

SPRING 2023

VOICES

UNITED THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY OF THE TWIN CITIES



"Revelation-Resurrection-Return" by Hortense McLeod ('15)
of blessed memory (June 20, 1954 to February 25, 2017)

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

REV. DR. MOLLY T. MARSHALL



Dear Faithful Friends of United,

It is a joyful season at the seminary as a long winter “melts into spring,” and we celebrate commencement. It is a magnificent graduating class, with stellar students who portend creative leadership for the church, the academy, and the common good. It is one of the largest graduating classes in recent memory, and we give thanks. Welcoming Rev. Dr. Willie James Jennings as the commencement speaker is a signal honor, as he is a longtime friend and revered scholar.

Your faithfulness in giving makes this mission possible. As we educate compassionate and innovative leaders, we remember that we do not do this significant work unaccompanied. The legacy of former faculty and trustees, those who have been donors over their lifetime, and those who continue to hold the seminary in trust make United’s flourishing a sign of grace.

This issue of *VOICES* recounts many of the good stories of United. As we think about the work of treasured alums, gifted expressions of the formation they received here, we are overwhelmed with gratitude. They embody the mission of the school, and they make the world more just, more thoughtful, and more joyful.

I am grateful for your faithfulness in supporting the seminary. I ask once again that you continue to give, to recommend prospective students, and to attend the many inspiring events we host on campus and online.

In the season of resurrection and renewal, I think of you and pray for your unfolding horizons. Hopefully, the association we all have with United beckons us to creative faith in a time of such rancor and violence. Our work at the seminary always keeps justice and peace as the focus, and we trust you will continue to participate in that holy pursuit.

Gratefully,

Molly T. Marshall

Molly T. Marshall
President

[Alums] embody the mission of the school, and they make the world more just, more thoughtful, and more joyful.”



Hortense McLeod

2015 ARTIST STATEMENT | HORTENSE MCLEOD

This triptych is the manifestation of the syncretic nature of my mind. For me, all is connected. We are all made of the same star dust. Therefore, the attempt to be pure pillars of belief or non-belief—isolated and insulated from that which we consider the beliefs of the “other”—is nearly impossible, given the existential realities of the 21st century.

And so, one will find upon this triptych the World Tree, the four horsemen of the apocalypse, the words of Friedrich Nietzsche, the shaman’s ladder, a bird of the soul, the sacred hoop, the words of Black Elk, and a cross. These are all words and images that resonate with my theological view.



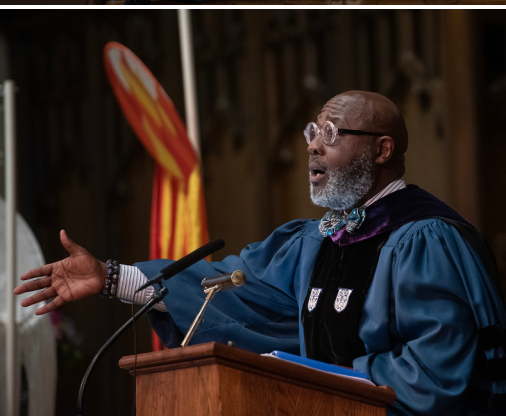
CONGRATULATIONS TO THE GRADUATING CLASS OF 2023!

On Sunday, April 30, United celebrated 30 graduates at the school's 61st Annual Commencement Exercises. Through the hospitality of our host, Plymouth Congregational Church in Minneapolis, the graduates, their loved ones, faculty, and staff observed a day of "fresh starts," in the words of our Commencement Speaker, Rev. Dr. Willie James Jennings. An Associate Professor of Systematic Theology and Africana Studies at Yale Divinity School, Jennings urged graduates to engage in the work of "building belonging," reminding them "you can do this, because you went to United."

We pray for blessings over these new alums as they go out into the world to minister, to educate, and to lead in the transformation of society.

Photos, left to right: The class of 2023; Commencement Speaker Rev. Dr. Willie James Jennings; Tammy Houts ('23); Cindy Bohrer ('23); Plymouth Congregational Church's Lead Minister, Rev. Dr. DeWayne Davis, with fellow United Board of Trustee members Lynne Krehbiel-Breneman ('95) and Rev. Elizabeth Macaulay ('99); Anne Gustafson ('23); Rev. Dr. Darrell Gillespie ('23); President Molly T. Marshall hugs Rev. Dr. Willie James Jennings; President Molly T. Marshall

Photo credits: Michele Jokinen and Nathaniel Green



That Which is forever changing. There is birth. There is death. There is birth and death again. Empires, cultures, and religions rise and fall. Out of the ashes rise new empires, cultures, and beliefs, which too shall fall. It is the condition of this mortal coil.

And yet, the human being yearns for that peace, that love, the "ground of being," that resurrection, that sacred hoop that is everlasting. We are beings that create stories to tell of that longing. Our stories may be different, yet the longing is the same.

—Hortense McLeod's Artist Statement for United's 2015 Arts Practicum, where the art panel was first displayed. The art was submitted again in early 2023 by Hortense's widow, Christine Keller Broughten, and displayed on campus for this year's 60th anniversary display, "60@60: Art under the Influence."

2023 GRADUATE STEPHANI PESCITELLI AND THE POWER OF YES, AND...

By Diane Riggs

Stephani Pescitelli, who graduated April 30 with an MDiv in Theology and the Arts, admits that United wasn't even on her radar when she first felt called to seminary. She intended to enroll in a Unitarian Universalist (UU) seminary. Still, after a phone call with a kind soul in United's admissions office, followed by a whirlwind visit with faculty, alums, and students during a February blizzard (naturally), the uniquely heartfelt and open sense of welcome, and United's arts and theology program won her over. As she recalls, "I walked out into the bitter cold after that day carrying a warm, welcoming, enthusiastic *YES!*"

Lessons Learned at United

Though she could have safely stayed in her UU community, Stephani is thankful she was exposed to so many differing faith traditions and histories at United. One "gift of learning...in classrooms and conversations with voices from other traditions," she shares, "is appreciating how all of our traditions have evolved in relation, often in syncretic ways, even when in opposition."

"Sometimes," she adds, "confronting these differences and histories is uncomfortable and has meant learning to speak and listen to different...perspectives, letting go of the coziness of knowing, and stepping into the practice of saying *YES, AND* to others." This practice of affirmation and openness is important for spiritual leaders who must face myriad challenges in today's world.

Personal relationships are also key. "The relationships I've cultivated at United," Stephani emphasizes, "are the most important gift I've received....I can't imagine any other graduate program or learning community where I could have truly practiced the messy, beautiful new ways of creating, relating, and leading together."

Looking to the Future

Thanks to connections made while in seminary, Stephani's future is rapidly taking shape. Through a research project for Dr. Awes Freeman's Images and Ideologies course about the changing landscape of monuments, last summer she was able to intern with a national nonprofit, Monument Lab.

Now, since presenting research about a community arts approach to saving memories and sharing stories at the Midwest American Academy of Religion Meeting, she's Monument Lab's part-time partnership research associate. "I am grateful," Stephani says, "to be able to bring this unique perspective and the holistic formational and practical leadership training I received as an MDiv student to this important art and social justice work at Monument Lab."

At the same time, Stephani is exploring a call to support people one-on-one, and hopes to focus on "offering discernment and relational spiritual care to makers, seekers, and activists through creative embodied practice." Learn more on her website: stephanipescitelli.com.



Stephani Pescitelli

Stephani credits her experiences and education at United for making these and other vocational options possible. As she explains, "Engaging in rigorous academic and rich formational learning within a community full of diverse, dynamic beliefs and spiritual backgrounds has helped me to contextualize and deepen my own theologies. It has also increased my desire and capacity for building coalitions across differences in my leadership work and in relationships beyond seminary."

No matter where she goes after commencement, Stephani now knows "that the most important repair and liberation is done...within our five-foot radius." She adds, "I am lucky that my immediate circle has included some of the finest faculty, co-conspirators, dance—and wrestling—partners, and humans, and even luckier to be able to carry these relationships with me in whatever lies ahead."



SUSAN DRAPER WHITE LECTURE | RETROSPECTIVE

In keeping with celebrations of our 60th year, the 2023 Susan Draper White Lecture provided an opportunity to reflect on how feminist theology has influenced United's development as a seminary. President Molly T. Marshall moderated a discussion with retired and current faculty members, including former United Professor Mary Potter, as well as Professors Emeritae Dr. Mary Farrell Bednarowski, Rev. Dr. Barbara Anne Keely, and Rev. Dr. Carolyn Pressler. Also joining the conversation were current faculty members Dr. Jennifer Awes Freeman and Rev. Dr. Jessica Chapman Lape.

Panelists explored what it was about United that drew in so many gifted feminist theologians, how they impacted our students' educational experience, and how the field continues to evolve today. Speaking to the power of stories—personal and collective—Dr. Bednarowski said, "The histories you had been a part of—economic history, labor,

ALUM MARJORIE GREVIOUS ('18) PROMOTES SPIRITUAL WELLNESS THROUGH HER YOGA MINISTRY

By Diane Riggs

Yoga and church were childhood pillars for 2018 alum Marjorie D. Grevious. She estimates that she started doing yoga alongside her mother at age three, and that the practice of yoga ran “parallel to my journey as a church girl raised in the Black missionary church tradition of the south.” Those two pillars remained constant, but separate, until United helped Marjorie connect her core beliefs as a Christian and her spiritual practice of yoga.

The Path to United

For most of her career—with an MS in Human Services and Community Counseling and Psychology—Marjorie worked with young people who were “caught in cycles of crisis and chaos most often caused by the unstable/unhealthy adults in their lives.” Part of the impetus for taking advanced training in yoga, and attending seminary, was Marjorie’s desire to not just treat the symptoms of dysfunction created by lives in turmoil, but to “help people at the core of their being.”

After completing a 200-hour yoga training in 2012, her first students were teen girls caught in the juvenile justice system. “I was amazed,” Marjorie says, “by the immediate effect a single yoga class had on their overly stressed minds and hyper-reactive bodies.” At the same time, she knew there was more to learn.

Connecting Faith and Yoga

At United, Marjorie realized “that ordination and formal church work was not the call that God has on my life.” Still, the relationships she built, the community she found, and the scholarship in which she engaged were what she needed.

“United to me is what I wanted and needed church to be,” Marjorie asserts. “It is a non-judgmental place where I am able to think theologically, I’m able to experience the spirit, but also to have intellectual discourse around what I believe to be true and what it is like to be with other Christ-centered people who believe differently than I do, but we have this core place of connection.”

“I think the beauty of my United education,” she adds, “was how big the conversations were. You were not trapped by dogma or by denominational restrictions.” Learning about “seminary siblings” plans also gave Marjorie the inspiration to lean into her strengths as a yoga teacher and person of faith.

It seemed obvious after that; a yoga ministry became possible. After all, as Marjorie readily confesses, “I feel in touch with the sacred, with that which is bigger than myself, on my my yoga mat; when life gets big and life gets full, I go to my yoga mat.”

There are other connections too. Notes Marjorie: “The philosophies behind yoga, the 195 yoga sutra statements,



Marjorie D. Grevious

created by Patañjali, are very parallel to what we read and study in the Bible in terms of how we treat ourselves, how we treat each other, and how we move through the world.”

Living into Her Purpose

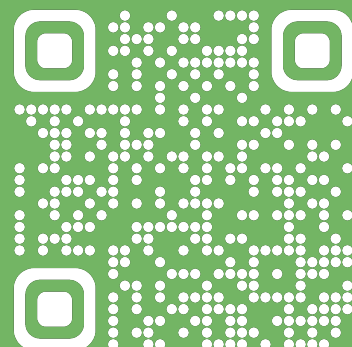
These days, Marjorie is an instructor at Yoga Sanctuary and operates a private practice at Temple Within. She has many more hours of training under her belt and is certified in five types of yoga, several designed to support individuals with histories of trauma.

Ultimately, Marjorie is happy to teach how the practice of yoga can realign each person’s sense of physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being. She is grateful, she says, that United helped her “to define my passion and fulfill my purpose of offering spiritual wellness as a way of being for all God’s people.”

history, immigration history, women’s history, theological history, church history—anything was pretty much fair game for articulating in a story that you constructed and deconstructed and reconstructed, and then joined with other stories.”

The Susan Draper White Lectureship is named for the grandmother of Cil Braun ('83), an alum of blessed memory and a former member of United’s board of trustees. Since 1992, this series has brought leaders in feminist theology to United’s campus to lecture in a vast assortment of areas including Homiletics, Buddhism, Pastoral Theology, Ethics, Islam, Beyoncé Mass, and the Bible.

Visit bit.ly/sdw2023 or scan the QR code to the right to view the full event!



SCAN QR CODE TO VIEW LECTURE

MIZPAH CHURCH OFFERS UNITED A LEGACY SCHOLARSHIP FUND

By Rev. Dr. Cindi Beth Johnson

Rev. Rebecca Lemenager ('01) was only seven when she knew she wanted to be a minister. All she needed was fertile soil in which to nurture that calling. Mizpah United Church of Christ (Mizpah), her home congregation in Hopkins, Minnesota, provided that nurture. Now, as Mizpah comes to the end of its life as a church, members have decided to provide a legacy of support for new pastors by establishing the Mizpah Church, United Church of Christ, Endowed Scholarship at United for United Church of Christ students who pursue ministry.

Mizpah's vital ministry spanned 125 years, providing a place for worship and spiritual formation as well as community support. Members played an active role by supporting a teen clinic, the Crisis Nursery, Loaves and Fishes, and more. In closing, they are making final financial gifts to those long supported groups. Their gift of the scholarship to United will hold the Mizpah name in perpetuity.

As decisions were being made, Linda Williams, a member of the Mizpah council, advocated for the new scholarship. Her husband, who attended the University of Minnesota in Duluth (UMD), started a scholarship fund with his college friends to support new UMD business students. That practice, and Rebecca's urging, inspired them to find a way to support new ministers.

"It is really important to help people who want to become ministers," Linda says. "We don't want the cost of seminary to be a barrier." Rebecca adds, "When

pastors graduate with debt, they have to make decisions about where they are called based on the compensation a congregation can provide. Having less debt opens up the possibility of serving a smaller congregation."

Mizpah and United have many connections. Both Rebecca and her mother, Betty Wentworth ('86), were United graduates. Rev. Coqui Conkey ('02), currently the Interim Pastor at Urbandale UCC, also came to United from Mizpah. Over the years, many pastors, interns, and students crossed paths from United to Mizpah and from Mizpah to United. Both places were known for their love of the arts and theological depth, both inviting people to wrestle with important questions.

Ordained 21 years ago, Rebecca has served a variety of churches. For the last decade, she has been working at the Virginia Public Library, but on Sundays, you will find her answering her call in new ways. Last year, she provided pulpit supply 30 Sunday mornings for churches in five different denominations. She appreciates the fact that United broadened her understanding and passion for ecumenism. This year, she plans on doing even more pulpit supply, believing that supporting churches that might not be able to otherwise afford a pastor is a valuable service.

Rebecca loved her time at United, stating that it prepared her well for what she is doing with the right mix of academic rigor, social justice, and pastoral care woven together. "We live in a polarized,

hurting world. We need people who are willing to have a vision of what this world can be, leaders who can share that vision. United helped me learn those skills."

Rebecca goes on to say, "Most of us knew we weren't going to become The Rev. Peter Gomes at Harvard, but that didn't mean that we weren't going to change a little piece of the world. That is true of Mizpah also. They weren't ever the biggest church in the conference, but in small and important ways, we changed the little corner of our community."

Through the creation of this endowed scholarship, Mizpah's 125 years of ministry will persist in a new form, transforming little pieces of the world through congregational ministry.

SUPPORT THE NEXT GENERATION OF FAITH LEADERS

When you leave a legacy gift to United, you ensure a rigorous education for the next generation of ethical faith leaders. To learn more about Legacy Giving and membership in the Barnabas Society, contact Cindy Schriever, United's donor engagement officer at 651-255-6111 or cschriever@unitedseminary.edu.



2023 DISTINGUISHED ALUM | BETH LONG-HIGGINS ('88)

An experienced pastor, talented consensus builder, and skilled administrator, Rev. Beth Long-Higgins is the founding executive director of United Church Home's Ruth Frost Parker Center for Abundant Aging. The Center, launched in 2016, serves as a conduit for exchanging ideas, creating partnerships, and promoting innovations in the fields of senior services, higher education, research, and advocacy.

"In the field of aging services," Rev. Dr. Kenneth Daniel (her nominator) asserts, "Beth has positioned the Parker Center, UCH, and herself as a trusted voice in ethical, faith-informed, and innovative thought leadership and program design....She is a true exemplar of all the values, legacy, and pedagogy of United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities."

Read more about our award-winning alums at blog.unitedseminary.edu/the-canvas.

A MESSAGE FROM ADVANCEMENT

REV. DR. CINDI BETH JOHNSON, VICE PRESIDENT

60 YEARS OF FAITHFUL GIVING | 60 YEARS OF MANY VOICES

Dear Friends of United,

Spring is finally making an appearance in the Twin Cities, and like the budding trees turning toward the sun, I am filled with anticipation for the future. On April 30, we celebrated Commencement, conferring the status of United alum on dozens of gifted, inspiring graduates whom I know will apply the spirit of this beloved community in their calls to ministry and leadership.

Each new alum is the sum of countless hours of education and mentorship, application, and experience. What these leaders will go on to accomplish will honor the many and varied voices who have poured into them through their time here at United.

This year, as we celebrate our 60th anniversary, I'm asking you to remember the voices that have inspired you, mentored you, and accompanied you in your journey. In gratitude, you may recall voices that carried with them loving wisdom and insight, awakening your imagination and intellect.

How might you express your gratitude?

Your contributions, when made to the United Fund (our unrestricted annual fund), empower our continued operations, support our staff, and afford us the opportunity to dream big for the future. For United to thrive as a transformational institution—educating leaders, artists, ministers, and advocates—this is where your support greatly matters.

I want to invite you to honor one (or several) of those voices through a gift to the United Fund before United's fiscal year ends on June 30.

When you make a gift, let me know who you want to honor—a professor, classmate, or person whose service you admire. When possible, we will share with them the manner in which you have borne witness to their impact on your life.

May these ideas serve as inspiration for you:

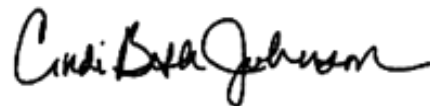
- A gift in honor of your entire graduating class.
- A gift in honor of a beloved faculty or staff member.
- A gift in honor of a trailblazer for social justice.
- A gift in honor of a United board chair or board member.
- A gift in honor of a United dean or president (current or past).
- A gift in honor of someone who is now of blessed memory.

You decide what voices you want to honor, and may your gift affirm United's significance in your own story. **To give, visit bit.ly/united-fund** or mail it to United using the envelope attached to this issue of VOICES.

Thank you for your generosity and for your commitment to transformative education.

We are many voices, united.

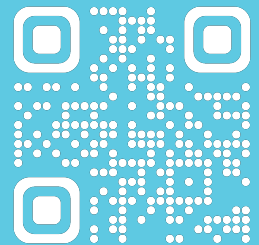
With profound thanks,



Cindi Beth Johnson
Vice President of Advancement

HOW TO GIVE

Mail your gift in the attached envelope, scan the QR code, or visit bit.ly/united-fund to give today.



2023 SPIRIT OF UNITED ALUM | JERMAINE ROSS-ALLAM ('12)

A dedicated scholar, gifted Presbyterian preacher, and a discerning social ethicist, Rev. Anthony Jermaine Ross-Allam earned an MTh in 2021 and is a doctoral candidate in social ethics at Union Theological Seminary. In October 2022, Jermaine was called to lead the Presbyterian Mission Agency's new Center for the Repair of Historical Harms.

"To me," Jermaine's nominator Rev. Phil Romine ('16, '21) attests, "Jermaine embodies that part of our spiritual heritage we affirm in our Presbyterian ordination vows: energy, intelligence, imagination, and love. In a time when many have energy, but few seek to deepen the dimensions of their intelligence to direct that energy, Jermaine brings both to bear on widening our imaginations, so that we might practice love: a love that revives and expands our imaginations; a love that guides our intellects; a love that animates our energies; and a love that ultimately weaves us together in the kingdom of creation."



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Cindi Beth Johnson

Vice President for Advancement
cbjohnson@unitedseminary.edu
651-255-6137



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IN REMEMBRANCE | DR. GAYLE GRAHAM YATES

United mourns the death of Dr. Gayle Graham Yates who served as the Director of the MARS Program from 1974 to 1976, offered United's first "Women and the Church" course, delivered the 1973 commencement address, and was the spouse of Rev. Dr. Wilson Yates, President Emeritus and Distinguished Professor Emeritus of Religion, Society, and the Arts.

Gayle received her PhD from the University of Minnesota in American Studies where she later served on staff. She was also one of the founders of the Department of Women's Studies as well as its first full-time faculty director. She was recognized by the University as Professor Emerita of American Studies upon her retirement.

Her friend and colleague, Dr. Mary Farrell Bednarowski, Professor Emerita of Religious Studies, says of Gayle, "When Gayle Graham Yates arrived at United as a young woman in the late 1960s, she brought with her a background in the Civil Rights movement, a fierce intellect, a highly developed aesthetic sense, and a commitment to the newly emerging feminist movement. The fruits of all these gifts permeate the history of our seminary."

Even after Gayle left United to go to the University of Minnesota, she was still an active member of the United Community, attending events, serving on committees, giving a lecture on theology and the arts, and hosting gatherings at the Yates' home. In particular, Gayle played a key role in the selection of the architects and building of the award-winning Bigelow Chapel on United's New Brighton campus.

An avid reader with a keen mind, she was the author of several books, including *Life and Death in a Small Southern Town: Memories of Shubuta, Mississippi* and *Ethics for Jessica: Meditations on Living*. Blessed be the memory of Gayle Graham Yates.

