the Bridge

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Harding University
Graduate School of Religion
1000 Cherry Road
Memphis, TN 38117
www.hugsr.edu

The Year of Christian Community

Human beings are relational creatures. If given a terminal diagnosis, we spend our final days with loved ones and make amends with those from whom we are separated. When we introduce ourselves to others, we share who we are by discussing our relationships at home, school, work and church. Our superheroes increasingly work together in groups, and even those who are "rugged individuals" always have a sidekick, romantic interest, or secret life in normal human society. Consider Tom Hanks' character in the 2000 movie "Castaway" who copes with living on a deserted island by making friends with Wilson the volleyball.

It should not surprise us that we are relational beings. Scripture teaches — and the early church consistently confirmed — that the one God of the Christian faith is also an eternal divine community of Father, Son and Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19, 2 Corinthians 13:14). We, too, were created by God to live in community. Although the exact meaning of the "image of God" is vague in scripture, a number of contemporary scholars conclude that it at least affirms our capacity to relate well to God and other people and our actually relating well. According to the great commandment, the Christian life is fundamentally one of loving God and loving others (Matthew 22:34-40). While sin disrupts our community with God and others, one of the primary New Testament images of salvation is reconciliation (Ephesians 2:14-18).

POWELL

God also saw fit that Christians would participate in the church. To call the church a community would be redundant since the Greek term "ekklesia" means "assembly" or "gathering." The title of Dan Kimball's popular book on "emerging generations" announces *They Like Jesus but not the Church*, but such a stance is not an option for the Christian. The church is a community of worship, mission and spiritual formation where we both shape others and are shaped by others in subtle yet profound ways. Even deep disagreements with sisters and brothers become opportunities for our own spiritual growth, as we are forced to deeper levels of prayer, love and commitment to God and his people. The Christian who sets out alone will soon wither in faith while simultaneously depriving others of encouragement and an example of Christian discipleship. The first believers, in contrast, were characterized by communion with God, fellowship with other believers, and a measure of respect and influence with those in the larger society (Acts 2:42-47).

The Graduate School of Religion fulfills a unique role as a community of learning, ministerial training and spiritual formation. We continually experience the power of community to strengthen faith and mold lives. This year, we invite you to join us as we explore and commit ourselves to community with God and the people of God, and as we eagerly await the new creation when God will dwell with us and we will be God's people (Revelation 21:3).

Mark E. Powell
Associate Professor of Theology

training *ministers* enriching *faith* transforming *leaders*

HUGSR

Harding University Graduate School of Religion

Admissions
800-680-0809
hgsadmissions@hugsr.edu

Advancement
901-761-1355
hgsadvancement@hugsr.edu

The Bridge editor
901-761-1356

HUGSR fax
901-761-1358

Web site
www.hugsr.edu

Dean's office
dean@hugsr.edu

Registrar's office
hgsregistrar@hugsr.edu

Library
hgslib@hugsr.edu

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Editor
Mark Parker

Contributors
Mark E. Powell, Evertt W. Huffard

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Harding University
Graduate School of Religion
1000 Cherry Road
Memphis, TN 38117

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Dean's Note

Dreamers

HUFFARD

This year our theme is Christian Community. We find God at work in the world wherever communities of believers come together to serve and honor God. Christian communities naturally form as centers of reconciliation, proclamation, spiritual formation, affirmation, renewal, sacrificial service, worship and grace. They open their hearts to all people because God loves everyone and Christ died for all. The father sent Jesus to show us the way, and Jesus sent the Spirit to keep the dream alive, build eternal relationships and teach us.

Peter began his sermon in Acts 2 with a quote from Joel the prophet, stating, "Your young men will see visions, and your old men will dream dreams." But what do we do with the visionaries and dreamers? I need much more space to reflect on the dreamers among us today. They can be as irritating as Peter may have been to Jewish leaders in Jerusalem or as inspiring as Paul was to Titus, Timothy and Silas. However, one thing is for sure: A Christian movement cannot thrive without dreamers who have a greater burden for the lost than for the status quo and who always strain forward for the growth of the kingdom.

Robert Dale uses a bell curve to map out the growth and decline of a church. It all begins with a dream followed by belief, goals and structure that supports ministry. At some point, the dream fades on the back of the curve into nostalgia, questioning, polarization and dropout (*To Dream Again*, p. 145). I must admit that this graph has always annoyed me, and I would like to ignore it as lacking adequate statistical data to support it. However, the more I study churches, the more real it seems to me.

> A Christian movement cannot thrive without dreamers who have a greater burden for the lost than for the status quo and who always strain forward for the growth of the kingdom.

If you were to compare this map to the history of church planting among churches of Christ, you would painfully conclude that we are at those final stages of polarization and dropout. Dynamic growth in new church plants in the Northeast took place from 1930-1950; in the Northwest from 1890-1960; in the Midwest from 1930-1950; in California from 1910-1950; in Texas from 1890-1960; and in Tennessee from 1840-1960 (Scott Lambert, *Kairos*). The number of new churches planted dramatically declined each decade in all regions of our country since the 1960s. We are somewhere on the back of the curve.

What happened in the 1960s to reverse the growth? While we can point to upward mobility, suburbanization, nostalgia and polarization as some of the detractors, I see one positive thing that affected us. In the 1960s our dreams shifted from national to global, so that today we have more congregations outside the U.S. God blessed our dreams. I have been blessed to visit missionaries in Kenya, Nigeria and Singapore where churches multiplied and thousands of lives found hope in God through Christ. However, most of the churches that sent these missionaries grew very little at home.

It is time to dream again. God obviously blessed the dreams of those who planted churches nationally and then globally; we need to get it all together now and do both. Dreamers still exist. We have some here at HUGSR and love them because they have a passion for creating new communities of faith everywhere. Pray for revival and renewal in the hearts of church leaders all over the world as we seek God's will in building communities of faithful servants of God.

Dr. Evertt W. Huffard (dean@hugsr.edu)

Meet the Student Association

Name: Caleb Borchers, president
Hometown: Clarkston, Mich.
Undergraduate school: Harding University
Degree sought: M.Div.
Expected graduation: May 2010
Family status: Married
Ministry plans: Church planting
Best experience at HUGSR: I have enjoyed the daily life in the community on campus
Advice for students: You are here to be transformed, not just to learn.
Why are you on the S.A.? I hope to return some of the blessing that I have received from HUGSR.

Name: Preston Cottrell, vice president
Hometown: Pinellas Park, Fla.
Undergraduate school: Harding University
Degree sought: M.A. in historical theology
Expected graduation: May 2010
Family Status: Married
Best experience at HUGSR: It would be either the fellowship events on campus or the feeling after the last final of the semester.
Advice for students: "Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 4:6-7)
Why are you on the S.A.? It is great to know I am a part of what happens at HUGSR. I feel more connected to the community here through my S.A. interactions. Plus, I have a great time while receiving a scholarship!

Name: Kacey Young, secretary/treasurer
Hometown: Tuscola, Texas
Undergraduate school: Harding University
Degree sought: M.A. in counseling
Expected graduation: May 2012
Family status: Single
Ministry plans: Missions or marriage and family therapy
Best experience at HUGSR: I enjoyed the intensive summer courses. You get to know your classmates really well.
Advice for students: You need to get involved in community service in Memphis. You're going to be here a while so you should really involve yourself in the lives of the people here and give back however you can.

Name: Jacob Parnell, communications director
Hometown: Kent, Wash.
Undergraduate school: Pepperdine University
Degree sought: M.Div.
Expected graduation: May 2010
Family status: Married
Ministry plans: Serve as preaching minister at a church
Best experience at HUGSR: I loved getting to preach several times at Kirby Pines Retirement Community.
Advice for students: You should start and finish your papers early.
Why are you on the S.A.? The HUGSR community is a great one to be a part of. The S.A. is just one more way I get to participate in the good things God is doing through HUGSR.

continued on Page 4

Paavo Tucker, Caleb Borchers, Jacob Parnell, Matt Simmons and Preston Cottrell

BRIEFS

ATS Accreditation Renewed for 10 Years

At their January meeting, the Association of Theological Schools renewed accreditation for Harding University Graduate School of Religion for 10 years, the maximum length allowed.

BRIEFS

New Students at Five-Year High

The number of new students entering during the three 2009 semesters rose to the highest number since 2003. During 2009, 68 students entered the Graduate School — an increase of 31 percent from the previous year. "We've noted a shift in the attitude of incoming students," says Mark Parker (M.Div., 2005, mparker@hugsr.edu), assistant vice president overseeing admissions. "Students are seeking programs with a proven record of success and an active emphasis on spiritual formation. This makes Harding Graduate School an ideal environment for campus and distance students alike."

Marisol Rosas, Jen Farmer and Kacey Young

Students

Student Association *continued from Page 3*

Name: Matt Simmons, married on-campus representative
Hometown: Shelbyville, Tenn.
Undergraduate school: Freed-Hardeman University
Degree sought: M.A. in counseling
Expected graduation: May 2010
Family status: Married
Ministry plans: To practice marriage and family therapy at an agency or be a family life minister
Best experience at HUGSR: The best experiences for me at HUGSR are always the various events where the community at HUGSR come together and fellowship.
Advice for students: Don't worry!
Why are you on the S.A.? I want to promote a strong community at HUGSR where students help each other and be stronger Christians.

Name: Marisol Rosas, counseling representative
Hometown: Puebla, Mexico
Undergraduate school: Harding University
Degree sought: M.A. in counseling
Expected graduation: Summer 2011
Family status: Single
Ministry plans: Counseling and ministry care in a church setting.
Best experience at HUGSR: It is hard to choose because there are several. Having lunch with my friends and classmates in between classes is one of the top ongoing experiences.
Advice for students: 1) See this learning experience as a way of God shaping you into a fruitful servant, 2) Do any activity that you love daily.
Why are you on the S.A.? It is a good way to serve other friends and classmates and enhance the atmosphere of camaraderie at HUGSR.

Name: Paavo Tucker, singles representative
Hometown: Varpaisjarvi, Finland
Undergraduate school: Freed-Hardeman University
Degree sought: M.Div.
Expected graduation: May 2011
Family status: Single
Ministry plans: Ministry of study
Best experience at HUGSR: Chapel in spring 2009 was focused on the topic Acts 16:6-10, and we practiced discerning the will of God. Some significant Godly decisions were made, and it was awesome.
Advice for students: Be nice to the librarians and don't forget to have fun every now and then.
Why are you on the S.A.? I want to be involved in things going on around campus and be able to serve in any way I can.

Name: Jen Farmer, married off-campus representative
Hometown: Largo, Fla.
Undergraduate school: Florida Southern College
Degree sought: M.A. in counseling
Expected graduation: May 2011
Family status: Married
Ministry plans: I'd like to work with a local counseling organization until our mission team leaves for Southeast Asia in 2014.
Best experience at HUGSR: I feel at home in the counseling department with both the faculty and students. It's nice to have family at a place where I spend so much time.
Advice for students: Don't freak out! It doesn't help you get better grades on tests. Just ask other students what you can do to prepare. We'd all love to help.
Why are you on the S.A.? I really enjoyed planning social events in my undergrad sorority and thought the S.A. would be a good place for me to give back to HUGSR.

Students Say Thank You to Faithful Donors

Generous scholarships make this sort of training possible. Many of us could not do the ministry we are doing or will do without financial help.

Caleb, *preparing for church planting*

I could not thank you enough for all the ways your financial support has helped me in my own spiritual growth and ministry. The training and spiritual development I have received here would not have been possible without your loving and giving attitude.

James, *youth minister*

This is just a note of thanks and gratitude for supporting me though scholarships. You will never know how much you have impacted my life, ministry and family.

Zack, *pulpit minister*

Thank you for the opportunity you have given me and for trusting that I would not let you down. I won't!

Grace, *ministry of study*

I thank you so very much for the scholarship that has allowed me to readjust to the U.S. after 17 years on the mission field and to help me further my ministry for the Lord's kingdom.

David, *missionary*

Without your support, I would be less confident in my ability as a minister because I would not have had the opportunity to apprentice in the inner city of Memphis.

Jeremy, *inner-city minister*

The depth of my understanding of the Bible and ability to communicate it to my congregation has grown exponentially from my time at HUGSR.

Josh, *community life minister*

My Christian faith, practice and understanding have benefited beyond measure by my time at HUGSR. Thank you so much for your donations to this ministry, without which my studies would not be possible.

Eric, *pulpit minister*

DONORS

Gifts Set Record

For the third year in a row, supporters of ministry training have set a record at Harding University Graduate School of Religion.

How is this possible with the current state of the economy? "We are blessed with amazingly faithful donors," says Larry Arick, director of advancement. "It was a blessing to see people continue to give in this economic environment."

"Those who support the school trust our faculty, staff and students," Arick explains. "People want to make a sound investment, and investing in church leaders has an eternal rate of return."

The Lord has blessed the Graduate School, even when other organizations have been struggling. We have been able to add a librarian and plan to add a faculty member next year.

Growth in the program also brings new opportunities for donors. The annual fund goal has been raised to $400,000 for the current fiscal year, the largest amount in HUGSR history.

"A few years ago this goal would have seemed impossible," Arick says. "But our alumni and friends have continually risen to the challenge of keeping the Graduate School fiscally strong."

BRIEFS

Faculty Notes

This summer Dr. Phil McMillion taught a class on the book of Job at the Oxford, Miss., Church of Christ and presented a paper "Theology of Joshua" at the Christian Scholars Conference in Nashville, Tenn. His review of *Fertility and Birth in the Psalms* by Marianne Grohmann appeared in *Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies*.

Dr. Dave Bland spoke this summer at Highway Church of Christ in Judsonia, Ark., and presented a series of lessons at Goodman Oaks Church of Christ in Southaven, Miss. He also presented a paper and served as a generative leader for the session on narrative preaching at the Christian Scholars Conference in Nashville, Tenn. He contributed the chapter "Conversation as a Resource for Character Formation in Proverbs," in *And the Word Became Flesh*, a festschrift honoring Michael W. Casey, as well as writing two book reviews for the journal *Homiletic*. In addition, he co-edited *Reclaiming the Imagination: The Exodus as Paradigmatic Narrative for Preaching* published by Chalice Press.

Three professors wrote articles for *Transforming Word* commentary, recently published by ACU Press. Dr. Phil McMillion wrote entries for the books of Joshua and Judges. Dr. Allen Black wrote the book of Mark entry. Dr. Richard Oster wrote the entry for the book of Galatians.

Faculty

Turner Joins Library Team

Bob Turner (M.Div., 2009, rjturner@hugsr.edu) joined the library staff as circulation librarian July 1. He brings with him a great deal of experience at the Graduate School, where he served as a graduate assistant and then part-time recruiter for the Admissions Office.

Turner will oversee the circulation desk as well as student workers.

"Bob's theological training has already been a benefit to the library with his ability to help students locate materials," says Don Meredith, head librarian. "His computer expertise has also been a benefit in managing accounts and online book purchasing."

Turner

McLeod Named Associate Dean

Effective July 1, Dr. Steve McLeod (D.Min, 2002, registrar@hugsr.edu) assumed the role of associate dean. He had served as registrar since 2000.

"The associate dean title more accurately represents the role Dr. McLeod fills on our campus," said Evertt W. Huffard, vice president, when announcing the promotion at Commencement on May 2. "His role has expanded beyond what the title registrar denotes."

In particular, Huffard noted McLeod's leadership role in the recent accreditation visit from the Association of Theological Schools, which resulted in a 10-year accreditation renewal. McLeod spearheaded the self-study and chaired the committee that developed the report for ATS.

McLeod also serves as liaison with the University Assessment Committee to maintain our regional accrediation with the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools.

McLeod's concern for student success has been a hallmark of his leadership. "It is my job to help students graduate," he notes.

In particular, McLeod has developed a process of long-term planning for students, customizing a plan for students based on their individual needs, taking into account where they live, their job situation, family life and more. "Not only does this long-range thinking give them a plan, but it gives them encouragement," he says. "When students realize their goals are in reach, they get excited."

The results of his work are demonstrable: in the last seven years the drop-out rate has been cut in half to 20 percent, which is well below the national average.

Another key to ensuring student success is to help students minimize their educational indebtedness. "Debt is a problem for students. They can take out more money in loans than they can reasonably repay on a minister's salary." McLeod added a section about student indebtedness to the new student orientation.

"The numbers of M.Div. graduates in the 2009 graduating class was the highest since 1988," he reports. "And half had no educational debt when they graduated."

Thirty-one Graduate During 51st Commencement

For the first time in 51 years, rain interfered with Commencement exercises at Harding Graduate School May 2. Even the traditional photograph on the steps of the Ijams Administration Building was brought indoors. In spite of the weather, 31 students were awarded diplomas.

During the morning exercises, Dr. Jack P. Lewis addressed the graduates with Ron Wade (M.A.R, 1988) presenting a message from the advisory board and Dr. Richard Oster bringing a message from the faculty.

GRADUATES

MASTER OF ARTS
Daniel Lee Cooper
Jordan Patrick Guy
Shelley L. Jacobs
Young Ran Park
David Pritchett
Aaron Michael Roland
Ethelene Bruce White

MASTER OF ARTS IN CHRISTIAN MINISTRY
Glen Alan Bowman
Rusty J. Campbell
T. Ryan Head

MASTER OF ARTS IN COUNSELING
Justin Paul Lewis
Jonathan Richard Teel

MASTER OF DIVINITY
Lendon L. Bartlett
Barry J. Fowler
Brian R. Hajicek
Peter A. Horne
Alan Byron Howell
Wesley Sam Abe Kuryluk
Daniel Edsel Reese
David Benson Rubio
Mac S. Sandlin
Terry D. Smalling
Rachel Ann Steele
Nathan Doyle Swanson
Jonathan Richard Teel
Robert James Turner
Chad Alan Westerholm
James Thomas Wood
Russell Lyle Woods

DOCTOR OF MINISTRY
Bruce Eugene Bates
Thomas Hershell McLemore
Leslie James Williams

BRIEFS

Grant Gives Alumni Free Database Access

Through a generous grant from the Lilly Endowment Inc. to the American Theological Library Association, Harding Graduate School alumni can now access *ATLA Serials*®, an online collection of more than 130 major religion and theology journals selected by leading religion scholars and theologians.

Through the *ATLAS* database, alumni can research the history of a topic from as early as 1924 to the present through more than 238,000 articles and book reviews combined. Currently, researchers are able to use *ATLAS* as a search tool to retrieve PDFs of the pages in more than 140 different journals with fully searchable text that allows for keyword proximity and citation set searches.

This three-year grant allows alumni to access *ATLAS* free. To access the system, go to the alumni privileges page under the library link at www.hugsr.edu.

HARDING UNIVERSITY
GRADUATE SCHOOL *of* RELIGION
1000 Cherry Road
Memphis, TN 38117

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Bridge

Final Word

Intentional Irony: Graduate School Community

Perhaps this year's theme of "Christian Community" seems ironic at a graduate school. After all, don't we send people to the library for endless hours of isolation among arcane tomes?

Yes. And no.

Yes, students work hard at their research. Graduate school would not be worth much without researching the rich heritage of thinkers and leaders who have come before us. And yes, students have to be willing to put time into individual academic pursuits.

But at the same time, ministers who cannot relate to people effectively will have tremendous difficulty leading others, much less a complex ministry. Being with others challenges us to be honest — we cannot fake our spirituality for long in a true community. Being with others challenges us to be humble — true community will make clear our strengths and our weaknesses. Ministers will never reach their full potential if they are not able to connect intimately with both God and other people.

Rich knowledge and honest relationships — which one of these can our churches do without? The answer is that we need both.

We strive for both at the Graduate School. Quality study combined with opportunities for discussion, casual fellowship, group activities, mentoring and prayer. We are a community formed by the academic enterprise. Equally important — but much more difficult to achieve — is that we are a community of encouragement, support and nurture.

We are a graduate school. And we are a community. The irony of this dual self-definition is vital to our task of preparing ministers who can serve with a kingdom vision.

Mark Parker
mparker@hugsr.edu