

# The Open Door

*Congratulations to  
the class of 2011!*

## Inside this Issue

- 2 Message from the President
- 3 Commencement 2011
- 4 The Seminary's Master of Arts Program:  
A New Alumnus and Two Students Share their Experiences
- 6 Grace Grows a Garden
- 8 Ministry behind Locked Doors:  
A BTS Student Finds Intrinsic Spirituality at the Cumberland County Jail
- 12 Ministry and Spiritual Poverty

## MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

At the beginning of the seminary's 2011-2012 year, I am excited to tell you about some of the ways in which BTS is evolving. I'm also writing to thank you for your friendship and support on behalf of our unique place of spiritual formation and learning.

Nearly 200 years ago, BTS came into being on the edge of a beckoning northern frontier. Today, we who form the seminary community also find ourselves approaching new frontiers. Like many who have gone before us, we are venturing into a future that at times can seem frighteningly unfamiliar. Yet we journey with God and with a profound sense of trust in God's guiding presence.

This trust is reflected throughout our community by:

- Students who have the courage to explore and embrace a spiritual path as they engage in rigorous learning;
- Faculty who have hearts for teaching that engages students' highest capacities;
- Staff who make uncompromising efforts in support of the BTS mission;
- Alumni/ae who reveal the value of a seminary education, acting as agents of love, transformation, and justice in church and community;
- Trustees whose visionary leadership sets a course for continuing faithfulness;
- Churches that embrace the leadership of our alumni/ae and mentor our students.

On a personal note, this seminary has prepared me for service through the Master of Divinity program, shaping and forming me for Christian ministry and lifelong theological learning. BTS has also helped me to deepen my spirituality and has sharpened my ministry skills through the Doctor of Ministry program.

With God's help, we will continue to be a place where authentic spiritual formation occurs and where God's ways of justice and compassion inform all that we are, and all that we do, through whatever vocational choices we make.

Throughout our history we have been a school of opportunity, helping women and men find a way to respond to God's call in their lives. We continue to work to break down barriers to a theological education. Today, we are exploring ways to dramatically increase options for accessing our courses. Online education is on our horizon. While online learning will offer convenience and flexibility,

making theological education more accessible to those who may be marginalized by distance or time is a justice issue for us.

Finally, as we develop plans for online courses, we have initiated and will further develop more flexible scheduling of onsite courses, broaden our evening offerings, and expand options for intensive courses.

Our former academic dean Dr. Glenn Miller will tell you that an essential characteristic of BTS over its history has been its "scrappy" nature. Our staff and faculty remain "scrappy." Our students remain dedicated and passionate. Our alumni/ae are an enduring inspiration. And we thank you for being part of this community, companions on a journey of discovery, trusting in the God who promises us a future.

Peace be with you.



The Reverend Dr. Robert Grove-Markwood  
President

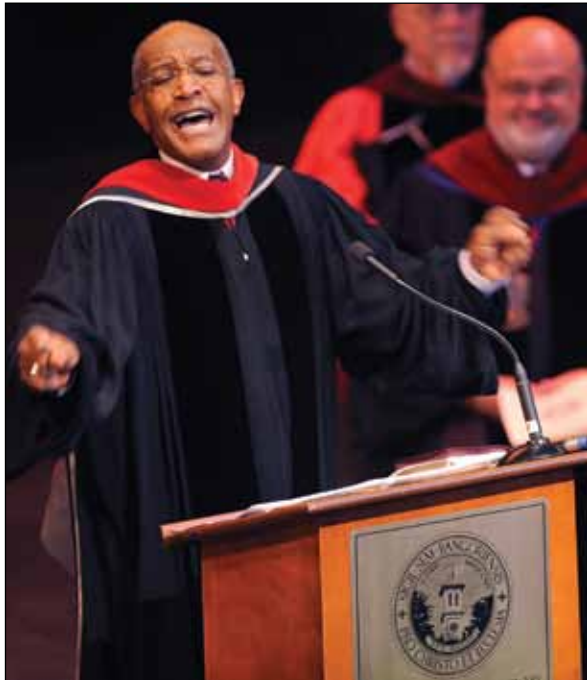


On the cover: **The Class of 2011** (front to back, and left to right): (1st col.) Timothy Hall, Ross King, Andrew Files, (2nd col.) Charles "Chick" Carroll, Aaron French, (3rd col.) Chelsea Whipple, Peter Michaud, Angela Tarbox, Susan Cole, (4th col.) Pamela Nourse, Suzanne Roberts, Amanda Wagner, Heather Blais, (5th col.) Kathleen Martin, Petra Smyth, Phyllis Merritt, Barbara Chodkowski, (6th col.) Linda Brewster, Melissa Marquis, Bree Candland, Izzie Radford-Nash, Kathleen Connelly. *Jane Mary Frost (In Absentia)*

# Commencement 2011

*Bound by God's far purpose in one living whole,  
Move we on together to the shining goal*

—from “Forward through the Ages,” recessional hymn



Commencement speaker The Rev. Dr. James A. Forbes, Jr.

On Friday May 20, at Commencement 2011, 23 members of the senior class of 2011, Bangor Theological Seminary, were awarded their Master of Divinity and Master of Arts degrees. Presided over by President Kent Ulery and Academic Dean Richard Snyder; Senior Class Advisor and Dean of Students Susan E. Davies; Waldo Professor of Ecclesiastical History Dr. Glenn Miller; and Chair of the Board of Trustees, H. Lowell Brown, the commencement ceremony was enriched by the contributions of many individuals who spoke, played music, sang, performed liturgical dance, read from the Bible in Hebrew, Greek, and English, and led prayers.

A number of special moments graced the short ceremony. Commencement speaker, the Reverend Dr. James A. Forbes, President of the Healing of the Nations Foundation, delivered a rousing address, “People of Faith, Speak Up,” in which he talked about the moral and ethical nature of choices about money for families, churches, and organizations, as well as municipalities, states, and nations. Dr. Forbes challenged the audience to live their faith in making financial decisions and in urging others to reflect the Gospel in allocating resources. “God is deeply concerned with budgetary deliberations and decisions,” he said. “What we do with the resources of the earth is an expression of our commitment to God’s creation.”

BTS extends its warmest congratulations to its 2011 graduates:

Heather Blais	Melissa Marquis
Linda Brewster	Kathleen Martin
Bree Candland	Phyllis Merritt
Charles “Chick” Carroll	Peter Michaud
Barbara Chodkowski	Pamela Nourse
Susan Cole	Izzie Radford-Nash
Kathleen Connelly	Suzanne Roberts
Andrew Files	Petra Smyth
Aaron French	Angela Tarbox
Jane Mary Frost	Amanda Wagner
Timothy Hall	Chelsea Whipple
Ross King	

*We are so proud of you. We know you have accomplished so much already, and we can't wait to see what you will contribute in the years to come. God bless you.*



M.Div. graduate Linda Brewster proudly shows off her new diploma.



Members of the class of 2011 and BTS Choir sing during the Baccalaureate Order of Service.



## Becoming a Stronger Practitioner of Ethics

by Peter Michaud, M.A., 2011

In the spring of 2007, I faced yet another of many ethical concerns as an allied health professional. In a career that had spanned more than 35 years, incidents that raised ethical questions seemed to be occurring more often, and, most of the time, I felt stymied as to what action to take, if any. As a Christian from a Catholic tradition, I had a good beginning in the development of my moral character and an ability to recognize right from wrong. However, I did not have any definitive formal training in ethics, nor had I undertaken any in-depth reading in that discipline. The missing piece was a reliable cognitive ability that could enable quicker thought and action and also yield optimal resolution. I will readily admit that, in the midst of an ethical challenge, I was often slow to act due to the lengthy and burdensome process of pondering what to do or a lack of resolve to see an action



through. I needed more instruction in order to have more confidence in the principles I already possessed.

BTS does more than train clergy; it enables all its students to develop a ministry of care, understanding, and justice. The Seminary has given me a deeper, more expansive knowledge that will help me develop an ability to advance ethical behavior and thought both for the students I teach and also among the people with whom I work. But my time at BTS has taught me the value of developing prudence of thought and action. It has taught me

the reality that moral common ground does exist among people from the various cultures, religions, and political perspectives of the world. Most of all, it has taught me that a focus on connections between people can yield a common ground necessary for creating ethical balance in most relationships. BTS has

not just instructed me in the concepts of ethics. The Seminary has helped me to be an ethical person.

Even if I never develop a strong voice to promote ethical thinking and behavior for the many, BTS has taught me the value of being a good example for the fw. With my redefined sense of compassion, as modeled by BTS, I can now follow a better Christian path with clarity and resolve. As an *alumnus*, I feel honored and blessed to remain an ongoing part of the BTS community.

## A Mother's Voyage

by Molly MacAuslan, M.A. student, interviewed by her daughter, Olivia

**Olivia:** You were religious as a child, but once you got older, you didn't seem to have as much interest. What made you come back to religion, and why have you gone back to school?

**Molly:** Good question, Liv! I wouldn't have described myself as religious when I was a child, but I did go to Sunday School until eighth grade, and in high school I worked in the nursery on Sunday mornings and went to youth group Sunday evenings...so I was pretty active in

my local UCC church. It always felt like a safe, welcoming, and accepting place.

Studying at BTS appealed to me for a couple of reasons—first because as an adult, I'd been intrigued by the fact that religion seems to be integral to the human experience—and yet religion is experienced and expressed in so many different ways around the world and throughout time. I wanted to have a fuller understanding of a variety of beliefs and traditions. Second, I wondered what had happened to the church of my youth, why membership levels in the mainstream Christian denominations have diminished, why the liberal



church doesn't seem to be relevant to so many of my family and friends, and why the literalists control the message in our country today.

### **Olivia: What fascinates you most about what you're learning?**

*Molly:* One of the things that I most enjoy about BTS is that there are no “secrets,” no questions that are “off limits” or unacceptable (sort of like at our house!).

Beyond that, I probably shouldn't be surprised, but I've been amazed by the depth and breadth of the message of Christianity. When you're in second grade, you learn a bit about math...and when you're in fifth grade you get some exposure to some more complicated concepts... and when you study calculus in high school you're thinking very differently than you thought earlier. It's the same with Christianity—there are so many facets to God's message, to God's relationship with His people. I was stuck at the fifth grade level, as I think many people are. I'm not sure that there's a better forum for learning at a higher level than at seminary.

### **Olivia: What have you learned, not only about the history of religion, but about yourself?**

*Molly:* Another good question. I suppose I've been surprised to find that I'm a Christian.

### **Olivia: How do you make time for school and home life?**

*Molly:* There are definitely days when I wish I had started work on my MA at an earlier stage in life; but I know I wouldn't have had the maturity to learn what I've needed to learn at BTS at those stages. Having said that, I generally take only one class each semester so I can give the responsibilities of each area of my life the necessary time and energy each requires and deserves.

## Seeking Dreams beyond What Seems Possible

*by Cherie Sukeforth, M.A. student*

For many years before beginning working on my Master Degree at Bangor Theological Seminary, I had been involved in Biblical Studies. However, I always felt I needed to go deeper, to find out what the story was behind the scriptures as written. I enrolled in one distance learning course from a reputable college and learned much. However, the lack of interaction between the professor, other students, and me was striking. I realized I needed to learn in a community of like-minded people where we could stimulate each other in thought and go deeper in meaning than I could do in isolation.

The fall of 2009 found me attending BTS for the first time. I enrolled in two Old Testament courses taught by Michelle Ellis. Her love of Hebrew Scripture was evident from the first class, and by the second week of classes I knew for sure that I was where God intended me to be. Michelle's classes were always lively. There was much discussion stemming from what each of us was gleaning from the texts, and we readily learned from each other and from Michelle. We were asked to stretch beyond what we thought we could do and to seek original meaning within the texts. Our eyes were opened to new understandings as we learned that before you can apply the message in a modern day context, you must first view the text within its original social worldview.

The world of the Ancient Near East began to unfold and, as it did, I began to find that story which I had been seeking. So-called discrepancies within the Hebrew Bible began to

make sense to me as I learned that, within each book, there is evidence of more than one contributor writing with a similar, yet different understanding. I found that I could identify the Yahwist and the Elohist writers and find the thread of each of the writings, which were ultimately tied together by a redactor. The Hebrew Scriptures became alive to me, and I found a passion to wade deeper into what became my area of specialization for the MA Degree.

Bangor Theological Seminary provides me and other learners with the access to a community of wonderful caring professors, mentors, and other students who strive to partner with each other and with God as we journey together. I am so grateful to everyone who creates this warm, caring environment where I can stretch my mind and where I am encouraged to seek dreams beyond what I imagine is possible.

When I travelled to Guatemala with the seminary last January, the most important lesson I learned was that all people are connected through God's grace regardless of location—that the wholeness for which we all strive is made more complete in our awareness of each other. I know that is also true for the community that studies at BTS and for those in the greater community who continually support us. We are all connected, and, without each other, what I and others have gained by becoming part of the seminary would not be possible. For that, I am deeply thankful.

# Grace Grows a Garden

*“What is Grace,” I asked God. And God said, “All that happens.”—John of the Cross*

by Elizabeth Lowe,  
M.A., 2010

Welcome through my open door. As we walk, it is my hope that my story will be a light for the recognition of grace in your life; that it will remind you to value your time spent at Bangor Theological Seminary, wearing it like a robe, reaching back into those deep pockets of wisdom and compassion when the road is rough; and that it will deepen your awareness of your own potential to grow, to create, and to minister for your own good and the good of God’s people.

## A Seminary Uses Grace and Grows a Woman

In May 2010, I walked out of Bangor Theological Seminary having completed a four-year journey filled with deep meaning and growth. For several weeks, I came home from my hospital ministry in a kind of daze. I felt empty as I realized there was no paper due, no assigned reading to complete, no mystics to examine, just—no—more. That emptiness stayed with me until, one day, as I was digging out a new flower bed, a voice inside me said, “If seminary was for growth, then grow something!”

When I’d entered BTS, my backpack held the following: fear of authority, an unformed theology, anger



destruction, or accidents. It’s important to point out that this was not a school for exceptional children, but an ordinary K-12 school system in a typical district. Each time we lost a child, the faculty would discuss the need for closure for the school com-

and aversion toward my childhood religion, and low self-esteem. But my pack also contained my strong desire to serve as a deeply prepared and competent chaplain. And, by the time I graduated, I’d been transformed by theological education, by clinical pastoral education at Hartford Hospital and Maine Medical Center, and by the BTS faculty’s confidence that, if I dug deep into myself, I would find I could do anything. A new and proud sense of my own authority, outrage over injustice in the world, compassion and forgiveness, and new skills had all become part of me. They inspired a new feeling of confidence that I could achieve goals I’d once left behind.

## Enter the Memorial Garden

Four years earlier, in 2002, I’d retired from a forty-year teaching career. My experience ranged from teaching six year-olds to sixty-plus year-olds, and my greatest joys had come during the 26 years I’d taught teenagers. Over the years, some of those students lost their lives to abuse, illness, self-

munities, as well as for the townspeople.

In one school property, there was an area on the grounds replete with trees and grass, with space for a flower garden, benches, and perhaps a fountain. This area started several teachers dreaming. We approached town officials with a plan to create and care for a memorial garden at the site. Two of us planned to integrate an age-appropriate curriculum on staying safe and grieving. Others mapped out fundraising, the purchase of benches, and planting. Another teacher had small cards printed with phone numbers of local agencies who could be reached in emergencies. But our ideas met with objections: “We might need the area for expansion”; “People might find this morbid.” The officials didn’t understand how much good was possible. After a while, we laid our dream down.

*Fast forward.* Three weeks after graduating from seminary, I came across yearbooks from my teaching days. I flipped through them, looking



at photos of children I'd once taught. A light came on, and I remembered that "laid down" dream. I headed outside and walked around my front lawn. Taking my time, slowly looking, I realized I was standing on holy ground. The foundation for the Memorial Garden was under my feet. A Buddhist Chaplain friend would help me craft text for a sign: *"Wellspring Memorial Garden: to the memory of all children who stayed as long as they were able."*

Fueled with hope, I reconnected with my colleagues from years ago. We set aside two weekends in June to meet, plan, and plant—and the joy began. With monetary gifts from graduation, I hired a landscaper to remove turf and to truck in topsoil and mulch. We planted rose bushes and a Japanese Maple Tree. One friend gave a beautiful fountain containing a light that was visible at night. My sister Mary drove from South Carolina with a park bench. This outpouring brought to mind the translation from the Aramaic in *Prayers of the Cosmos*: "Blest are they who soften rigid places; in humus and in humor God is theirs."

### Grace Grows Goodness

I am grateful to all who made the Memorial Garden a reality. Two BTS professors in particular drove

me to plumb the depths of my being to recover my self-esteem and conquer fear and anger. Another softened my spiritual edges by introducing me to mystics I could relate to, such as those of the Buddhist tradition, as well as Rumi and Rilke. These teachers are present in the garden.

Elders from the nursing home at which I minister now visit, alone or with children from a daycare. Folks from the Wisdom's Women's Center come and bring their friends. My neighbors, as well as members of my church, sit or walk in contemplation. The garden is a blessing and a dream realized. I invite any of my seminary

family to come, to rest, and to see.

It has always been a delight for me to discover that beauty has a way of multiplying itself. Think of the times you've noticed a young, flowering crabapple in the midst of evergreen trees or a pussy willow in a small wetland. That is probably the work of birds or the wind; however it is amazing, as I see it. This article cannot address the suffering of those who died, which perhaps was, most often, avoidable. Yet, as I walk and talk with the children, I feel the influence of their souls. Flowers grow lush and new species of birds come to nest. Goodness has a way of growing.



Elizabeth Lowe (left) and Dr. Ann Johnston

*Chaplain Elizabeth Lowe, endorsed by the Episcopal Diocese of Maine, ministers to a 214-bed residential care and rehabilitation center. She serves on the Team of the Palliative Care Initiative at St. Mary's Regional Medical Center, as well as on the Board for HIV AIDS. She is an active member of Integrity Maine, which works toward equality for men and women of the Gay-Lesbian-Transgendered-Bisexual community. In this effort, she focuses on youth who are bullied and abused because they are suspected of being different.*

### Your Planned Gift: An Invaluable Investment in your Seminary

Please remember BTS in your will. With a simple bequest, you can help ensure the future of this unique place of spiritual formation and learning. For many decades, planned gifts have been essential to the vitality of our seminary in northern New England, and they will remain so as we forge ahead into our exciting future. We warmly invite you to become part of this great philanthropic legacy.

Please call Lesley Heiser, Vice President for Advancement, at 207-774-5212, ext. 202 or email her at [lheiser@bts.edu](mailto:lheiser@bts.edu) to let us know of the planned gift you have made, to request language that may be used in making a bequest in your will, or to discuss other planned giving options.

# Ministry behind Locked Doors:

## A BTS Student Finds Intrinsic Spirituality at the Cumberland County Jail

by Linda Mawhorter

In keeping with the holiday spirit, we wore Santa hats, felt antlers, or red and green. Our choir group was excited to be going Christmas caroling on a dark frosty night! Reverend Jeffrey “the Rev” McIlwain greeted us, prayed with us, and sent us on our way. With a little nervous laughter, we approached our destination with its windowless corridors, which closed at one end with a loud clang of a heavy door before the other end opened. We instinctively walked closer together as a Correctional Officer (CO) accompanied us to each of three different pods at the Cumberland County Jail in Portland, Maine (a pod is an open area surrounded by two levels of cells). Inmates had not been notified of our arrival—one man behind swinging shower doors, startled, quickly put a big towel around himself, and tried to get to back to his cell with dignity intact.

We clustered near the door. After the men were counted, the cell doors opened with another loud clang, and the inmates quickly came out. They looked at us, and we looked at them. They were men of varying ages all wearing orange jumpsuits, some of them persons of color in this very white state of Maine, many with extensive tattoos. One excitedly called out, “Look! Christmas carolers!” They eagerly looked over the top level railing, filled the seats in the open area below, and sat or stood on the stairwells. Many smiled at us. As

we sang first one song, then another, one was overheard to say, “Oh, it’s been so long since I’ve heard music.” Some closed their eyes as they listened. Several softly joined in as we sang, “Silent Night,” one with tears in his eyes.

One excitedly called out, “Look! Christmas carolers!”... Several softly joined in as we sang, “Silent Night,” one with tears in his eyes.

All the inmates spontaneously applauded and cheered after each song. As we began singing in one pod, an older inmate with long gray hair, missing teeth, and many tattoos, jumped up and went to his cell. He got something, wrote on it, and passed it around. Every inmate in that pod made a point of signing what turned out to be a Christmas card in which they thanked us, blessed us, and expressed their appreciation for our visit. The inmates whistled, clapped, and hollered their thanks as we left each pod, after

only about 20 minutes of singing in each. We returned to the cold night air with smiles on our faces, while they remained inside. That card remains pinned to the bulletin board in our choir room as a vivid testimony to the memory of our ministry behind locked doors.

### Hidden and Waiting

Here, in a building in downtown Portland that most people can’t see or locate, hundreds of men and women reside. They share small cells and peer through thick windows set in heavy doors waiting to be released periodically from lockdown into the common area, where they have little to do except remain under 24-hour

surveillance. Some play cards to while away the time, others read books, exercise, watch a little TV. They wash their hair and do their laundry. In that same facility, painted a utilitarian pale green on the inside, jail employees are also cloistered, including correctional officers, social workers, kitchen staff, nurses, administrative assistants, and bailiffs. The noise level is always high, and the light is harsh.

Who are these inmates? They are human beings, plain and simple. Why are they in jail? All have been accused of wrongdoing. A few are completely innocent, but because they can’t make bail and have not yet been brought to trial, they remain incarcerated, sometimes for months at a time. Some have been found guilty and await sentencing. If sentenced to serve time, they will then be transferred to a prison to complete their sentence. Some are in jail waiting for the Immigration Service to decide if they will be deported or not. Some are housed awaiting federal transfer. Because this is meant to be a waystation between trial, sentencing, and punishment, there is little available in the way of activities or rehabilitation programs, compared with the prisons. Here, most stays are measured in months, as opposed to prisons where the terms are in years.

Prisons house inmate populations that are subdivided into those requiring low, medium, and high security. In jail, the reasons for incarceration range from immigration issues, minor misdemeanors, and burglaries, to drug charges, sexual assaults, and murder. They are all housed together, although there is a small higher security unit reserved for those inmates who themselves need protection or



for those who offend while in jail. For some, this is a first-time charge. Others already have a lengthy criminal record.

## Counsel and Kleenex

Reverend Jeff McIlwain is the jail chaplain and an alumnus of Bangor Theological Seminary (BTS). Few jails employ chaplains due to a lack of resources, while most, but not all, prisons do hire chaplains. The Rev's job is varied and endless. As a volunteer with him for the last ten months, I have seen how badly his services are needed. He counsels inmates who are spiritually seeking and trying to understand their own behavior and motivations. He counsels those dealing with anxiety, fear, shame, and guilt. He gives practical advice to some who want to know how to get back on track. He talks about God, but also about the importance of family, honesty, responsibility, faith, and avoiding drug and alcohol addiction.

He coordinates the religious volunteers who participate in Bible studies and religious services. He is constantly on the lookout for Bibles, Korans, rosaries, and other religious materials to meet the needs of his diverse religious community. He contacts imams, priests, or rabbis for those who need them. He helps inmates make calls to family members in the event of a crisis, relays news of family deaths, conducts funerals, and answers questions about how to get married while in jail. That just scratches the surface.



Linda Mawhorter with Rev. Jeffrey McIlwain

But he also cautions me against misty-eyed naiveté saying, "Always, always, remember that there are also so many victims who need someone to talk with."

As he walks down the corridors, inmates smile at him saying, "Hey Rev, how're you doing? Did you get my request?" He laughs back, "All in good time, my man!" COs tease him about his supposed misdeeds and warn me to keep an eye on him, while he complains about Lily, his dog who likes to pee on the carpet at home. Sometimes, COs pull him aside to alert him to an inmate who could use

his help or to discuss a personal issue of their own, and he commiserates deeply. In his office, taped to the pale green cinder block wall with blue duct tape, is a big sign that reads, "Thank you, Rev!" It's signed by a group of inmates.

On his desk rests a large box of soft Kleenex instead of just a roll of harsh paper; he says inmates take notice of it and appreciate its availability for the tears that arise when he has brought them into his office to deliver bad news. He feels for these people and says

that seeing just one person turn his or her life around makes his job worthwhile. The day he stops feeling that way is the day he will stop working at the jail. But he also cautions me against misty-eyed naiveté saying, "Always, *always*, remember that there are also so many victims who need someone to talk with."

## Listening to Stories

The experience of singing carols at the jail stayed with me. The next semester, in the context of a course on ministry at BTS, I decided to complete my practicum hours at the Cumberland Jail. This provided the

opportunity for me to visit at length with inmates. Here is what I saw and heard when I looked in their eyes and listened to their stories.

I saw many-faceted human beings who are also children of God. They had regrets, often quite profound. They experienced loneliness, anger, sadness, shame, and anxiety. They worried about their future. Some expressed their desire to do the right thing and wanted to avoid returning to jail or resuming their addictions. Many also expressed love for their parents or caregivers, spouses, children, pets, nature and the outdoors, the color of the fall leaves, art, music, and their God and religious faith.

One widow reminisced with me about her husband, who used to give her roses every day. She nursed him for several years until he died of diabetic complications. One man who worked as an outfitter described his enjoyment of horses; he was pleased to pass on his love of animals to his daughter, who is now a veterinarian. Another expressed his satisfaction at seeing evidence of his construction work on buildings around Portland. One relayed in detail his faith in a

God of miracles, who healed his back at a revival meeting. A woman tearfully described to me how much it hurt to be called stupid because her English was poor, when she was fluent in three Eastern European languages. She prayed three times a day in each language for her safety while in jail and for her release, which came soon.

## Beyond Statistics: An Intrinsic Spirituality

Statistics bear out the facts that people in jail are often poor, addicted to alcohol or drugs, unhealthy, under-privileged, under-educated or illiterate, and mentally ill. Most are incarcerated for nonviolent offenses. It is also clear that many have themselves been the victims of crime and abuse. Most of them made a mistake, large or small, which resulted in their incarceration. Many express remorse, while some do not. Most admit that they have broken the law and should pay a price. Some only make excuses or blame others. Is that so different from what you or I do?

In contemplating our criminal justice system, terms might quickly spring to mind such as retribution, punishment, and control. Other concepts such as love, respect, humanity, and spirituality might not. The corrections literature is replete with articles about better methods of containment, advertisements for durable prison furniture, and improvements in modern prison construction. One has to search harder to find those that refer to the intrinsic spirituality that inmates bring to their experience of incarceration, their basic humanity and dignity, and their hopes and fears which they

do not leave at the prison door.

Numerous books and articles detail the statistics which tell part of the story. Compared with the 300,000 people incarcerated in the U.S. in 1970, forty years later over 2.3 million are now incarcerated in America's federal, state, and local prisons and jails. This is the highest per capita incarceration rate in U.S. history. The U.S. has six percent of the world's population but holds 25 percent, *one-quarter*, of the world's prisoners, the highest rate in the world. Some counties in the U.S. now have *one-third* of their residents behind bars. The disparities between inmates and the general population are striking, as no other country in the world incarcerates such a high percentage of its racial or ethnic minorities. We

imprison a greater percentage of our black population than South Africa did at the height of apartheid. Human rights organizations have criticized the U.S. criminal justice system for violations of human and civil rights.

The fastest growing segments of the population being incarcerated today include women and older inmates, those over 50 years of age. It is estimated that the latter will comprise one-third of the prison population by the year 2030. Older inmates are far more expensive to house due to health issues. Our prisons are rapidly becoming some of the largest health-care providers in the country. There is every indication that this trend will continue. We spend \$50 billion a year for the direct administration and maintenance of our prisons and jails, which takes an enormous economic toll on our society.

The U.S. has 6% of the world's population but holds 25% of the world's prisoners, the highest rate in the world.

## Racial Disparity Feeds a Vicious Cycle

Since violent crime has, in fact, gradually fallen, what accounts for the massive increase in the number of human beings behind bars? The majority of convictions are related to drug offenses prompted by the War on Drugs. Studies have shown that illegal drug use is fairly even across the economic and ethnic spectrum. Yet, in some states, black men are incarcerated on drug charges at rates of 20 to 50 times higher than that of white men. Harsher sentencing laws with mandatory minimums, "three strikes" laws, and elimination of parole programs now lead to the incarceration of individuals who at one time would have been fined or sentenced to an alternative such as community service. More youths are being tried and sentenced as adults. Meanwhile, funds are being cut for programs addressing drug and alcohol addiction.

Reviews show that whites use marijuana and cocaine with the same or higher frequency than persons of color. It is the increased policing in poor, urban neighborhoods that accounts for the disproportionate incarceration of Blacks, Hispanics, and other ethnic minorities for relatively minor drug possession charges. Sentencing laws widen the disparity in incarceration rates still further. Cocaine provides one example. Current laws result in significantly lighter sentences for conviction of possession of expensive powder cocaine, used typically by more affluent individuals, than does conviction of possession of cheap crack cocaine. That fact plus these uneven rates of policing reinforce the racial disparity between those who get a lesser sentence and those who are incarcerated and labeled as felons.

## A BTS Student Finds Intrinsic Spirituality at the Cumberland County Jail

Studies of our prison-industrial complex show that housing first-time non-violent offenders with hardened and violent recidivists in jail or prison serves to criminalize the former.

We must remember that the punishment to which the person has been sentenced is loss of liberty. It is not degrading physical or sexual abuse while incarcerated, whether at the hands of other inmates or even prison employees, both of which unfortunately happen all too often. Many seem to feel that incarceration should be as degrading as possible because “they deserve it.” We need to ask ourselves what type of person this kind of treatment releases

back into society. Once labeled a felon, a person can lose the right to vote, to low-income housing, to food stamps, to many types of employment, and to certain educational grants. These losses contribute to a vicious and shame-filled cycle that encourages recidivism, the ongoing disruption of families, and increasing numbers of children raised by single parents or placed in foster care.

### Religion and Prayer, Coping and Comfort

Studies have shown that many inmates bring to prison significant spiritual and religious inner resources. Religion is cited by many inmates as their most important asset while incarcerated. T. R. Clear has defined the real goal of religion in prison as being “to counteract the tendency of prisons to dehumanize people and help prevent a further decline in their humanity.”

One of the speakers at the 2011 BTS Convocation, Mr. Julio Medina, founded Exodus Transitional Community, Inc. in New York. Mr. Medina, an ex-felon, obtained a Master of Divinity Degree while incarcerated at Sing Sing Prison. He thus experienced first-hand the difficulties inmates encounter in prison as well as upon their release. He began this organization to more holistically facilitate former prisoners’ reintegration into society, access to meaningful jobs, freedom from addictions, and continued education. Hearing his story and visiting with him over dinner at Convocation was truly inspiring and furthered my interest in prison ministry.

“Most admit that they have broken the law and should pay a price. Some only make excuses or blame others. Is that so different from what you or I do?”

I now know first-hand that multiple opportunities for grace can arise in working with inmates. Yes, I have been warned that some can be manipulative. But I have joined in prayer with those who requested it and also with some who looked startled to be asked. The moment of prayer is one of vulnerability for both the inmate and for me to share in the Spirit of God. I

asked one man, an admitted agnostic, if he would be interested in a prayer. He answered, “Well, if you want to.” I responded, “It’s not what I want but what you want that matters. There can be comfort in knowing that someone is praying for you, even if you don’t yourself.” He thought a moment and then answered, “Well, in that case I would like it. I would appreciate that.” I could tell that he meant it.

I have been changed by my work in the jail and look forward to learning and doing more. The Spirit of God is there, inside those human beings,

whether we can see it or not. Jesus’ instructions are to find release for the captive and to help the least of these. This could be one place for me to start.

*Linda Mawhorter, a former physician, is half-way through her journey to the M.Div. degree at the Portland campus of BTS. She, her husband, Phil, and their four dogs live in Gorham. Linda recommends the book, Good Punishment: Christian Moral Practice and U.S. Imprisonment, as an excellent resource on these subjects. If you would like to contact Linda, you may reach her at [newmainer@maine.rr.com](mailto:newmainer@maine.rr.com)*



Linda’s four dogs Red, Bella, Sadie and Buddy (top to bottom).



# Ministry and Spiritual Poverty

by the Reverend Dr. David H. Lester, M.Div., '87; D.Min., '94

For several years, I knew first-hand the experience of earning fifteen dollars per month too much to be eligible to qualify for food stamps. Today, I find my own past experience of economic poverty reflected in the difficulties of some of my parishioners and many of my neighbors. Such is life in Maine and throughout our nation and world. The U.S. Census reports that a staggering 43.6 million people, or 14.3% of Americans, live in poverty.

At the same time, both scripture and our experience in the world speak to the prevalence of another kind of deprivation. Spiritual poverty can be the most damaging form that poverty can take. We in ministry can learn to discern expressions of spiritual poverty. We can prayerfully seek to be invited to minister to individuals who are expressing deprivation of the spirit. And if we are invited to minister to them, we can offer the pastoral care that can support them in seeking a restored and renewed relationship with God.

Often, spiritual poverty is not what first catches our attention. When it comes to ministering to the poor, we tend to jump to providing time, talent, and/or resources to make sure the people in our church, community, nation, and world have access to a nutritionally balanced meal, a roof over their heads, fuel for their furnace, and safety. Based on years of experience working with the Church and social service agencies, I can attest to the great value of providing a vulnerable person with these essentials.

But it is insufficient to care for the physical needs of people who are



Dr. Lester and John Murphy

poor without also seeking to minister spiritually to them. As the person's presenting crisis begins to recede and he or she achieves some measure of stability, ministers should also gently explore whether the person's spiritual life is neglected or depleted or broken.

What does that brokenness look like? Something has happened or failed to happen that has caused the individual to disconnect from the personal relationship to which God calls each of us. This disconnection is more damaging than economic poverty. One who suffers in this way can sometimes be heard echoing the words of Jesus: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

*The telephone rang at 2 a.m., startling me out of a deep sleep. On the line was Joan, a four-time divorced mother of five and a long-term victim of domestic violence who had also been convicted of assault with a deadly weapon against one of her adult children. In a tearful and quaking voice she said, "Dr. Lester, I have hit the bottom!"*

*There is nothing left for me in this world. I am plain exhausted from all the stress." She then said words no minister wants to hear: "I have a gun in my hand."*

*Twenty minutes later, I opened the passenger door to her car and got in beside her. For what seemed like an eternity, we talked about her life and the incidents that had led her to mental, physical, and spiritual exhaustion. We explored Joan's relationship with God and discussed the power in her new recognition that, on her own, she could do nothing. As the darkness of night became a spring morning, we joined hands and prayed. Then, we set up a series of times to talk and pray again, and I put her in touch with a mental health professional.*

*Over time Joan's relationship with God continued to grow as she prayed on two truths: without God, she could do nothing; and with God, all things were possible.*

As in Joan's case [Joan is not her real name], spiritual poverty can coexist in conjunction with other kinds of deprivation—economic poverty, a relational poverty within the family, and/or a poverty of health. But it's not necessarily the case that people who endure economic poverty are spiritually poor. Very often, the opposite is true. For example, in the spring 2011 issue of *The Open Door*, BTS students wrote of the tremendous graciousness and hospitality with which they were received by villagers in a poor, mountainous region of Guatemala. "We [the seminarians] were thirsty, and 'whenever you see someone thirsty and give them drink, you are Christ to them' (Matt. 25:40). We came to serve, yet found ourselves in need and being served. They [the impoverished villagers] were Christ to us."

Spiritual poverty, then, can stand alone. It can exist in the midst of wealth and privilege and abundance. This is one of the paradoxes of our broken world. It can be hard to discern how to minister to an individual who seems spiritually poor, but also seemingly blessed in almost every other way. However, the need for such ministry exists. Ministers are called to represent the love of God to all, including to those who seem to have *almost* everything they need.



Dr. Lester and wife Joyce

*Rev. Dr. David H. Lester, is a Pastor and member of East Orrington Congregational Church in Orrington, Maine, and currently serves on the Executive Committee for the Congregational Christian Council of Maine. Through the Church and through Social Service Agencies, Dr. Lester is known throughout Northern New England for his work and ministry with the poor among us, paying special attention to "poverty of spirit."*

## BTS Welcomes New Academic Dean



As an ordained elder in the United Methodist Church, Dr. Lewis has worked closely with judicatory leaders and congregations from mainline and Evangelical traditions. He continues to consult with new ministry starts in the United States and Germany and to speak at retreats and conferences about the future of the church amidst the shifting sands of postmodern culture. His research interests are even broader: the various forms of 21st century ministry and their impact, actual and potential, on individuals, institutions, and society. Body art as spiritual expression, landscape metaphors for the spiritual journey, theology in film, the current preference for the spiritual over the religious, and the potentialities of the spiritual imagination all culminate to feed Steve's passion for exploring and charting the intense relevance of Christian expression in the 21st century.

Steve brings that passion to BTS. "I am inspired by this school's legacy. Bangor Theological Seminary has served New England since 1814, preparing individuals for ministry while endeavouring to respond to the changing needs of church and society. BTS in the 21st century balances diverse audiences seeking theological and spiritual education. Today, our community includes those seeking ordination for clergy roles, second-career persons seeking to engage pastoral ministry; younger students following a call to service, discovering spiritual gifts and discerning direction; spiritual seekers who have left organized religion in hopes of finding other means to spiritual fulfilment, and even the curious. BTS is rooted in a strong Christian tradition, yet we invite others to join us on our voyage of imagination and discovery into the heart of God, to embrace the mysterious and familiar, to appreciate the spiritual richness of beauty and awe, pilgrimage and seeking, imagination and creativity, mystery and holy ambiguity. This seminary is a wonderful place to be and also an ideal place from which we can navigate together."

## In Memoriam

### **The Reverend Gary R. Akeley, '88**

The Reverend Gary Russell Akeley passed away Aug. 4, 2011. He was born Nov. 4, 1951, in Presque Isle and attended Fort Fairfield schools, the University of Maine at Presque Isle, and Bangor Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1988 with his Master of Theology degree. He was ordained as a deacon in the United Methodist Church, and, in 1990, he became an elder. He served the communities of Pembroke, Columbia Falls, Orrington, Strong, Salem, Westbrook, South Portland, Randolph and East Pittston. Gary touched the lives of people throughout New England and beyond.

### **The Reverend Dr. Deborah Hall Carney, '86 & '03**

Deborah Carney died Sept. 5, 2011, at age 62, after a brief bout with cancer. Her family settled in Maine before the Revolutionary war. She held a Master of Divinity and a Doctorate of Ministry from Bangor Theological Seminary, from which she graduated with academic honors, receiving the G. Wayne Glick Award for Community Involvement. Her doctoral work focused on the need for the church to include people with intellectual disabilities in the life of the congregation. She devoted her life to serving people with disabilities and people who are disadvantaged. She was a member of St. Patrick's Episcopal Church, Brewer, where she served on the vestry and on the outreach committee. She was a lay Eucharistic minister as well as a Eucharistic minister. Deb was involved in many community activities; she was active in the LGBT community; and she wrote about sexual ethics.

## The BTS Honor Roll of Donors

July 1, 2010 – June 30, 2011, is now available. This year, we are experimenting with making this resource available online and also in print, by request. If you would like to view this resource online, please simply go to the Alumni/ae and Friends section of our website, [www.bts.edu](http://www.bts.edu), and click on Honor Roll of Donors, 2010-2011. If you would like to receive a color print copy, please email Lesley Heiser at [lheiser@bts.edu](mailto:lheiser@bts.edu) or call her at 1-800-287-6781, ext. 202.

BTS cares about all its friends and supporters and is extremely grateful for all gifts. We hope this new method of celebrating our donors will please you. If you have any comments or questions, please let us know. Thank you for your support.

## Marvin Ellison's 2010-2011 sabbatical leave

During the 2010-2011 academic year Professor Marvin Ellison was on sabbatical leave in order to engage in a research and writing project. He has now completed a book tentatively entitled *Making Love Just: An Ethical Guide for the Sexually Perplexed*, which will be published by Fortress Press late summer 2012.

Ellison comments: "These days sexual sin is far less about sex and far more about the misuse of power and exploitation of vulnerability. Therefore, a consensus is emerging about the necessity of redrawing the ethical map, but how should a contemporary Christian ethic of sexuality be formulated? How might we help shift the discourse to emphasize justice and love as the normative expectation for intimate relationships across the boards? Above all, how might we break with a sex-negative, patriarchal religious framework and instead embrace the vitality of a justice-centered spirituality that is women-friendly, gay-affirming, and multiracial and welcomes a diversity of perspectives with the power to name, invoke, and represent the sacred?"

"This book seeks to increase the reader's skills and confidence for engaging in this kind of liberating ethical deliberation and to explore the demands, as well as the opportunities, for embodying sexual justice. Each chapter offers a way into inquiry by first posing a question and then offering a response, all the while inviting readers to explore their own questions and enrich the conversation in ways that will prove useful and even revelatory."

In March Professor Ellison and his partner Frank Brooks, a licensed clinical social worker, traveled to New Zealand, where they both gave public lectures. Marvin lectured on his new book for the St. Andrew's Trust for the Study of Religion and Society in Wellington, and he also presented at St. John College, the Anglican seminary in Auckland. During his sabbatical, Marvin also continued to chair Maine's Religious Coalition Against Discrimination, which co-sponsored an educational conference with the Center for Preventing Hate.



## Alumni/ae Association Adopts New Mission

Last spring, the Executive Committee of the BTS Alumni/ae Association held a strategic planning retreat to identify new leadership/service activities for graduates of the seminary and to craft a new mission statement. The following statement was adopted:

**Responding to the Spirit, we create opportunities that celebrate and nurture alumni/ae and the Seminary.**

---

## Heartfelt Thanks to Kent and Meg Ulery

As many in our community know, Kent Ulery's last day at BTS was June 30, 2011.

Bangor Theological Seminary offers deepest and warmest thanks to Kent and Meg for three years of leadership, friendship, and service. The seminary truly benefited from Kent's stewardship and from his and Meg's many gifts. We will remain grateful for the time, dedication, effort, insights, and prayers with which they graced us.

Kent and Meg have moved closer to beloved family members in the Midwest. We pray God's blessings upon the entire Ulery family.



## No Longer at Ease Now Available

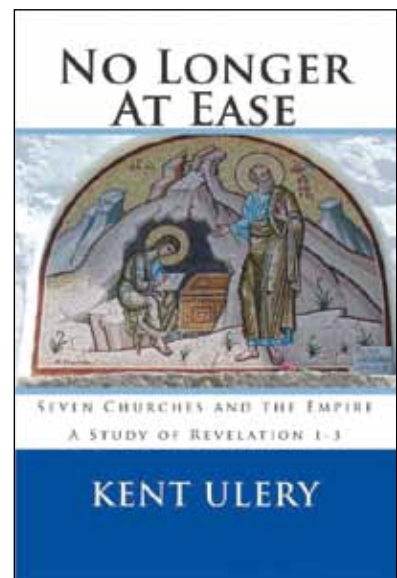
Who is God, who is not, and who are the real American idols? Such questions lie at the heart of Kent's new book, *No Longer at Ease: Seven Churches and the Empire*.

Written for congregational use in adult Bible studies, Kent's book focuses on Revelation's letters to the seven churches, which deal with what it meant to act faithfully in the midst of the Roman Empire. Beginning each chapter with a vignette of a contemporary congregation, Kent invites the modern reader to reflect on what acting faithfully means today as we find ourselves living in the world's first borderless empire.

Revelation is a neglected biblical book, ignored by those who deem it too violent or who find it sexist, anti-

Semitic, too puzzling, or appealing to the lunatic fringe. However, Kent discerns in Revelation an unveiling of the principalities and powers that stake claims on virtually all contemporary institutions, with the result that idolatry plagues those who seek God as much in the 21<sup>st</sup> century as it did in the first century.

The book is ten chapters in length (perfect for a quarter of adult church curriculum); the book concludes with discussion questions, a helpful map, and worship resources.



*No Longer at Ease: Seven Churches and the Empire* is available in print and via Kindle from [amazon.com](http://amazon.com)

# Convocation 2012: Evolving World, Emerging Church

January 9 – 11, 2012 Gracie Theater, Husson University, Bangor



## Rev. Karen Ward

A dual Episcopalian and Lutheran-ordained pastor who describes herself as Episcopal priest and missionary entrepreneur, Reverend Ward is a leader of the post-denominational, emergent church movement. A former pastor and the current director of the Episcopal Village, she provides trainings that support communities seeking a renewed faith and a reinvigorated sense of mission.



## Rev. Eric Elnes, Ph.D.

Dr. Elnes is Senior Minister at Countryside Community Church in Omaha, Nebraska. He received his Ph.D. in Biblical Studies from Princeton Theological Seminary and served as Senior Pastor of Scottsdale Congregational United Church of Christ in Scottsdale, Arizona ([www.artinworship.com](http://www.artinworship.com)) from 1995 to 2008. He creates multi-sensory, experiential worship that transcends classification as “traditional” or “contemporary.”

Featured Musician, Chuck Marohnic, director of Music for Darkwood Brew.



## Ms. Cassie Meyer

Ms. Meyer oversees curriculum at the Interfaith Youth Core, which convenes young people of different identities for cooperative service and dialogue. She has taught at Princeton Theological Seminary, the University of Chicago Divinity School, and McCormick Theological Seminary. She writes about religious pluralism and interfaith cooperation. She holds an M.A. in American Religious History from the University of Chicago.



## Dr. Steven Lewis

Dr. Lewis is Academic Dean at Bangor Theological Seminary. He holds a Ph.D. from St. Louis University and is the author of two books. As an ordained elder in the United Methodist Church, he has worked closely with judicatory leaders and congregations from mainline and Evangelical traditions. He also consults with new ministry starts in the U.S. and Germany.

**Parking will be freely available outside Gracie Theater;  
Special events Monday and Tuesday night; Alumni gathering on Tuesday.  
For more information visit [www.bts.edu/convocation](http://www.bts.edu/convocation)**



Bangor Theological Seminary  
PO BOX 411, Bangor, ME 04402-0411