



THE SOUL REPAIR PROJECT

Dedicated to Healing and Preventing Moral Injury in Veterans of War

Exploring Moral Injury and Religious Resources for Moral Repair in War Veterans

A CONFERENCE MARCH 18-19, 2011, BERKELEY, CA

Register at: <https://secure.groundspring.org/dn/index.php?aid=3791>

This conference will explore newly emerging VA research on moral injury and examine effective strategies, theologies, and practices in religious communities that can help veterans heal from moral injury and support their families. Veterans and their families are especially welcome to attend.

Conf. Schedule: Fri., 3/18: Graduate Theological Union, 2400 Ridge Rd. Dinner Bd Rm
12-1 pm Check-in, reception, introduction by **Rev. Dr. Rita N. Brock** and **Rev. Gabriella Lettini**, conf. organizers
1-3 Panel of Veterans, including **Tyler Boudreau**, author of *Packing Inferno: The Unmaking of a Marine*, and **Camilo Mejia**, author of *Road to Ar-Ramadhi*. Facilitator: **Rev. Herman Keizer**, U.S. Army Colonel (ret.)
2:45-3:15 Lecture by **Dr. Shira Maguen**, clinician at San Francisco VA Medical Center and clinical professor at UCSF in the Dept of Psychiatry
3:15-4:15 Panel of Religious Leaders including:
Rev. Lizette Larson-Miller, Professor of Liturgical Leadership and Dean of the Chapel, Church Divinity School of the Pacific
Imam Ustadh Abdullah bin Hamid Ali, resident scholar at Zaytuna Institute
Rabbi Steven Jacobs, Rabbi Emeritus at Temple Kol Tikvah, Woodland Hills
4:15-4:45 Discussion

6:30-9 Extra Event: Reception and Book Reading with Boudreau and Mejia

Sat., 3/19: First Congregational Church, Berkeley, 2345 Channing Way
9-11 am Presentation on Moral Injury, **Rev. Dr. Kent Drescher**, Mental Health Clinician with Pathways Home Program and Menlo Park VA
11-12 Discussion
12-1 lunch
1-3 Workshops
3-4:30 Final Plenary and Closing

1.5 CEUs available. **Registration \$20** for veterans and families and other co-sponsor members: Baptist Peace Fellowship, Buddhist Peace Fellowship, Christian Peace Witness, Center for Islamic Studies, First Congregational Church, Graduate Theological Union, Iraq Veterans Against the War, Jewish Peace Fellowship, Oakland Peace Center, Orthodox Peace Fellowship, Pax Christi, Presbyterian Church USA, Starr King School, Unitarian Universalist Association, United Church of Christ, United Methodist Church GBCS. (full list at www.conscienceinwar.org/about/co-sponsors.)

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WHY THIS CONFERENCE AND WHY NOW?

Suicide rates among active duty military and veterans are currently at alarming and unprecedented rates. In December 2009, Veteran's Administration mental health professionals described a new concept called "moral injury," the devastating negative consequences of "perpetrating, failing to prevent, or bearing witness to acts that transgress deeply held moral beliefs and expectations." (Litz et. al., "Moral Injury and Moral Repair in War Veterans: A Preliminary Model and Intervention Strategy" www.bu.edu/ssw/research/social/pdf/Moral%20Injury%20CPR.doc). They observe that it is a significant contributor to clinical depression, addiction, violent behavior, and suicide.

The aftermath of service in war, for veterans and their families and faith communities, is spiritually devastating, and the current wars, VA clinicians suggest, create conditions that increase the exposure to moral injury. However, veterans who raise moral issues such as guilt and remorse are usually referred to clergy.

Treatment protocols for moral injury suggested by VA clinicians include access to both a caring, nonjudgmental moral authority and a welcoming community that can receive the testimony of veterans, provide means for making restitution, and offer forgiveness. Such protocols indicate that trauma and spirituality often intersect.

Healing the psyche requires healing the spirit.

Alleviating the suffering of moral injury is an important responsibility of religious people in the United States. We must find ways to address guilt and remorse about moral transgressions so grave as to threaten the individual's soul and their communities. Religious communities and scholars can create robust and effective practices to address moral injury and offer teaching about crucial life and death moral issues.

This call to understand and heal moral injury also offers faith communities an opportunity to serve a wider common good that can extend the study and treatment of moral injury into other areas of society, for example law enforcement officers, gang members, by-standers who witness violence, prisoners, and the formerly incarcerated. Through such work we can contribute to efforts to reduce the polarizing, violent tone of discourse in American public life and offer new approaches to complex and difficult moral problems, grounded in restorative justice.