



Congregational Science

Session 5: Friday, June 7, 9-10:30 a.m.

“Congregations: Challenging Times, Hopeful Solutions”

Location: Journals Room

Marsha Vaughn, LMFT, *Adler University*, Convener

- **Chris J. Gonzalez**, LMFT, *Lipscomb University*, Convener
- **Holly Catterton Allen**, *Lipscomb University*
- **Earl Lavender**, *Lipscomb University*

As congregations face challenging times with membership declines, generational fragmentation, church hurt, and many members experiencing deconstruction of their faith, some church leaders and members are having a hard time holding on to hope. This session addresses several of the main challenges facing congregations by offering insights and potential solutions to meet these challenges.

Chris Gonzalez, *Lipscomb University*, “Deconstructing Deconstruction: Systemic Perspectives on Faith Deconstruction”

For several years, many people questioning their faith have described the process they are going through as “deconstructing” their faith. Deconstruction as a descriptive term or critical process has been popularized and transcended its philosophical and academic origins. This paper seeks to explore the systemic and cultural context in which the popularized iteration of “deconstruction” is applied to one’s faith. The presentation concludes by framing deconstruction as a social process of stewardship of relevant and meaningful questions through the lens of ambiguous loss and post-traumatic growth.

Marsha Vaughn, *Adler University*, “Relational Repair After Religious/Spiritual Abuse: Perspectives from Systemic Therapy Theories”

Continuing the discussion on spiritual trauma and religious abuse from previous CSCs, this session will provide a more in-depth exploration of relational repair through the lens of several family systems theories and therapy models, such as attachment theory, Schwartz’s Internal Family Systems therapy, Bowen’s family systems theory, and Hargrave’s Restoration Therapy. The emphasis will be on contrasting each model’s definition of a “self” and of healthy relationships, extending those definitions to a human’s relationship with the Divine. We will also discuss the application of these theories to psychotherapy, pastoral counseling, and spiritual direction.

Holly Catterton Allen, *Lipscomb University*, “How Can Congregations Respond to Generational Fragmentation?”

Congregations have become generationally fragmented over the past fifty years; that is, by building ministries based on age-specific developmental needs and by emphasizing the differences across the generations, we have isolated the generations. Age groups

have become separated from each other and from the church family as a whole. This presentation, building on the premise that intergenerational Christian experiences especially and uniquely nurture spiritual growth and development across all ages, will outline key responses to the questions posed by generational fragmentation.

Earl Lavender, *Lipscomb University*, "Renewal and Congregational Growth: Application of the Divine Empowerment Model"

Having planted two churches, one in Italy and another in Illinois, and with my experience in teaching at Lipscomb and consulting with churches internationally, this paper will summarize my research, study and observation concerning the importance of offering creative participation to those who identify as followers of Jesus as the Christ. Using the model of divine empowerment reflected in Ephesians 4:1-16, this paper will demonstrate the potential of renewal and congregational growth based on a concept of ministry focusing on appropriately equipping all members to creatively explore their active participation in the body of Christ.