



GRACE NOTES

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WHAT DOES THIS NEW YEAR BRING?

The New Year, particularly this one, is scandalized by separation and divisiveness whether we look externally or within. We woke up this morning, after a restless night, with the words of First John, that came to us from the ELCA's daily Bible Reading. It so fit, this broken world and its challenges, with the only true solution that may once again call to us:

1 John 1:1--2:2 (NRSV)

John, Apostle, and Evangelist

^{1:1}We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life — ²this life was revealed, and we have seen it and testify to it, and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us — ³we declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. ⁴We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.

⁵This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light and in him there is no darkness at all. ⁶If we say that we have fellowship with him while we are walking in darkness, we lie and do not do what is true; ⁷but if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. ⁸If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. ⁹If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. ¹⁰If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

^{2:1}My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; ²and he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.

As we make our way to this new year, do we do so, with the trust offered by John or do we listen to the discord raining bombs on the people of Ukraine, or our own people plotting to get even and fight harder, rather than realizing that we have been off track for years, and a solution that does not come from a place of love, but is embodied in sinfulness and hate, just will not and can not work. And it is so deeply necessary that all faiths understand and come together such that the hatred our divisiveness encourages will never go away and always plague the young and old, the poor and the rich, the sick and the healthy, and the homeless, the hungry, the searching and those simply lost.

There are signs of hopefulness, too. It is those that we need to hold up and support in every way we can. See the article about Yale and its new initiative to tie faith into public concern.

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Just like GHIAA. That is we gather as people of faith, no matter what that faith might be, and we work together to bring about desperately needed change. We do this with curiosity about the “other”, faith-wise and a deep concern about what is happening to the most vulnerable in our society that is so blatantly obvious to all who have eyes to see and hearts to feel. That IS all of us.

Let’s commit ourselves to prayers and love for the sick, collective work in breaking down the barriers that have been continuing, and to truly look for the truth among us and with us. We invite you to listen to signs of hope from the articles in this issue, and from so many other sources crying out to new ways of living and being. We can come together. As church, as families, as people wanting to end war, conflict, hate and violence. We’ve got a new year to try... we did make some progress in 2022. Let’s bring that progress home in this spanning new year to come. May we believe that God continues to offer us the direction we need, and as Lloyd made clear on Christmas Eve, “God is good. All the time. God is good! And the people said,” May those words hold us together and bring us peace. Amen.

PASTOR’S MESSAGE - A TIME TO PRAY AND A TIME TO ACT

Many of us have been struggling with untold and clearly visible challenges striking members of our families, friends, neighbors, and the world around us. What is notable is how we have gathered prayerfully trying to help each other and discover new ways of finding common ground.

Judy has shown remarkable courage, resilience and has taught me a lot about suffering. January is a big month for us, and she will spend many weeks in Boston, and I will join her there a portion of the time. Our family is geared up to keep going as the hands of the healers go to work and our prayers guide their hands.

We pray that our new Church Council will help us to guide our work and our love towards one another and outwardly to the world around us. May we come to draw closer with our brothers and sisters from First Calvary and CT Myanmar Baptist. May we learn from one another and continue to find ways for joy to break through our mutual work, hopes and dreams. Those who are leaders of Grace we pray will worship with us. Those who are among those we serve may we find new ways to invite them to worship and give them in that way new opportunities for support and love.

May we find others to join with us in our ministries and our worship, not to simply grow our numbers, but rather to strengthen each other in the faith, not simply the tasks. Believing is more than doing as we learned so dramatically from Martha and Mary.

We will continue to work in building a children’s choir and to invite young people to be a part of what faith means. Emmanuella continues to work with our people, Wheeler Clinic, other organizations, and faith groups. We are on an intentional journey looking for partners to be with us. Looking for people who need to find ways to be a part of something that has wings of angels and hearts full of love.

Come, be with us in 2023. Let’s see if we can make things just a little bit better for each one of us, members of our families, neighbors, friends, and the strangers all around us. What else is church for? Let’s discover what that is.

WHAT HAPPENED WHEN JOSEPH BROUGHT MARY HOME? by Amar D. Peterman



We don't know much about Jesus' entrance into the world. For all the blockbuster movies, theatrical retellings, and creative adaptations, the New Testament authors give little detail regarding the timeline and context of these events. The following is an act of imagination. It is an attempt to fill in the gaps that are left for us in this story to bring the text to life. My hope is that this could be used as a resource for family Christmas Eve devotions or for congregations looking to creatively imagine the birth of Christ.

In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their own towns to be registered (Luke 2:1-3).

Sarah used more focus to sweep her home than most butchers use when cutting with a knife. Every bit of dirt was swept away by her broom as she prepared the house for the guests coming to town for the census. She needed to preoccupy her mind. She couldn't begin to think about what would happen when they came. Miryam, on the other hand, was looking forward to guests coming and was "helping" her aunt Sarah with the chores. Miryam was doing more talking than helping, but Sarah didn't mind. That is, until Miryam began asking questions.

"Are they staying here?" asked Miryam.

Sarah coyly responded, "Who?"

Miryam stared blankly at her. "Joseph and Mary."

Sarah didn't hesitate: "No."

"But the census ... they'll need *somewhere* to stay."

"If Joseph wants somewhere to stay, he will leave her behind."
A chasm seemed to open up between the two.

Miryam composed herself. "But, we don't know whose child that is. She says that she's been faithful. Why would she lie?"

Sarah, stared off into the distance, quietly remembering the **Law**, "*You shall not commit adultery ...*" She continued cleaning before answering. "Because she *knows* what happens to women like her. Mary will lie and Joseph will believe her, but we will have no part of it. You must remember that we are God's *chosen* people. We are set apart for the world to see. What would it look like for us to welcome in a woman who has been unfaithful to our own flesh and blood?"

“But her story ... an angel? What about Elizabeth? Who would make this up? Maybe the Mes—”

“DON'T! You wouldn't dare believe the Messiah would come to us in this way!” Her anger caught Miryam off guard. A pregnant silence settled into the house. After a moment, Sarah continued, now more gently. “What would our people do with an infant? We need a king. Look outside. Rome counts our heads so they know how much money they'll profit from our taxes. They bring the entire world to them so they can throw our children into battle, dull swords in hand. They'll never let us forget about the power they wield over us. How would a baby change that? If you're seeking the Messiah, look up to the clouds where Elijah was taken to heaven. That is where our salvation will come.”

Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child (Luke 2:4-5).

“They're here!” exclaimed Miryam.

“Both of them?” Sarah asked with surprise, even though she knew they were coming.

“Yes. She's *really* pregnant. Are you sure they can't stay here, Aunt Sarah?”

With her back to both Miryam and the busy road just outside the home, Sarah replied firmly, “I'm sure.”

“The whole caravan is helping her unload their things. It must've been such a difficult journey.” “I'm sure it was.”

“They're heading this way. Just the two of them.”

Voices sounded from the entrance.

“Peace, mother,” a ragged Joseph said. “This is Mary, my wife.” Even through his exhaustion, Sarah could see his pride. He loved her. He *believed* her.

Sarah sighed a sigh of relief and disappointment. Relief because her son was home; disappointment because she felt her faith was being tried and she was uncertain if she'd pass the test.

“Peace to you, my son. It has been so long. You look tired.”

“Joseph! Mary!” Miryam shouted as she pushed her small frame into the entrance.

“Cousin!” Joseph exclaimed, bending down with open arms to receive her.

Mary and Sarah faced one another for the first time. “*This woman,*” Sarah thought to herself. Their eyes met for a moment and Sarah was briefly overcome with loving kindness. She looked away, back to Joseph. Mary's hands rested on her belly.

“Has anyone else arrived?” Mary asked Sarah.

“No. You're the first, Mary,” she replied without breaking eye contact with Joseph. Sarah was searching for something; she was searching for a sign — a sign that Joseph didn't

MARTIN LUTHER ON HOPE

By Kathryn Kleinhans



*In you alone, O God, we hope, and not in our own merit.
We rest our fears in your good Word and trust your Holy Spirit.
Your promise keeps us strong and sure;
we trust the cross, your signature,
inscribed upon our temples.*

*My soul is waiting for you, Lord, as one who longs for morning;
no watcher waits with greater hope than I for your returning.
I hope as Israel in the Lord,
who sends redemption through the Word.
Praise God for grace and mercy!*

When I think of Martin Luther and hope, what comes to mind first is these two stanzas of his hymn “Out of the Depths I Cry to You” (*Evangelical Lutheran Worship* 600). For Luther, hope was not a nice holiday sentiment or an expression of wishful thinking. Hope was the cry of the trusting heart!

The hymn is a musical setting of Psalm 130. Luther wrote it in 1523 and shared with a colleague that someone starting such a project would probably begin at the beginning, with Psalm 1. Instead, Luther chose first to put to music a psalm that expressed deep despair, deep longing and deep faith!

In his commentary on Psalm 130, Luther observed that hope and despair are opposites. In Romance languages, the words are intertwined—for example, in modern French, the word for hope is *espoir* and the word for despair is *désespoir*, with the prefix *dés* indicating lack of something. For Luther, though, the relationship between hope and despair is not just a linguistic one but a theological one. He saw this relationship as dynamic, because it is precisely in the midst of despair that hope is created!

“Hope changes the one who hopes into what is hoped for” and “the thing hoped for and the person hoping become one.”

We live in a culture where hope is often confused with optimism. “I hope the weather is nice tomorrow,” we say, or “I hope my team wins the championship.” Luther’s reading of the Scriptures shifts our attention away from this transactional *hope that*. Instead, he invites us to *hope in*—“In you alone, O God, we hope.” Luther invites us to *hope for*—for the returning of the Lord “who sends redemption through the Word.”

In his commentary on Romans, Luther writes: “Hope changes the one who hopes into what is hoped for” and “the thing hoped for and the person hoping become one.”

When we hope that something will happen, the object of our hope is something outside ourselves. When we place our hope in the Lord, Luther believed, we are drawn more closely into the presence of God.

At the end of the letter to the Romans, Paul blesses his hearers and readers with these words: “May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit” (15:13). Luther embraces this blessing, explaining that the “God of hope” is the very one who bestows hope upon us.

Praying or singing Luther’s words is a means through which the God of hope works the gift of hope deep into our own hearts.



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**NEW ENGLAND SYNOD ENEWS
DECEMBER 14, 2022
GREATER HARTFORD INTERFAITH ACTION ALLIANCE**



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God’s work. Our hands.



GHIAA 2022 Power Summit Draws over 1,000 People of Faith

The auditorium at Weaver High School in Hartford, CT, was packed with 750 people of faith with more than 300 joining online for the Greater Hartford Interfaith Action Alliance’s 2022 Power Summit. They were gathered to call on state legislators, local council leaders, mayors and the governor, for concrete action on issues of justice that matter deeply to the

community. Nine state legislators and six local officials were present to listen to stories and respond to the specific asks.

GHIAA is focused on five issue areas that emerged from house meetings around greater

Hartford, involving over 1,000 people. In the areas of Mental Health, Gun Violence, Education, Housing and Environmental Justice, issue teams researched, developed partnerships and crafted asks of political leaders for the coming 2023 legislative session:

Mental Health: Public insurance for income-eligible youth regardless of immigration status; funding for peer-run respite care for people experiencing mental health crises and an ask of congregations to develop their own resources for mental health

Gun Violence: Fund existing community violence prevention programs with an additional \$20 million

Education: Immediately increase school funding by \$275 million to meet the existing, but yet-unfunded commitment to close the funding gap between predominantly white districts and districts with majority populations of color

Housing: Pass Fair Share legislation to increase affordable housing; pass a 3% rent cap to curb predatory rate hikes; have local towns do their part to support services for people experiencing homelessness

Environmental Justice: win the necessary resources to remediate the polluted land left by the MIRA Trash-to-Energy Plant, as the company continues to reap the profits of polluting in Hartford

The political leaders present were overwhelmingly supportive of GHIAA’s legislative agenda and made many commitments to move it forward.

Attending the assembly were members of several Lutheran congregations who are members of GHIAA: Ministerio Nueva Creación, Manchester; Concordia, Manchester; Emanuel, Hartford; Grace, Hartford and Shepherd of the Hills, Simsbury. Lutherans who spoke at the event included: co-emcee Bea Luciano (licensed lay minister at Ministerio Nueva Creación); co-chair of the mental health issue team Naomi Ngoma (Emanuel, Hartford) and Pr. Steven Wilco, representing the New England Synod.

Read more from the [Hartford Courant article](#) covering the event. To learn more about GHIAA or faith-based community organizing in your region, contact Pr. Steven Wilco at swilco@nesynod.org

DIMMING THE SUN TO COOL THE PLANET IS A DESPERATE IDEA, YET WE’RE INCHING TOWARD IT

The scientists who study solar geoengineering don’t want anyone to try it. But climate inaction is making it more likely.

By Bill McKibben



This is an excerpt of a lengthy discussion of the dilemma of climate change—what can we all do to make change—do we have the time...

If we decide to “solar geoengineer” the Earth—to spray highly reflective particles of a material, such as sulfur, into the stratosphere in order to deflect sunlight and so cool the planet—it will be the second most expansive project that humans have ever undertaken. (The first, obviously, is the ongoing emission of carbon and other heat-trapping gases into the atmosphere.)

DIMMING THE SUN TO COOL THE PLANET IS A DESPERATE IDEA, YET WE'RE INCHING TOWARD IT

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The idea behind solar geoengineering is essentially to mimic what happens when volcanoes push particles into the atmosphere; a large eruption, such as that of Mt. Pinatubo, in the Philippines, in 1992, can measurably cool the world for a year or two. This scheme, not surprisingly, has few public advocates, and even among those who want to see it studied the inference has been that it would not actually be implemented for decades. "I'm not saying they'll do it tomorrow," Dan Schrag, the director of the Harvard University Center for the Environment, who serves on the advisory board of a geoengineering-research project based at the university, told my colleague Elizabeth Kolbert for "Under a White Sky," her excellent book on technical efforts to repair environmental damage, published last year. "I feel like we might have thirty years," he said. It's a number he repeated to me when we met in Cambridge this summer.

Others, around the world, however, are working to speed up that timeline. There are at least three initiatives under way that are studying the potential implementation of solar-radiation management, or S.R.M., as it is sometimes called: a commission under the auspices of the Paris Peace Forum, composed of fifteen current and former global leaders and some environmental and governance experts, that is exploring "policy options" to combat climate change and how these policies might be monitored; a Carnegie Council initiative of how the United Nations might govern geoengineering; and Degrees Initiative, an academic effort based in the United Kingdom and funded by a collection of foundations, that in turn funds research on the effects of such a scheme across the developing world. The result of these initiatives, if not the goal, may be to normalize the idea of geoengineering. It is being taken seriously because of something else that's speeding up: the horrors that come with an overheating world and now regularly threaten its most densely populated places.



SUNDAY, DECEMBER 25, 2022

"Brothers and sisters, standing before the crib, we contemplate what is central, beyond all the pretty lights and decorations. We contemplate the child. In his *littleness*, God is completely present. Let us acknowledge this: "Baby Jesus, you are God, the God who becomes a child". Let us be amazed by this scandalous truth. The One who embraces the universe needs to be held in another's arms. The One who created the sun needs to be warmed. Tenderness incarnate needs to be coddled. Infinite love has a miniscule heart that beats softly. The eternal Word is an "infant", a speechless child. The Bread of life needs to be nourished. The Creator of the world has no home. Today, all is turned upside down: God comes into the world in littleness. His grandeur appears in *littleness*.

To accept littleness means something else too. It means embracing Jesus *in the little ones of today*. Loving him, that is, in the least of our brothers and sisters. Serving him in the poor, those most like Jesus who was born in poverty. It is in them that he wants to be honoured. On this night of love, may we have only one fear: that of offending God's love, hurting him by despising the poor with our indifference."

Pope Francis

believe in all this mess, a sign that he knew Mary had humiliated him. She couldn't find what she was looking for. She felt herself becoming incensed. Sensing his mother's anger, Joseph asked, "Should we put our things in the guest chamber, mother?"

"No, no. The kataluma is occupied."

Joseph had been given the runaround before. He was a carpenter by trade and although he was "uneducated" by society's standards, he could tell when someone was trying to give him a bad deal. He had imagined Mary's pregnancy would be difficult for his mother to accept, but her callousness and lack of compassion were unexpected. "What do you mean?" he confronted her. "You just said we were the first ones here. It has been such a long trip. There's nowhere else for us to go. We just want to rest. *Mary* needs to rest."

"It is *occupied*, Joseph. There is only room for *one*." Sarah said, before thinking to herself: "*Are they so determined to live in sin?*"

Growing impatient, Joseph replied, "Well, which is it? Is it occupied or is there room? *I* will leave if there is only room for one!"

"Joseph, we can find somewhere else to stay," Mary softly interjected as she placed her hand back over her womb, shielding her child from the dangers of this world.

Sarah agreed. "Perhaps that is best." She could feel her facade beginning to break as her eyes welled with tears.

"There's nowhere for them to stay, auntie," Miryam explained as her short arms wrapped around Joseph's waist. "Everyone is here for the census. It's not safe, either. The Romans are everywhere." Miryam was wise beyond her years.

Lost in her own thoughts, Sarah remembered all of the times Joseph had been hounded by the Romans growing up. She considered these things in her heart. "Fine," she finally conceded. "If you insist she stays here, then you can go below." This was insulting, and Sarah knew it, but she felt her heart giving way and she was convinced that if she gave in she'd be failing the test.

"To the animals!?" Joseph replied, indignant.

"Unclean for the unclean," she replied. She resolved to harden her heart.

And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no place in the guest room. ... When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us." So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph and the child lying in the manger (Luke 2:7; 15-16).

Sarah and Miryam ate dinner in silence. The two empty spots, reserved for Joseph and Mary, screamed louder than any of the words that could have been shared. Then came *real* screaming — the pains of childbirth rang throughout the house. Sarah wept. She questioned her actions, unsure if it was God's command or her own anger that had sent her own son and his pregnant wife to the basement with the livestock. She considered going down to help, but her pride kept her away.

Many hours later, deep into the night, Mary's shouts of pain turned into the soft wailing of a newborn child.

WHAT HAPPENED WHEN JOSEPH BROUGHT MARY HOME?

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To her surprise, Sarah heard a sound at the door. Wiping away her tears she asked through the door, "Who is there?"

"Peace, peace," a voice responded. "We are shepherds who have come to see the child." Miryam exclaimed, "They're here to see Mary's baby!"

"To see her child?" Sarah replied. "Why would they come all this way to see a child?" "Don't you see, aunt Sarah? Remember what the prophet **Isaiah** said: 'For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders ...' Maybe this is *that* child? What if Mary wasn't lying? Maybe Mary's child is the one who will save us?"

Strange as it was, Sarah invited the shepherds in and directed them to Mary and Joseph. "Miryam, make our guests comfortable," she instructed.

Sarah listened intently to the conversation below. The shepherds were explaining how they knew about the child: "...and these heavenly beings surrounded us singing about *this* child! They said he is the Messiah born in the city of David..."

"I knew it!" Miryam interrupted. "He *is* here. Everything is going to change."

As the shepherds continued, Sarah made her way to the basement. She was going down to see her grandson; she was going down to see her Messiah.

It is easy to miss God's presence among us when we are consumed with anxiety, fear, and anger in the face of oppression. For Sarah, her pursuit of holiness initially blinded her to the presence of the Messiah. As we continue to seek justice in our world today, we should expect to find the presence of Christ in unexpected places (Matthew 25:31-46). May we have the eyes of Miryam to see God at work in the world and follow the Spirit in bringing good news to the poor, liberation to the captive, sight to the blind, and freedom to the oppressed.



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WHY THE BIBLE'S TEACHING ON LENDING MATTERS TO CLIMATE JUSTICE

By Adam Russell Taylor

SOJOURNERS



A couple of weeks ago, the U.N. climate summit in Egypt, COP27, ended with a breakthrough deal to create a “loss and damage” fund that would help developing nations recover from climate disasters — financed by wealthier nations responsible for most of the emissions that are driving climate change.

Though most wealthy nations have not yet offered cash pledges to **the fund**, it's a significant step forward. Yet if we're serious about addressing the dire effects of climate change, we need to tackle another problem: a

worsening **debt crisis** that has left many nations needing exponentially more resources to recover from climate disasters and invest in sustainable development. This will require transforming how large entities like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund loan money to low- and middle-income nations.

I know talking about international lending policies makes most people want to yawn, but the Bible takes debt — and the people who profit from it — seriously. In his opening Nazareth sermon (Luke 4), Jesus cites the prophet Isaiah to proclaim “the year of the Lord’s favor,” a passage that evokes the ancient instructions for debt forgiveness, such as those found in Deuteronomy 15 (“Every seventh year you shall grant a remission of debts”). While biblical scholars can't confirm that these Jubilee injunctions were fully lived out, these instructions were understood to be a regular course corrective to extreme inequality and injustice. Other parts of the Bible flat-out forbid charging interest when the person seeking the loan is poor (Exodus 22:25, Leviticus 25:37).

So, if you care about truly addressing the dual crises of extreme poverty and climate change, stay with me. First, let's consider why low- and middle-income nations have so much debt in the first place. The answer? Low- and middle-income nations face a complex (and expensive) nest of overlapping and mutually exacerbating crises. They face increased energy prices, rising interest rates, the **global food crisis**, not to mention navigating a pandemic with **dramatically less access to vaccines**, and nowhere near the **\$11 trillion economic stimulus** that the U.S. and Europe marshaled to get their populations through the worst of the pandemic. As a result, 60 percent of low-income countries are already in or at high risk of a debt crisis — an echo of the crushing debt so many nations faced in the 1990s until the **Jubilee debt cancellation movement** helped secure substantial relief.

Then comes a hurricane. Or an earthquake. Or historic flooding. Or fires, or droughts, or any other disaster that is becoming more frequent due to climate change. When one of these natural disasters devastates a small, low- or middle-income country, that country generally needs to take out a loan to repair the damage and help their population recover. Because private lending institutions generally view these loans as risky investments, they offer exceptionally high interest rates that make such loans non-starters for these countries. Instead, nations needing a loan for disaster relief often turn to one of the multilateral development banks (MDBs) like the World Bank or the Inter-American Development Bank.

The World Bank was originally created to help rebuild Europe after WWII and subsequently focused on helping countries transition out of poverty by investing in development. I used to work at the World Bank, where I led efforts to build stronger partnerships with faith-based organizations to help achieve the bank's goals of ending extreme poverty and promoting

WHY THE BIBLE'S TEACHING ON LENDING MATTERS TO CLIMATE JUSTICE

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shared prosperity. Through this work, I saw how the World Bank could make a major difference to mobilize the knowledge and financing needed to achieve these goals; I also saw that MDBs needed further innovation and bolder reforms to help countries meet the climate and development crises they currently face.

Unfortunately, borrowing from MDBs often comes with challenging interest rates and **stipulations** that the recipient nation must tighten its spending to ensure the loan can eventually be repaid. For many nations this means they must prioritize repaying their debts instead of making critical investments in their nation's sustainable development. So, when the next hurricane, or earthquake, or flood strikes, they're once again not prepared. It's become a devastating **cycle of debt and disaster**.

The bad news is that institutions like the World Bank **aren't well equipped** to deal with the scale and scope of challenges of facing low- and middle-income countries today, especially those related to climate change. The good news is that momentum for bolder reforms of the MDBs is taking shape and building momentum. Which brings me back to COP27.

During the global conference last month, Barbados' prime minister, Mia Mottley, championed reforms to the World Bank and International Monetary Fund in the **Bridgetown Initiative**, named for her nation's capital. Through Mottley's advocacy, the initiative gained the attention of several influential leaders. The initiative would expand low-interest lending from the IMF and ensure countries hit by natural disasters aren't expected to keep repaying the loans as they recover. The initiative would also draw on reserve funds from the IMF that can be used in times of crisis (as it **did in 2021** to aid in global economic recovery due to the pandemic) to help finance climate mitigation projects in developing countries.

The result? Huge amounts of money could become available to low- and middle-income countries — money that would not only help them recover from the effects of climate change they're currently facing, but also prepare for future disasters and invest in sustainable development more broadly. These proposals echo reforms to international financial institutions promoted by the **ONE campaign** as well as the **Jubilee USA Network**.

In many ways, this moment reminds me of the choice the world faced in the lead up to the new millennium when so many low- and middle-income countries faced both enormous debt and a devastating HIV/AIDS pandemic. In that moment, the HIV/AIDS movement recognized the need to galvanize a paradigm shift and moved wealthy nations from investing paltry millions of dollars for prevention and treatment programs to the billions that were urgently needed. In the face of growing climate disaster, we desperately need a similar paradigm shift that demands bold and transformational proposals along these lines. All this is frankly in the self-interest of the U.S. and other wealthy nations: Breaking the debt and disaster cycle would mean building a more stable and prosperous world in which we collectively avert the direst consequences of climate change and enable all nations and people to thrive.

And for those of us who are people of faith, it's also clearly the right thing to do — a powerful expression of the Jubilee vision of restoring right relationship.



Adam Russell Taylor is president of Sojourners and author of [*A More Perfect Union: A New Vision for Building the Beloved Community*](#). Follow him on Twitter [@revadamtaylor](#).

ACCOUNTABILITY: A PROPHETIC MESSAGE

by Jonathan Kuttab



- *“One shot. One kill. No remorse. I decide.”*—velcro patch on uniform of an Israeli soldier in Hebron
- *“We will not allow our soldiers to be put on trial by anybody,” & “The Israeli Army is the only party which determines our policy on open-fire regulations.”*—outgoing Israeli Defense Minister Benny Gantz
- *“The Department of Justice should drop any investigation of the killing of Shireen Abu Akleh”*—Letter by Mark Rubio and 7 other US Senators to the US Department of Justice.
- *“We will boycott the boycotters and delegitimize the delegitimizers. No one has the right to tell Israel what to do,” & “If International law is a problem, we will change international law.”*—Benjamin Netanyahu
- *“We insist on new legislation granting IDF soldiers and Israeli Police immunity from investigation or trial for their actions. This is our condition for joining the new government.”*—Itamar Ben Gvir of the Jewish Power Party.



These and similar statements reflect the arrogance of the powerful, those confident in their ability to act with impunity, who seek to avoid any accountability, any sanctions or restrictions, or any interference with how they relate to the population under their control. In fact, these leaders arrogantly threaten to punish international bodies, including judges and prosecutors who attempt to investigate their behavior or who call for accountability.

The US has already supported such arrogance by issuing similar threats against prosecutors and judges at the International Criminal Court, denying them visas to enter the US. Many are also using their power in this country to criminalize and penalize Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) and to promulgate and institute IHRA-based procedures to accuse anyone calling for such accountability of being antisemitic.

One of the main functions of the prophet is to speak truth to power. In the Old Testament, prophets were reviled and persecuted precisely because they dared to remind the all-powerful kings of the requirements of a just God. The prophets did not accept the notion that a King could act as he pleases, with full impunity, just because he may have wielded power.

It is clearly the function of the church today to play a prophetic role. “Prophecy” is not, as many evangelicals think, about predicting the future or discerning signs of the “End Times.” It is the active pronouncement of God’s requirement of justice, and it is the act of standing up against the powerful and for the weak and oppressed. It also faces opposition as it flies in the face of powerful vested interests.

NC PASTOR HEADED TO YALE FOR NEW THEOLOGY PROGRAM

By Martha Quillan - The Charlotte Observer

The Charlotte Observer

Yale Divinity School will launch a new Center for Public Theology and Public Policy with the Rev. William J. Barber II as its founding director.

The center will offer instruction combining theology and advocacy, teaching students to approach public policy issues from a faith-based moral perspective. Yale Divinity School Dean Gregory E. Sterling said Barber was chosen to lead the center in part because of the work he did in North Carolina mobilizing Moral Monday marches beginning in 2013 in opposition to decisions by the N.C. General Assembly.

“YDS is thrilled to launch the new Center for Public Theology and Public Policy and to welcome William Barber to our community,” Sterling said in a statement announcing the center.

“Dr. Barber’s work and service is in the tradition of public witness that produced Frederick Douglass and Sojourner Truth, Walter Rauschenbusch and Howard Thurman, Ida B. Wells and Dorothy Day, Martin Luther King, Jr., Ella Baker, and Abraham Joshua Heschel. Establishment of the Center at YDS is an opportunity to deepen our relationship to a historical movement that revives nearly two centuries of social justice tradition to meet the complex social realities of our time.”

To join Yale, Barber will retire as pastor of Greenleaf Christian Church in Goldsboro, which he has led since 1993.

Barber, 59, said he is excited about joining Yale and sees it as a transition from one type of pastoral work to another.

“Leaving a congregation is a little teary,” Barber said, because its members are like family. Moving into the position at Yale will allow him to become more of an elder, he said, allowing him to share his knowledge and experience with students who can use it and expand on it.

“Legacy is not so much what you do,” Barber said, “but how many people you can sew into what you did to do it better than you did and have an impact on society.”

Barber, who is a former president of the North Carolina NAACP, will continue to work with the Poor People’s Campaign and Repairers of the Breach, organizations that advocate for social and economic justice on a national level. He compared the job at Yale to being a physician at a teaching university who can lead a classroom but also continues to perform surgeries.

“We have a biblical responsibility to pour into and to share,” Barber said. “In some ways I may be leaving the pastorate but not pastoring. Because in some ways this is about pastoring the movement.”

For Barber, “the movement” is a continuation of all social and economic justice work done throughout American history, including efforts to end slavery, to improve working conditions, to secure the rights of women and minorities and to protect the environment.

“If you look deep enough, all of those issues are pushed forward by theology and public policy, by people raising the real question: What kind of society are we if we don’t have labor rights?”



Israel today is in desperate need of prophetic witness. Its leaders feel that they have full power and control. Militarily, they are beyond challenge. They are in charge of the entire territory of historic Palestine and can project their power throughout the region. Palestinians are at their mercy. The international community is either totally impotent or in many cases complicit in Israel's behavior.

Palestinian leaders are either corrupt, collaborating through "security coordination" or else dependent on Israel for the most basic elements of running the Palestinian Authority, whether it concerns travel permits, import/export licenses, water and electricity, or WiFi and postal services, and the like. The PA is literally dependent on Israel for everything. The current US administration seems no better than the last one in continuing to shelter Israeli leadership from any international rebuke or sanctions.

Accountability is not just something that occurs in the afterlife, when many believe we will all face judgment for our actions, but it is also something to be sought in this world. All of us have a duty to demand and eventually ensure that justice is being done and that war criminals, human rights violators, oppressors, and individuals and regimes that practice apartheid, torture, and unjustified killings of civilians must face justice. They cannot forever escape accountability for their actions. Even as we work for peace and reconciliation (until that day finally arrives) we must work to prevent further suffering, and we must demand accountability, especially for those who feel they can arrogantly act with impunity and fear no consequence. Most importantly, we must raise our voices and proclaim our firm belief, in the face of arrogant power, that justice will prevail in the end and that the arc of history, however long, bends towards justice.

Those who care about justice or a better future for both Israelis and Palestinians have an important prophetic role to play. In the context of Israel/Palestine, Christians cannot be covered by the power of the political forces marshaled against the requirements of a just peace. We cannot be held hostage to "political realism" and the international balance (read: imbalance) of power dictating possible outcomes. Extremist Zionists may think that they have already won and that Israel can use the power and influence of the United States to gain normalization and acceptance in the Arab world, without addressing in any way the question of Palestinians. The raising of Palestinian flags at the recent World Cup was a reminder that despite Arab regime "normalization" with Israel, the Palestinian cause is still very much in the hearts and minds of people everywhere.

Israel has been blessed, however, with a number of brave prophetic voices who have not minced their words in telling fellow Israelis of the danger of relying on their current power and ignoring the need to establish a just peace with Palestinians.

From Yesheyahu Liebovitch, who soon after 1967 warned Israelis that they must immediately give up the occupied territories or they would become 'Judeo-Nazis,' to the current voices arising from Jewish Voice for Peace, Rabbis for Human Rights, journalists like Gideon Levy and Amira Hass, as well as numerous others who tirelessly carry forth the prophetic message. Even though they may be a tiny minority, their prophetic voices are clearly heard.

We in FOSNA stand in solidarity with them as well as with Palestinian and international voices calling for real accountability for Israeli actions, which not only fail the test of justice and fairness but often blatantly fly in the face of the recognized principles of international law and violate Palestinian human rights.

If we don't have women's rights? If we don't have equal rights? If as a society we don't have those, aren't we in violation not of some political position, but of some deep moral conviction?"

Barber will be joined at the Center for Public Theology and Public Policy by Durham's Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove, a Christian author and activist who will serve as a lecturer and assistant director for partnerships and fellowships.

He said work to launch the center began in 2018 when he and Barber did a mobile course in public theology visiting about a dozen seminaries to see who was open to the idea of connecting — or reconnecting — theology and public policy.

Yale's Divinity School was especially interested in the idea, which Wilson-Hartgrove said was more in vogue in the mid-20th century and faded as the notion of religion was increasingly tied to conservatism.

Courses at the center will be part of degree programs within the Divinity School, Wilson-Hartgrove said, but also will be open to students at the law school and to undergraduates at Yale College.

Yale also is interested in bringing in students to the Divinity School from historically Black colleges and universities in the South, including in North Carolina. The center will announce partnerships with some HBCUs next year, he said, that will allow students to attend its classes without incurring debt.

Wilson-Hartgrove said that while the center will emphasize faith values in public policy, including those from the Christian faith, the teaching will be different from the Christian nationalism espoused by some on the far right.

Wilson-Hartgrove said Christian nationalism — the notion that America is a Christian nation and the government should be involved in keeping it that way — arose in part as a response to the moral arguments in favor of Civil Rights in the 1950s. That evolved into a sense of Christian supremacy, he said.

"We don't think that you answer that with a sort of religious left," he said. "You don't just try to create a religious alternative to that. Rather, we want to have a place where the best scholarship about public policy can be in conversation with the best scholarship about fundamental morality.

"All of the moral traditions that inform who we are and what our values are as communities in this country should speak to what kinds of public policy we want to see in the world," Wilson-Hartgrove said. They should be like those the Poor People's Campaign has advocated for, he said.

"Policies that lift from the bottom, helping people thrive to the benefit of everyone."

Barber will travel between Yale, in New Haven, his home in Goldsboro and his speaking engagements around the country.

The center will begin work in early 2023.

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EXPIRATION DATES ARE MEANINGLESS

“When in doubt, throw it out” doesn’t cut it anymore.

By Yasmin Tayag



This is an excerpt from an interesting article from The Atlantic—November 30, 2022 issue

For refrigerators across America, the passing of Thanksgiving promises a major purge. The good stuff is the first to go: the mashed potatoes, the buttery remains of stuffing, breakfast-worthy cold pie. But what’s that in the distance, huddled gloomily behind the leftovers? There lie the marginalized relics of pre-Thanksgiving grocery runs. Heavy cream, a few days past its sell-by date. A desolate bag of spinach whose label says it went bad on Sunday. Bread so hard you wonder if it’s from last Thanksgiving.

The alimentarily unthinking, myself included, tend to move right past expiration dates. Last week, I considered the contents of a petite container in the bowels of my fridge that had transcended its best-by date by six weeks. Did I dare eat a peach yogurt? I sure did, and it was great. In most households, old items don’t stand a chance. It makes sense for people to be wary of expired food, which can occasionally be vile and incite a frenzied dash to the toilet, but food scientists have been telling us for years—if not *decades*—that expiration dates are mostly useless when it comes to food safety. Indeed, an enormous portion of what we deem trash is perfectly fine to eat: The food-waste nonprofit ReFED estimated that 305 million pounds of food would be needlessly discarded this Thanksgiving.

Expiration dates, it seems, are hard to quit. But if there were ever a moment to wean ourselves off the habit of throwing out “expired” but perfectly fine items because of excessive caution, it is now. Food waste has long been a huge climate issue—rotting food’s annual emissions in the U.S. approximate that of 42 coal-fired power plants—and with inflation’s brutal toll on grocery bills, it’s also a problem for your wallet. People throw away roughly \$1,300 a year in wasted food, Zach Conrad, an assistant professor of food systems at William and Mary, told me. In this economy? The only things we should be tossing are expiration dates themselves.

Expiration dates, part of a sprawling family of labels that includes the easily confused siblings “best before,” “sell by,” and “best if used by,” have long muddled our conception of what is edible. They do so by insinuating that food has a definitive point of no return, past which it is dead, kaput, *expired*—and you might be, too, if you dare eat it. If only food were as simple as that.

SOLAR PANEL REPORT—NOVEMBER, 2022



Produced

1.5 MWh

10% lower*

8 Nov :73.3 kWh

Maximum production day

Consumed

1.4 MWh

5% lower*

11 Nov :105.2 kWh

Maximum consumption day

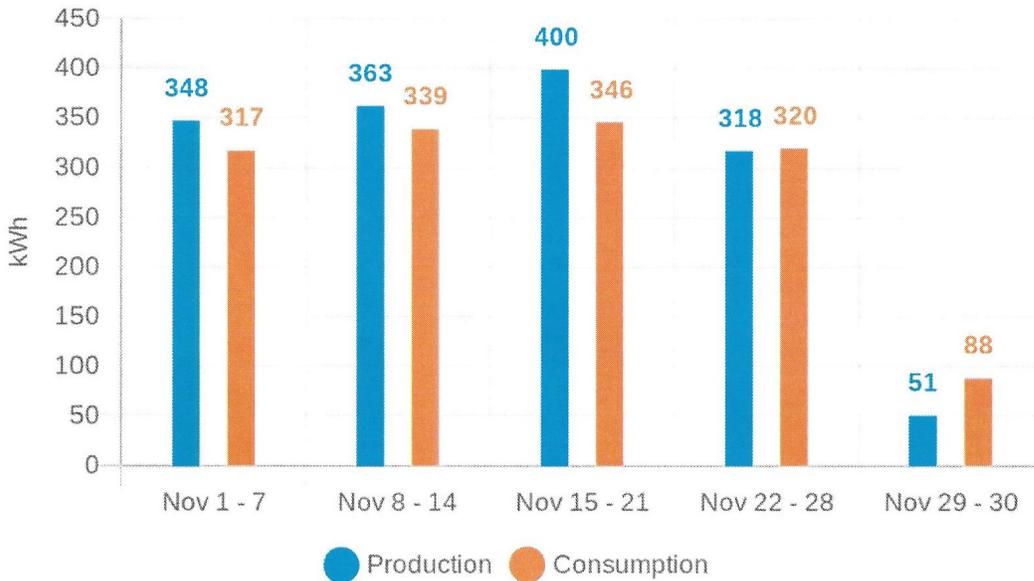
Grid energy

916.6 kWh

Imported

986.4 kWh

Exported



Carbon offset

1.05 ton

Offset equivalent to 18
Trees

Energy Independence

35%

For this month, 65% of your energy consumption is supplied by the utility grid.

Get grid independence with Enphase

Add Storage

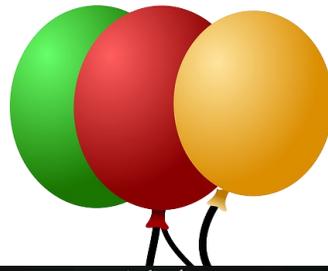
Year-to-date production

24 MWh

* As compared to last month's records

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JANUARY 2023 BIRTHDAYS AND ANNIVERSARIES!



**Happy Birthday!
January**

**Birthday blessing to all
those who birthday is in
January!**



**Happy
Anniversary!**

***May you all be blessed as
you celebrate your
special days!***

Did we miss your birthday or anniversary?
Contact the office at 860-527-7792 or
email office.gracelutheranhartford@gmail.com
to update our records.

2023 COUNCIL INSTALLED—DEPARTING MEMBERS HONORED



**NEW COUNCIL—
DETAILS TO BE
PROVIDED IN
FEBRUARY ISSUE**

**BARBARA RUHE—
8 YEARS**



**MILDRED
UNFRIED—
6 YEARS**



**BARBARA
CALOGERO
—7 YEARS**





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