



UNITED THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY OF THE TWIN CITIES

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NEWSLETTER
September 2009

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT



Dear Members of the United Community,

It is a great honor to be the new president here at United. You have a wonderful heritage and a strong commitment to the very best of our progressive, spiritual, and artistic heritage. I have enjoyed meeting many people this summer and look forward to more interesting and thoughtful conversations.

As I write, our academic year is just beginning! New students have arrived from the Upper Midwest, across the country, and even from the Philippines! As people have moved into student housing, attended their first few days of class, and begun to get to know each other, there is a hum of excitement and hope. This year's opening communion focused on the general theme of "coming to voice," that is, of finding one's own voice in ministry. As new students enter these halls and begin to grapple with a sense of call – often very general and difficult to articulate – they also work through books and articles which record the struggles of saints who have gone before and who help point the way. From Bonhoeffer to Niebuhr to King, these stories are cherished. So we ask that you keep our students, especially our new students, in your prayers as they engage Scripture and the great theologians and leaders of the church to better find that light which guides their way.

We are pleased to welcome back Rev. Dr. Christie Neuger as founding director of the seminary's new Institute for the Support of Pastoral Ministry and its distinguished senior scholar in pastoral care. She returns to us from Brite Divinity School where she is concluding her work. We are pleased to welcome Rev. Dr. David Mwhia, pastor for immigrant ministries at the Church of All Nations, and Rev. William Mate, recently retired minister of the United Methodist Church, as new adjunct faculty members, and to welcome back adjunct faculty members Victoria Safford, Jeanyne Slettom, and Judith Scoville. Rev. Trish Greeves will teach CS251/2 and CS253 while we search for a new professor of the life and leadership of the congregation.

On a more institutional front, we have begun to work with strategic planning in a way which affirms work done in the past two or three years, but also broadens the process to include more contextual information to guide the board of trustees and which anticipates approving a broader range of goals and plans.

While this has been proceeding, we are working with our sister seminaries to launch a new program with the Guthrie Theater that will feature panels of theologians after selected performances of plays with significant theological content. The first play will be "Faith Healer" with panels following performances on November 10 and 17. Trustee Greg Plotnikoff and Chaplain Martha Postlethwaite will be panelists on November 17. I will moderate the panel on November 10.

In the next few weeks, we will co-convene a discussion of religious leaders to develop ways in which the faith community can use TPT's screening of the remarkable series featuring Professor Michael Sandel, Harvard University, in 13 programs that explore the question of "Justice: What is the Right Thing to Do?" I anticipate that the series could be used as the base for remarkable adult and family faith education. United's long commitment to justice makes us a natural leader in this project.

We plan to be in touch several more times this year using the format of a newsletter and inviting you to respond to any one or more of us with your thoughts. We value your guidance!

Sincerely,

Mary E. McNamara, President

A Year of Gratitude and Joy 2008-2009

Thanks to many generous supporters of United Theological Seminary, we concluded our fiscal year on June 30 with an amazing outcome. We received \$1,149,000 in gifts to sustain the operation of the seminary and fund scholarships, exceeding the goal for the Annual Fund and ending the year with a balanced budget.

More than 700 trustees, alums, and friends demonstrated their confidence in United and their commitment to the seminary's mission by giving generously to the Annual Fund. We are immensely grateful to so many people who stretched their giving during a challenging economy. Every dollar made a difference and contributed greatly to United's ability to offer its unique brand of theological education to students who are responding creatively, compassionately, and with commitment to the challenges of the 21st century church and society.

Author Rosemary Williams eloquently refers to giving in this way: "Stewardship is everything – a call, a gift, a lifestyle." Thank you for caring deeply about United Theological Seminary!



Scholarships Make a Difference!

In some ways, not all, the recession has had a positive impact on students enrolling at United Theological Seminary. More people are coming to seminary rethinking what is important in their lives, wanting to make a meaningful impact on the world. Some are coming directly from college and some are unemployed. And although we keep tuition as low as possible, the demand for additional scholarship funds this year has increased significantly. We anticipate we will need to provide \$450,000 in scholarships to at least 70 percent of our degree students who are seeking financial support.

By the year 2011, the average seminary loan debt is anticipated to be more than \$54,000, a daunting and burdensome situation for most of our students who, as graduates, will work in churches or professions in the nonprofit world and earn modest salaries.

To invest in future leaders of the church and the world, please consider making an all important gift for scholarships that will support our students' journey of the theological formation and spiritual transformation. Visit our Web site at www.unitedseminary.edu and click *Giving Opportunities* or call 651.255.6115.

Academy for Vital Christianity

"The Academy class experience put my mind in motion in new ways and in new directions—which is, I think, exactly what it was intended to do."

- Christine Vesper Rhode

United's Academy for Vital Christianity begins its second year this fall with additional offerings and new locations in Mankato and Alexandria and sites in Fargo and Valley City, North Dakota. Topics include the Bible, music, worship, the environment, congregational life, women in the church, spirituality, immigration, the problem of suffering, and more.

Classes are taught by seminary faculty and well-known regional experts. The Academy learning environment is intellectually substantive and spiritually rich without the time commitments of a regular seminary course. Each class totals 10 contact hours and sessions are held on weeknights and weekends. Students receive a reading list of books, and dialogue and interaction are an integral part of each class. For a complete list of offerings and locations, see our Web site at www.unitedseminary.edu/CommunityPrograms/academy.asp.

Student Enrollment Increases!

By the time classes began on September 14, 37 new Masters Degree students had enrolled for the fall term. In addition, one new Campbell Scholar – an international student from the Philippines – began our one year Diploma in Advanced Theological Studies. This brought new student enrollment to 38, seven more students than enrolled in 2008.

Here's a quick snapshot of the students in this year's new class:

- 31 are in the M.Div. program
- 27 are female and 10 are male
- 23 live an hour or less from campus (8 in the region from which we normally draw, greater Minnesota and bordering states, and 6 from beyond the region: Illinois, Ohio, North Carolina, Washington D.C., and Florida)
- 13 are under the age of 30
- 8 are persons of color (non-white)

Other good news is that eight new enrollees are expected for our D.Min. program, as opposed to one new enrollee last year. Enrollees include ELCA, UCC, UMC, Nazarene, and Orthodox Jewish students. The first seminar of Module 1 in the D.Min. program will meet in mid-October.



In 1960, United Theological Seminary was established by the United Church of Christ through the merger of Mission House Seminary, Sheboygan, Wis., and Yankton School of Theology, Yankton, S.D. Now, nearly 50 years later, to celebrate the shared legacy of Mission House Seminary and United and to commemorate the approaching 150-year anniversary of Lakeland College, United has planned a reunion luncheon for Mission House and United alums, friends, and former faculty members. This special event will take place Saturday, October 17, at Lakeland College in Sheboygan. Reflecting on great times at Mission House and renewing relationships will be the focus of the get-together, along with honoring Mission House pastors for their faithful and lifelong ministries in the church. This will be a memorable day for all, *Remembering the Past, Looking to the Future*. For more information on this special gathering, please contact Kayla Daniels at kdaniels@unitedseminary.edu or 651.255.6190.

from the Board

Dear Friends,

I cannot believe that the summer is over and the fall semester has begun. For many of us on the board of trustees, we have been working with our new president, Mary McNamara, to make a smooth transition for her into this school year.

President McNamara has been working hard to meet and greet a variety of constituencies. Mary hit the seminary running, and she has been doing an outstanding job. I have been wondering if she ever sleeps. As one of our trustees commented, "President McNamara is like the energizer bunny."

On September 10, the trustees had their first meeting of the school year. They were excited and filled with enthusiasm for the new year and the new goals they are looking to accomplish. The trustees are anxious to make this year one of the best for United Theological Seminary. Every one of us is committed to serving all of you and the needs of the seminary to the best of our abilities.

I am pleased that the trustee board is filled with dedicated men and women from a variety of professions. Many of these trustees have significant skills that, under President McNamara's leadership, will propel the seminary in a new direction of confidence and growth.

I hope you too feel the excitement as we face our challenges with new confidence, as we energize our spirits.

Please join with the trustees in making this year one of the most successful for you and United Theological Seminary.

Sincerely,

Sharon Ryan
Chair, Board of Trustees



Ministry Integration before Seminary Graduation

A 2004 revision of United Theological Seminary's curriculum includes the Final Master of Divinity Integrative Seminar (IS 351), which is required of all M.Div. students following the completion of their Contextual Studies courses (which include their congregation-based internship). It exemplifies the new curriculum's goal of creating intentional opportunities for students to integrate course learning, ministerial experiences, and spiritual formation.

What led to the emergence of this capstone seminar was an ongoing concern of faculty that students experienced their courses as discrete pieces, but were not provided opportunities to weave them together. Building upon the congregational internship, one area addressed is *ecclesiology*. What is the church's mission? What is one's theology of church and how might that shape one's approaches to ministry?

Another focus is *one's spiritual life as a religious leader*. How might one nurture one's relationship with God through personal practices and spiritual companions? Within the course, companions are self-chosen groups of three who meet during class almost each week to experience the gift of having others listen and help them hear God's voice in their lives. The course includes six personal spiritual practices and the spiritual life of the congregation.

The ability to identify and address challenging situations is addressed by having each student write a case of a real situation they have faced or watched another face in a congregation. The *case study process* is done in groups of five, working with one of the course professors. Each student develops a case brief on the others' cases, identifying the characters and issues arising in the case. They also examine the case through the lenses of what they have learned in courses at the seminary. The requirement is to present specific ways of approaching the case, drawing from each of the curricular areas (theology and ethics; Bible, historical theology, and denominational studies; and the practices of ministry, including education, pastoral care, worship, preaching, administration, and church leader leadership). Each case is discussed and facilitated by a member of the group. The exercise is not to determine a solution, but to discover the possible ways one issue can be addressed and how to draw upon one's learning in an integrated process.

To provide more intentional integration and in preparation of ordination exams, the final course assignment is to write a 12-page *statement of ministry*. The statement integrates ecclesiology, mission, ministry, context, leadership, vocation, and spiritual life. The course is taught by Eleazar Fernandez, professor of constructive theology, and Barbara Anne Keely, director of masters studies and associate professor of Christian education and congregational spirituality.

Aaron Lauer: Finding a Voice in the Future of Liberal Religion

by Virginia Bergman

A senior at United Theological Seminary, Aaron Lauer is familiar with the work of fellow Nebraskan Ted Kooser who served as America's poet laureate a few years ago. Aaron appreciates how the plainspoken Kooser honors rural life in southeastern Nebraska in vividly detailed poetry and prose.

Aaron knows about rural life. Born and raised in the small town of Ainsworth, population 1,862, he didn't venture too far from home when he attended Hastings College in Hastings, Nebr., where he majored in religion and history, fueling his dual passion for theology and politics.

He leapt into a much larger pond when his enrollment at United brought him to the Twin Cities where he has thrived in an expanded cultural environment while pursuing a master of arts in religion and theology.

An emphasis in the arts was among several factors that drew Aaron to United; he also lists the school's inclusive ethos, its focus on social justice, and its reputation for academic excellence. In addition, Aaron received a combination of merit and need-based scholarships that have covered his tuition in full. In the past year, Aaron has also assisted Director of Admissions Glenn Herrington-Hall as young adult recruitment coordinator for 20 hours per week.

A member of Unity Church, Unitarian-Universalist Association, in St. Paul, Aaron's theological perspective has a Tillichian flavor. Expressing concern about the future of liberal religion, he explains that as a new student at United he was at first uncertain whether or not he could have a voice in the movement. But, he says, his experience at United has given him the confidence he needs to contribute to the ongoing discussion while meeting his vocational goal as a college teacher in religion and history.

In the early days of his final semester, 25-year-old Aaron, who has found time in a demanding schedule for extra-curricular reading, music, and working out, needs only to complete his thesis on *American Civil Religion – Changes in the Past 40 Years* to receive his well-deserved MA degree this December.



“To Whom Much is Given, Much is Expected”

by Virginia Bergman

Things happen fast at United Theological Seminary. New student Pamela Cook moved into her apartment on campus July 29 and on the first day of classes, she reported she and her neighbors had formed a community – they've already had five potluck dinners!

Born in Washington, D.C., Pamela grew up in a household that valued community. Her parents lived out the dictum “to whom much is given, much is expected.” Both of Pamela's parents participated in the historical March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom in 1963. The family later moved to Milledgeville, Ga., where Pamela's father was a clinical chaplain and her mother served as a professor of nursing.

The example set by their parents inspired Pamela and her two younger sisters. Her middle sister teaches at Michigan State University, and the youngest is a lawyer. The *vitae* Pamela submitted to the seminary covers more than seven single-spaced typewritten pages of educational, career, and volunteer achievements.

The recipient of many academic honors and awards, Pamela's educational background includes a B.A. in political science from Spelman College in Atlanta, her J.D. from Emory University School of Law, and graduate work in political science at the University of Chicago. She has taught at Luther College, Decorah, Iowa; Beloit College, Beloit, Wis.; and Georgia College and State University, Milledgeville, Ga. Pamela has a long list of ministry and other church-related activities to her credit, and her record of community activism wherever her life's journey has taken her would make her parents proud.

What motivated this outstanding candidate for ordained ministry, currently in care with the Northeast Association, Iowa Conference of the United Church of Christ, to enroll in the masters in divinity program at United Theological Seminary?

Pamela said she was impressed by United's concentrations in Leadership Toward Racial Justice and Women's Studies. She was also attracted by the emphasis in the arts and an art studio that offers a balance to academic work. She notes the seminary's proximity to Decorah, Iowa, where she is a member of the Decorah Congregational Church. In addition, she said opportunities for financial aid were better than those offered by the seminary's competitors.

And Pamela did not fail to mention United's welcoming community.

