

Plenary presentations

Oak Suite, Elm Grove

Note that plenary presentations will be filmed.



Rachel Griffiths

Living Between Two Worlds

The act of challenging hope requires us to be present to the world as it is, and active in shaping the world as it should be. How do we find freedom as we live in this tension between these two worlds? This opening session will help us arrive well, awakening our imaginations to the reality and possibility of challenging hope. We will also have the chance to begin 'doing' some hope.



Dr Oded Leshem

Hope as a catalyst for social change

Combining philosophical, historical, and psychological perspectives, the talk takes the audience on a journey into the depths of hope and its role as an instigator of political and social change. Based on research on hope in times of crisis, we will try to answer thought-provoking questions such as: What is hope, and how does it operate in the current era marked by uncertainty? The talk also introduces the bi-dimensional model of hope that has been instrumental in defining and measuring hope in a wide variety of contexts.



Dr Munyurangabo Benda

Living and/as Learning Hope

Once, so Ernst Bloch tells us, people travelled far and wide to learn fear. However, in our time, fear comes easier, ever closer, more suffocating. At times, the very landscape of life feels like a work of creators of fear, a vast manufactory of anxieties. As a result, the toll on the health of our minds and souls is increasingly stretching into the realm of the catastrophic. In the circumstances, to speak of hope is daring, dangerous even. Yet, I want to suggest that this is indeed the feeling that suits us better, and serious intellectual-spiritual reflection on it is long overdue.

In my contribution to this conference, I will draw heavily on my personal experience of living through and after the genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda (April-July 1994); reflecting on it as a journey of learning hope. In prose and poetry, I look into the despair of dehumanizing cruelty, the disappointment of institutional collapse – with the family, the church and the state at the forefront of my

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thinking, and the sheer hopelessness of absurd death. To have lived through, known and experienced that world is to truly understand failure, even the failure of understanding. To live after that world is no less spiritually and mentally exhausting.

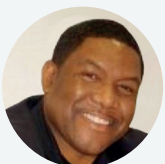
To chart an exodus out of it is, has been a work of hope; one that has demanded of me to seek the love of success rather than failure. I do so by grounding individuals as sites of resilient hope, a hope that proved superior to fear and therefore unlocked possibilities for life in that world and the world that came after. By sharing the stories of those individuals that stood against fear and its creators on my behalf and others who were in my position, I hope – there goes that word again – to make a case for hope as a thing of this world, to be found in this world and to help this world.



Tazim Fatima

Planting Peace, Growing Hope

In this session, Tazim will discuss the Peace Pole project she initiated at Southlands College. Standing tall at the front of the college, the Peace Pole is adorned with the universal message, “May Peace Prevail on Earth,” inscribed in multiple languages. This serves as a poignant reminder of our shared commitment to fostering a campus culture rooted in diversity, understanding, and cooperation. There are estimated to be over 250,000 Peace Poles across the world. The idea to introduce a Peace Pole was born out of a desire to create a physical symbol that embodies Southlands’ core values. As we navigate the challenges of our fast-paced lives, the Peace Pole stands as a steadfast reminder of the importance of peace, unity, and respect for all.



Bevan Powell, MBE

Hope for Justice

Bevan, founding member of the UK National Black Police Association, former Labour councillor, and current Director for Inclusion for the Methodist Church and member of the Racial Justice Advocacy Forum, will tell the story of his lifelong pursuit of justice and the lessons he has learned about hope and change.

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Dr Heather Major

Lamenting Hope

Biblical lament is often ambiguous, messy and uncomfortable. There are threads of pain, suffering, doubt and anger which are rarely found in our regular practices of prayer and worship. There are also echoes of hope and confident expectation. The act of lamenting can be, in itself, an expression of hope in the midst of despair.

In this session, Heather will explore lament through the dual lenses of academic research and personal experience, encouraging conference attendees to consider the place of lament in their own lives, congregations and contexts.



Bill Crooks

Resident Cartoonist

Bill will be capturing the day through cartoons and he will share a mural with us toward the end of the day.



**The Revd Dr Jo
Cox-Darling**

Closing Reflection

Jo will bring our conference to a close with a reflection and poetry.