

**MFSA Iowa Spring
Virtual Gathering
Saturday, April 24**



Iowa IPL Faith Statement on Climate Change

Iowa IPL invites all Iowans of faith and conscience to sign:
Called to Uphold Our Values & Upheave Injustice: 2020 Iowa Interfaith Statement on Climate Action. All religious leaders, clergy, laity, students, and anyone that resonates with the statement is invited to help reach IPL's goal of **1,000 Iowans** signing by February 1, 2021.

Visit <https://iowaipl.org/> for the statement and more

**April 24 Keynote:
Matt Russell, Executive Director
Iowa Interfaith Power & Light**

Drink Water



Breathe

2020 Hangovers

Rev. Dave Shogren, SQB Editor

The only year in memory of Boomers & younger which might be comparable to 2020 for stress, 2001, did not directly touch billions around the world. Covid-19 did, a dominant story worldwide, with Black Lives Matter protests by millions a close second. While masks, Zoom and social distance are largely second nature to rational people of good will, these common-sense measures remain bones of contention as science is attacked and conspiracy theories abound.

Murder and systemic injustice by police, racists and local government provided stressful headlines and video. Progressives such as MFSA, seeing antiracism imperatives, reexamined their blind spots of white privilege, intrinsic in a dominant culture of deeply ingrained systemic racism. Iowa MFSA, pre-dominantly white and heterosexual, embraces intersectionality and correcting our ongoing failures of justice.

Constant lies, mishandling pandemic and thinly veiled racism left Trump vulnerable, trailing in early polls. He responded by challenging the validity of the election well in advance. On election night he declared victory prematurely as in-person votes, counted first -

**Note about SQB links: a PDF with live links
is online at: www.mfsalows.org**

had him ahead. The election was a clear victory for Biden/Harris, surviving recounts, legal challenges and attempts to steal the Electoral College. Unfortunately, millions believed Trump's **big lie** that the election was stolen, leading to the storming of the Capitol, a failed coup resulting in a quick second House impeachment. Ongoing investigation by the FBI and law enforcement reveals how close a violent mob came to capturing and possibly executing VP Pence and congressional leaders. Military and police personnel are among those implicated, caught on security cameras. Trumpist Congresspersons may be revealed. Here are two articles, excellent reads.

1. Timothy Snyder, Yale history professor, NYT, 1/9/21 "The American Abyss"

<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/09/magazine/trump-coup.html>

2. Rev. Nate Nims "Reckoning with White Christian Nationalism" in **UM Insight** 1/11/21

<https://um-insight.net/perspectives/reckoning-with-white-christian-nationalism/>

Perpetual War Rev. Brian Carter

As 2021 dawns the U.S is involved militarily with "Wars on Terrorism" in 80 countries. In Somalia 700 troops were deployed 3 years ago, after President Trump, with Pentagon approval, declared part of that country an "area of active hostilities." Loosening of military rules of engagement, repeated multiple times, makes it easier for the US military to conduct airstrikes, drone attacks and worse aggressions.

In the first seven months of 2020, the Trump Administration launched 43 airstrikes in Somalia. The total number of airstrikes under the Bush and Obama administrations there, 2007 - 2016 was 41. To be fair, airstrikes were increasing under Bush and Obama, not only in Somalia, but in many countries where hostilities or terrorism occurred. In December 2020 President Trump finally announced the withdrawal of troops from Somalia, but it remains unclear when/if troops will leave.

The Bureau of Investigative Journalism and "Airwars," a nonprofit monitoring organization, carefully documented air strikes and casualties in Somalia from January 2004 - February 2020. They report 202 airstrikes, with 1,197 - 1,410 combatant, 12-97 civilian and 1-13 child deaths. Perpetual War is not restricted to Africa, with 23 U.S. bases. There was a 330% increase in civilian death from 2016 under Obama to 2019 under Trump in Afghanistan. From 2007 to 2016 US led forces killed an average of 582 civilians each year. From 2017 through 2019, American forces killed an average of 1,134 civilians each year, a 95% increase. (AlterNet Newsletter, Jan 11, 2021)

PERPETUAL WAR is defined as a state of war with no clear roadmap for peace or an end to hostilities. Vastly bloated defense budgets allow the U.S. to fight multiple (80!) wars simultaneously; our 2018 military budget was larger than our World War II budget, adjusted for inflation. War is fully funded. Major General Smedley D. Butler, twice a Congressional Medal of Honor recipient notes how military contractors and manufacturers make fortunes.



President Dwight D. Eisenhower warned of the military-industrial complex as a threat to democracy and liberty. We must guard against undue influence as the potential for a disastrous rise of misplaced power

persists. Noam Chomsky says Perpetual War further empowers dominant political and economic classes. **PERPETUAL WAR threatens liberties** and democratic institutions by promoting the lie that war keeps citizens safe. In our culture, the military is glorified and honored while our collective mind is trained to worship a false god of power, weakening our economy. In an age of pandemic, it is not only the military which deserves a hearty, "Thank you for your service!" Teachers, health care workers, farmers and food servers, delivery personnel, social and mental health workers; all are essential and deserving thanks.

In Democracy in America Historian Alexis de Tocqueville wrote, "No protracted war can fail to endanger the freedom of a democratic country. . . If it does not lead to despotism by sudden violence, it prepares people for it more gently by their habits." Entering a state of perpetual war becomes easier in a modern democratic republic such as the U.S. even though the military-industrial-Congressional pact threatens democracy, creates poverty, causes over-priced housing and food insecurity for millions. Our trust in war necessitates a hero versus demonized, good versus evil contrast which moves citizens toward fear and conspiracy-based attacks on elections and democratic institutions such as the January 6, 2021 insurrection. Christians should always remember, "Those who live by the sword shall die by the sword." Jesus admonishes all his followers to love enemies and neighbors as oneself.

What to do? Repeal the 2001 AUMF (2001 Authorization for Use of Military Force) and urge President Biden to reign in military spending for perpetual and drone war. Work for that which makes for peace by supporting locally led peace with justice efforts that are fully inclusive and designed to end PERPETUAL WAR and the failed War on Terror.

**Bridging Racial Dividing Lines:
Intentionally creating multiracial/multi-ethnic
congregations in the Iowa Annual Conference
of the United Methodist Church
Rev. Dr. Willy L Mafuta, Ph.D., Th.D.**

A recent issue of the *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* notes that racially diverse congregations are becoming important parts of America's religious landscape. Multiracial congregations are defined as those in which no one racial or ethnic group comprises more than 80% of church membership. This racial diversity allows internal racial power structures to be challenged while promoting inclusivity and equity, often resulting in membership growth. In 2019 there was a 16% growth in the number of multiracial congregations, as compared to 6% in 1998.

The Iowa Annual Conference includes several African American churches and white churches hosting African ministries. Satellite churches comprise mostly people of similar origin or regions (Africa), dual Latinx-Anglo ministries, Asian or other ethnic associations. The Iowa Annual Conference does appoint pastors of color who are often relegated to predominately white rural areas. As a result, Sunday worship in Iowa churches is highly segregated, predominately elderly and white, reflective of Iowa demographics.

I am arguing that **growing numbers of minority groups in Iowa's larger cities calls for our Conference to intentionally create multi-racial congregations.** This is becoming ever more imperative as the country experiences growth in minorities while reckoning with injustice, inequity and systematic racism against people of color.

Racism or racialization is based on power dynamics and position superiority. In a hierarchical system, the dominate group, by forceful design or default constructs guardrails/safeguards of privilege. Churches, as moral social compasses, play a major role to mitigate injustice.

In 2016, I conducted a research study of three churches in South African Sophiatown, a mixed-race community that once was black before being levelled by Apartheid to promote white expansion. Today's

Sophiatown has a predominately white Afrikaner Dutch Reformed Church, a black Anglican Church and a Catholic Church, all within a 3-mile radius.

The study measured commitment to an overarching identity, reconciliation, inclusivity, diversity and equity in each congregation. It found that the Catholic Church located in a predominantly black section with racial diversity, was growing in membership and becoming a platform for racial dialogue, equity and inclusivity as compared to more racially monolithic churches.

Apartheid in South Africa was a mirror image of America's Jim Crow and segregated laws of the 1950s/60s. Unfortunately, in the America of today, systemic racism perpetuated by that system lingers in a metastasis which Michelle Alexander calls "The New Jim Crow." The death of George Floyd and other persons of color confronts our collective consciousness.

EMBRACE & INCLUDE

DO NO HARM

OPEN DOORS

As a church formed around Wesleyan ideals of "do no harm" and social justice, the Iowa Conference should resist evil and intentionally seek to create structures which mitigate injustice and promote social and racial cohesion. To succeed in this vision, the Conference must pair pastors of passion, vision and cultural competency to initiate multi-racial churches within identified areas of diverse racial/ethnic population growth. For newly birthed congregations of this type to thrive, the Iowa Conference must embrace shared leadership with the community and support new liturgy/worship models.

In and of themselves, multi-racial congregations cannot eliminate entrenched American racism. Yet they can provide a prophetic platform to speak truth to power, a "Thus sayeth the Lord" Word, modelling ongoing healthy race relationships. By intentionally fostering inclusive congregations, anti-racism is promoted. A powerful evangelical message, our motto of "open hearts, open minds, open doors" becomes real as all people, regardless of race, background, ethnicity, origin, or sexual orientation are welcome indeed.

Theology of COVID-19

Rev. Joshua Steward

A January 13, 2021 *The Christian Century* article, "[Qoheleth meets COVID-19](#)" by Duke University professor Brent A. Strawn suggests that Qoheleth – Hebrew for both the book of Ecclesiastes and its author – has two things to say to us during Covid.

One, that life is finite. For Qoheleth, life is "small," is "vanity." Strawn writes: "Finitude is a real problem for Qoheleth...he doesn't like it. It irks him that death is the great leveler of people...despite how shrewd he's been, there's no guarantee his heirs won't be...fools, squandering everything (2:18-21). To add insult to injury...he faces the same reward that any...dolt does – the cold hard...grave. "Why then have I been so very wise?" he asks (2:14-17)."

The second thing Professor Strawn says Qoheleth teaches during Covid is "...the exquisite nature of life..." Ecclesiastes celebrates joy multiple times. (2:24-26; 3:12-13,22; 5:18-20; 8:15; 9:7-10; 11:7-10; 7:14). Strawn suggests Qoheleth is a "preacher of joy." He concludes, "The way out of finitude is not by denying or escaping it. It's by accepting it, and by doing and enjoying – don't forget the enjoying! – what we can, while we can, within our profoundly inescapable and frustrating limitations."

Enjoying life is good advice, yet many congregations are worshipping online with U.S. deaths from COVID-19 over 380,000 and climbing. A vaccine is not yet widely in arms and we need a more robust theology than, "DON'T WORRY, BE HAPPY." Professor Strawn misses Qoheleth's full response. Qoheleth calls himself a king, giving many examples of his wealth in Ec. 2:4-8. Whether Qoheleth was Solomon or not, this wealthy, powerfully wise person rejects privilege and wealth which he feels is all vanity. In each of the seven joy verses Strawn lists in Ecclesiastes, Qoheleth encourages people, defining joy as an intrinsic part of toil, labor and company. It is good to eat, drink and be merry.

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- Visit mfsaiowa.org for SQB archives, monthly events memo and more.
- [Facebook.com/MFSAIowa/](https://www.facebook.com/MFSAIowa/)
- MFSA National <http://mfsaweb.org/>
www.facebook.com/MFSAVoices/

MFSA Iowa Membership and Support:

To join or donate, contact membership and financial secretary Mike Biklen.

Organizer Fund: Supports coordinator Eloise Cranke.

- **General Fund:** operating budget expenses.
 - **Memorial Fund:** Gifts given /designated
- Donate by mailing a check to MFSA Iowa
c/o Mike Biklen 515 E. 11th St., Muscatine, IA
52761-3920 or [via PayPal](#) at mfsaiowa.org.



(Photo by Tom Blackout on Unsplash)

In 2:26, Qoheleth proclaims: "For to the one who pleases him God gives wisdom and knowledge and joy; but to the sinner he gives the work of gathering and heaping..." "Heaping and gathering" or focusing solely on amassing wealth, is sinful. Ecclesiastes teaches a focus on God to make life rich and full in the face of death, not simply accumulating many things.

In summary, Qoheleth rejects a life of privilege. Fulfillment comes in community, enjoying toil, labor, company, food, drink and free time. Sinners obsess by only heaping and gathering.

Jesus teaches similar values: "Truly I tell you, it will be hard for a rich person to enter the kingdom of heaven" (Mt. 19:23). Jesus also tells the story of the rich barn building fool in Luke 12:18-21.