

February 2017

# The EPISTLE

News from Johnson C. Smith Theological Seminary



*JCSTS provides innovative theological education to advance communities of faith, justice, and compassion.*

## JCSTS Announces New Initiative— CONNECTING GRACE

**Program Teaches Faith Communities to Assist the Formerly Incarcerated**

Johnson C. Smith Theological Seminary is pleased to announce a new program initiative entitled Connecting Grace. Launched in partnership with the Philadelphia Leadership Foundation, Connecting Grace teaches faith communities to be agents of healing for families affected by crime and incarceration.

The U.S. today with only five percent of the world's population has 25 percent of the world's prisoners. These incarceration rates exact a high toll on our nation's productivity. When these citizens are released from prison and return home, the pressures associated with their reintegration can be overwhelming to our most fragile neighborhoods and towns. Faith communities can be instrumental in easing these pressures by providing safe spaces to conduct the arduous work of reconciliation and reentry. This initiative equips



**JCSTS Program Director Tony McNeill Leads Worship at Samuel DeWitt Proctor Conference, February 21-23, Richmond, VA**



**JCSTS Artist in Residence Ann McPhail performs works by African-American composers through March 2017.**

### 150TH ANNIVERSARY

JCSTS commemorates its 150th anniversary this year. Stay tuned for a listing of local and regional activities!

### NEXT CHURCH

Join JCSTS partner NEXTChurch for its Annual Gathering, March 13-15, 2017, in Kansas City, MO.

### GIVE NOW

Want to help? Go to [smithseminary.org](http://smithseminary.org) to make a gift to JCSTS in any amount. Thank you.

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communities to support families dealing with issues of stigma and shame associated with violence; foster nurturing relationships with the incarcerated; build a non-judgmental culture of forgiveness and reconciliation; and help reduce the risk of recidivism by assisting returning citizens to build productive lives.

James H. Costen, Jr. (pictured right), is the Connecting Grace Program Director. James has an academic background in Urban Studies. His research focus is on the readiness of the Church to effectively assist the formerly incarcerated in community reintegration. The Connecting Grace Initiative is a five-part training series deliverable as a one-day seminar or two-day retreat. The cost of the training for congregations is \$500 plus curriculum fees and expenses.



## Inaugural Certificate in Worship Leadership Now Underway

Registration for Next Cohort (Fall 2017)  
Opens June 1

Johnson C. Smith Theological Seminary's certificate in worship leadership kicked off October 2016 with a capacity class of learners. The program invites students to think theologically about worship and justice and to identify strategies for creating more equitable and inclusive worshipping communities. Instructional partners for the year-long program include Alisha Lola Jones, Ph.D., Professor of Ethnomusicology at Indiana University; Anthony Leach, Ph.D., Professor of Music Education at Penn State University; Eric Wall, M.A., Dean of the Chapel at Austin Theological Seminary; Joshua Lazard, M.A., Minister for Student Engagement at Duke Divinity School; and Floretta Watkins, D.Min., Pastor of Seigle Avenue Presbyterian Church in Charlotte, NC. The Program Director is JCSTS staffer Tony McNeill, D.W.S. The cost to enroll in the next program cycle is \$1,500.

Scholarships are available. Space is limited so apply early.

## Scholar Willie Jennings Headlines Conference on Origin of Race

The Presbyterian Outlook magazine in collaboration with Johnson C. Smith Theological Seminary is sponsoring a two-day conference dealing with the complexities of race, February 10-11 at Saint Mark Presbyterian Church in Bethesda, MD. The keynote lecturer is Dr. Willie Jennings of Yale Divinity School, author of *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origin of Race* (Yale University Press, 2010). Respondents are Denise Anderson, Co-Moderator of the Presbyterian Church USA; Jill Duffield, Editor of the Presbyterian Outlook; and Paul Roberts, President of Johnson C. Smith Seminary.

## NEW TRUSTEES ELECTED

JCSTS recently elected three new members to its Board of Trustees, Class of 2019.

**Cassandra Kirk** is Chief Magistrate Judge of the Fulton County Magistrate Court. She began her career as a labor attorney, then as a Juvenile Court Judge. She is a member of North Avenue Presbyterian Church in Atlanta.

**Catherine Taylor** is pastor of the Blacksburg Presbyterian Church in Blacksburg, VA. She holds a Doctor of Ministry degree from Columbia Theological Seminary and has an extensive background as a writer and editor.

**Anne Aiko Wilson** is immediate past-president of the Association of Presbyterian Church Educators. A gifted teacher, she has served on numerous boards and is a member of St. Phillip's Presbyterian Church in Houston, TX.