

Artist Statements

While we hope viewers develop their own interpretations of the art we create, we offer these artist statements as theological reflections on our process creating these works. You are welcome to share these artist statements in worship bulletins, church newsletters, or online. You can also incorporate them into sermons or worship liturgy (with credit). Additionally, you can use this document to print, mount, or frame each artist statement alongside prints of the images to create an art gallery in your space.





Zechariah and the Angel

by Hannah Garrity
Inspired by Luke 1:5-13
32"x20" Paper lace & graphite drawing, backed with cyanotype print

Within the political landscape of Herod's time, hope was not on the horizon—that's the point. And Elizabeth had been barren for many years. This miracle visited her—in her body, in her womb—because it was so unexpected.

In this piece, I imagine the angel in a female form arriving close to Zechariah in the darkened Temple, surprising him by her presence. His reaction is a fearful one in this image. He leans away, squints his eyes, and covers his head. He protects himself from her, from her presence, from her power, from her words, from her gaze. He hides. The incense swirls around them. In contrast to his fear, her message is one of hope: long-yearned-for-joy and family security. Here the angel's message is represented by the doves and the stars. Her message flows into his space with the same power that invoked his fear. I imagine Zechariah lets his guard down then, and listens to her in shock. I imagine he takes in her words, lets his arm down, meets her gaze, and holds onto joy, despite his ongoing apprehension.

In this image, I placed my paper lace over a cyanotype print, which is created using photosensitive paper, objects, and sunlight. The cyanotype didn't work the first time; I had to paint the light-sensitive solution again and then expose the print for longer in brighter daylight. I really needed plexiglass to hold my branches and leaves tightly to the paper, but I didn't have it. Nonetheless, the final print reflected the flow of energy in this text.

The movement in the cyanotype is horizontal—perfect for the lateral conversation between the angel and Zechariah. Pine needles created shapes that appear to reiterate the angel's words as they are leaving her mouth toward Zechariah's ear. These words, this unexpected and miraculous hope, are the focal point in the text and the art. In the cyanotype, there are deep blues with silhouettes of leaves and stems, but nothing so powerful as these words, these pine needles creating a high-contrast focal point. God is breaking in. —HANNAH GARRITY



Depths

by Carmelle Beaugelin Caldwell Inspired by Lamentations 3:55-57 16"x20" Acrylic, oil pastel, metal leaf on canvas

I am reminded of my love-hate relationship with theme park rides as soon as the ride quiets into a slow, steady climb—creeping toward an edge that seems to vanish. It's at this point that full panic sets in and it hits me: a drop is coming.

It's not the speed or height of roller coasters that scares me. It's the weight—being pulled down by something far heavier than myself, strapped to metal with gravity

dragging me into the depths while my stomach scrambles to catch up, my heart left behind in midair.

Many of us, like the writer of Lamentations, know this kind of free fall—in our personal lives, in our ministries, and in a political climate that seems to collapse our sense of security into a bottomless pit. Yet, when the fall ends, when the deepest depths have been reached, who hears us when we call? As we echo prayers from the depths of each of our lives, we can rest in the assurance that we are heard by a God who meets us at rock bottom. —CARMELLE BEAUGELIN CALDWELL



Hope Like a Dancer

by Lauren Wright Pittman
Inspired by Matthew 11:1-11
11"x14" Gouache, paint pens, colored pencils, and ink
on paper

John the Baptist was thrown in prison after publicly questioning the legality of Herod's marriage (Matthew 14:3-5). He was not afraid to go toe-to-toe with the powerful, and perhaps he expected Jesus' ministry to look more confrontational and politically strategic. In questioning Jesus, I wonder if John sought a particular answer to hang his hope on, that maybe the Messiah would be how he'd imagined him. Maybe Jesus would bust him out of jail and take things straight to Herod, but Jesus offers something else.

In this image, John sits in prison, letting the disciples' testimony settle in. People with hearing, visual, and physical impairments experience new senses and mobility. Those with skin diseases are cleansed.

Those with little material comfort are offered irrepressible hope, and the lungs of the dead are filled with the breath of life. I decided to image this good news through the dancing light of a lantern¹ in John's prison cell. I chose dancing figures because dancing feels like a primal response to the radical healing taking place outside the prison walls. As these six dancers illuminate the cell, I imagine John, even if for a moment, breaking into a bit of laughter at the magnitude of Jesus' ministry. Jesus was quite literally doing the unimaginable. He was removing barriers so that the marginalized were no longer reduced to begging and sitting on mats, shoved to the edges of society. He was not only healing physical ailments; perhaps more importantly, he was restoring people to community.

Out of all the miraculous actions mentioned, the news did not include "release of the captives" (Luke 4:18-19).² With this message, John would know that he was not going to be freed,³ and so, the number of dancers would remain one short of seven.⁴ As we know all too well, God's work isn't completed in Jesus' time. We are still woefully short of realizing the fullness of God's desire for all of creation, and the work is ours to see through. Until then, let us keep our eyes peeled for the glimmers of hope dancing all around us and work toward a day when all can join in that dance of wholeness.

-REV. LAUREN WRIGHT PITTMAN

⁴ The number 7 represents wholeness or completion. This podcast episode provides more information about the symbolic use of the number 7 in the Bible: bibleproject.com/podcast/significance-7/



¹ The lantern has very simplified shapes representing each of the miracles (received sight: eyes opening; walking: footprints; cleansed: bowls; hearing: volume symbols; raised: butterflies; good news: jar and anointing oil drops representing the Messiah.

² John's clothing includes open bird cages and birds taking flight, which represent how "release of the captives" is missing in the message he receives from Jesus.

³ Bonnie L. Pattison points this out in her commentary on Matthew 11:2-19 in Feasting on the Gospels: Matthew, Volume 1, edited by Cynthia A. Jarvis and E. Elizabeth Johnson (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013), 286.



Something in the Water

by T. Denise Anderson Inspired by Isaiah 43:19-21 20"x20" Acrylic on canvas

Deutero-Isaiah⁵ addresses a community that had been in exile for a while and had probably resigned themselves to their fate. But the prophet has the temerity to proclaim that God still has something in store and asks if they can "perceive" what it is. That word "perceive" would not let go of me. The Hebrew word can be translated as "know" or even "discern." Christian churches don't talk about this often, but one way ancient Israelite communities discerned God's direction was through divination.

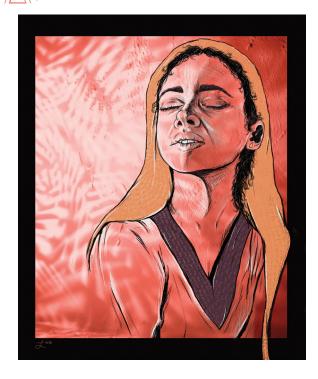
The water imagery in this text is strong and shows

up in contrasts ("rivers in the desert" and "waters in the wilderness"). The Holy One is making something out of nothing, providing life-sustaining water to a thirsty nation as God's "new thing" "springs" forth. It's also interesting to me that water itself is a tool of divination. To the extent the prophet is inviting the community to "discern" what God is doing, I was reminded of the practice of scrying or "seeing"—looking into a reflective surface like water to get clarity on what Spirit might be saying.

Another translation of "perceive" is "feel." Here I depict someone placing their hand in the water of God's provision and direction. Is it God's hand manipulating the water to send it forth, or is it the hand of someone trying to know/feel/discern the water? A sudden onset of water (like a flood or deluge) can be terrifying, but in this case water is coming to the rescue. What might be scary right now, but is actually coming to save us? How do the waters help us see God and ourselves? By claiming rest, what can we discern in the stillness when we divest from the cycle of fear and turn to the water?

-REV. T. DENISE ANDERSON

⁵ Deutero-Isaiah refers to Isaiah 40-55, which scholars attribute to an anonymous prophet during the Babylonian Exile. It is characterized by themes of hope for the deliverance of the exiled Jewish people.



Mary's Yes

by Lisle Gwynn Garrity Inspired by Luke 1:26-39 Photography with digital drawing

In the *sixth month* of Elizabeth's pregnancy, the angel goes to Nazareth to find Mary. I was six months pregnant with my second daughter when I reread this scripture and began this image, so at first, this detail seemed like a happy coincidence. But as I pondered it, I wondered if Elizabeth's pregnancy might have everything to do with Mary's willingness to say yes to this wild, wonderful—but risky and terrifying—undertaking.

Elizabeth's pregnancy provides reassurance that Mary can trust the angel's impossible news. By the sixth month, Mary will be able to see for herself that Elizabeth is truly pregnant. By the sixth month, Mary can place her hands on Elizabeth's belly and giggle as

the baby leaps and kicks. By the sixth month, the risk of miscarriage has significantly decreased. By the sixth month, Elizabeth will be emotionally, mentally, and physically preparing for birth. Her miracle is real, even as it is yet to be born. Therefore, Mary can rest her hope in an emerging—not empty—promise.

Mary's willingness to say "yes" is also fortified by the assurance that she is not stepping forward alone. Even as fears surely surround her, Mary will go to Elizabeth for protection and comfort. She won't fulfill her calling without support. Her hope will be strengthened in solidarity.

In this image, we see the angel greeting Mary in the form of dappled light.⁶ Mary's back is turned to the angel, but we see her in the process of pivoting toward the warmth of the cascading light. I imagine this is the moment after the angel responds to her initial question, "How can this be?" After hearing the angel's response, Mary closes her eyes, imagining her cousin Elizabeth and perhaps her many ancestors holding her up as she prepares to step forward. The wrap around her head carries the angel's good news, anointing her with the promise that fear won't stop her. Embroidered along her neckline is Mary's willing response: "Here I am." Her lantern earring is a sign to each of us, to anyone who is fearful. It's as if Mary herself becomes a lantern, emanating courage in the face of a fearful calling, lighting a way forward.

-REV. LISLE GWYNN GARRITY

⁶ I captured these textures by photographing the shadows cast by a lantern.



To Build and to Plant

by Hannah Garrity Inspired by Jeremiah 1:4-10 32"x20" Paper lace and graphite drawing, backed with cyanotype print

This scripture is Jeremiah's call story. Jeremiah is a prophet just prior to the fall of Jerusalem to Babylon. Once Jerusalem falls, Judea's ruling class is taken into exile in Babylon. We learn of their story through the book of Ezekiel. Jeremiah stays as a prophet for those left behind in Jerusalem. At that time, the major theological question of the people was whether or

not God was present without the temple and the Ark of the Covenant. In Jeremiah chapter 31, the prophet delivers a new covenant from God, written on the hearts of the people. "Fear not; God is with all people always" (Jeremiah 30:10-11).

As I explored the process of cyanotype printing for this piece of art, the visual metaphor of negative and positive space offered a parallel to this major theological question: *Is God gone?*

First, I painted a photosensitive solution on the paper in a dark room, then it dried in the dark as well. Once dry, I placed leaves, buds, blossoms, and branches on the paper and took it outside. These natural forms created a negative image as the paper was exposed to the sun. Just as Jeremiah will eventually offer the new covenant when the people fear that the absence of the tangible means the absence of the divine, so it is that in this artwork the absent spaces become deep and dark with color. The present spaces, where items were placed, become void of color, creating a negative image.

On top of the cyanotype, I overlaid a paper lace image of leaves, branches, buds, and blossoms weaving around the hand of God reaching out to touch the lips of Jeremiah. There are boxes too, portraying the building up after the tearing down. Do not fear. Like Jeremiah, we are but children ill-equipped for the call, but God reaches out and calls us anyway. So let us prepare ourselves for the planting and the building of God's justice. The temple is gone. Hard work is ahead. —HANNAH GARRITY





In Too Deep

by Nicolette Faison Inspired by Matthew 1:18-25 30"x40" Acrylic and marker on canvas

My inaugural contribution to *A Sanctified Art* in 2023 focused on the relationship between Mary and Elizabeth. After having a challenging pregnancy of my own, I used my art to explore the divine connections of people who carry pregnancies and how that special type of relationship benefits the community. But even after reading these pregnancy stories time and time again, I have struggled to sit with Joseph and how he processes all of this change with his new wife.

Somehow life is always in alignment with the text, and now, as I process a divorce, I think more often of what it would feel like for someone else to come in and try to fit into my established family system.

This made me think of a Joseph who can't sleep well at night, as his mind is uneasy with the words of Gabriel in his ear. I wanted Joseph to have an uncomfortable sleep form with a clenched fist that shows us he is tense even while he dreams. His foot is raised up in a way that looks almost as if he could pop up at any moment. Funny enough, this is how I slept throughout my own pregnancies. His hair, while luxurious, has flowy movement to it, leaning into the uneasiness. The soft spiral pattern in the background also implies movement. We don't see Joseph often in holy art. We receive the occasional holy family portrait, which is often not detailed, but Joseph does not really get his own place in the story. He is almost like the forgotten father after Jesus comes



of age, so his time is really now. I don't think his position needs to be a cornerstone for the birth story; however, as my own life changes, I can appreciate the importance of his devotion and obedience to God.

In the artwork, the angel Gabriel is talking to Joseph as he sleeps, with silver locs reminiscent of God from the children's book I illustrated, *God's Holy Darkness.*⁸ This is a nod to my own work, which honors holiness as brown, coarse textured, and wise. Why wouldn't an angel both resemble God and the people they are called to speak to?

The dreamy pregnant body we see in the top left is styled in an outfit that is a nod to Beyonce's 2017 Grammys performance costume for the song, "Love Drought." At that time Beyonce was pregnant with her twins, Sir and Rumi, and gave one of the most outstanding performances someone so far along could provide. Her full costume also included a golden headpiece that resembled that of an icon, a goddess even. How appropriate for a woman of faith carrying twins—performing a song from an album where she experienced betrayal, heartbreak, and reconciliation—to perform at this last supper-like

table in such an outfit, knowing her marriage and pregnancy could have killed her. In my painting, the pregnant belly is celebrated with rays beaming from it followed by soft clouds, reminding us this is a dream. The color choices are bright, detailed, and whimsical to keep us in the fantasy. There is vibrancy here because, while Joseph is uncomfortable, this is still something to be celebrated. —REV. NICOLETTE FAISON

⁷ sanctifiedart.org/image-licensing-library-advent/two-mothers

⁸ God's Holy Darkness. Written by Sharei Green and Beckah Selnick. Illustrated by Nikki Faison. (Beaming Books, 2022).

⁹ Beyonce. "Love Drought." Track 7 on Lemonade. Parkwood Entertainment and Columbia Records, 2016.



I Am With You

by Lauren Wright Pittman Inspired by Isaiah 41:5-10 11"x14" Hand-carved block printed with oil-based ink on paper

Here we find the Israelites far from home, living in Babylonian exile. Fear and uncertainty hang heavy with the looming threat of Persian invasion.

"The coastlands have seen and are afraid, the ends of the earth tremble" (Isaiah 45:5). As some scramble to find courage in idols, God calls those exiled from Judah to be heartened by their rootedness in God's story.

The image that formed in my mind was a community nestled in God's hands amid the Mediterranean coastlands—the same lands conquered by the Babylonians, and to which the exiles longed to return.

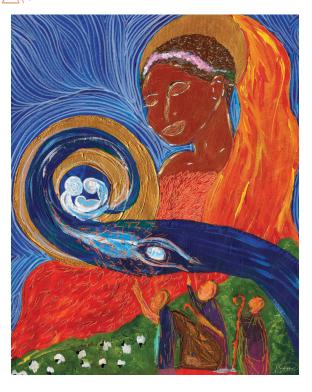
While I was creating this image, the U.S. President shared an AI-generated video of his "vision" for Gaza, those same coastlands referenced in Isaiah. I was

shaken by the contrast between his imagined future and the reality of U.S.-funded devastation. The video transformed rubble and the bone-chilling cries of mothers into panning vistas of high-rise beachfront resorts and casinos, rebranding Gaza as the "Riviera of the Middle East." ¹⁰

This bombastic vision mocks a people clinging to threads of existence. Watching the powerful revel in the demise of the vulnerable is horrifying—but fitting. In Isaiah, God's people are exiled under the thumb of a world power. Fearful artisans solder golden idols, hoping for security. But God is not found in the hands of the powerful or the shine of idols. God is present amid the rubble, comforting the forsaken and reminding them of their place in God's story. No matter which empire holds sway, God sides with the subjugated and disenfranchised. Despite the fear that causes the very earth to tremble, God accompanies the downtrodden, upholding them with a steady hand.

From my study of this passage and shock at the video, a counter-vision of hope emerged. Coastal Mediterranean plants—bougainvillea for peace, lantana for liveliness, and red valerian for strength—anchor the shifting sand. God's hands cradle the community like a fragile flame as their light resiliently radiates. The twelve figures in simplified Palestinian garb represent the exiled Judeans in Isaiah, the Palestinians in modern day Gaza, and all crushed by empire—each cherished by a faithful God. The hands in the image *could* also be ours. ¬REV. LAUREN WRIGHT PITTMAN

¹⁰ Some of the imagery included: a child holding a golden balloon in the shape of the U.S. President's head, crowds standing beneath a golden statue of said President, billionaire Elon Musk basking as money rained from the sky, and the U.S. President lounging poolside with the Israeli Prime Minister. While this imagery flashes, a song plays with the lyrics, "No need to fear, Trump Gaza is finally here."



Good. New

by Carmelle Beaugelin Caldwell Inspired by Luke 2:1-20 16"x20" Acrylic on canvas

We often link fear and anxiety to bad news. But what about the moments when the news is good—almost too good to believe? The dream job offer arrives. The long-hoped-for pregnancy test is finally positive. The illness goes into sudden remission.

Euphobia, the fear of good news, often stems from past losses, fear of change, or the pressure of new expectations. Joy and relief may come first, but they're often followed by a quiet dread. What now? What could this mean?

In Luke's Nativity story, even angelic news stirs overwhelm. The shepherds tremble. Mary ponders. As she wraps her newborn in cloth, what thoughts rise in her heart?

The word "new" is nestled in "good news"—a reminder that even the best gifts lie beyond our control. In the birth of Jesus, we witness the mystery of it all: the terrifying, the unexpected, the good, and the new that hope often brings. —CARMELLE BEAUGELIN CALDWELL



Stay With Me

by T. Denise Anderson Inspired by Matthew 2:13-15, 19-23 18"x24" Acrylic on canvas board

I used to think my mother was cheap. When we'd go on road trips, she'd spend the night before preparing food for the trip. I thought it was because she didn't want to spend money on fast food. She didn't. But her reasons had nothing to do with a drive-thru.

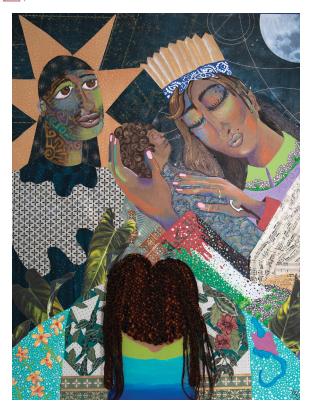
My mother was a Black child in the U.S. in the 1950s and 60s. When they went on road trips, they had to leave in the dead of night with everything they'd need for the trip. For Black folks, there was no casual stopping along the way. If you stopped at the "wrong" place, you might not make it home. Her elders taught her what they had to learn themselves, often the hard way. My mom grew up in the Steel Belt, but the family had moved there after leaving the Jim Crow South during the Great Migration for greener (and ostensibly safer) pastures. Her preparations were

vestiges of a circumspect upbringing designed to keep her safe.

I was well into adulthood when I realized my family had been refugees in their own country.

The story of the Holy Family's flight to Egypt takes new significance as I consider not only the experiences of dear ones around the world, but also my own ancestors. My piece focuses on a parent's desperate grip of their child's hand as they escape a despot's fiery wrath, possibly in the dead of night. The colors subtly recall the Pan-African, Palestinian, and Sudanese flags. I remember those left behind, and the lower part of the composition depicts the anguish of mothers whose children were not spared. Rachel still weeps (Matthew 2:18).

Our fears aren't unfounded. Salvation may have arrived, but the world still isn't safe. How will we remember Rachel's children as we resist and rebuild? —REV.T. DENISE ANDERSON



King Tingz

by Nicolette Faison Inspired by Matthew 2:1-12, 16-18 30"x40" Acrylic, paper, markers, synthetic hair on canvas

If there is one thing I can't stand, it is when people disregard the spiritual use of herbs, metals, and the stars. For years, there has been a nasty practice of shaming indigenous practices, such as the usage of sage, when high church settings actively use incense in worship. We have come to a tension where anything that does not look like a particular type of Christian practice is perceived as pagan or satanic. For years, I have been reminding people that Jesus was gifted gold, frankincense, and myrrh by people who followed the stars to find him. That is the heart of my piece, King Tingz. I wanted to emphasize the sky and the importance of the stars, a reminder that this was essential to their witness. I wanted to bless each king with a different gift which is found in different places of their attire.

Of the magi, the one bowing is marked with the flower of frankincense on their robe. On their left

shoulder is a map of modern Persia, reminding us of their journey back home having to take a new route because they defied the request of Herod. They are crowned with cornrows and covered with more greenery because of their position to the ground. While we celebrate the stars, I wanted there to be some grounding to the earth. As Jesus is both divine and human, he holds space in both worlds.

The king to the right has soft myrrh flowers on her elbow and collar. Her outer arm is holding an infant, not Jesus, while her sleeve holds the Palestinian flag with the Arabic word *Nakba*, ¹¹ reminding us of the genocide of 1947. She is weeping for the children that Herod commits to murdering because of their defiance. She holds a child in the palm of her hand with deep lament. Her golden crown is surrounded by a blue bandana, a quiet nod to Chola culture found on the West Coast, as Latino Christians have always emphasized the importance of *los reyes*. ¹²

The one to the left is dripped in a starry durag and plated in gold. He has a subtle gold bottom grill and his face is celebrated in a gold pattern. He looks up to the sky, more concerned about navigation, as he is the guiding force for the three of them. I gave this king a durag after some research on Persian magi showed me variations of headwear or turbans that emulated that of a durag.

Above all, if there is something I have learned from living in a Hispanic community and attending a Spanish-speaking church, it is that BIPOC¹³ communities do not play about *los reyes*. I wanted aspects of my culture and other American subcultures to be able to see bits and pieces of themselves in this art. But to also see our connection to the stars and the earth alike. I urge this to be a reminder that even if your church does not celebrate herbs, crystals, metals, and the stars, that does not mean they are not Christian practices nor that they are satanic. –REV. NICOLETTE FAISON

¹³ This is an acronym for "Black, Indigenous, People of Color."



¹¹ Meaning "the catastrophe," this refers to the events of the 1948 Palestine war in which Palestinian Arabs were ethnically cleansed and displaced from their homes. These events continue to shape the ongoing Israeli-Palestine conflict.

¹² Meaning "the kings."

About the artists



Rev. T. Denise Anderson

Denise (she/her) is a minister in the Presbyterian Church (USA) and the Director for Compassion, Peace, and Justice Ministries at the Presbyterian Mission Agency. A graduate of Howard University School of Divinity, she is the former Co-Moderator of the 222nd General Assembly (2016) of the Presbyterian Church (USA). As a gifted visual artist and photographer, she creates art that explores themes of spirituality, history, religion, and race. tdandersonart.com



Carmelle Beaugelin Caldwell

Carmelle (she/her) is a Haitian-American multidisciplinary artist whose visual lexicon fuses gestural abstraction and theology to explore themes of diaspora, faith, and cultural memory. Borrowing her use of color from the vibrancy of Haitian artistic traditions, Carmelle's art pulses with movement and mysticism. Beyond her studio practice, Carmelle serves as Associate Director of the Missing Voices Project at Flagler College's Center for Religion and Culture and serves on the board of Artworks Trenton (artworkstrenton.org).

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Rev. Nicolette Faison

Rev. Nicolette "Nic" (*she/her*) is a pastor in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America serving as the Illinois Outreach Director for Faith in Place. Nic is the creator of MONadvocacy, a racial justice resource grounded in play, as well as the "Talks at the Desk" series which celebrates the voices of leaders in the ELCA African descent community. She is passionate about queer Black liberation, cultivating diverse leadership in faith spaces, and the art of creation.



Rev. Lisle Gwynn Garrity

Lisle Gwynn Garrity (she/her) is a Pastorist (pastor + artist) and creative entrepreneur seeking to fill the church with more color, paint, mystery, and creativity. Her faith is rooted in creative practices that help her break free from perfectionism and control and participate in creating a more whole, just world.



Rev. Lauren Wright Pittman

Lauren (she/her) is an artist, graphic designer, and theologian. She uses paint, metallic inks, linoleum carving tools, and her trusty Apple pencil to image the layered complexity she experiences in scripture texts. Visual exploration offers her a holy space to ask questions, find her voice, take risks, and make bold statements.



Hannah Garrity

Hannah (she/her) is the Director of Christian Faith, Life, and Arts at the wonderful Second Presbyterian Church in Richmond, VA. She also serves as liturgical artist for the Summer Worship Series at Montreat Conference Center (Montreat, NC). Hannah is currently pursuing a Master's of Divinity and Master's of Christian Education at Union Presbyterian Seminary in Richmond, VA.