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Summer 2020

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The Bridge

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Dr. Carlus Gupton in
his home office studio
(Photo Credit: Ann Gupton)



Greg Muse

Advancement in the Age of Uncertainty

By Greg Muse, HST Advancement Director

Enough with the grim news. No school takes a pandemic more seriously than Harding School of Theology, but we still have reason to smile. Did you know that 18 of our students completed coursework and earned advanced degrees during the most chaotic semester in history?

Know what else happened during the chaos? The mail. The mail kept coming. Every day an envelope or two still arrives addressed to HST advancement. They often contain a gift for the school. Some contain a note of encouragement. Each one is a ray of sunshine on a rainy day. Thank you, donors! Online gifts and scheduled monthly drafts continue to appear on our overnight report. The names and amounts are familiar to the advancement staff. Now, each monthly gift that reappears generates a sigh of relief.

Our country's economic climate is uncertain. If a gift to HST is out of reach for you, we understand. Some of our readers may be hurting financially. If you are struggling, we pray for your relief. If you are not struggling, we praise God for your blessings.

Regardless of your circumstances, pray for HST as our leadership navigates what social distancing means for theological education. Have faith that God's word will prevail through any circumstance. Be hopeful that innovation will lead to more effective and efficient education.

We urge readers with the financial capacity to make a gift to the school as we welcome a new class of students this fall. Please visit hst.edu/giving to make an online gift, or establish a monthly gift with your credit card.

While you are on our website, read about members of HST's Class of 2020. Pictures of their confident faces will make you smile, too. Feel free to congratulate the graduates that social distancing could not stop.

Reflections FROM THE Dean

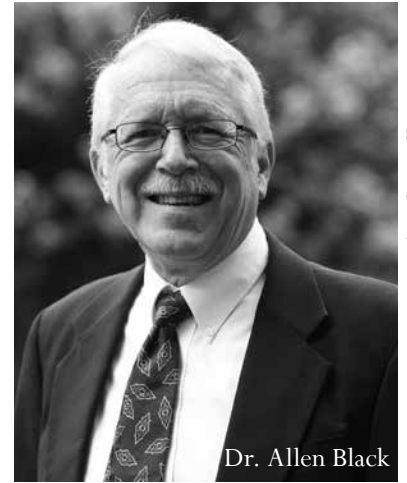


Photo Credit: Jeff Montgomery

Dr. Allen Black

A Strange Semester

By Dr. Allen Black

For most people associated with HST, there was nothing unusual about the first half of the 2020 spring semester. As has been our custom in recent years, we began our semester the day after Martin Luther King Jr. Day. Spring break began Monday, March 9. It began like any spring break, but change was in the air. During that week the University Cabinet met several times to consider an appropriate response to COVID-19. By the end of that week the University had called off on-ground classes, informed all students who had left for home to stay at home, and begun a transition to online classes. Over the next few weeks, graduation would be postponed and all summer classes would also be moved online.

Classes at HST were in a very favorable situation for the crisis created by COVID-19. Our classes were already using Zoom (a relatively unknown application before March of this year) to bring distance students into the classroom. All we needed to do was ask our local students to use Zoom as well. The transition was smooth. Beginning immediately after spring break, all classes were “Zoomed” for all students. Faculty and staff came to our offices that week, but the buildings were locked. The next week faculty and staff began working from home — except for occasional trips in for various projects. (The one exception was Cecil Tomlinson, who continued to maintain our buildings and grounds each week.)

What a strange semester! However, because HST had been relying on Zoom for several years, it was a relatively smooth transition in the classroom. Besides having local students Zoom in, we only had to make a few other key changes. Our library was accustomed to serving the research needs of distance students: mailing books and making and emailing PDFs of book sections or articles not already available through our online services. But now with the library closed, we needed to do similar services for local students. Faculty were already accustomed to using proctors to give exams to distance students. But now, due to widespread stay-at-home orders, very few of our students, distance or local, could find acceptable proctors. Harding University (and HST as a part of it) turned to Proctorio, an electronic proctoring system with impressive capabilities. We also changed our — formerly on-ground only — summer classes to Zoom-only classes.

Graduation was the other big change. It was originally scheduled for May 16. Even though our graduation ceremony is small, we could not

have it safely (or even legally) in mid-May. We postponed it nearly three months to August 8, and then finally had to make it a virtual ceremony.

HST’s graduation is a gratifying and fulfilling event for me each year. Our students have worked hard for their degrees — the equivalent of two full-time years for a Master of Arts or a Master of Arts in Christian Ministry, another 18 hours for a Master of Arts in Counseling, or three full years (most take four) for a Master of Divinity. The Doctor of Ministry is the equivalent of another full year on top of the Master of Divinity (although it is completed more slowly, while also practicing ministry). HST has a deserved reputation for high standards in ministry and scholarship.

Photos and descriptions of this year’s graduates are provided on our website at hst.edu/class-of-2020. We have 18 graduates receiving 19 degrees (one has earned an M.A. and an M.Div.). This year’s class is unusual in several respects:

- There are no D.Min. graduates, though there are six nearing completion
- There are four MAC graduates — all students from HST’s former counseling degree. The current counseling degree in Memphis is overseen by Harding’s College of Education
- There are only two MACM graduates
- There are more M.A. degrees (seven) than M.Div. degrees (six)

It is a great class of men and women gifted by our Lord and dedicated to serving in his kingdom.

What I always find so fulfilling and motivating about each class of graduates are the roles they plan to serve in, or, in many cases, are already serving in. This year’s class includes three in pulpit ministry, three in youth ministry, three counselors, two in campus ministry, one associate minister, one family and discipleship minister, and four planning to pursue further graduate studies. They are scattered from Colorado to North Carolina and from Indiana to Mississippi.

The spring semester was indeed a strange semester. Thankfully, it was easier for HST to make adjustments than it was for most schools. Furthermore, although our graduation ceremony could not be a typical one, this year’s graduating class is yet another group of exciting servants of God who will make a difference for Christ for decades to come.



Dr. Dave Bland

The Church in Mission

Dr. Dave Bland, Professor of Homiletics

Each year HST has a theme that provides a special focus throughout the year. The theme for the 2020-21 school year is the Church in Mission. That mission is God-centered. Therefore, it is not the church that has a mission; rather it is God's mission that has a church. And the only way the church can fulfill its role is through the power of God's Spirit. This brief essay is intended to initiate a conversation on this theme that will continue throughout the school year in chapel, classes, and special events. I want to highlight just a few of the multifaceted dimensions of the church's mission. These dimensions, however, are not mutually exclusive; they overlap and ultimately become greater than the sum of their parts.

At the most fundamental level, God's mission for the church takes on the responsibility of loving one another. This is Paul's emphasis as he writes his letters to the churches. He repeatedly admonishes them to build up and edify one another. They are to love one another, accept one another, be kind to one another, forgive one another, bear one another's burdens, etc. When the church no longer builds up its own, it no longer witnesses good news but fake news.

While the church is in mission for one another, it does not engage in "excessive caregiving." A church all wrapped up in itself makes a mighty small package. God's church, therefore, moves beyond itself and is in mission for the neighbor. From the very beginning, this was what God wanted the chosen people to do. God chose Abraham and his descendants (as dysfunctional as they were) to act in ways that blessed others (Genesis 12:1-3). God intends that mission to continue through the church (as weak

and dysfunctional as it is; 1 Corinthians 1:26-29). The church is to "shine like stars in the world" (Philippians 2:15). According to the Gospels, the church carries a special responsibility to bless the powerless, the foreigner, the disabled, the elderly, the underprivileged, and those treated unjustly.

The church's mission, however, continues to expand to the whole world. The church does not believe in a "stay at home God."

God's message of judgment and grace is for all races, all societies, and all nations. The church was to remain distinct in character and lifestyle from the standards of the world.

“God’s mission for the church takes on the responsibility of loving one another.”

There remains one neglected mission that must be included. God's mission extends not only to the human world but as well to the nonhuman realm (Colossians 1:15-20; Romans 8:19-23). Therefore, the church is in mission to the created world. To care for God's creation is essentially an unselfish form of love. The church defends that which

cannot defend itself. Its members care for creation because creation belongs to God.

The church in mission for God is demanding. That means leaders in the church carry a special burden to ensure the church remains faithful to God's mission. That requires them to be mission equippers and mission movers (Ephesians 4:11-16). All of these aspects contribute to the church fulfilling its mission and serve as starting points for what will hopefully be a fruitful conversation during this school year at HST.



Dr. Edward Gray

These are the Days of COVID-19

Dr. Edward Gray, Professor of Counseling

When stay-at-home orders went into effect and our work and daily routines drastically changed, the care and compassion in the classroom did not. Each week, my Counseling Skills class started with, “How are you doing? How are you coping with these changes?” These are not polite questions for which I expected superficial responses. These ministry students shared there is a lot more family time, online worship challenges, more connecting through social media with members, time on the phone, and a lot more time alone. Our approach to ministry significantly changed as we scrambled to meet new challenges, but our goal remained the same — to build connections, to grow and to lead with the Lord.

“How are we supposed to get through this?” became a familiar question to me as a counselor.

A good place to start is the story of Elijah in 1 Kings. It is an understatement to say that his world turned upside down after successfully engaging great spiritual challenges. I can only imagine the depths of his anxiety, worry, and subsequent depression after great spiritual victories turned into a panicked run to Beersheba, fearing for his very life. God’s antidote for Elijah was rest, food, and people. As leaders, our application of Elijah’s story for self-care needs to focus on answering questions in these three prime areas.

Rest – The pandemic, for most of us, created a change in the pace of our lives. “Stay at home” changed our family, work, worship, and recreational routines. Fear of the unknown, the unpredictable physical response if infected, and concern for the safety of loved ones ... even in normal times these can become obsessional concerns. How does our faith support us in resting in our times of anxiety? What challenges are we facing with our sleep needs, and how are we addressing those needs? How do we find rest, peace, and comfort with our good shepherd of Psalm 23?

Food – Over the past months, I heard numerous challenges about food, paper products, shopping, and empty shelves. How are you and your family addressing eating? Some of the best success stories I hear involve increased collaboration and intentional “kitchen time” as a way of connecting, sharing, laughing, and being together. God knows how we go about our “daily bread” is fundamental to our lives. What are we creatively doing for this essential daily need?

People – God designed us as individuals, in his image, to live in the context of others. We do not do well when we are alone.

Our kingdom introverts may have a slightly easier time with this; however, we all need people in our lives. Elijah needed to know he was not alone; there were others who were faithful believers in Yahweh with whom he could share the journey of faith.

These days of coronavirus provide extra time for reflection and opportunities for growth. Though we would never wish for this type of crisis, how are we using this time to be more reflective of being God’s child and how we relate to others? In the prayer of a 4-year-old that echoes

Scripture, “Thank you for the sickness. . .”

We will not do these days perfectly. May God give us grace, flexibility, and creativity as we embrace these days of COVID-19 and reflect on the lyrics of the song, “These are the days of Elijah ... Declaring the word of the Lord!”

Dr. Gray teaches in Harding’s professional counseling program in Memphis and serves as an adjunct professor for HST. For an additional ministry resource for leaders in these COVID-19 days, see [Leaders Who Last at 12conversations.com/leaders-pdfs](https://www.12conversations.com/leaders-pdfs). Find a kindred spirit in ministry to engage in supportive conversations.

“We do not do well when we are alone.”



Dr. Carlus Gupton

We Will Come Back. In Some Ways, We May Roar

Dr. Carlus Gupton, Professor of Ministry

Crises like COVID-19 often constrict cultural imagination, cordoning off lessons from the past and eclipsing hope for the future. Atlantic Monthly writer Yascha Mounk draws from the concept of chronocentrism, “the belief that one’s own times are paramount, that other periods pale in comparison.” She says:

“The past few weeks have, understandably, confronted us with an especially loud chorus of chronocentric voices claiming that we are on the cusp of unprecedented change. Academics, intellectuals, politicians, and entrepreneurs have made sweeping pronouncements about the transformations that the pandemic will spur.”¹

To be fair, some things will change. But God’s grace allows us to see these changes through lenses that challenge the discouraging ethos.

First, dystopian projections often reflect a less than God-like view of cultural capacity. Scripture conveys a human sacredness, the *imago Dei*. God entrusts us with the co-creative work of culture-making as we use our collective gifts for the common good. He imbues humanity with a noble desire to enjoy one another and build just and flourishing societies.

We see reflections of God’s common grace in stories of cultural rebound. For instance, after the 1918 pandemic killed over 50 million people worldwide and many wondered whether life would ever return to normal, we saw an enthusiastic “flight into sociability” in the Roaring Twenties.

“The 1918 virus ... did not reduce humanity’s determination to socialize. Throughout history, humanity has, again and again, experienced pestilence. And though these bouts of infectious disease have had all kinds of long-lasting consequences ... they never stopped people from seeking out one another’s company.”²

The social resurgence, with the art deco and music of Duke Ellington and Louis Armstrong, came alongside economic prosperity. This is nothing to lionize, as the 1920s were also wild, excessive, and full of organized crime and labor corruption. After all, sin mars the image of God. Humanity, although good, is fallen. Still we see a kind of cultural resilience. Certainly, reentry after devastation is challenging, but history offers hope that the renewed life will transcend dystopia.

For believers, however, there is more. We serve a God whose dream of the redemption of all creation is not a mere composite of human resilience throughout history. It is a long story of God’s work of establishing his righteous justice in the world, always through chosen people who face overpowering odds. God’s story is assured through the resurrection hope of Jesus. The church is called to be a sign, foretaste, and instrument of that hope.

It is impossible to say with certainty what the church or the world will look like after COVID-19. God’s story in both the creation and the redemption, however, gives us lenses to see the outcomes hopefully, and to engage the opportunities of the present with great anticipation.

¹Yascha Mounk, “Prepare for the Roaring Twenties. The human desire to socialize will survive the pandemic,” *Atlantic Monthly*, May 21, 2020. Accessed 2020-05-24, <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/05/i-predict-your-predictions-are-wrong/611896/>.

²*Ibid.*

HARDING SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY *Student Association* FOR 2020-21



Andrew Montgomery
President

B.A. in Bible and Ministry,
Harding University

Ministry goal: To serve the church through ministry and teaching



Cana Moore
Vice President

B.A. in History,
Harding University

Ministry goal: To serve as a minister of reconciliation



Matthew Mitchell
Secretary/Treasurer

B.A. in Bible,
Freed-Hardeman University

Ministry goal: To provide spaces and direction for members of our congregation to grow in their faith and love for Christ and his church



Aaron Parker
Communications Director

B.A. in Music Composition,
Harding University

Ministry goal: To teach Hebrew Bible to graduate students as a way of deepening churches' biblical, theological, and spiritual resources



Deonté Watkins
On-Campus Representative

Bachelor of General Studies,
Georgia Southern University

Ministry goal: To be a faithful and effective minister for the Lord



Reid Stafford
Off-Campus Representative

B.A. in Bible,
Harding University

Ministry goal: To share the good news of Jesus by providing pastoral care through ministry and chaplaincy

FACULTY & STAFF NEWS HIGHLIGHTS

Dr. Matt Carter spoke at a Zoom worship gathering for Cordova Community Church on the topic "Waiting on God."

Dr. Allen Black spoke on Psalm 91 in a virtual chapel for the online Bible program at Harding University.

Dr. Jim Martin presented two sessions for a class at Austin Graduate School of Theology: "Calm Leadership & Self-Governance During Crisis & Change" with Jon Mullican, and "Communication & Preaching During Crisis & Change" with Mike Cope.

Dr. Lance Hawley wrote and presented curriculum in early March

to the Central Church of Christ in Amarillo, Texas. The curriculum was on wisdom literature, titled "Walking Humbly with God."

Dr. Mark Powell conducted Bible classes through Zoom: "The Armor of God: Ephesians 6," Sulphur Well Church of Christ, Springville, Tennessee, April 2020. "Be Still: Slowing Down Your Soul to Speed Your Growth," four-week series for Wednesday Night Live (adult discipleship), Sycamore View Church of Christ, Memphis, Tennessee, May 2020. He also presented "A Light in the Darkness," Episodes 1, 2, 14, 20, and 27 (video series), March-April 2020, on nathanguy.com.

DEGREE PROGRAMS

M.A.	Master of Arts
M.A.C.M.	Master of Arts in Christian Ministry
M.Div.	Master of Divinity
D.Min.	Doctor of Ministry
C.S.L.	Certificate in Spiritual Leadership



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News & Events



First day of fall classes
August 17



Fall Break (Offices/Library closed)
Oct. 9

Virtual Graduation
August 8



Jumpstart (New student orientation)
Aug. 27



D.Min. Seminar
Oct. 12-17

