Inside: letter from your editor, Words for Friends, and reflections on homelessness, immigrant experiences, capital punishment, financial awareness, and other perspectives on the margins.
To the APTS Community:

This semester, Kairos and its writers and readers have embarked on a new journey. We have begun exploring a particular theme over the course of a month, or two issues of Kairos. In February, we grappled with the theme of “Mosaic of Voices.” Those issues were largely an exploration of the diversity of people and perspectives in our community. As Christians and as leaders, we are called to recognize and respect such diversity. However, it is also incumbent upon us to recognize those voices not present in our conversations.

Our two Kairos issues for March will deal with the theme “Crossing the Line” and will give consideration to those in the margins who are often overlooked or even avoided by communities, by society, and—devastatingly enough—even the church itself. God has love for all people and all of creation, and we are called to share in that love. The incredible truth of our faith is that God speaks into every life and every circumstance. Given this, any voice the goes unheard is a missed opportunity to bear witness to the presence of God in our world.

I chose this theme because working to help the voiceless reclaim voice is something about which I am deeply passionate. But I have also found evidence that this passion is shared by many in our community. The pieces in this issue explore this idea of crossing our human boundaries and finding the church in the margins. There is a creative meditation on a friend who is homeless, a reflection on a divided Northern Ireland, a call to recognize the Earth’s voice in our conversations about God, and many other pieces that offer a new perspective and a new challenge for us.

I hope you’ll take the time to not only read, but really consider what these things mean for the church and for you. And then I hope you’ll join in the conversation too. I look forward to hearing your voice, and all voices, ring out!

Layton Williams, Editor
A tattoo is etched across his neck – dotted lines with the words “Cut Here.” That’s not how he feels today… this minute… this moment. But things could change. As money clinks in the tattered brown bag in front of him, he knows he won’t make the payment for his meds. Then they’ll start talking to him again – those voices. They tell him he isn’t worthy. He isn’t special. His life is a waste. Such is the life of a man haunted by the poison of paranoia. Manic-depressive actions rip at his sense of self as he frantically looks for a way to stop the voices.

There it is… dropped by a passerby flitting from drug ring to dealer. A syringe filled with bittersweet serum that will cast him into nowhere – into nothing. He injects the infection into his bloodstream and he is liquefied. The concrete block that supported his tired body fades as he floats away into a sea of colors. Swimming in senses, he is at ease – fading slowly, heartbeat drumming to a softer rhythm, hollowed breath and hollowed body. Pulled by drag rats to a nearby dumpster, he sat limp against the green wall. His bones clank and his head crashes to the pavement, limp and alone to await death’s knocking.

The hand of the Lord came upon me, and he brought me out by the spirit of the Lord and set me down in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. He led me all round them; there were very many lying in the valley, and they were very dry. He said to me, ‘Mortal, can these bones live?’ I answered, ‘O Lord God, you know.’ Then he said to me, ‘Prophesy to these bones, and say to them: O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. Thus says the Lord God to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. I will lay sinews on you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live; and you shall know that I am the Lord.” (Ezekiel 37:1-6)

He comes to with a gasp and a choke and a sharp pain that makes it hard to see. Sputtering, he sees water thrown into his face is mixed with the blood that continues to seep from his cracked skull. He swings his fists in hopes to save his own life, knocking the water bottle away from the stranger looking down on him. “Get up, buddy.” That’s not his name. It hurts to move. Slowly, he sits up and curses the pounding in his head. At least it makes the voices hard to hear.

What? That stranger wants to pray for him? The voices scream it isn’t worth it – God will never save him from this hellish life. But maybe… maybe God will hear if the stranger prays. He nods his head and closes his eyes, his finger tracing the dashed lines tattooed across his neck. And then he finds the clasped hands of the stranger praying for him. He grabs them like his life depends on it – and he breathes. A deep breath sucking in the pain of the world and the grace of a stranger. One more day. He can do one more day.
Crossing the line: a simple phrase with multiple meanings about one’s actions, thoughts, or maybe a challenge to an idea, a person or perhaps an institution. Let’s examine what this phrase might mean to you and to me...especially me.

Don’t you dare cross that line!!

Hurry, hurry! Don’t let him tackle you before you cross the goal line.

You take your life in your hands if you cross the Demarcation Line between North and South Korea--you’re likely to start a war.

During filmmaking a film or TV director crosses the line, when they break the 180-degree rule; that is to say breaking a basic guideline regarding on-screen spatial relationship between characters or objects within a scene.

A line-crossing ceremony and a ship voyage, such as crossing the equator.

Then there are those lines, invisible lines, discerning lines, made by everyone on a daily basis; we cross them without end when we question what, how, when and why we do anything. By doing so, we challenge our ethics, philosophies, norms of society and how we interpret the word of God.

I cross societal, normative lines when I was accepted to attend this auspicious seminary. I’m on the cusp of the great baby boomer society who has retired. This is the time of my life where I should be coming to the city limits of Mayberry, USA, with my grandchildren and some fishing poles in hand looking for the nearest fishing hole. It is during these leisure times that my grandchildren would be spending quality time with their g-parent creating their own demarcation lines and beginning to accept societal norms they are expected to abide by... OR NOT!

Instead, at my ripe old age, God has made it perfectly clear (well a little bit muddy perhaps at times) what He has been asking me to do for over 40 years. You see, just as my grandchildren would be creating their lines, their paths, as did I, but mine were not straightest lines or paths. We do that sometimes without trying, What it all comes down to is listening when God speaks, then moving when He says move, then living out our lives according to His purpose.

Having said all that, some of the lines I must cross portend slippery slopes, angry retort of perhaps friends and relatives who may think I’ve “backslid” and fallen away from fundamental principles of Scripture, lines of demarcation, to which they say I must adhere. Or perhaps it’s those lines that I cross when I say a negative response regarding marriage equality for our LGBT friends so often given by our society is unjust. Or perhaps it’s those lines I cross which say, according to my fundamental upbringing, that I must support the biblical interpretation about divorce even though a woman is suffering from spousal abuse and she herself has physical scars as a result suffers from battered wife syndrome; reasons in my mind that can support a legitimate biblically sound divorce or any other women’s rights issue.

What about the word jihad? Am I crossing the line when I say it that I practice jihad, when I struggle to understand why someone whose faith as a Muslim is somehow anti-American; or when I strive to understand the merits of other faiths beyond Christianity? Do I cross the line when I say there is value to be gleaned from a faith other than Christianity? Am I crossing the line when I reread Scripture and do not find the "truth" that so many other Christians say condemn homosexuality? DO I CROSS THE LINE when I openly justify helping the poor according to the commandments of Christ?

I do not care how many lines I have to cross if it means I am doing what I know God wants me to do. At this time in my life I suppose I could say that by most standards I’m entitled to sit back and rest, read my books, watch television, go to the theater, laugh with my grandchildren, go to ball games and should be satisfied with that. Those things should and most likely will happen. But my focus is to do as much crossing-of-the lines as I am able to do as an ordained minister and chaplain in the time allotted to me. God has called and I am finally answering.

Crossing the Line:

A Sacred Calling

Will Nelson is a junior, MATS student. He is a member of the United Methodist Church.
Quiet Constants:
The Role of Janitorial Staff in Christian Communities

Dr. Gregory Cuéllar is an Assistant Professor of Old Testament at APTS. He is also an ordained Baptist minister.

Recently my attention has been drawn to the men and women who clean and maintain my church community’s building. Apart from the church ministerial staff, their presence in the church is constant yet often unnoticed by many in the church. They are the few who move silently and exclusively in and out of multiple spaces in the church—classrooms, closets, hallways, offices, chapels, bathrooms, and lobbies. Indeed, their acquaintance with these spaces is often juxtaposed with their peripheral position in the community of faith that gathers every Wednesday and Sunday. They know us, yet many of us do not know them. They see our tread on the carpet, crumbled papers underneath the pews, smears on bathroom mirrors, and left behind bibles in the classrooms. They marvel at our children’s Sunday school art on the walls and day dream about home in the offices of church staff. After each Sunday service, they see and hear us from a distance, as many confirm lunch plans with family and friends. at any given Sunday service, they can be found standing along the edges waiting for congregants to depart. Indeed, their view of the Christian community’s most sacred hour is from behind and at a distance. Unbeknownst to many in the church, however, are the untapped examples of humble and faithful servanthood that janitorial staff presents to the church. For some, their cleaning service in the church is ministry and is regarded as sacred work. Seen as such, their role resonates in many ways with the levitical activity of setting up the tabernacle (Num 1:51). When was the last time you included a member of your church’s janitorial staff in a post-Sunday service conversation? Perhaps even more radical, have you ever considered inviting him or her to lunch? In ending, the best place to begin as a new pastor of a church is with those who truly know the witness of a church’s faith commitment, the janitorial staff. They are the eyes and ears of most church communities in North America.

Immigrant:
A Poem
Ruth Elswood is a middler, M.Div student. She is a member of the Presbytery of St. Augustine in the PCUSA.

When I dream of home my sister smiles, and children listen wide-eyed to Florida tales of alligators and spiders big as their young hands. A backdrop of green velvet fields appears, marked out in imperfect squares by dry stone walls, drenched with pillows of moss. England’s earth is chill, but warmth breaks through in the eyes of family and dear, familiar friends.

When Maria dreams of home her sister sighs because she makes one more hungry mouth to feed. A husband with scorn in his eyes and pain in his iron-hard fist invades her dreams, though she does not invite him in. No meaningful labor waits for a woman, but money must be found and there are ways.

“I would rather be in prison in the U.S. than free in El Salvador.”

Poverty, abuse, mistrust afford a cold and hungry freedom.

The Hutto Visitation Program urgently needs people to visit women detainees. Whether you can speak Spanish or not, you can become a visitor and provide a ministry of presence for these women who are far from home. Please contact Ruth Elswood or come to a Corpus Christi meeting for more information.
Walls that Divide:
A YAV Experience in Belfast

Amy Wilson-Stayton is a middler, M.Div student. She is a member of the Presbytery of Tampa Bay in the PCUSA. She also served as a Presbyterian Young Adult Volunteer in Belfast, North Ireland before coming to seminary.

“The church is to be a community of love, where sin is forgiven, reconciliation is accomplished and the dividing walls of hostility are torn down.”

-F-1.0301

There are few places other than Northern Ireland where the “dividing walls of hostility” present in a society are so tangibly visible. I spent a year in Belfast during my time as a Young Adult Volunteer through the Presbyterian Church, U.S.A. That year was formative for many reasons, but the specific societal construct in which I found myself in Belfast forced me to wrestle particularly with what it meant to follow Christ in such a divided community. As Christians, we are called to be healers, peacemakers, bridgers of the gaps, repairers of the rift, and proclaimers of a message that calls its followers to radical unity, if not uniformity.

For those of you unfamiliar with the history of Northern Ireland, “The Troubles” (the term used to refer to the conflict there) began when the Republic of Ireland was established as an independent country from the United Kingdom in 1949. Fortunately, or unfortunately, depending on which side of the conflict on which one comes down, six of the thirty-two counties that constitute the physical island of Ireland were not included in the Republic; but rather, remained as a separate country called Northern Ireland which is still, today, a part of the United Kingdom. “The Troubles” refer to the civil war among the two main social groups in Northern Ireland: Catholics and Protestants. These terms do not mean what they mean for us in the United States; they are largely political/social signifiers. Catholics advocate for the unification of Northern Ireland with the Republic of Ireland and identify with Gaelic heritage and Protestants advocate for Northern Ireland to remain as a separate country and a part of the United Kingdom and identify with British heritage. As with any issue, many smaller divisions and varied perspectives exist within these two main divisions. Found among those smaller divisions are the paramilitaries that arose within the conflict, and while they did not, and do not, represent the majority of the population on either side of the issue in Northern Ireland, they caused (and cause) great conflict and violence for everyone living in Northern Ireland since the Republic was established.

While in Northern Ireland, I lived in a public housing estate named Ballybeen. Ballybeen is a Protestant, or Loyalist, estate. Public housing estates are most easily defined as government subsidized housing. They are the rough equivalent of the “projects” in the States. That being said, most, if not all, are much nicer than their American counterparts. The estates in Northern Ireland are significant because of the cultural role they have played in the conflict there. They are a place where one can see, most clearly, the deep divisions that still exist in Belfast and the rest of Northern Ireland. Each estate can be associated...
with either the Protestant or Catholic side of the conflict. Clear visual clues throughout the different estates make it obvious to which group the residents belong. In Protestant housing estates, and Protestant areas of Northern Ireland, the Union Jack flag is flown prominently and the street curbs and other public structures are painted red, white, and blue (the colors of the Union Jack). In Catholic housing estates or areas of the country, the tricolor green, orange, and white flag of the Republic is flown and shop signs and other public communications are written in Irish (Gaelic).

As an American, I was able to pass through the clear divisions present in Belfast and the rest of Northern Ireland. I was able to walk freely in and out of both Protestant and Catholic housing estates. My identity as a foreigner allowed me that privilege. At first I was uncomfortable with this ability, but as my time in Northern Ireland progressed, I began to see it as a metaphor for the kind of identity we are called to have as Christians. As followers of Christ, we are the bearers of a beautiful message: one that transcends the divisions we falsely impose on each other, whether along the lines of sectarianism, class, gender, race/ethnicity, or sexual orientation. There were times during my year in Belfast when the red, white, and blue curbs of my housing estate made me sick to my stomach because they never allowed me to forget the fractures and divisions still yet to be healed. But, after returning to the United States, and not faced with an obvious daily visual reminder of the divisions present in my own context, I found those divisions easier to forget, easier to ignore. I am not suggesting that the sectarian “territory marking” practiced by certain groups in Northern Ireland is admirable, but it did help me remember that there was work to be done. My time in Northern Ireland solidified my conviction that peacemaking is most certainly the task of those who call themselves Christian. Let us not forget this sacred task: we are to heal the wounds imposed on the Body of Christ, not to be the cause of them.

WORDS FOR FRIENDS:

A Column By Molly McGinnis

The Word of the Day is: SPACE

space |spās|
noun 1 a continuous area or expanse that is free, available, or unoccupied: | we shall all be living together in a small space |

Have you ever had one of those Dead Poet’s Society moments with a professor? You and some fellow classmates gather around the professor, drinking in the wisdom dripping from his or her speech, daring to take the conversation somewhere it wouldn’t go during class. Your head and heart produce some strange alchemy of articulation, and you find yourself speaking truth you never knew you’d been searching for. As you walk away, your shoulders feel a little lighter, your stride a little longer, and your lungs a little fuller as if the Divine has breathed new life into your soul. In Turkey, this moment happened while sitting beside an altar to Cybele, the mother goddess, in the Artemis Temple that also houses an early Christian church.

Turkey has been molded by some of the world’s most influential and enigmatic belief systems. Pagan, Greek, Christian, and Muslim history combines in a beautiful coexistence of sacred space. Some believe that there is a connection between Cybele, Artemis, and Mary and that these figures are different incarnations of the same divine feminine spirit. I don’t know if the scholarship would prove that theory, but I do know that in this place, there is a very strong divine presence. This same plot of land has been used throughout the centuries by pagans, Greeks, and Christians to celebrate and worship their gods. This place holds depth and meaning, and something holy draws people in. It seems that once a space has been determined to be sacred, it stays that way, no matter what it looks like or who occupies it. It is limitless, just like the deities to which it has been dedicated.

As we witness to and participate in the changing face of the Church, we are expanding our vision of what sacred space looks like. While some may be accustomed to the traditional brick or stone church building, many communities worship in a variety of spaces. MCC Austin gathers under a huge tent. Austin Stone worships in a high school gymnasium. Our colleagues who work with the Street Ministry team gather for prayer on the sidewalks. I even once went to a place that was a music venue on Saturday night and a church on Sunday morning. “Church” is not determined by the structure of its buildings; it is created by people who love God, who live to follow Christ, and who, through the power of the Holy Spirit, seek to form strong communities. And that is sacred space.
“One of the most important indicators of one’s health is one’s zip code.” So said Dr. Robert D. Bullard last Friday night when he spoke on the University of Texas campus as a part of their Hot Science-Cool Talks series. Bullard is the dean of Texas Southern University’s School of Public Affairs and is regarded by many as the father of environmental justice movement. Like the civil rights movement this one has its beginnings in the South, the land of “slow-moving” legacies like slavery, Jim Crow, and entrenched white supremacy.

From the South, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., inspired by Gandhi’s non-violent activism, had a dream. We still hear his voice ringing the ancient words of Amos 5:24 into the air - We will not be satisfied until justice rolls down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream. While no one pulled out a Bible in this university lecture, there was still the need for such a dream.

We needed a dream after the term “fenceline communities” was introduced by Bullard. This is a description of what we see every day but too often ignore - neighborhoods located next to industrial plants that emit hazardous waste and are disproportionately inhabited by people of color and the working poor. The United Church of Christ (UCC) Commission for Racial Justice published a groundbreaking report in 1983 that illustrates in a pain-staking manner the immoral realities that are dumped on these vulnerable communities.

Interestingly enough, the Green Bible (an ecologically focused edition) has the words of Amos 5:24 printed in green soy based ink which means that HarperCollins identified it as having something to do with “God’s care for creation.” Hmm, maybe so; or maybe it was just the word “stream” which automatically qualified it for the special ink. But if we do go with the idea that this verse is concerned with care of creation it could actually help us realize an added layer to another chilling statement from Bullard: “There is a direct correlation between exploitation of land and exploitation of people.” Here is why.

Creation is not “out there.” Creation is you and me and our neighbor along with where we live, work, play, and study. Care for the vulnerable and the least of these is at the core of what we, as people of faith, are about. Bullard also reminded us that “there is no black, white, or Hispanic air.” Likewise streams of justice are intended to flow freely through every land, with no fence in their way, so that all creation (human and non-human) can drink equally and abundantly from them.
Have They Met My Friend, Jesus?

Amy Litzinger is a junior, MATS student. She is a member of the United Methodist Church.

Have they met my friend Jesus?
Sometimes I don’t think so.
The one they met sounds strange and dangerous;
He sounds harsh and cold.

Sometimes they say He wants me to change
Or even worse He wants nothing to do with me
They call me deficient, sinful,
Filled with demons, or even a demon myself.

They say I need to be fixed,
And restored to community,
Or exiled and punished,
Or that this is my punishment

To be a living example to others,
An example of what not to do,
And what happens when you break the law.

They see I’m not one of them,
This is not simple variation like eye-color.
This is unacceptable.

There is something horribly wrong with seizures,
Mental illness is dangerous and must be contained,
Paralysis must be likened to death, no one could live like that.
Lack of sight means lack of wisdom, or unwillingness to see life
as it really is. Unwillingness to see their own sin
They see me as broken and inhuman, as sinful outsider
They don’t understand that to be human is to be broken
And sinners should be insiders, because we all belong
together.
We are all lawbreakers, but we are all found innocent.

This is the Jesus I know.
He accepts people where they are.
Why else would he eat with sinners?
He doesn’t want people to be in pain, but He understands that
we’re all different.
He knows what it’s like to be exiled, and He doesn’t exile
anyone.
He knows that we are created, and that we are created to be in
community.

He can use brokenness, and brokenness has value to him.
Disability and difference are not foreign to him,
So much so that he would disable himself, for me, for us.
Can’t they see that the table is a representation of that?
Please understand that we are all welcome of the table.

Note about intentions: In my experience, the most significant roadblock in building relationships with people with disabilities is often a previous experience with the church.
Even with a personal relationship with Jesus, an individual’s experience with the church can be alienating and exclusionary.
This is especially true when certain Gospel stories are interpreted and presented in such a way that disability is equated with sin, lack of knowledge, or problematic possession.
This is not happening on our campus, I am writing so that we can begin to understand why the church is sometimes seen as unwelcoming, and how we can refocus problematic texts to be restorative and community building.
The following texts are alluded to by the speaker in this poem: Mark 1:21-28; Mark 2:1-12; Mark 8:22-27; Mark 9:14-28; Mark 10:46-51 (it is wise to read the other Gospels to have a fuller understanding of the narratives). Fortunately, some of the same texts are reinterpreted by disability theology, which is summarized in the last stanza.
One of the hats I wear at APTS is “Financial Aid Student Assistant.” Glenna Balch, the Director of Financial Aid, works tirelessly to find ways to help students afford seminary and stay out of debt. While the scholarship and grant side is critical for most of us, the need to be smart with our money is critical for all of us. It is a wonderful thing that there are so many people in the church that are so generous and care so much about the kingdom of God that they give scholarships and grants that we might study at Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary. It is up to us to spend that money wisely—as good stewards of what has been entrusted to us.

Frugality simply means avoiding unnecessary spending. But what is necessary? Our culture conspires against us, telling us we “need” many things. It is up to us to make rules for ourselves to avoid unnecessary spending. A few suggestions:

1. Make a list before going to the store. Take time to thoughtfully put things on the list that are “needs” while not in the midst of a market that is creating pressure to buy. When at the store, only buy things on the list. Items that are not on the list and seem to be needs can be put on the list for the next trip to the store. Exceptions can be made, but be extremely slow to make exceptions to avoid losing the benefit of the rule.

2. A corollary of the first rule is to avoid buying things on impulse. If impulse items are put on a list for the next trip, often the luster will wear off, and the item is not truly needed after all. If the item is indeed needed, better and cheaper similar items might be available after thinking about it.

3. Avoid temptation. Going to the store to “window shop” creates desire. An item that is never seen is not a temptation! Similarly, browsing catalogues and magazines with advertisements for attractive things only feeds a desire to buy unneeded items. Make a point to look at catalogues only when looking for a specific need.

4. Plan shopping in a manner that considers the total cost. Driving across town to purchase something adds the cost of gasoline. At 20 miles per gallon, a 20 mile round trip adds about $3.60 to the cost of the item at today’s gas pump.

5. Take advantage of online shopping. There are many online services that compare costs such as Amazon. Many of the online stores have free shipping or a service like Amazon Prime that ships for free for an annual fee (only $39.00 for students). The value goes up when a gas saving is involved, not to mention to saving of nerves by avoiding the traffic!

Part of being a good steward of God’s good gifts is to avoid needless spending. The money saved can then be used for furthering the kingdom of God. The fruits of frugality can then be put in the collection plate, or used in a myriad of other ways that truly fills a need! (Do you have tips? Please email them to finaidstudent@austinseminary.edu.)

Crossing the Frugality Line

Gordon Blackman is a middler, M.Div student. He is a member of Pines Presbytery in the PCUSA and he also works at the Financial Aid Student Assistant.

One of the hats I wear at APTS is “Financial Aid Student Assistant.” Glenna Balch, the Director of Financial Aid, works tirelessly to find ways to help students afford seminary and stay out of debt. While the scholarship and grant side is critical for most of us, the need to be smart with our money is critical for all of us. It is a wonderful thing that there are so many people in the church that are so generous and care so much about the kingdom of God that they give scholarships and grants that we might study at Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary. It is up to us to spend that money wisely—as good stewards of what has been entrusted to us.

Frugality simply means avoiding unnecessary spending. But what is necessary? Our culture conspires against us, telling us we “need” many things. It is up to us to make rules for ourselves to avoid unnecessary spending. A few suggestions:

1. Make a list before going to the store. Take time to thoughtfully put things on the list that are “needs” while not in the midst of a market that is creating pressure to buy. When at the store, only buy things on the list. Items that are not on the list and seem to be needs can be put on the list for the next trip to the store. Exceptions can be made, but be extremely slow to make exceptions to avoid losing the benefit of the rule.

2. A corollary of the first rule is to avoid buying things on impulse. If impulse items are put on a list for the next trip, often the luster will wear off, and the item is not truly needed after all. If the item is indeed needed, better and cheaper similar items might be available after thinking about it.

3. Avoid temptation. Going to the store to “window shop” creates desire. An item that is never seen is not a temptation! Similarly, browsing catalogues and magazines with advertisements for attractive things only feeds a desire to buy unneeded items. Make a point to look at catalogues only when looking for a specific need.

4. Plan shopping in a manner that considers the total cost. Driving across town to purchase something adds the cost of gasoline. At 20 miles per gallon, a 20 mile round trip adds about $3.60 to the cost of the item at today’s gas pump.

5. Take advantage of online shopping. There are many online services that compare costs such as Amazon. Many of the online stores have free shipping or a service like Amazon Prime that ships for free for an annual fee (only $39.00 for students). The value goes up when a gas saving is involved, not to mention to saving of nerves by avoiding the traffic!

Part of being a good steward of God’s good gifts is to avoid needless spending. The money saved can then be used for furthering the kingdom of God. The fruits of frugality can then be put in the collection plate, or used in a myriad of other ways that truly fills a need! (Do you have tips? Please email them to finaidstudent@austinseminary.edu.)
Thanks to conversations on campus this week, I realize my moral arguments against the death penalty are not entirely relevant yet. Today I propose a shift. I’ve been arguing against the death penalty ideally, when it is more relevant to argue against the death penalty in our current reality. Instead of first looking at why voters support capital punishment, we do better to ask how our courts enforce it for us. This is a more important conversation to have with each other, and it’s an easier question to ask in a congregation. It’s also more likely to save a life.

These questions became clear in my mind last Thursday, when we gathered in the chapel to mourn Carl Blue. Blue was an African American man who, 18 years ago while high on crack, committed a heinous crime and turned himself in to the police the same day. In a capital case in Texas, a jury must decide a person is a “continuing threat” to prison guards and other inmates. Part of the case against Carl Blue was the testimony of a state psychologist who told the jury that, because he was black, Carl Blue was more likely to pose a future risk of violence. Blue’s death sentence stood for 7 years before an appeal forced a new trial. Racist testimony from an expert witness of the state was accepted in court in my lifetime, and Carl Blue could not get a lawyer who could protect him from it. As we prayed and sang Thursday night, I couldn’t get that thought out of my head.

Before we ask theological questions of whether the Bible condones the death penalty, we need to ask a few more basic questions. If, according to the 2010 census, only 1 in 8 Texans are African American, why were 5 of the 9 vigils we’ve held in our chapel this year for African Americans? Why do I see 6 black faces out of the 9 executions scheduled between Easter and Pentecost? Why are 70% of the people on Texas’s death row minorities? A theological approach to this question is not useful if it pretends due process is beyond doubt.

There is something inherently unjust with how we practice the death penalty here in Texas. It has something to do with race, class, county District Attorney elections, and yes, theology, too. But even if we don’t know how to solve the problems of racism or class disparities in Texas tomorrow, we can solve the problem of capital punishment today. All we have to do is stop claiming the right to kill people as long as we can’t even prove our courts are not corrupted by class and race. Then we can take abstract questions more seriously as we solve more complicated problems. That’s a much simpler message to figure out how to preach.

Any conversation about the death penalty is complicated. But the concrete terms are as simple as living or dead, as clear as black and white. We can debate a lot about whether someone deserved to die, but, as long as a doctor says so, there’s no debate about whether that person is actually dead. Concrete conversations are simpler, and more relevant. Perhaps the most important line we need to cross sometimes as a community is the line between abstract and concrete.
**Weekly Calendar: Mar. 4th - 18th**

**Mon. 3/4**  
- 8:30-5:00 pm: Growing into Tomorrow Today  
- 12:00-1:15 pm: Easter Vigil Planning Meeting  
- 5:30-7:30 pm: ASSG Bible Study  
- 5:30-7:00 pm: Student Senate Meeting  
- 7:00-8:00 pm: Centering Prayer  

**Tues. 3/5**  
- 8:30-5:00 pm: Growing into Tomorrow Today  
- 7:00-10:00 pm: Improv Workshop  

**Wed. 3/6**  
- 11:00-12:00 pm: Manna  
- 2:30-6:30 pm: Reading, Writing, and Study Skills Workshop  
- 3:30-5:00 pm: LIQRE committee meeting  

**Thurs. 3/7**  
- 11:15-12:30 pm: QA Lunch / Meeting  
- 11:45-12:30 pm: Choir Rehearsal II  
- 6:00-9:00 pm: S.O.S. Marriage and Ministry Workshop  

**Fri. 3/8**  
- 5:30-7:30 pm: S.O.S. Potluck  

**Mon. 3/11 - Fri. 3/15**  
- APTS Spring Break

**Contributing to Kairos:**

1. Kairos is the voice of the community at Austin Seminary.  

2. Kairos generally carries no advertisements for sale of goods or services by individuals. An exception is the sale of a student or professor’s library or other study aids.  

3. It is not possible to make all program announcements which are submitted by individual churches. Kairos is more likely to run announcements which apply to ecumenical or interfaith groups or groups of churches.  

4. No letters which attack individuals or groups will be run in Kairos. This is to be distinguished from letters which might criticize the actions of individuals or groups.  

5. Please note that ALL contributions are expected to be 300-500 words unless otherwise noted. Longer submissions may be excluded in final editing due to limitations of space.  

6. Please also note that Kairos seeks to uphold the APTS policy on inclusive language. All contributors are strongly encouraged to use expansive and inclusive language and may be asked to edit their pieces to reflect this policy.  

7. Kairos will publish letters to the editor that contribute to Christian conversation on the APTS campus. All letters must be signed.  

8. Email submissions to the editor, Layton Williams, at layton.williams@student.austinseminary.edu. Editorial decisions are based on urgency, availability of space and editorial guidelines. Deadline is Wednesday at 5:00 pm. Submissions made after the deadline must be accompanied by a bribe.