

EMBODYING THE MESSAGE

by *Jessica Easter, '14*

One of my favorite aspects about divine communication in the First Testament is how often G-d's Word is intrinsically linked with G-d's Actions. Genesis 1 is full of G-d speaking creation into being. The First Testament involves repeated communication between G-d and creation by way of prophets and angels serving as the channel for G-d's message. If I am to call myself a Friend of Christ and a Friend of G-d, then I must recognize that I might be used as the channel and the message.

Last year, I had the blessed opportunity to complete my Supervised Ministry year as a chaplain and HIV test counselor to homeless youths on the streets of Chicago. My ministry to the youths taught me how much of a divine vehicle communication can be. The presence of staff, interns, and volunteers communicated to the youths that they were seen and cared for. Sometimes, words don't need to be uttered for G-d to communicate with and between us. G-d's Presence is sometimes more than enough communication. I was humbled and tendered how they thanked me for simply being with them and talking with them over the course of those months. Perhaps the other interns and I embodied the *Shekinah*, or Divine Presence, of G-d for a segment of our society that is so often rendered invisible by others.

Recently I decided to attend a Sunday morning worship service at a Catholic church. The gospel reading was of Matthew 21:28-32, which is commonly referred to as the "Parable of the Two Sons." On the surface, the parable served as Christ's lesson that G-d prefers that we put G-d's Word into practice rather than simply disingenuously agreeing to a Divine command that we do not plan on carrying out. I felt that the parable was also reminding me not to just give lip-service to G-d but to practice my beliefs, and, in doing so, align myself with the Quaker concept of letting our lives preach. I am called to be as clear of a channel as possible.



Jessica Easter (bottom left) with her fellow chaplain interns

I continue to ponder all of these observations as I carry out my current ministry in a hospital setting. Although I moved from my Supervised Ministry site in Chicago to a chaplaincy residency in San Francisco after graduating from ESR, I am still constantly reminded of how important and fruitful communication can be. Patients and families of patients have told me how much they appreciate having someone to talk with. They don't need another person to help "fix" their situation; they have a whole interdisciplinary team dedicated to that. They want someone to be with them and truly listen to them. They want someone to share their fears, giggles, tears, and joys. I believe that's where my current ministry comes in. When it comes to communication, I represent a Christ who dwells with humanity and a G-d who sends love notes.

Jessica Easter is currently a chaplain intern at University of California, San Francisco Medical Center. She enjoys giggling with pediatric patients, talking to G-d, and finding fun things to do in a big city. She is the older sister of a nurse in training and the only minister daughter of a brilliant and compassionate mother.



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COMMUNICATION AND THE MINISTRY OF SONGWRITING

by Josh Seligman, '14

I graduated from ESR in May as a student in the Ministry of Writing program. I wrote fiction and nonfiction but discovered my main form of ministry to be songwriting. While a student, I tried to become a better songwriter and musician by taking various writing classes, including a songwriting class. My Supervised Ministry involved performing songs at Roscoe's Coffee Bar and Tap Room, the Common Grounds Coffeehouse at West Richmond Friends Meeting, and volunteering as a musician at the Iona Abbey in Scotland. Since graduating, I have continued practicing and writing music, playing the guitar, and sharing songs.

Two songs I have written recently illustrate how communication is essential to the ministry of songwriting and singing. "As You Led Your People in the Wilderness" is a hymn, and one that my local church sang during one Sunday service. I wanted to write a song to help the church (locally and globally) express some fears, joys, and petitions to God. I felt that an appropriate corresponding story to the church today was the Israelites' journey through the wilderness as told in the book of Exodus.

"Hymns are different than other kinds of songs because, rather than being sung by a performer to an audience of listeners, a community of people sings hymns together."

Hymns are different than other kinds of songs because, rather than being sung by a performer to an audience of listeners, a community of people sings hymns together. Thus, I made the first lines of each verse parallel so that people could quickly follow along and understand the hymn's direction: "As you led your people in the wilderness. . . / As you fed your people in the wilderness. . . / As you gave your people in the wilderness. . . / As you saved your people in the wilderness. . . ." I employed rhyme schemes to make the singing more enjoyable and to help singers remember the words. (Besides, rhyming is customary in most songwriting.)



Josh Seligman showcasing his songwriting skills

Although this hymn is addressed to God, I was also aware that the words we recite shape us. I considered what I wanted to communicate to people through the lyrics. Hymn writers often focus on either the spiritual or the physical side of our existence, and I wanted to balance both. I compared manna to both the "daily bread" with which God satisfies our hunger and "[God's] Word which makes us whole." I compared the water that flowed from a stone to both "living water that will not run dry" and nourishment from "gardens we have grown."

I wrote this hymn when folks at church, friends, and other people were grieving over local, national, and international acts of injustice and violence. I tried to funnel those emotions into the song: "Deliver us from those who use and harm us / From evil laws and leaders set us free." While writing, I remembered how our prayers not only form us; they can even compel God to respond.

The second song I wrote is from the perspective of Adam and is about his yearning to return to the Garden of Eden. In the first verse, Adam connects

humanity's reentry into paradise with Isaiah's vision of a world in which people "beat their swords into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks" (2:4): "Can't go back / Through the flaming sword / Must work the cursed ground / 'Til we learn war no more."

In late September, I performed this song during a service at my local church. I felt it was appropriate given the military conflicts in which our country and others have begun to engage. I hoped that in communicating a vision in which we relate to our neighbors and even our enemies in peace, I might persuade those who think it is right to attack our enemies to imitate Christ, the second Adam, who did not use his power to destroy his enemies but to bless, love, and ultimately save them.

Because this song is from the perspective of the first human, it communicates that forsaking war is not new but is at the root of what it means to be human. And although "learning war no more" is prominent, the song is not a protest but a lament and petition to

return to our true home, where grows the tree of life whose leaves heal the nations. Such a song can be both prophetic and pastoral, calling people to walk in righteousness and giving voice to our yearnings.

Songs communicate ideas, emotions, experiences, communal memories, and more. Singing is a life-giving activity that can engage our depths. Because we not only listen to songs but also sometimes sing them, they influence how and to whom we communicate. Writing songs communicates that there are words worth singing, people with whom to share them, and a God who we believe will listen and act.

Josh Seligman was born in the Philippines. He enjoys, among other things, traveling, hanging out with friends, and going on walks.

COMMUNICATION BEYOND THE SERMON

by Adam Webber, '11

Here's something I've learned in my first two years as a pastor: as a means of communication, the sermon is highly overrated.

The church I serve is a congregation of the United Church of Christ, and like many UCC congregations, it expects a lectionary reading and a relevant sermon every Sunday. I enjoy researching and delivering these sermons, but at the same time, I often feel a frustrating contradiction at the heart of the process: *the better the preaching, the more people admire the preacher*. If you preach with flawless logic, people will be distracted from what you are trying to say by the impressive flawlessness of your logic. If you preach with simple honesty, the memory of your simple honesty will drive out the memory of your message. I long to help people become more aware of their connections to God, and I think I've improved with practice. But the more ardently and skillfully I preach, the more people become aware of *me*. I'm not giving up on sermons, but I am equally drawn to alternative channels of communication.

I am, for example, a songwriter and performer. I love this channel for its freedom. In concert I might sing something worshipful and reverent, but I might also sing something comical, narrative, sarcastic, comforting, bawdy, or defiant. I might sing a song that expresses a point of view other than my own—for example, my song "I Don't Believe in You Anymore," in which I try to give voice to the loss of faith experienced by a homeless veteran I once knew. There is a frankness about music in performance I find liberating.



Adam Webber practicing what he preaches

People are usually willing to give you a hearing, even if they don't agree with you; but if they're bored, they're also free to walk out.

Recorded music offers yet another channel. As a recording artist, I can use all kinds of studio tricks to get the sound just right. On the receiving end, the audience can listen to the music without focusing on just the performer. Music stretches the definition of communication because part of what a song "communicates" can't be put into words. *Continued on page 4.*

“As they sing, they encounter the idea of God’s forgiving love in a more intimate way as it rolls out of their own mouths.”

Continued from page 3. The visual arts can stretch this even further. For my recent CD, *As a Deer Longs*, I worked with fellow ESR graduate Rob Pierson, whose photographic artwork graced the CD cover and booklet.

My latest adventure in ministerial communication has been the writing of hymns. I began doing this when I discovered that the hymnals and other collections available to me didn’t have enough of what I wanted: singable hymns that reflect a progressive Christian theology. My congregation, while theologically progressive, is musically very conservative. For their sake my hymns are harmonically and rhythmically simple. They’re also rather repetitive; for example, many of them have refrains, which help timid singers build confidence.

As a preacher, I have often felt myself working against the theological notions people learned from old hymns. Hymnody can be so tenacious! People who are used to singing “Washed in the Blood of the Lamb,” for example, often seem to have little room for alternative ideas about Jesus’s work in our salvation. Hymns have a leverage that is difficult for preaching to match. So instead of trying to overcome that leverage, I’ve tried to use it to my advantage. I certainly still preach about God’s forgiving love, but in some ways it’s more effective for me to invite people to sing my hymn, “The Inn of God’s Forgiveness.” As they sing, they encounter the idea of God’s forgiving love in a more intimate way as it rolls out of their own mouths.

I collected eight of these new hymns and published them with an essay about each in book form: *The Inn of God’s Forgiveness and Other Hymns for the Progressive Church*. That project involved yet another form of communication: theological writing. Such writing reaches a rather limited audience, I’m afraid. Many people who have enjoyed singing my hymns would find it a dead bore to read about them. But for those who do choose such reading it is a channel of uniquely high capacity. I can express my thoughts in writing that are too complex to make a good sermon and too full of rational concepts to make a good song.

As a minister, I am called to use my gifts to help people feel their own connections to God. I haven’t given up on sermons, or on Sunday morning—not yet, anyway! But I do feel called to communicate in many different ways. And I remain very grateful to ESR for helping me develop this broad understanding of ministry.

Rev. Dr. Adam Webber had a previous career as a professor of computer science and now serves as pastor and teacher of the Clare Congregational United Church of Christ in Clare, Michigan. He blogs at adambrookswebber.com.

Cross on ESR campus

SPRING '15 EVENT HIGHLIGHT: Friend in Residence

During the week of March 2-6, 2015, Callid Keefe-Perry will join us as our spring Friend in Residence. Callid is the author of the recently released book, *Way to Water: A Theopoetics Primer*, one of the founders of the journal *Theopoetics*, and cohost of the progressive Christian podcast, “Homebrewed Christianity.” He describes himself as an “educator, minister, and advocate for the arts.”

Callid is currently completing his doctorate in theological studies at Boston University’s School of Theology, where he is working on a public theology of public education and other projects related to creative and liberation approaches to adult religious education. As the Friend in Residence, Callid will participate in many activities with the ESR and wider Richmond community. We invite anyone interested in reading



Callid Keefe-Perry

his new book to participate in a discussion group and book signing event one evening that week. Callid will present the programs for common meal and peace forum, bring the message for programmed worship, and also present a workshop surrounding the theme of *Theopoetics* for all who are interested. He will spend time visiting ESR and Bethany classes and interacting with students and faculty. Callid’s presence will be a vibrant and rich resource for our community on emerging topics related to faith and Friends.

ESR FACULTY HIGHLIGHTS

Jim Higginbotham gave a paper at the Society for Pastoral Theology meeting in Decatur, Georgia, June 19-21, titled, “Toward a Pastoral Theology of Incarceration,” which is based on research he did during his spring sabbatical. This is the first significant scholarly examination of this topic by a pastoral theologian in recent years. Jim also spent March 2014 in Kenya as part of his sabbatical. He provided staff development for an ecumenical ministry to orphans and vulnerable children, joining them in home and school visits while doing informal research on resilience. While in Western Kenya, he participated in a professional consultation with the faculty of Friends Theological College about his research. In September Jim traveled to Pennsylvania to facilitate the fall weekend retreat of the Pittsburgh Friends Meeting on the topic of “Creating a Caring Meeting.”

Stephen W. Angell presented a lecture on “A. Neave Brayshaw and the Reinvigoration of the Quaker Peace Testimony During World War I” on July 28 at Wilmington College in Wilmington, Ohio, to celebrate the opening of the exhibit *The City of War: Words and Images of World War I* at Wilmington College’s Meriam R. Hare Quaker Heritage Center (<http://bit.ly/angell-wilmington>). Steve also presented the George Richardson Lecture at the Woodbrooke Quaker Study Center in Selly Oak, UK, on October 11 on the topic of “Richard Farnworth, Samuel Fisher, and the Authority of Scripture Among Early Friends” (<http://bit.ly/angell-woodbrooke>).

Jay Marshall preached at West Elkton Meeting (May) and Cambridge City United Methodist Church (June). In July he visited Friends in the Wabash and South Bend area before joining a dozen alumni/ae, advisors, and spouses for dinner in Ann Arbor, Michigan, at the home of Dwight and Diane Wilson. Jay also attended Western, Philadelphia, and North Carolina Yearly Meeting Sessions. In September he enjoyed visits with Friends in North Carolina, including lunch with twelve alumni/ae.

COMING UP @ ESR

Spirituality Gathering

Saturday, February 28, 2015
Featuring Sr. Mary Margaret Funk, author of many books, including *Discernment Matters: Listening with the Ear of the Heart*
Theme: Discernment

Willson Lectures

Saturday, March 28, 2015
Featuring Diana Butler Bass, author of many books, including *Christianity after Religion: The End of Church and the Birth of a New Spiritual Awakening*

Spring Friend in Residence

March 2-6, 2015
Callid Keefe-Perry, author of *Way to Water: A Theopoetics Primer*

FALL EVENTS OFFER NEW PERSPECTIVES

by Mandy Ford

Each fall we offer a variety of events at ESR, and this year the diverse topics offered new perspectives in Quaker leadership, ministry, spiritual creativity, and writing as part of a nonviolent life. In August we hosted our fifth annual Leadership Conference, *Leading as Servants in the Manner of Friends*, featuring presentations from Alan Kolp and Ann Riggs. Former ESR Dean Alan Kolp shared his views on servant leadership as a "Spirituality Charged Change Agent," and how servant leaders are also "spiritual leaders" to the groups they serve. In Ann Riggs's keynote, she discussed the importance of servant leaders to build "empathic community" and "leading from a base of experience." A group of related workshops and panel presentations rounded out the conference, and anchor groups gave participants additional time to share their thoughts and questions in a small group setting.

Our Fall Friend in Residence during the week of September 15 was '98 alum Melanie Weidner. Melanie works as a spiritual director and retreat leader and is also an accomplished artist. During her week with us she offered many wonderful opportunities to share her artistic and spiritual talents. She led a workshop that gave participants the unique opportunity to create blessings for each other through a poetry exercise. Melanie shared her spiritual journey during the common meal program, and gave the message for programmed worship. She also met one-on-one with students for spiritual/vocational direction sessions. Her time on campus was rich and meaningful for all.

Following Melanie's visit, our annual Pastors Conference on September 29 featured author Margaret Placentra Johnston, whose book, *Faith Beyond Belief: Stories of Good People Who Left Their Church Behind*, examines the spiritual life outside of a church setting. In her presentations Johnston shared the reasons that survival of our individual traditions may depend on pastors's success in shepherding congregants toward post-

literal faith. She helped participants examine the value of allowing their congregations to explore and question their faith and the challenges involved in that process. This topic was valuable and timely as the climate of ministry continues to change.

Fr. John Dear was the keynote speaker for the 2014 Ministry of Writing Colloquium on November 1. His keynote, "Writing and the Nonviolent Life," invited attendees to use writing as one tool in the Christian life of prophetic ministry. Nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize by Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Fr. Dear has led peace organizations, worked in homeless shelters, traveled in war zones, and been arrested more than 75 times for acts of civil disobedience against war. He has published more than 30 books, including his latest, *The Nonviolent Life*. Along with Fr. Dear's keynote, Colloquium workshops included topics on poetry, nonfiction, fiction and editorial writing, and online promotion. This year's Colloquium also included a new Writers' and Friends Dinner on Friday evening, which we hope will become an annual feature of the weekend.

Looking forward to spring 2015, our Spirituality Gathering on February 28 will feature Sr. Mary Margaret Funk with a theme of "Discernment Matters." The week of March 2 we will host Callid Keefe-Perry as our Spring Friend in Residence, and Diana Butler Bass will be our Willson Lecturer on March 28. We are thankful for all who join us for these events and learn alongside our community.

To see videos of these events go to <http://esr.earlham.edu/esr-video>

Mandy Ford is ESR's director of external relations.

Left to right: Melanie Weidner, Fr. John Dear, Margaret Placentra Johnston



ESR ALUMNI/AE UPDATES

Tyler Connoley (MA '03, MDiv '09) began a new position as the immigrant care coordinator for the Southwest Conference of the United Church of Christ on August 8, 2014. When his position as a hospice chaplain ended because his hospice was closing, he began this new work of helping people within the UCC connect to those working for immigrant justice. He and his husband, Rob, also began a journey as foster parents in 2013 and have had a foster son for the past year and a half. Their son turns eighteen in November and intends to remain a part of their family after that date.

Dan Snyder ('82) will be teaching his "Inward Activism, Outward Prayer" workshop at Woolman Hill in February. This workshop explores strategic nonviolence as a model for theological reflection, depth psychology, spiritual practice, and social witness. Anyone interested can get more information at the Woolman Hill Web site at this link: <http://bit.ly/snyder-woolman> (PDF). Hope to see you there!

Ingrid Fabianson ('01) continues to care for her 102-year-old father-in-law, Wolf Bauer. She has also recently been hired by the new hospital on San Juan Island to serve as the sole social worker in the small inpatient department. "I always hoped to find such a job here on this small island. I am enjoying the work. Cheers to all my Earlham Friends."

Adriana Cabrera-Velásquez ('08) continues her work as Christian Peacemaker Teams (CPT's), personnel coordinator, combining work online with CPT volunteers from her home in Paipa with trips abroad for CPT events and visits to CPT teams. In March 2014, Adriana spent a month in Sulaimani, Iraqi Kurdistan, coleading a CPT training, sharing time with the team on the ground, and getting to know CPT's local partners in the area. Currently, Adriana is in conversations with Ben Brazil to lead a CPT delegation of ESR students to Colombia in May 2015. She and her wife, Silvia Restrepo, moved to a beautiful country house in Paipa, Boyacá, Colombia, where they have started to live an intentional life of care for nature and the environment. This has come with a new passion for composting, adopting two stray dogs and a tomcat, bird-watching, gardening, and biking.

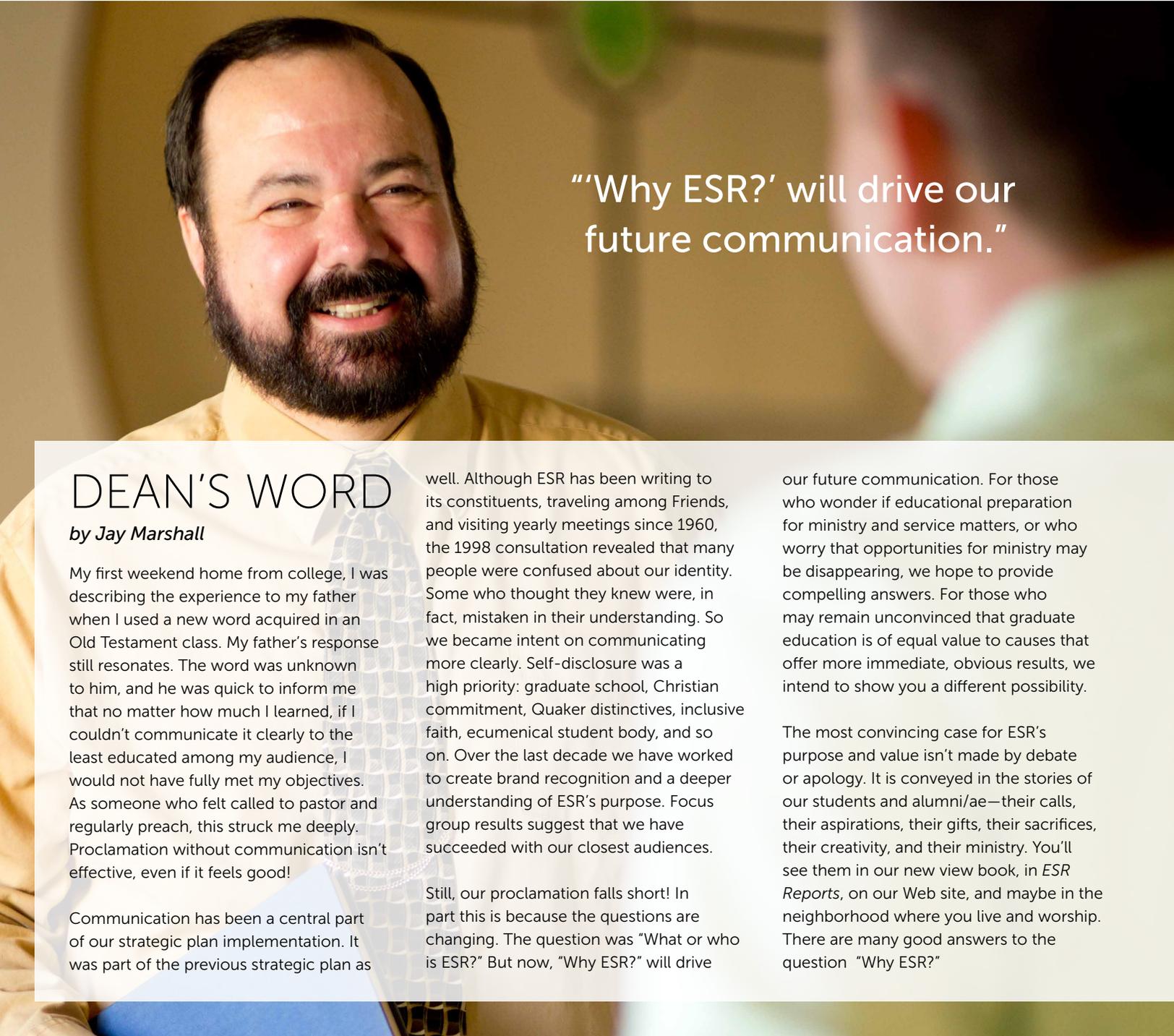
Gary Wagner ('81) is minister of music/pastoral associate for Southport Baptist Church in Indianapolis (American Baptist). In addition to ministry, he has been involved as a staff musician for the Grand Hotel, Mackinac Island, Michigan, and the Greenbrier Hotel in West Virginia, with engagements in Europe and South America as well.

Julie-Ann Silberman-Bunn ('91) was recruited by the Main Line Unitarian Church in Devon, Pennsylvania, to the position of developmental minister of religious education. Julie-Ann began her position at Main Line on August 1. In this position she is responsible for all of the children's religious education programming, including their time in the weekly worship service of the congregation. Main Line is a 600+ member congregation, and Julie-Ann is responsible for reinvigorating their children's and youth programs. She is fortunate to have three staff members helping her in this major task. Julie-Ann and her family moved from Moorestown, NJ, to Malvern, PA. She would love to hear from former classmates and friends. Her address is 181 Blackberry Lane, Malvern, PA 19355, and her cell number is 203-231-8243.



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CHANGE SERVICE REQUESTED

A photograph of a man with a dark beard and mustache, smiling warmly. He is wearing a light-colored, possibly yellow, collared shirt. The background is softly blurred, showing what appears to be an indoor setting with a window and some greenery.

“‘Why ESR?’ will drive our future communication.”

DEAN'S WORD

by Jay Marshall

My first weekend home from college, I was describing the experience to my father when I used a new word acquired in an Old Testament class. My father's response still resonates. The word was unknown to him, and he was quick to inform me that no matter how much I learned, if I couldn't communicate it clearly to the least educated among my audience, I would not have fully met my objectives. As someone who felt called to pastor and regularly preach, this struck me deeply. Proclamation without communication isn't effective, even if it feels good!

Communication has been a central part of our strategic plan implementation. It was part of the previous strategic plan as

well. Although ESR has been writing to its constituents, traveling among Friends, and visiting yearly meetings since 1960, the 1998 consultation revealed that many people were confused about our identity. Some who thought they knew were, in fact, mistaken in their understanding. So we became intent on communicating more clearly. Self-disclosure was a high priority: graduate school, Christian commitment, Quaker distinctives, inclusive faith, ecumenical student body, and so on. Over the last decade we have worked to create brand recognition and a deeper understanding of ESR's purpose. Focus group results suggest that we have succeeded with our closest audiences.

Still, our proclamation falls short! In part this is because the questions are changing. The question was "What or who is ESR?" But now, "Why ESR?" will drive

our future communication. For those who wonder if educational preparation for ministry and service matters, or who worry that opportunities for ministry may be disappearing, we hope to provide compelling answers. For those who may remain unconvinced that graduate education is of equal value to causes that offer more immediate, obvious results, we intend to show you a different possibility.

The most convincing case for ESR's purpose and value isn't made by debate or apology. It is conveyed in the stories of our students and alumni/ae—their calls, their aspirations, their gifts, their sacrifices, their creativity, and their ministry. You'll see them in our new view book, in *ESR Reports*, on our Web site, and maybe in the neighborhood where you live and worship. There are many good answers to the question "Why ESR?"