Slow Down for Michael Brown  
By Rev. Geoff Browning, Campus Minister

It is known as the “Circle of Death.” It is so named because it is the most dangerous intersection on the Stanford campus; several serious accidents have occurred there. Between classes students hurry through this crowded roundabout as pedestrians, skateboarders, or bicyclists.

On Monday, October 28th, for four and a half hours, students stood in silent vigil holding signs to raise awareness about the killing of yet another unarmed black man at the hands of the police. Four and a half hours is the time that Michael Brown’s body lay in the street, uncovered, after his death. At each branch of the roundabout a lone student held a sign that proclaimed, “Slow Down for Michael Brown,” as other students closer to the circle stood shoulder to shoulder so that bicyclists and skateboarders had to go through in single file. Others handed out informational flyers to help answer questions like, “Who is Michael Brown?” among the students passing through the intersection.

That Monday evening, Cemex Auditorium was filled to capacity as students heard from hip-hop artists and activists David Banner and Tef Poe, Missouri state senator Maria Chappelle-Nadal, and Marc Lamont-Hill, professor of African-American Studies at Morehouse College. At one point in the discussion, one of the panelists asked people in the audience to raise their hands if they had been the victim of profiling or discrimination by the police. About 75% of the people in the audience raised their hands, but few, if any, white hands were among them. Tremendous pain and anger was expressed that night – feelings that many of us rarely experience because of our social privilege.

What is our calling as Christians and as a campus ministry in this situation? Should we continue to reach out to our traditional constituency of mainline protestant students who are mostly white? Or can we listen to the pain and anger of others, and join with them in community? Jesus’ ministry was characterized by moving toward those who are in pain due to ostracism and oppression, as were many of the activities of early Christian communities.

UCCM/PC@S has been doing that for as long as we’ve been on campus. We want to thank those who bring dinners to our Bread & Belonging fellowship and help to support reflection and discussions on issues of faith and social justice. We have reached out to marginalized communities with alternative spring break trips to meet farm workers, visits with the homeless in San Francisco, support for LGBTQ students, ongoing work with the Ecumenical Hunger Program, or our class and trip to El Salvador. We hope to continue and expand these activities in the coming year. We are grateful to each and every one of our students and to you, our supporters, for helping to make this ministry possible, for helping us to hear the cries of those who are suffering and to join the sacred work for justice and peace.
As we’ve seen, powerful forces keep moving the US back into the curve to more war, continuing war, new war…. How quickly things change when the Sirens of war begin to sing to us. Was it only last year that Obama pulled back from bombing Syria after Syria stepped over his red line and used chemical weapons? At that time our country was middle-east-war-weary and against a new military campaign.

So what is the solution? Do we do nothing in the face of the horrors perpetrated by IS? No one disagrees that great horrors are taking place. What should we do? It’s not my job to answer that. I’m going to shift the focus now to Stanford, and ask some new questions. These questions arise from the work of the Stanford Peace+Justice Studies Initiative. They are not comprehensive but represent my particular interests in the project as they are relevant to tonight’s discussion of perpetual war.

Stanford has many courses, programs, departments, institutes and centers whose work is vital to the inquiry into peace and justice. But are we imbalanced? Are we still missing something very important? I say yes.

Where at Stanford are students learning in depth about how to draw back from militarism and from the misguided imperial designs that have shaped our foreign policy from the Vietnam war, to the overthrow of Allende, to the Contras, to the deceptive and incalculably destructive invasion of Iraq? Where are they applying Stanford's fabled rigor and resources to the study of how to fight nonviolently? Does any political scientist teach a course on the theory and practice of nonviolent action? Should somebody be doing that? Does any economist or other social scientist teach a course called “The Real Costs of War,” measuring beyond budgets and effects on business? Who is teaching about the terrible harms done to our own people by our incessant warfare, particularly affecting our military members and their families, and spreading like a sickness through our whole society? Who is teaching about the ecological devastation caused by war? Who is teaching about healing and reconciliation after great violence? Are these important subjects or not? Could our Peace & Justice Studies initiative play a valuable role in inspiring and coordinating such courses?

Here’s another example. A course on US Foreign Policy, taken by many Stanford students, offers a very creative learning situation in the form of simulations where students and faculty role-play decision makers in crisis situations. The last one I heard about was focused on the question of bombing Syria because of its chemical weapons use. It was set in the White House Situation Room. The professor played Pres. Obama and students were cabinet members and military leaders. The assumption is perhaps that Stanford students are going to be in powerful positions, in rooms like this, weighing decisions like this.

I wonder if anybody ever thought about an equally creative and deeply prepared simulation of a grassroots nonviolent civil resistance movement. Hong Kong or Egypt or Serbia, from the point of view of the people in the streets. How could those movements be better strategized, more effective? I am not against the White House simulation. But how about other imaginative ways of understanding and conducting large-scale conflict?

Are we at Stanford, wittingly or unwittingly, influenced by a mindset that continually defaults into military solutions, that is losing flexibility and vision, that focuses too single-mindedly on entry into the corridors of power? Are we still rejecting the truth that Martin Luther King told us in 1967—that poverty, racism, and militarism are inextricably entwined, and, if not addressed, will be our nation’s undoing?

Editor’s Note: UCCM/PC@S is deeply involved with a movement to develop a Peace and Justice Studies program at Stanford. Pastor Geoff Browning serves as the Community Representative on the Peace + Justice Studies Initiative Committee. At a recent forum, another campus leader in this initiative, Linda Hess, Senior Lecturer in Religious Studies, shared some of her thoughts about the need to shift the balance in curriculum and perspectives towards peace and justice. The comments below are excerpted from her presentation, “Why More War?” on October 15, 2014. For the entire text of her presentation, please visit: http://uccm.stanford.edu/programs/WhyMoreWar
The Rev. Geoff Browning, Campus Minister
goff.browning@stanford.edu
UCCM P.O. Box 20149, Stanford CA 94309
http://uccm.stanford.edu/

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PC@S is working close
ly with Students for Alternatives to Militarism (SAM). As one of the only anti-war, pro-peace student organizations in the country, SAM, formerly known as Stanford Says No To War, occupies a particularly important position on campus. This year, SAM is committed to intersectionality; we recognize that militarism exists in many different forms and intersects with many other human rights issues at home and abroad, such as transphobia, police brutality, imperialism, and environmental degradation.

In early October, SAM held a screening of “Fruitvale Station,” a film which highlights the killing of Oscar Grant, a young, unarmed black man who was shot to death by an Oakland police officer on January 1, 2009. A crowd of at least 50 students attended. After the screening, we had an emotional discussion about police brutality and racism in America.

Later in October, SAM protested the actions of Michael Hayden, the NSA director who presided over an expansion of wire-tapping operations, and Leon Panneta, the former director of the CIA. We also co-sponsored a week-long series of events about stereotyping with another student group, Movimento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlan de Stanford (MECHA), which included an event on racial bias and stereotyping by the police.

Other actions included signing an open letter to President Benigno Simeon Aquino III and President Barack Obama which called for an end to the “Visiting Forces Agreement” the US has with the Philippines. The Agreement allows the US to militarize and terrorize the Philippines and came under international scrutiny again after an American soldier was charged with the murder of a Filipino transgender woman. SAM also stood in solidarity with Stanford Students for Queer Liberation (SSQL) on November 20—Transgender Day of Remembrance—when SSQL hosted a vigil in memory of trans-people who have been murdered over the past year.

SAM’s main campaign this year has been Stanford Out Of Occupied Palestine (SOOP). SAM was one of the first student groups to sign on in support of SOOP, a group of student organizations that will be bringing a resolution to the Stanford undergraduate student senate calling for divestment from companies that enable and profit from the injustices of the Israeli occupation of Palestine injustices that intersect with police brutality, mass incarceration, and collective punishment in America, as well.

SAM is looking forward to continuing to work for a more peaceful and just world. Learn more about SAM by visiting its Facebook page at https://www.facebook.com/studentsforalternativestomilitarism.

Update on Queerituality and QIS

By Chris

PC@S is working to build bridges between LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer) and religious/spiritual communities through Queerituality and Queer Interpretations of Scripture (QIS). Queerituality is an interfaith group that seeks to educate the Stanford community, create dialogue, and support students on LGBTQ and religious/spiritual issues. Queerituality holds quarterly internal meetings and events open to the entire campus community. The group also produced a guide and website for incoming students about religious/spiritual groups on campus (see “LGBTQ Guide to Religious Groups at Stanford” article in this newsletter).

QIS is a subgroup of Queerituality and specifically seeks to explore and better understand LGBTQ-related issues in Scripture. It tries to include both planned discussion and more informal conversation about topics of interest.

We have been encouraged by recent progress and growing acceptance of people who are LGBTQ and religious/spiritual. When Tim Cook, CEO of Apple, came out last month he related: "I’m proud to be gay, and I consider being gay among the greatest gifts God has given me.” Nevertheless, it is important to remember that significant hurdles remain—even in progressive environments such as Stanford. Several Christian groups on campus continue to be critical or unwelcoming of LGBTQ individuals. Through Queerituality and QIS, we hope to encourage dialog and give voice to the belief that being religious/spiritual and LGBTQ are fully compatible.
LGBTQ Guide to Religious Groups at Stanford

David Patino (Political Science, ’14)

College is a time of excitement, of exploration, of freedom. Away from home, we can finally choose to do, act and believe whatever we want to do. We are taken out of our comfort zone, away from our support systems and daily reinforcement of our beliefs by our caretakers, community, and established base of friends. Our ideas about how to navigate the world, who we are and who we want to be are shaken from the roots. Everything that was once certain is now a question.

For many of the Queer, LGB, and Trans-identified folks, college is a time when they can finally speak their truths and more fully express who they are. But this time can also be confusing, troubling, and scary. As we begin to express ourselves as Queer, LGB and Trans people, many of us may come into conflict with our religious communities. Whether we come from a religion or spiritual practice that is passionately opposed or passionately supportive of LGBTQ rights and people, we struggle.

Just as we are learning how to navigate our sexuality, we also must learn how to navigate our religious lives and spirituality by ourselves.

This is why current Queerituality members and members of an earlier group, the LGBTQ Religious Leadership Roundtable, worked to put together a guide in which religious and spiritual groups on campus could share their thoughts – in their own words – about how their campus community approaches LGBTQ issues. The goal of this guide is primarily to help Queer, LGB, and Trans students navigate religious and spiritual communities safely and confidently. We therefore wanted all the contributing groups to be very honest about their beliefs and approaches to interacting with Queer, LGB, and Trans communities. We hope this guide will provide an honest look at the religious and spiritual groups on campus that seek productive, healing, and respectful dialogue and relationships with LGBTQ communities.

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