Lake Institute recently hosted a visit from the 2016 Lake Doctoral Dissertation Fellowship recipient, Kimberly Pendleton, and we are pleased to share some reflection and insights from her research. Pendleton is a doctoral candidate in American Studies at George Washington University, and she presented her research to the Lake Institute advisory board earlier this month. In reflecting on the value of the Fellowship, and her work’s relevance for a broader conversation about faith and giving, Pendleton says:

“It has been a huge benefit to be supported, and surrounded, by other scholars who are interested in the questions of faith and giving that I am. I foresee continuing to research together, and probing more deeply into the ways that religious beliefs and institutions shape ideas of charity, of rescue, and offer a view of the world in which we are all interdependent, relying on one another. My research touches on one of the key questions with which the field of faith and philanthropy is concerned, and that is, what moves people to give? By looking at the narratives and stories that draw donors, believers, activists, and missionaries in to a cause, my work contributes to that conversation. It has been an honor to represent the Lake Institute this year as a Doctoral Dissertation Fellow. Questions of faith and giving are at the forefront of my dissertation research, so to have the support and resources of an institute devoted to exploring their intersection is an invaluable asset to me, and the time to write which the fellowship has afforded me is unbelievably helpful as I finish this year.

Additionally, we are pleased to share this summary of Pendleton’s dissertation research, and look forward to her continued contributions to the broad conversation about the intersection of philanthropy and religion.

**Sex Trafficking as an Evangelical Missions Issue**

*Kimberly Pendleton*

November 2016

My dissertation, “Captivated: Evangelical Enchantment, Sex Trafficking, and the Politics of Purity,” asks not only how evangelical Christians in the United States frame the specter of sex trafficking as a human rights and missionary issue, but how an interest in sex trafficking came to fit logically within religious notions of sexuality, theology, and the transnational in the post cold war period. To do this, it traces the emergence of sex trafficking narratives in evangelical missions and devotional language in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries cultural products, based on close readings of sermons, books, media products, fundraising campaigns,
and mission trips or domestic events designed to encourage evangelical believers to join the fight against sex trafficking. Domestic prostitution, pornography perusal and production, and individual struggles with purity are also articulated in this evangelical parlance through language of deviance and bondage that sweeps multiple kinds of sexual behavior and actors—within the sex industry and the church—into the narration of struggle between captivity and freedom that animates narrations of sex trafficking in evangelical discourse, whether produced by large NGOs like IJM or by individual evangelical churches.

This dissertation focuses predominantly on evangelical NGOs and parachurch organizations that have incorporated response to sex trafficking into their missions, such as IJM and InterVarsity Christian Fellowship’s global projects, as well as individual churches and smaller ministries that include view their work as a response to sex trafficking, including Seattle’s former megachurch, Mars Hill, and their (now independent) ministry Real Escape from Sex Trafficking, or REST, and Hookers for Jesus, a Las Vegas-based ministry that counsels women in sex work. The breadth of this range of actors offers the crucial opportunity to examine narrative structures across an array of intended audiences with varying levels of engagement and donor capabilities.

This dissertation mounts a close reading of the narratives of sex trafficking themselves, circulating through the prolific materials that these organizations and churches have produced, and tracks its emergence (and then ascendance) of among the increasingly global focus of evangelical politics in the post cold war period. Thus, a rigorous study of evangelical global politics in the long 1990s, tracking the end of the 1980s and reaching into the early 2000s, is a crucial element of this dissertation as well. Sex trafficking comes to be legible as an issue of missional and devotional importance in a moment when evangelical discourse in the U.S. has already made inroads in considering global crises like poverty and famine to be issues of justice with which they are imbricated, and in the era of transforming HIV/AIDS from a marginalized domestic issue from which most Americans, including evangelicals, could hide into a galvanizing global crisis with which evangelicals must be involved. This examination of cultural impressions and humanitarian engagements, both financial and emotional, and its relationship to narratives of sex trafficking within evangelical discourses of care makes this dissertation an important contribution to scholarship on religion, transnational cultural studies, scholarship on sexuality and the global sex industry, and the relationship in U.S. evangelicalism between compassion and action, devotion and donations.

Lake Doctoral Dissertation Fellowship

This $22,000, one-year grant is given annually to support a graduate student whose research engages and intersects issues within religion and philanthropy or faith and giving. It is intended to support the final year of dissertation writing for a doctoral candidate at a U.S. graduate school. We are now accepting applications for the 2017-2018 fellowship. Applications are due by January 31, 2017.

philanthropy.iupui.edu/institutes/lake-institute/grants-scholarships/dissertation-application.html