Kathleen H. Staudt, Ph.D., Adjunct Professor of Theological Studies at Virginia Theological Seminary recommends the following books as part of the Bishop Payne Library’s monthly series highlighting a faculty member’s “picks”. Dr. Staudt’s home library is organized by genre and she offers a sampling of fiction, poetry, spirituality and non-fiction titles.

**Fiction** – Marilynne Robinson’s *Gilead* (Farrar, Strauss & Giroux 2004), a lovely, lyrical meditation on faith, politics, sin and grace in the voice of an aging Congregationalist pastor writing in the 1950s. The language is like prose poetry, beautiful to read, and the voice is theologically astute and mature both in years and in wisdom. It won the 2005 Pulitzer Prize. Two other Robinson novels, *Home* (2009) and *Lila* (2014) give us the fuller back-stories of characters we meet in *Gilead* so it becomes an invitation to a world that we can inhabit. Great summer reads.

**Poetry** – Scott Cairns’s collection *Idiot Psalms: New Poems* (Paraclete Press, 2014) is a good introduction to this engaging and subtle Christian poet of our time. With wry humor and a devastating truth-telling, the voice in these poems speaks honestly to a God who knows all about him and stays with him anyway. Honest, inspiring poetry, brilliantly crafted, and often unsettling for its honesty about the human struggle toward God and our constant need for grace.

**Spirituality** – I try to return about once a year to *Thomas Kelly’s A Testament of Devotion* (Harper 1941; reprint 1996). Kelly, a Quaker mystic and social activist lecturing and writing in the 1940’s, describes inspiringly what is like to live life “from the center” and invites us to see the inevitable connection between the mystical/contemplative life and call to work of social justice in a broken world.

**Nonfiction** – The most compelling nonfiction book I’ve read in awhile is *Michelle Alexander’s The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration In the Age of Colorblindness* (New Press, 2012). Prophetic and insistent, Alexander leaves her reader unable to look away from the systemic injustice behind mass incarceration in our country. It will likely be seen as one of the founding books behind the increasingly visible movement to expose and reform this system.