

Introduction to the Vice-Presidential Address

Kimberly Hope Belcher

Kimberly Hope Belcher is Associate Professor of Theology (Liturgical Studies) at the University of Notre Dame in South Bend, Indiana.

The Reverend Doctor James Farwell straddles many divides. Professionally, he is Professor of Theology and Liturgy at Virginia Theological Seminary and also the H. Boone Porter Professor of Liturgics at General Theological Seminary. (Those institutions are in different states, James!) James has been very active in the North American Academy of Liturgy, as well, a founding member of both the Critical Theories and the Comparative Liturgy seminar. He is currently bipedal in the ordinary way, being Vice President and President-elect, but is also doing the very heavy lifting of identifying a mode and location for our meeting next year.

A more profound type of bilocation, however, can be found in his scholarly work. He bridges Christian liturgical theology and Buddhist practice, liturgizing the approach of comparative theology. Beginning from the practice of his own Anglican Episcopalian tradition, James has gone forth into Soto Zen, exploring types of belonging that depend on multiple modalities of religious practice in one receptive human person. Methodologically, his work fuses liturgical theology, comparative theology, and autoethnography. As a result, his work speaks to the ways that practice becomes a condition for religious knowledge, and how one can nonetheless understand the knowledge gained by practice as a precondition for that practice. James's work respects a mysterious and timely binary he describes himself in his 2018 article, "On Whether Christians Should Participate in Buddhist Practice: A Critical Autobiographical Reflection."

On the one hand, "one can learn from religious traditions other than one's own—a belief I came to inhabit from many hours of conversation with my maternal grandmother who, quite out of step with her time, history, and formal education, read and appreciated Jewish, Christian, Vedanta, and Buddhist texts and passed that appreciation on to me; and (the second conviction) ... there is an integrity to religious traditions as practitioners experience them that deserves respect and resists any careless assemblage of various parts of several traditions into someone's preferential pastiche." James, we thank you for your service among us, and we look forward to hearing more in your paper, "Speaking to Religious Hybridity."