

Conference info

Societas Homiletica online conference 10-12 August 2020:

"Words in a Time of Crisis: Preaching during the COVID-19 Pandemic."

Preliminary program:

August 10: Keynote lecture by Deborah van Deusen Hunsinger, Professor of Pastoral Theology Emerita, Princeton Theological Seminary
"Word and Witness: Lifelines for the Traumatized"



Deborah van Deusen Hunsinger, Ph.D., an ordained minister in the Presbyterian Church, USA, is a Spiritual Director at Princeton Theological Seminary, and Professor of Pastoral Theology Emerita. Originally trained as a pastoral counselor, Deborah taught courses in pastoral theology and pastoral care at Princeton Seminary for 25 years. Among her major publications are: *Bearing the Unbearable: Trauma, Gospel and Pastoral Care* (2015), *Transforming Church Conflict: Compassionate Leadership in Action* (2011), *Pray Without Ceasing: Revitalizing Pastoral Care* (2006), *Theology and Pastoral Counseling: A New Interdisciplinary Approach* (1995)

August 11: Keynote lecture by Ian Nell, Professor in Practical Theology and Missiology, Stellenbosch University, South Africa
"Pandemic homiletics?"
"A South African exploration of preaching during the time of the Covid-19 crisis"



Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic confronted the world and South Africans with the challenges of health care and "Zoomification": From the 29th of March it was, because of the restriction and ban on gatherings, expected from ministers and faith leaders in South Africa to use online technology to preach their sermons. Many preachers had to rethink the format and content of their preaching. The question arose as to what sermons may look like during these times, and specifically the content and God-images of the sermons? This article examines the sermon content of a purposive sample of ministers from the combined Stellenbosch circuit of the Dutch Reformed Church and Uniting Reformed Churches in South Africa. Twenty sermons were analyzed, making use of grounded theory in order to identify the core themes of their preaching and the God-images used amid the COVID-19 pandemic. With the sermons in hand, the researcher asked three questions to these sermons: Which texts did the preachers choose? What themes emerged from the sermons? With which God-images did the preachers work? Using Atlas.ti, the sermons were coded, topics were identified and God-images were discerned.

International panel on Preaching Trauma

Participants:

Rev. Dr. Gary V. Simpson of Concord Baptist Church, Brooklyn, New York,

Rev. Dr. Luiz Coelho, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil,

Alfred Stephen Professor of Homiletics and Academic Dean of Graduate Studies at the Tamilnadu Theological Seminary. Founder of Ecumenical Centre for Homiletic Orientation,



Conference statement:

Most of us became aware of the coronavirus just before the season of Lent this year. As it swept through the world, communities and nations were suddenly locked down amid an unprecedented situation of uncertainty and fear. COVID-19 causes thousands of casualties and infects hundreds of thousands of people. Millions have lost their jobs and the poorest and most vulnerable among us (including persons who are homeless, refugees, the elderly, and those with pre-existing health conditions), are most susceptible to hardship and suffering. Further exacerbating this situation is our uncertainty as to its treatment, impact, and world-wide duration. Many will be infected; everyone will be affected.

Preachers have suddenly found themselves in terribly difficult and complicated situations. People are seeking comfort, hope, and meaning. They may also be raising difficult questions about life and faith. But preachers may not have the answers to their questions and they have also lost many of their traditional means of reaching out to visit, celebrate services, and preach in the physical presence of their congregations.

COVID-19 is a global problem but it also presents at least two, closely related homiletical challenges not only for preachers but for those who teach and study preaching as homileticians: (1) There are questions of content. What can and should preachers say at a time like this, even as conditions continue to develop and change over time? How can sermons bring hope without losing their connection to the reality of suffering among congregants, communities, nations, and the wider world? Those who teach and study preaching are also challenged to reassess their methods and the questions they raise in the classroom and academy. How can preachers comfort people without using obscure or irrelevant words from seemingly antiquated religious traditions? Is lament a possible language for sermons? Should we offer answers and reassurance or should sermons raise open-ended questions? When do we provide each or any of these? Which Biblical passages offer healing words to wounded people, and which hermeneutical strategies are appropriate? What kinds of changes may we consider making in our classrooms, pedagogies, interactions with students, and in the direction of our research agendas? (2) There are questions of form: As physical gatherings of congregations and classrooms are not possible in most parts of the world, digital media have been and continue to be used for preaching and worship. Many of these endeavors involve great creativity on the part of pastoral leaders, laity, and preachers around the world who have utilized new formats and preaching forms. Which are most meaningful and effective and under what circumstances? How do we assess whether the forms we are implementing are indeed helpful in our preaching? What are the pedagogical and educational implications of adapting to online methods of teaching homiletics?

During this online, synchronous conference, we will engage in analyses of Preaching during the COVID-19 Pandemic as we explore the content and form of our preaching and teaching, sharing academic insights and studies from different parts of the world and various Christian denominations. We invite you to join us and other international colleagues for this two-day conference.

All participants are asked to register ahead of time and in lieu of a registration fee you are encouraged to make a donation in support of our programs.