Episode 11** “Matthew 25 and Decolonization” with Rev. Dr. Diane Moffet (10-13-21, begins at 1:20)

**Episode 12** “Decolonizing Worship” with Dr. Lisa Allen-McLaurin (11-10-21, begins at 0:50)

**Episode 13** “Decolonizing the Church” with Rev. Dr. J. Herbert Nelson II (12-8-21, begins at 1:05)

**Episode 14** “Decolonizing the Dream” with Geanna Capitan, Rev. Cyreta Oduniyi and Broderick Williams (1–12-22, begins at 0:35)

**Episode 15** “Decolonizing our Infrastructure” with Dr. Catherine Coleman Flowers (3-9-22, begins at 1:20)

**Episode 16** “Decolonizing Holy Week” with Brenda Blackhawk and Rev. Dr. Mark Lomax (4-13-22, begins at 1:20)

Within our co-moderator responsibilities, Gregory and I have also, following the guidelines from Edgar Villanueva around what is indigenous and what is colonial, we've come up with these seven Rs.

**ICQ:** Seven Rs?

**Rev. Bentley:** Yes, we've tried to put into an alliterative form something that would capture the spirit of Matthew 25. The first R is a **Remembrance**. I think Gore Vidal said, "We live in the United States of Amnesia. We learn nothing because we remember nothing." So the first thing we have to do is remember, and remember rightly -- not remember mythology, but remember things as accurately as we can. And that's not for the purpose of demonizing anybody, but for the purpose of building on the truth. I love that passage from Ephesians 6, where it talks about putting on the full armor of God. The first piece of armor you put on is the belt of truth. If you don't put on truth, nothing else is going hold together. *"You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."* Not necessarily more comfortable, but it'll make you free. In remembering, we need to remember two fundamental pillars of American society, and that is the genocide of the indigenous people and the theft of their land, and the enslavement of Africans. Those are the two

pillars on which American society rests. There's no way around it. People often say, "Aww, you hate America." No, I don't hate America; I love this country. This is the land of my nativity. My ances-

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*"We need to remember two fundamental pillars of American society, and that is the genocide of the indigenous people and the theft of their land, and the enslavement of Africans ... There's no way around it."* — Rev. Bentley

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tors' blood is in the soil of this nation. But I don't have to lie about America in order to love America. In fact, it's because I love it, that I want it to do right and become the best that it can be.

So, in remembering we should have some **Remorse** about that, if we have any God about us. But it's not enough just to feel sorry, we move to **Repentance**. Biblical repentance is about way more than feeling sorry, feeling bad; it's about change. Let this mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus. Paul says, *"I beseech you therefore brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God to present your*



Photo by Randy Hobson

bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. Be ye not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind.” (Romans 12:2)

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“Repentance should lead us to repair and that’s the one we really get hung up on, because now that means it’s going to cost somebody something.”

— Rev. Bentley

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Repentance should lead us to **Repair** and that’s the one we really get hung up on, because now that means it’s going to cost somebody something. We used to want to jump to the fifth R, which is **Reconciliation**, but reconciliation comes after repair. Zacchaeus said, “Look, half of my possessions I’m just going to give away, because I know I participated in an unjust system and I’ve gotten unjust wealth. And if I have defrauded anybody I’m going to pay them back four times as much.” Then you see Jesus gets happy. “Ooooh – oooh! Salvation has come to this house, for he is the son of Abraham!” Zacchaeus was a very wealthy man, and he changed. We can have money, but money doesn’t necessarily have to have us. And when it doesn’t have us, we can engage in this restorative action that we’re talking about. And when that happens, we can have true reconciliation. And when we have true reconciliation we have **Resurrection**, as a community, and after resurrection, we can **Rejoice**. So those are the seven Rs that we use to try to capture the spirit of Matthew 25.

I want to say something else about Restorative Actions. It’s deeply rooted in the biblical notion of justice -- not criminal justice, which is punitive, but biblical justice which is restorative and distributive. It’s about distributing God’s resources in such a way that all of God’s creation can flourish into the fullness of what God created it to be. We have to disabuse ourselves of zero sum thinking if you remember that old song, [singing] *Somebody got to win. Somebody got to lose. Somebody got to play the fool.* We’re not engaging in that. We’re talking

about a win-win situation in which everybody wins, in which all of us get what we need to fully manifest what Dr. King called the Beloved Community and living to the fullness of God’s design.

**ICQ:** Would there be one of those R’s that you think is most critical, given where we are today as a country?

**Rev. Bentley:** The repair.

**Elder Street-Stewart:** Repair.

**Rev. Bentley:** That’s where we get stuck. I tell Elona we do the land recognitions. Frankly, I’m to the point of *Where’s this going?* Okay, we recognize that this land was stolen from indigenous people, *what are we gonna do?* Just keep recognizing it? At some point we got to do something to make right that wrong. So that’s why we can’t stop at remembrance, we’ve got to move through to remorse and repentance, and ultimately repair. And that’s where the real fight is.

**ICQ:** I really appreciated this framing that you offer around these seven Rs. But I have an eighth R for your consideration that comes from the sense that this work that we’re involved in, it seems to me, is not necessarily a linear process. So a perhaps an eighth R might be ‘recycle.’

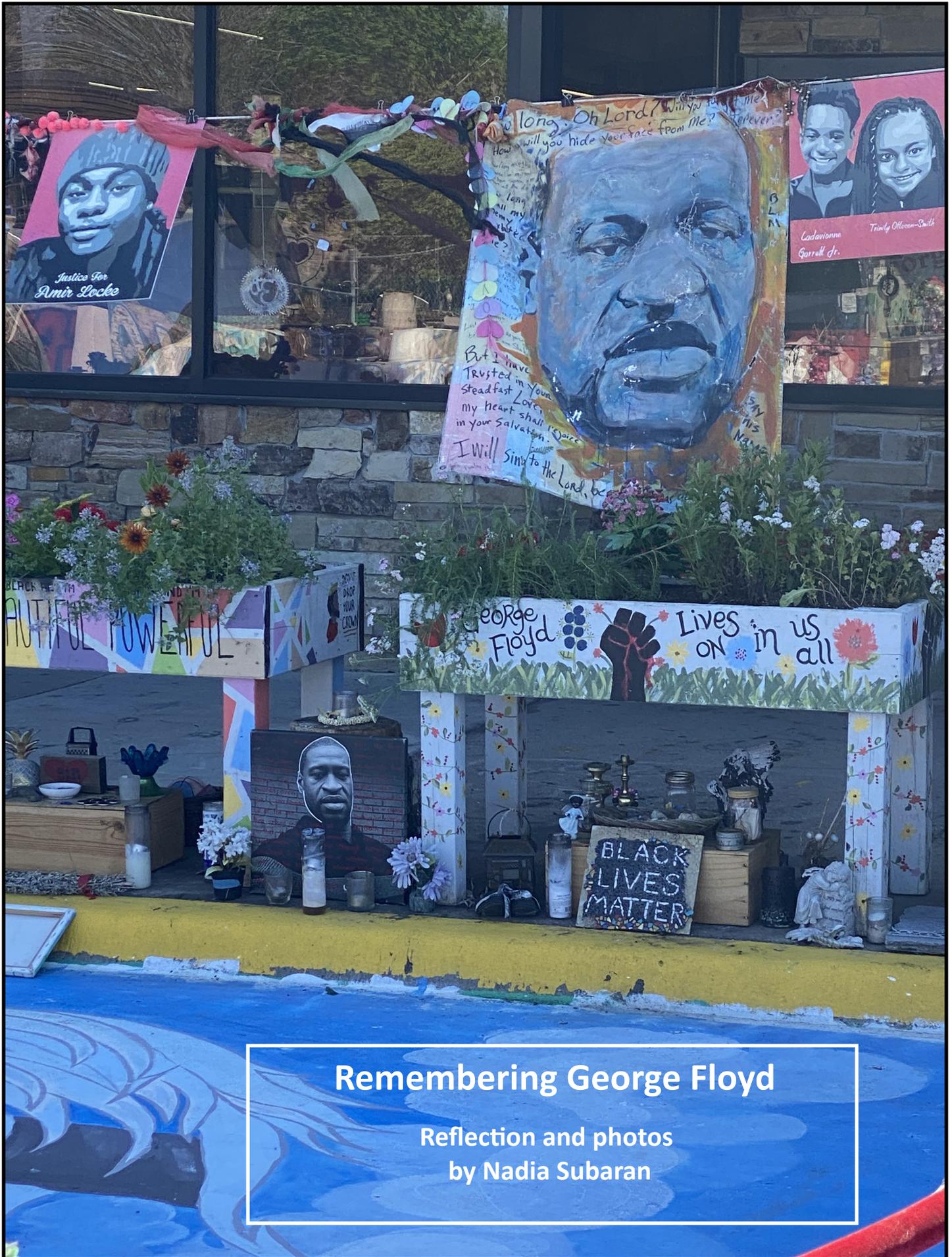
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“We’re talking about a win-win situation in which everybody wins, in which all of us get what we need to fully manifest what Dr. King called the Beloved Community and living to the fullness of God’s design.”

— Rev. Bentley

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**Rev. Bentley:** Yes. Yes, Yes. It’s not point A to point B, it’s a discursive process where it kind of goes over here and loops back on itself. We talk about it as if it’s linear, but it’s anything but. (Continued page 12)



## Remembering George Floyd

Reflection and photos  
by Nadia Subaran



## Remembering George Floyd

I thought it would be so much bigger. Two years ago, when I pictured the scene of George Floyd's death in front of that Cup Food's convenience store, I imagined that the scene would have been a busy, high-trafficked area where the killing of a black man in broad daylight might have slipped the notice of people rushing to and fro. But no, the site of Mr. Floyd's death is an intimate space. A neighborhood corner.

I was on travel to Minneapolis in early May when I made my visit to this place that has become a living memorial. Two years since those 9 minutes and 29 seconds stopped the world, and set in motion protests across the country and around the globe. The site brims with energy. It's a place of solace for many who come to pay respects and

bear witness to the violence and suffering as well as a place of solidarity for the community that keeps the memorial vibrant and vigilant. Two blocks away, an installation of headstones bearing the names, ages and places of those who have lost their lives to senseless violence invites you to 'say their names' in remembrance and respect for the lives lived and taken too soon. Since George Floyd's death, the killing of African Americans hasn't stopped. And then Buffalo happened, leaving people of color to wonder whether anyplace is safe. So for now these makeshift memorials in Minneapolis call out to us, defying our efforts to just get on with life. They call out in anguish, tinged with fury, but also – still, as all across our history – in hope.

*Nadia Subaran is the principal of Aidan Design, a recipient of the Washington Business Journal 2022 Diversity Award, and a member of the Governing Board of Interwoven Congregations.*



# Buffalo

## Charleston

### Pittsburgh

#### El Paso

It's the latest occurrence of a racially fueled domestic act of terror.

10 people killed, 3 others wounded, and a community traumatized by a white teen animated by the toxic ideas of white supremacy and white nationalism.

Yes, we do pray for the victims, the community, and the perpetrator, too.

And we give thanks for civic leaders and everyday citizens who continue to stand up for racial justice at this time.

President Biden stated: "Any act of domestic terrorism, including an act perpetrated in the name of a repugnant white nationalist ideology, is antithetical to everything we stand for in America."

We welcome the President's clear condemnation of this act, the naming of white supremacy, and the assertion that such racial violence violates American values.

And yet in one sense, the president's remarks are aspirational.

Racial terror has a deep, centuries long, well-documented history in our nation.

That is a reality that must be acknowledged and confronted if we ever hope to rid our nation of this cancer of racism.

We believe that faith communities can help lead the way.



**Uvalde, TX.** Just as we prepared to go to press with this May issue, news of the horrific shooting in Uvalde swept across the country. Mass school shootings, and gun violence in general, have become, numbingly, a regular part of American life. "What are we doing?" pleaded Senator Chris Murphy on the senate floor. Today we lament. Tomorrow, can we act?



Photo by Randy Hobson

**Elder Street-Stewart:** It's like wash, rinse, repeat. I think that again is also out of Edgar Villanueva's saying native people don't think in a linear fashion. Everything you do is in this continuous circle of life, or the medicine wheel.

**ICQ:** Elder Street-Stewart, as a member of the Delaware Nanticoke Tribe and the first Native American to serve as co-moderator of the PCUSA, could you share a word about the history and the role of Native American worshipping communities in the PCUSA? And what do you see as some of the most urgent needs around racial justice for those communities?

**Elder Street-Stewart:** The perennial need has always been to be recognized. We have been pretty much either erased or made invisible in our church structures. In colonial times there was not much emphasis between Presbyterians and Native communities. The Episcopal Church and Methodists in the Mid-Atlantic region were the denominations who assumed that contact. Presbyterians began to connect to Native communities especially when

there was a call in the early 1800s that the frontier is moving. And we are going to need missionary-like people to come and to work with these native communities so we can bring Christianity and civilization to them.

Shinnecock Presbyterian Church, out there at the tip of Long Island, is our longest existing "mission church." You would think after several centuries, you would stop being called the "mission church." They were formed around 1745 and continue to be Presbyterian. And they're still there. And then there was the education process at universities we now recognize as William and Mary, Dartmouth, Yale, and Harvard. Native students, young men, were sent to those schools. And I'm proud to say they were studying in Latin, and passing tests. These were first and second generation indigenous young men who were brilliant, and were adapting to a whole new language and styles of learning.

As America continued to grow and settlers began to overwhelm particular geographical areas, native people went from being associates in trading

negotiations and, during the war for independence, allies of the colonists, French and British -- to enemies that needed to be removed. The church was in the midst of that, shifting how they saw Native people, and they joined the policies and practices of the nation to remove Native people. You were in the way of the development of the civilization. When the war for independence ended, the United States claimed all this territory as theirs under the Doctrine of Discovery. So Presbyterians during this time were focused around settlement and education, but were also complicit in those national policies between the church, the government and the military to relocate native people. So the places where you still have historic native ministry in the Presbyterian Church are with the five civilized tribes area, particularly the Choctaw, upstate New York, the Southwest, Alaska, and here where I am with the Dakota and Lakota people. That began in the early 1830s with a call for Presbyterian missionaries from back east.

The first presbytery west of the Mississippi was the Dakota Presbytery formed in 1844. It was diverse; it was a native and white presbytery. At

the time those Dakota culture congregations were ordaining their own pastors, and were setting up their own churches. But within 50 years that Presbytery was segregated. The pioneers out this way were tired of traveling all over this territory to go to meetings, so they started separating into smaller presbyteries. Dakota Presbytery, however, remains a non-geographical presbytery and there are churches in North Dakota, South Dakota and northeast Montana.

Today, there still remain historic Native American worshipping communities in eight of the Presbyterian Synods. And there are now under 100 native congregations. We're the oldest converted Christian groups on this continent. So the great need is to stop erasing us, to recognize us where we are, and for who we are, and our ability to survive. The second need is for the support for leadership. When you have been committed to perpetual poverty, your ability to send your children to school, or to self-govern yourself was limited up until about the 1960s and 70s -- when Indian empowerment, Indian self-governance, Indian education, and intertribal strategies all were part of the rising of Indian voices and

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*“The perennial need has always been to be recognized. We have been pretty much either erased or made invisible in our church structures.”*

*— Elder Street—Stewart*

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Photo by Randy Hobson

the changing attitudes of their tribal nations to say we're sovereign. And we need to govern ourselves. It's a very dynamic time within the church and across the country in relationship to Native communities.

**ICQ:** That is quite a history. What is your challenge now to the church? What is it that you look for from the Presbyterian Church -- and not only for Native Americans but also in support of other marginalized people?

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*“The first presbytery west of the Mississippi was the Dakota Presbytery formed in 1844 ... a native and white presbytery... But within 50 years that presbytery was segregated.”*

— Elder Street-Stewart

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**Elder Street-Stewart:** Well, the ability to worship freely first, and have our traditions be recognized. Up until passage of the Indian Religious Freedom Act of 1978, it was against the law for Native people to practice their native religion. So those things changed. We want an understanding that our theological premise is the same. Those who are Christian believe in Jesus Christ, that this spirit of Jesus is the same spirit that our people had directly from the Creator. We are struggling with poverty created by racism, leaving us with buildings that are over 100 years old, some of them have just recently gotten electricity and plumbing. I'm not joking. The roads into our buildings will give you mud above your hubcaps when it rains.

After decades of the national church assigning pastors out to Indian churches, the PCUSA restructured in the 1970s, leading Synods to say, “Well, now you're responsible for getting your own pastors and paying them.” You can't have that kind of transition in two or three years, when you had decades of being dependent upon the church and the government to tell you everything to do.

Our youth work is very exciting, but the travel distances are great and cost a lot. The church handed us poverty, so assist us by alleviating

poverty. Recognize our spiritual leaders are theologians; you know that they're the ones who really can speak to our people about their spirituality. Give them the opportunities to not just teach our people but the whole church.

Then there is the trauma and terrorism that happened around kidnapping our children to Boarding Schools and today's out-of-home placement in foster care and adoption. Those things are all in my lifetime; those are all real stories. And so we want to be able to say to the church, acknowledge those things. Repent of your complicity with that and let's talk about supporting our families, as well as the missing and murdered indigenous women. Presbyterians who have the power to address the judicial system need to address these laws that say who can be prosecuted on an Indian Reservation if an Indian woman is killed. These are real life realities that the church needs to be involved in.

**ICQ:** Interwoven Congregation strives to move the needle on racial healing and racial justice through partnering congregations of different racial compositions. What role do you see partnerships like this playing?

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*“We want an understanding that our theological premise is the same. Those who are Christian believe in Jesus Christ, that this spirit of Jesus is the same spirit that our people had directly from the Creator.”*

— Elder Street-Stewart

**Rev. Bentley:** I think it's critical that we work across these traditional lines of race, class, gender, whatever it may be. We can recognize these distinctions but they shouldn't be barriers. They should be bridges to help us connect with one another. J. Herbert [Nelson II, Stated Clerk of the PCUSA] said we need to move beyond just having teas and eating pie and cake. Let's connect around *the work*. Let's fellowship around *the work*. And not just for the sake of getting to know one

another. We get to know one another by addressing things that make our lives better together, especially for the most vulnerable among us. So yes, there's definitely a need for this kind of collaboration.

**ICQ:** Looking nationally, what opportunities do you see for ecumenical, interfaith or governmental partnerships to address racial justice?

**Elder Street-Stewart:** We've seen over time where our national offices often exemplified those ecumenical relationships, and so you would gather together your church leaders, meet, worship and make pronouncements. In the 60s and the 70s the National Council of Churches formed coalitions with groups of people organizing around their needs. Even today, and it's been accelerated by the pandemic, in our grassroots connections. We need to stretch beyond some of these boundaries.

**Rev. Bentley:** I think for me the most important thing is how do we connect with the people that we see every day? I think we have to bring some intentionality to that, because I think that's where we get the most traction because those are the lives that we can really impact most profoundly. I was talking with my city councilman today about how we all get excited about presidential elections – and we should because they're important. But what we don't realize is the amount of power and influence that city councils, county commissions, local school boards have over the quality of people's lives. I think that's where the real hay is to be made. If we can, as Booker T. Washington said, cast down our buckets where we are. Find out who's already doing good work and find out how we can amplify that.

**Elder Street-Stewart:** I echo Gregory's comment. I think the more that we can determine who our neighbors are and how we're going to work together, the better. I was elected to the school board here in St. Paul as the first American Indian in the state of Minnesota to an urban school district. We need more than that. But at the same time, that allowed me in those positions to really support housing collaboratives, education collaboratives and all those partnerships. And I would say "I'm Presbyterian." So when I'm in the house, Presbyterians are in the house! But we do have a place within our institutions for that national and international level work. I would say again as an indigenous person the indigenous interest, let's say through the United Nations and the Declaration of Rights for indigenous people, we can't ignore that either. Because we have those same interests on all the continents. Our Washington office can influence policies that will then represent these interests that we're doing locally. And so I think again we have to understand how we're working this huge medicine wheel that's a circle of life. But, no doubt, being right where we are and being active and providing respect and well-being to our neighbors. That's what we're called to do.

**ICQ:** Finally, in a word, in the midst of this ongoing work, which is a long journey and can be uphill, who is it that inspires and feeds you to continue walking forward for racial justice and healing?

**Rev. Bentley:** My children and my ancestors.

**Elder Street-Stewart:** Yes, same. You can see why we say we're siblings. Our ancestors and our children. ■

*We wish to express our gratitude to Rick Jones from the PCUSA Office of the General Assembly for his assistance with photographs for this issue.*



Photo Credit: Steve Povey, Hope in Focus

# DENIAL OF VOTING RIGHTS & ECONOMIC JUSTICE IS IMMORAL



*"No, we've not yet received what has been promised, but we have a cloud of witnesses who are showing us what America could be. We have no right to despair when they are yet fighting. We must do everything in our power to join and support them."*

*-Bishop William J. Barber II*

All Roads lead to Washington D.C.

**JUNE 18, 2022**

**Mass Poor People's & Low-Wage Workers' Assembly and Moral March on Washington and to the Polls in 2022**

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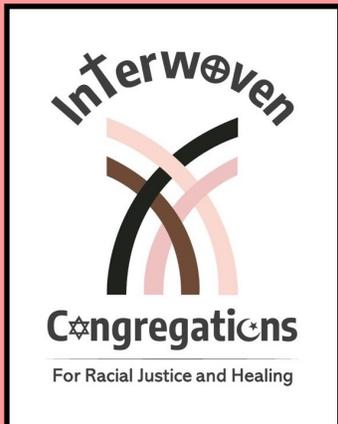
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## JUNE 18th March on Washington

On June 18th, we have an important opportunity to rally for racial justice by joining in the March on Washington organized by the [Poor People's Campaign](#). Visit that link to learn more about the campaign and to register for the June march.

### And now an invitation from us to support the work!



If you are committed to racial justice and healing, then we invite you to support the work of Interwoven Congregations as we organize and equip partnerships of congregations (of all faith traditions) across the barrier of race to help realize a society in which all people are prized as part of God's intended wondrous creation.

Donate [here](#).

Subscribe to Interwoven Congregations Quarterly [here](#).

*Thank you!*