



Scott Griessel

CAIR California

by DA'SHAWN MOSLEY

Showing Up

These five leaders are working to make our world a more just and peaceful place.

Many people talk about the injustices in the world but do nothing to rectify them. This can't be said about the following five leaders—pastors, activists, lawyers, businesspeople, and artists—who Sojourners will recognize as “movement honorees” at the June 13-15 Summit 2018. These innovators are doing what Jesus did: taking God's vision of the world and spurring others toward that ideal.



Eze Amos

Rev. Brittany Caine-Conley

“It’s about building a relationship and showing up.”

Long before Rev. Brittany Caine-Conley entered the nation’s gaze in her work to dismantle white supremacy in Charlottesville, Va., her love for social justice began on a small scale. When Caine-Conley was a child, she watched *Rugrats*, the animated series on Nickelodeon about toddlers gone rogue. Sometimes, though, she couldn’t make it through episodes of the show due to her anger that the character Angelica “was so mean to the other babies and no one was doing anything about it.

“I learned pretty early about myself,” Caine-Conley told *Sojourners*, “that the concepts of justice and righteousness were really important concepts to me.”

Cue Aug. 12, 2017. While much of the nation watched from afar the racially charged violence in Charlottesville, Caine-Conley encountered the physical threats in person as she protested the white nationalist rally in her city. Caine-Conley and other protesters were shoved by supporters of the Unite the Right rally. And the car that a Nazi sympathizer plowed—apparently on purpose—into a crowd of protesters, killing 32-year-old Heather Heyer, also injured an affiliate of Congregate Charlottesville, the local faith-based social justice network Caine-Conley, United Church of Christ minister, helped organize.

“It was the most horrible thing I’ve ever experienced,” Caine-Conley said to *Vox* about seeing the wounded, who were lying in the street in the car’s wake.

And yet Caine-Conley believes it is her duty to be wherever tragedies like this happen—to put herself in harm’s way. “As a white faith leader,” Caine-Conley told *Rolling Stone*, “I feel it is my duty to absorb violence, so that black and brown bodies don’t have to. Black and brown bodies have been absorbing violence since as long as this country has been occupied by white imperialism.”

Caine-Conley’s activism—Congregate Charlottesville organized nonviolent direct action training in preparation to protest the Unite the Right rally—has garnered national attention, with her name appearing in high-profile publications such as *The New York Times* and *Washington Post*. Dealing with the spotlight has been weird, she told *Sojourners*, but she’s grateful for a larger platform from which she can direct attention to the racism in Charlottesville and the work that must be done to eradicate it. “Activists of color here in Charlottesville have been doing this work a long time,” Caine-Conley acknowledges, but she believes it’s white people’s responsibility to undo the racism they have benefitted from.

“What I did last summer, and what others did with me, is something that other people can do,” said Caine-Conley. “It’s really about building a relationship and showing up.” ■

Kesha Cash

“There are still lots of people out here who want society to be better.”

Communities of color are often overlooked in the financial world, their interests often ignored and their desire for positive economic impact for their neighborhoods denied. But Kesha Cash is working to change that. A former analyst at Merrill Lynch and a graduate of Columbia University’s business school, Cash now helps entrepreneurs who may have been overlooked by funders due to their identities by providing them with the means to start their dream businesses. Cash supports these initiatives

Columbia Business School



first began in Los Angeles when she met a fashion designer who was selling his creations—dresses he had sewn by hand—at a local flea market. “He worked at the flea market on the weekends,” said Cash, “and then, the rest of the week, sold items out of his garage at his home.” She was struck by the quality of his work and his story of struggling to succeed as a fashion designer, and she became committed to using her business knowledge to secure him funding to open a store.

This is just one of numerous success stories that Cash has helped facilitate, but what Cash may be most proud of is the nature of the people she has gathered behind the scenes to work on the Impact America Fund and their commitment to the work. She says the success stories wouldn’t be possible without them.

“We have a fantastic network of people who we can call on at any moment in time, and they respond,” said Cash.

“With so many things going on in the world, and turbulent times, I think, ‘No, there are still a large number of people out here who want society to be better.’” And Kesha Cash is glad to be among them. ■

Zahra Billoo

“I attempt to create space and amplify the concerns of those who are being silenced.”

It’s possible that President Trump knows who Zahra Billoo is, since Billoo has filed suit against the president—but not guaranteed, since Trump has been a defendant in federal court 72 times since 2000.

Billoo, an attorney and executive director of the San Francisco Bay Area chapter of the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), sued Trump, the Homeland Security secretary, the State Department, and the director of National Intelligence over Trump’s immigration order, which restricted for 90 days travel to the U.S. by citizens of seven countries with mostly Muslim populations.

Billoo’s lawsuit, filed with several other American Muslims, states



Jason Halimberg

Jeanette Vizguerra

“Our faith tells us to do what’s moral, what’s right.”

Throughout Jeanette Vizguerra’s 86 days in sanctuary, often with three of her four children by her side, the Virgin of Guadalupe was constantly on her mind. “I always think about the Virgin of Guadalupe,” Vizguerra told *Sojourners*. “She and God are always in my thoughts as I go through all these challenges.”

It was Vizguerra’s faith that sustained her during her time living in First Unitarian and First Baptist churches in Denver—a refuge from the U.S. government’s threat of deportation, until the government granted her a two-year stay of removal last year. Vizguerra says it has also been her faith that has fueled her activism, with more than 21 years of work as a leader in Colorado for the cause of immigrant and worker rights. She also worked as a janitor and started a company.

It’s brave for an undocumented immigrant to be public in the way that Vizguerra has been, in constant danger of being seized from her children and sent back to Mexico. But Vizguerra has taken the risk, even during President Trump’s time in office, sharing not just her story but also the struggles of others. In doing so, she garnered national attention, with *Time* magazine naming her one of the 100 most influential people in the world in 2017 and Emmy-winning actress America Ferrera—a daughter of immigrants—writing about her for the issue.

“I always want to include the stories of others who have not been highlighted,” said Vizguerra, “people who the media is not rushing to get to.”

Vizguerra admits that being a face of a movement is strenuous, but she feels responsible for her community—and for all immigrants—to be adequately represented to the world, so that people who don’t know the immigrant struggle can be educated.

“What I always tell congregations, whenever I visit churches,” said Vizguerra, “is that our faith tells us to do what’s moral, what’s right—to reflect if we’re doing what’s right for our brothers and sisters.”

“This is not a crime,” wrote Ferrera, about Vizguerra’s life in the U.S. “This is the American Dream.” ■



Jake Holschuh

Rev. Julian DeShazier

“My faith is really the only thing that doesn’t waver in the midst of all this nonsense.”

The 2016 U.S. presidential election wasn’t the start of Rev. Julian DeShazier’s awareness of—and grief over—current injustices in a nation built on an ideal of “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.”

“I’m a black man living on Chicago’s South Side,” DeShazier told *Sojourners*. “My life and faith were tested long before 2016.” As the pastor of University Church based in a city known for its gun violence, DeShazier is trying to rewrite Chicago’s murder narrative into a story of peace and care. He was a prime mover behind the South Side’s efforts to have its own Level One adult trauma center—so that gunshot victims wouldn’t have to be taken across the city for care—and in September 2016, the requests were finally fulfilled. In April 2016, DeShazier’s church provided sanctuary to an undocumented father given, by the U.S. government, an order to leave the country.

In November 2015, under the name J.Kwest, DeShazier released a rap album titled *Lemonade*—months before another artist you may have heard of released her

project of the same name. And in July 2015, DeShazier shared an Emmy Award from the local chapter of the National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences for a short film titled “Strange Fruit.”

In short, DeShazier has been a busy man. And in the face of a Trump presidency, it doesn’t seem as if he plans to stop. In December, he and several others cut the ribbon for the opening of the trauma center, and in April he hosted the A.C.T. to End Racism rally in Washington, D.C.

“I don’t really believe in a faith that is only for ‘good times’ or ‘when the party I voted for is in control,’” said DeShazier. “I was taught that I belong to God, am beloved, and possess great power and responsibility. My faith is really the only thing that doesn’t waver in the midst of all this nonsense.”

What DeShazier really wonders is how those who “hold onto this destructive and often loveless status quo” can also hold onto their faith. ■



Things Not See Radio

that the “Muslim Exclusion Order” issued by President Trump “imposes upon Islam ... the stigma of government disfavor.”

“What else will this administration do,” Billoo wondered aloud, in conversation with *Sojourners*, “to target people who pray differently than their friends do?”

Billoo has made it her mission to help stop whatever injustices Trump and others plan next against her fellow American Muslims. In the past few years, Billoo has been arrested while protesting at Speaker Paul Ryan’s office for immigration reform; successfully sued the clothing company Abercrombie & Fitch, which fired a Muslim woman who wouldn’t remove her hijab; appeared on MSNBC and at the 2017 Women’s March in Washington, D.C.; and much more.

But Billoo doesn’t just focus on Muslim rights. Intensely aware of intersectionality, she speaks on the basis that bias against one group is often inextricably linked to bias of

another group. “We try really hard,” said Billoo about CAIR, “to name the fact that this country was built on the genocide of Native Americans and the slave trade—and that we didn’t end slavery but just moved it from the fields to the prison industrial complex—because, though in this moment everyone is talking about Trump, individually, but also as communities, we’ve experienced racism and oppression for generations.”

Billoo is committed to using her privilege to further causes that don’t directly affect her.

“I attempt to create space and amplify the concerns of those who are being silenced,” she said. “I work to protect myself and my family, and it would be dishonest for me to deny that. But beyond that, my hope and my prayer is that my faith also drives my service for others.” ■

Da’Shawn Mosley is assistant editor of Sojourners magazine.