

Sue Park-Hur,
denominational
minister for leadership
development and
transformative peace-
making for Mennonite
Church USA

Photo by Andrew Strack



ON CAMPUS

By Lauren Jefferson

Among "Stormy Seas of Change," School for Leadership Training Celebrates 50 Years of Supporting Ministry

Approximately 200 pastors, ministers, and laity attended the 50th annual School for Leadership Training at Eastern Mennonite Seminary. Funded by the seminary's Lilly Foundation "Thriving in Ministry" grant, the three-day event included workshops, seminars, worship and fellowship opportunities focused on serving in challenging times of "political upheaval and national divisions" in the country and "theological debates in our denominations, congregations and families," said Brenda Martin Hurst, Lilly Grant director.

Participants came from 13 states and two countries, and represented nine denominations, including Mennonite, Quaker, Church of the Brethren, Disciples of Christ, Church of God of Christ, Methodist, Baptist, Presbyterian and United Church of Christ.

Hurst and the planning committee selected Mark 4:35-41 as the guiding scripture. "Navigating these times as followers of Jesus and church leaders does feel like charting unknown waters in a choppy and stormy sea," Hurst said in her welcome. "The biblical story found in Mark 4 of the disciples crossing the stormy sea with Jesus seemed appropriate for our repeated hearing and reflection over these days."

Maren Tyedmers Hange, co-pastor of Charlottesville Mennonite Church, painted a special piece of art, featuring an empty boat floating in storm-swept seas, for

contemplation. The boat is “intentionally empty as an invitation to join Jesus there,” said Veva Mumaw, seminary admissions director and member of the planning committee.

Expanded worship opportunities throughout the three days led the gathered through interpretation and reflection on the scripture passage. Keynote addresses were provided by David Evans, associate professor of history and intercultural studies and the director of cross cultural programs at Eastern Mennonite Seminary; Sue Park-Hur, denominational minister for leadership development and transformative peacemaking for Mennonite Church USA; and John Pavlovitz, author and Methodist pastor.

Engaging Scripture

Pavlovitz provided three keynotes, addressing parts of the scripture each day. A pastor for two decades, writer and activist from Wake Forest, North Carolina, Pavlovitz blogs about “Stuff That Needs To Be Said.” His books include *A Bigger Table: Building Messy, Authentic, and Hopeful Spiritual Community* (Westminster



Victor Gomez, superintendent of the Harrisonburg District of the United Methodist Church, presents a workshop during School for Leadership Training.

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An advertisement for BEVCO chairs. On the left, a black ergonomic office chair is shown in detail. The background is a blue-tinted image of a group of people in a meeting or classroom setting. The text "SEATING THAT MAKES THE DIFFERENCE" is prominently displayed in the center. Below this, a paragraph describes the benefits of BEVCO chairs, including their flexibility and GreenGuard Gold certification. The BEVCO logo and GreenGuard Gold logo are also present, along with contact information and a copyright notice.

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John Knox Press, 2017) and *HOPE and Other Superpowers: A Life-Affirming, Love-Defending, Butt-Kicking, World-Saving Manifesto* (Simon & Schuster, 2018).

An Upside-Down World

In an “upside-down world” that corrodes hope and faith, followers of Christ—seeking to embody the compassion modeled by Jesus, “to intercede on the behalf of people in need”—often feel anger and disillusionment.

“You have the eyes of Jesus and the heart of Jesus that moves you towards people who no one else knows, who everyone else avoids, who no one else hears,” Pavlovitz said. The “collateral damage” of moving with empathy towards those has to be acknowledged, but at the same time, the movement is the heart of the Gospel.

Feeling Spiritually Inverted

“Muslim bans, health care repeals, ICE raids, Nazis in the street, debating the value of a black life,” he said, “I feel completely inverted spiritually. I feel profoundly disoriented as a Christian...but

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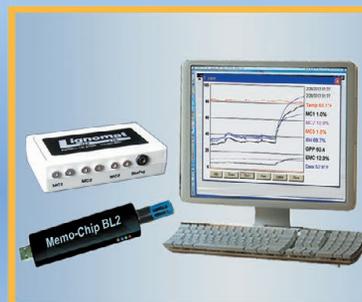
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disorientation means your faculties are intact, your mind is right, your heart is working properly, and your soul is keeping you human in profoundly inhuman times.”

Pavlovitz suggested that the challenge for ministers and people of faith is “how to take that natural anger and channel it into something redemptive and constructive ... Can we find a transcendent Jesus? ... Can we create a community where the full Jesus can be on display? I think we can. We have to embrace the activist, compassionate heart of Jesus with people who we would not otherwise be with, in places we would not think to be.”



ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Lauren Jefferson is editor-in-chief at Eastern Mennonite University, where she manages and produces news coverage and magazine production related to EMU's undergraduate and graduate programs, Eastern Mennonite Seminary and the internationally renowned Center for Justice and Peacebuilding.

John Pavlovitz, a keynote speaker during 2019 School for Leadership Training, addresses attendees in Martin Chapel.



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