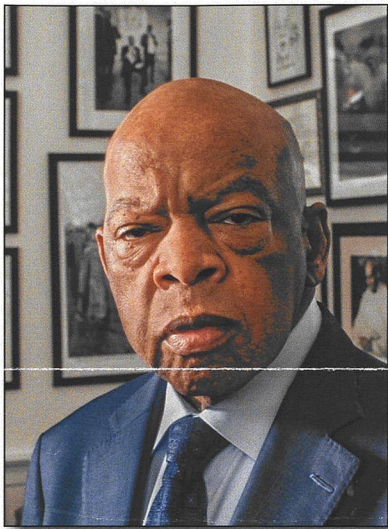


Callings

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CONGRESSMAN JOHN LEWIS MENTOR AND PARTNER, FRIEND AND BROTHER



Congressman John Lewis

Before, during, and after our travels, we wrestled with the challenges facing a nation founded on one document that declared all men created equal and endowed by their creator with inalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness...and another that counted its enslaved population as only three-fifths men accorded none of those rights.

By Rev. Doug Tanner

This past March, my wife Kathy and I stood on the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama with Congressman John Lewis and an impressive delegation of his congressional colleagues. As we huddled around John that Sunday morning, we knew it could be a last opportunity to hear him speak in that revered setting.

"On this bridge, some of us gave a little blood to help redeem the soul of America. Our country is a better country. We are a better people. But we have still a distance to travel, to go before we get there. I want to thank each and every one of you for being here. For not giving up, for not giving in, for keeping the faith, for keeping your eyes on the prize. You're wonderful; you're beautiful; you all look so good! ... We have a lot of work to do. So don't get weary; keep the faith!"

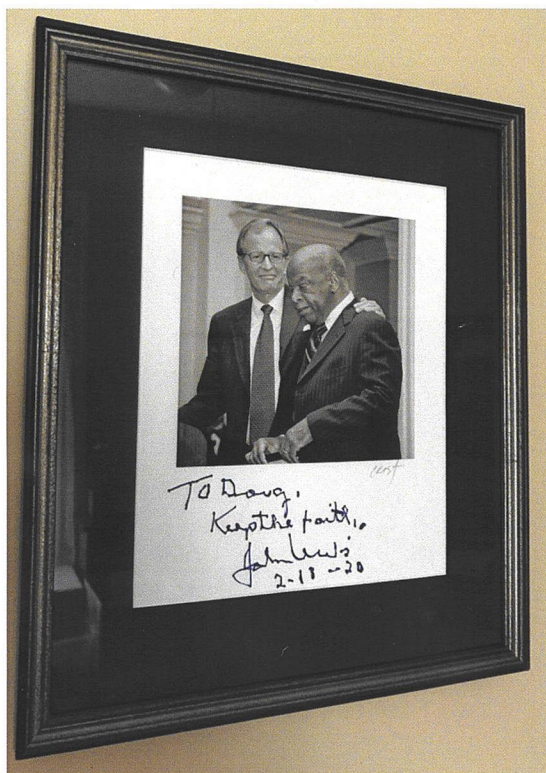
Today we watched John cross that bridge one last time as the horse-drawn carriage bore his flag-draped casket on its way to Montgomery to lie in state in Alabama's Capitol. We couldn't be there in person, but we couldn't have been more there in spirit.

Twenty-three years ago, in March 1997, Congressmen John Lewis (D-GA) and Amo Houghton (R-NY) agreed to co-chair the Board of Directors of The Faith & Politics Institute, an entity I had helped found some years earlier. From deeply different backgrounds and opposite sides of the aisle, John Lewis and Amo Houghton were a dream team. As the Institute's chief executive, I worked with them for seven rich and formative years, and as its senior adviser for another decade. We remained close until their respective passings—Amo's in early March of this year, John's on July 17. My experiences with each were amazingly graced, and many of the times we shared together became hallowed.

Together we created the first Congressional Civil Rights Pilgrimage to Alabama, where we walked through history in Montgomery, Birmingham and Selma with John. Kathy deserves credit for the idea; it leapt from her mind when John told us he went to Selma every year for a reunion with participants in the march he led across the Edmund Pettus Bridge on March 7, 1965. Alabama state troopers beat John unconscious and cracked his skull on the day that became known as Bloody Sunday.

The pilgrimage grew every year, with John and his colleagues in the civil rights movement sharing stories and songs that shaped a momentous chapter in our nation's reckoning with racial injustice. In 2003, it led us to South Africa to consider and explore that land's journey toward truth and reconciliation. Before, during, and after our travels, we wrestled with the challenges facing a nation founded on one document that declared all men created equal and endowed by their creator with inalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness...and another that counted its enslaved population as only three-

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fifths men accorded none of those rights. Along the way, we saw the qualities in John Lewis's heart, soul and spirit that had endowed his leadership with unbounded love, steadfast courage, and wondrous grace.

Of our pilgrimages to Alabama, I've written earlier in *The Truth Can Set Us Free: Toward a Politics of Grace and Healing*, a lengthy essay published by The Fetzer Institute:

"For many participants, it's a first encounter with the nature and power of nonviolent resistance to evil. John Lewis, Bernard Lafayette, Fred Shuttlesworth, Dorothy Cotton, Bob Zellner, and other civil rights movement leaders who travel with us convey a warmth, clarity and spirit deeply grounded in the philosophy and practice of nonviolence. Some participants at first don't know what to make of this. The very idea of choosing to put yourself in a situation where you're going to be hit and determining you are not going to hit anyone back sounds insane. Then as they listen more closely, it begins to sound wise. It becomes worth learning more about. It becomes worth considering. It merits respect, honor, and—perhaps—even allegiance.

Journalist Ellis Cose describes a comparable encounter with John Lewis in his book, *Bone to Pick: Of Forgiveness, Reconciliation, Reparation, and Revenge*:

'When I asked John Lewis, the congressman from Georgia, how—in his life as a grassroots civil rights leader—he had avoided anger while being beaten, repeatedly, by cops in the Jim Crow South, he answered like the seminary graduate he is: 'If you believe there is a spark of the divine in every human being...you cannot

get to the point where you hate that person, or despise that person...even if that person beats you...You have to have the capacity, the ability to forgive.'

John Lewis believed with Martin Luther King, Jr., that the moral arc of the universe is long, but it bends toward justice. Throughout his career, John was called to help bend that arc. He invited everyone into what he and Dr. King called "the beloved community." John and Dr. King and their colleagues sought to form in these United States a truly more perfect union and, as they often said, to redeem the soul of America.

I was blessed for 23 years to watch John Lewis welcome his colleagues in the Congress into circles of trust and warmly invite them into the work of continuing to form a more perfect union. One Senator and former governor of his Southern state had to leave his first pilgrimage early, but not before taking John and me aside to say, "I can't tell you what this has meant to me. I wish I had had this experience twenty years ago. I believe I would have made some decisions differently."

In the past week, treasured friends from across town, across the country, and across the sea have shared their condolences. Many have spoken of the impact of John Lewis and his spirit had on their own lives and work. Roelf Meyer served as F.W. de Klerk's chief negotiator in South Africa's internal peace process; his counterpart representing Nelson Mandela, Cyril Ramaphosa, is now South Africa's President. The message from Roelf reflects John's influence beyond America's borders:

Michèle and I will never forget that extraordinary visit to Selma that you organized. We were reminded so intimately and strongly of the civil rights movement and John's particular role in it. The whole episode in your history left an indelible impression on me from the mid-sixties onwards, and may I say for the better because it influenced my thinking in the decades that followed. I can therefore in that way celebrate with you the life of John Lewis!

Pam Crist is a friend and extraordinary photographer who documented many of our pilgrimages. When Pam learned of John's pancreatic cancer diagnosis, she told me she had a picture for me. Soon afterwards came a print with space for John to sign it. John was undergoing treatments by then and came into his office only occasionally. His scheduler David Bowman generously took the picture to John's home. The inscribed photo was brought back to the office and I promptly picked it up. The pandemic came along, and I delayed taking the picture to my local frame shop until July 10. When told that I sensed the time was near, the framer promised to have it for me the following week. I picked it up Friday afternoon, July 17, and hung it above my desk. John Lewis crossed over the Jordan later that night.

John Lewis rests in peace and power. May his spirit give us grace and strength to not give up, to not give in ... and to keep the faith.

Rev. Doug Tanner is the Founding Director, The Faith & Politics Institute, Washington DC, and a long-time associate of Church of the Saviour.