



CENTER FOR
Faith Studies

THE EYE OF THE STORM

**Real Reasons for Hope
in a Conflicted World**

2011-2012

Annual Lecture Series



Countryside

Community Church UCC

8787 Pacific Street

Omaha, Nebraska 68114

www.countrysideucc.org

So when life is chaotic, when disasters loom and whirl is king, how shall we maintain hope? Dizzied by serial catastrophes in the environment, and world-wide economic and political strife, we note shortening attention spans, increasing anxiety and too many demands on our time. We find ourselves asking how we can best remain hope-filled, grounded and faith-full, to find the eye of the storm that rages around us... and to operate outwards from that central place of quiet and peace.

Centered in love of God, love of neighbor and love of self, we seek reasons for hope that can we carry with us every day. If part of our evolution as storm-tossed human beings is to increasingly make life whole for our neighbors as well as ourselves, how do we expand our consciousness and stretch our moral imagination in service to those neighbors? To whom do we turn for wisdom?

Each of the presenters we offer this year comes, we believe, bearing wisdom and gifts of hope. They offer their years of academic work as well as life experiences, bringing us to center and equipping us with tools for stretching our moral imagination for the benefit of all humans and other creatures with whom we share this earth. Happily, when we engage deeply with the world...it is there we are most likely to find God, and we, too, become beneficiaries.

May we acknowledge our opportunity then, to recognize hope and to operate from the eye of the storm. How best to do that? Rather than finding ourselves overwhelmed by the size and all-encompassing nature of the storm, Countryside's Senior Pastor Eric Elnes invites each of us to live into our "sweet spot"—much as author Scott Russell Sanders reminds us that the challenge for all of us is to "find those few causes which are peculiarly our own, those to which we are clearly called, and then to embrace them wholeheartedly."

All are welcome at the Center for Faith Studies. We offer you these events and opportunities for inspiration and encouragement, our best expressions of real reasons for hope in the coming year.

Sunday, September 11, 2011 • 2:00 PM

Sahar Aziz

THEN AND NOW: Civil Liberties and Interfaith Relations Ten Years After 9/11

*A community-wide gathering for reflection and remembrance,
featuring civil rights attorney and writer Sahar Aziz*



**WITHERSPOON CONCERT HALL
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This program is free to the public, but pre-registration is strongly encouraged at www.911omaha.eventbrite.com or in the Countryside Church offices in person.



Join with fellow community members on the tenth anniversary of 9/11 to remember this tragic event and to reflect on its impact on religious and ethnic relations in our community and country. Esteemed civil rights attorney and writer Sahar Aziz will share her insights on the delicate balance between national security and civil liberties in our post-9/11 America and will offer thoughts on what the next ten years may hold.

Sahar Aziz is an associate professor of law at Texas Wesleyan School of Law and frequently writes about national security and civil rights issues for a variety of media sites. She has also served as a senior policy advisor at the U.S. Department of Homeland Security.



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Radical Amazement

Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, a great theologian, said "our goal should be to live life in radical amazement, to look at the world in a way that takes nothing for granted. Everything is phenomenal; everything is incredible; to be spiritual is to be constantly amazed."

The Center for Faith Studies offers a fourth annual *Radical Amazement Lecture* with special guest Scott Russell Sanders, Ph.D., exploring the opportunities for inspiration offered by the intersections of faith, imagination and the environment.

Thursday, October 13, 2011 • 7:00 PM

Scott Russell Sanders, Ph.D.



The Way of Imagination

LECTURE, Q AND A AND BOOK-SIGNING

Author and professor Scott Russell Sanders seeks to articulate the link between the shaping force we perceive in nature and the shaping force that gives rise to art, inventions, utopias, ethical ideals, stories, and other human creations. How do we nurture imagination in ourselves, our children, and our communities? How might we use this power to envision and create a way of life more in harmony with nature, a way of life less damaging to Earth and less costly to future generations? What does the power of imagination suggest about the role humans might play in the cosmos?

Dr. Sanders is the author of twenty books of fiction and nonfiction, including, most recently, *A Private History of Awe* and *A Conservationist Manifesto*. His *Earth Works: Selected Essays* is forthcoming in 2012. He is a Distinguished Professor Emeritus of English at Indiana University, where he taught from 1971 to 2009. In addition to his evening lecture, Dr. Sanders will meet at Countryside with people who are interested in deepening their sense of place, as well as with students of English at University Nebraska Omaha. For more information about these opportunities, please contact Cyndi Kugler at cyndik@countrysideucc.org.

UNIVERSITY OF
Nebraska Department
Omaha of English

Sunday, October 23, 2011 • 7:00 PM

Rev. Michael Piazza

Shawn Northcutt



Straight Talk From A Gay Man:

*Why We Should ALL Be
Interested in LGBT Equality*

LECTURE, Q AND A AND BOOK-SIGNING

Reverend Michael Piazza has been named one of the most influential people in the gay and lesbian movement. Having served as pastor of the liberal and inclusive Cathedral of Hope in Dallas, Texas, for over 20 years, during which time the membership/attendance grew from 280 to over 3,500, Reverend Piazza led his congregation to be uncompromisingly devoted to reaching out to lesbian or gay persons who have been excluded by their churches of origin. Rev. Piazza now serves as senior pastor of Virginia-Highland Church in Atlanta, Georgia and as Co-Executive Director for the Center for Progressive Renewal, an organization that supports the birth of new liberal/progressive congregations, and the renewal and strengthening of existing progressive churches.

Throughout his career, he has supported and equipped progressive people of faith to be champions for peace and justice in our conflicted world. Reverend Piazza joins us at the Center for Faith Studies to shed light on the vast scope of LGBT issues in our community, and how those issues not only lie at the intersection of faith and justice, but also have profound *practical and societal* effects on all of us, whether gay or straight.



Thursday, November 10, 2011 • 7:00 PM

Diana Butler Bass, Ph.D.



The Great Religious Recession or A Great Spiritual Awakening?

LECTURE, Q AND A AND BOOK-SIGNING

Like other aspects of American life, religion is going through a challenging period of change, erosion, and decline. Many Americans are dissatisfied with forms of faith and church that no longer seem to speak to the soul. From membership to traditional beliefs, nearly every measure of conventional religiosity is down. Dr. Diana Butler Bass explores the religious trends reshaping our understandings of faith, practice, and community, drawing out the *real* questions that Americans are asking about their spiritual lives. Probing these deeper questions – and addressing them in meaningful ways – opens paths for a different sort of Christianity, one that offers genuine hope for spiritual awakening and cultural transformation.

Dr. Butler Bass is a writer, speaker, and independent scholar specializing in American religion and culture. She is the author of seven books including *A People's History of Christianity: the Other Side of the Story*, and best-selling *Christianity for the Rest of Us*. She regularly consults with religious organizations, blogs at *The Huffington Post* and *Beliefnet*, and comments on religion, politics, and culture in the media including *USA TODAY*, *Time*, *Newsweek*, *The Washington Post*, CNN, FOX, PBS, and NPR. Her presentation at Countryside is based on her new book, due out in February of 2012.

Thursday, January 26, 2012 • 7:00 PM

Frank Schaeffer



The Case for Spirituality in the Age of Doubt:

How Both Atheism and Christian Fundamentalism Miss the Mark on Faith

LECTURE, Q AND A AND BOOK-SIGNING

Former evangelical Christian political activist Frank Schaeffer takes a long, hard (and sometimes hilarious) look at fundamentalist atheists as well as religious zealots. Drawing comparisons in their battle for followers in the world today, he is scathing in revealing their blatant commercialism, fear-mongering and lies of either *commission* or *omission*. Schaeffer speaks from experience, as the child of fundamentalist missionaries, who as an adult became part of the evangelical/fundamentalist political scene until he could stand it no longer. His memoir, *CRAZY FOR GOD: How I Grew Up As One of the Elect, Helped Found the Religious Right and Lived to Take All (or Almost All) of It Back*, was a best-seller. Schaeffer is now a follower in what he calls the “Church of the Hopeful Uncertainty,” worshipping God rather than the Bible itself, and finding great beauty in the music, art and liturgies of the Church. Through honest reflection, Schaeffer offers hope for many who can no longer stomach the inflexibilities of either evangelical/fundamentalism, or atheism, and who are looking for a way to interpret and make meaning of the God-experiences that enrich their lives every day. Frank Schaeffer is a popular blogger for the *Huffington Post*. He has also written for *USA Today*, the *Washington Post*, the *San Francisco Chronicle*, the *Los Angeles Times*, the *Baltimore Sun* and many other publications. He has appeared on *Oprah*, *20/20*, the *NBC Today Show* and many other TV and radio programs.

Sunday, February 5, 2012 • 7:00 PM

Grace Wolf-Chase, Ph.D.



Extraterrestrials, Science and Religion:

Life and Meaning in an Evolving Universe

LECTURE, Q AND A AND BOOK-SIGNING

During the last few decades, tremendous progress has been made in tracing the evolution of the Universe through the emergence of life on Earth. Among these discoveries has been an understanding that planets form along with stars in an ongoing process.

Indeed, we can observe nascent planetary systems in diverse stages of evolution. In addition, we’ve learned that most “adult” stars appear to be accompanied by planets. Dr. Wolf-Chase examines how these discoveries inform our thinking about life on other worlds, including intelligent life, and offers reflections on how this might influence Christian theology and dialogue with other faiths. The concept of “other worlds” is not new to Christian thought, but for the first time in human history, this concept has moved from the realm of abstract thought to empirical scientific investigation.

Dr. Wolf-Chase is an astronomer at the Adler Planetarium and senior research associate in the Department of Astronomy & Astrophysics at the University of Chicago. Devoted to tearing down barriers that contribute to negative attitudes toward science and scientists, Wolf-Chase is passionately interested in helping to build partnerships, trust and mutual respect between scientists and religious communities.

Thursday, April 12, 2012 • 7:00 PM

Isabel Wilkerson



Joe Henson

The Warmth of Other Suns:

*The Epic Story of America's
Great Migration*

LECTURE, Q AND A AND BOOK-SIGNING

In her book, *The Warmth of Other Suns*, Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist, professor and author Isabel Wilkerson chronicles one of the great untold stories of American history: the decades-long migration of black citizens who fled the South for northern and western cities in search of a better life. From 1915 to 1970, this exodus of almost six million people, largely fleeing the violence of "Jim Crow" laws, changed the face of America to this day. Join us as Wilkerson tells the story behind the story - how she interviewed more than a thousand people, and gained access to previously untapped data and official records, to write her definitive and vividly dramatic account of how these American journeys unfolded, forever altering our cities, our country, and ourselves. Through the power of shared stories, Wilkerson presents the remarkable details of the lives of three unique individuals and their families. The book and her talk reflect her commitment to this project and offer a superb account of an "unrecognized immigration" within our own land, stretching us to consider all of its implications for questions of race, power, politics, religion and class today.



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Tickets are required for all lectures except the September 11 "Then and Now" event which is free and open to the public. For all other events, tickets are for the suggested donation of \$10. Students with ID are admitted for free. For more information, please contact Cyndi Kugler, Director of the Center for Faith Studies: cyndik@countrysideucc.org or 402.391.0350 ext. 121.

If requesting tickets by mail, please include a check made out to *Countryside Community Church* and a self-addressed, stamped envelope with your request. Please send to the church at 8787 Pacific St., Omaha, Nebraska 68114



CENTER FOR
Faith Studies

Center for Faith Studies Mission Statement

Our mission is to provide study of what it means to be the community of people through whom God is experienced.