

WINTER 2023

VOICES

UNITED THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY OF THE TWIN CITIES



Cover Art: *Feral Biome, Sky Layer and Tree People Forest Layer* by Amanda McElray Hunter ('10). The bottom two layers of a four-layer process of creating "Feral Biome—Fall Fest," a collaged Diorama made with mixed media: paper, watercolor, gouache, colored pencil, graphite, and thread. 22 x 30 x 2 inches, 2021

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

REV. DR. MOLLY T. MARSHALL



Dear Faithful Friend of United,

The most important question a school can attend to is this: What is our deepest aspiration? In other words, what is our mission? Why do we exist? United is clear about its mission: *We prepare innovative and compassionate leaders for the equipping of churches, other faith communities, and society toward justice and peace.*

United has always devoted its capacities to nurturing venturing faith that bursts open new possibilities. The seminary's care for justice in every realm has shaped its identity over its 60 years of transformative service.

You sustain this vital and urgent mission through your interest and investment. As you reflect on your experience with United, we count on you to tell the grand narrative of a seminary that continues to traverse new ground as we engage urgent issues. Faculty and students boldly address human sexuality, environmental concerns, racial injustice, interreligious thinking, spirituality of the arts, and social transformation—all with the goal of establishing justice “on earth as it is in heaven.”

Would you consider giving to the United Fund (our unrestricted annual fund) in honor of a professor or classmate, a person whose service you admire? All of us need to say words of gratitude while the opportunity exists. Regret about what is left unsaid can linger; “while it is yet day,” honoring the living matters.

Every person who claims United as a spiritual homeplace is essential to its flourishing. Thank you for your care for the seminary over the years. I trust you will continue to support its creative and necessary mission.

Gratefully,

Molly T. Marshall
President



*Every person who claims
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UNITED OFFERS NEW SPIRITUAL DIRECTION DMIN

This fall, United will offer a Doctor of Ministry (DMin) in spiritual direction and reconfigure the existing Master of Arts in Leadership (MAL) and Master of Divinity (MDiv) degrees in spiritual direction. Spiritual direction education prepares spiritual directors or leaders to practice in many vocational settings.

Through a partnership with St. Catherine University in St. Paul, United has been able to offer the two master's level degrees. This fall, United will assume responsibility for the MAL, MDiv, and the new DMin in spiritual direction with support from the program director of St. Catherine's Theology Department.

Dr. Cynthia Bailey Manns, a nationally recognized expert in spiritual direction, will join United's faculty this fall. Cynthia is also the adult learning director at Saint Joan of Arc Catholic Community.



Dr. Cynthia Bailey Manns

DR. MUNJED M. MURAD INSTALLED AS ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF WORLD RELIGIONS AND INTERCULTURAL STUDIES

By Diane Riggs

Surrounded by United faculty, staff, students, board members, and friends, Dr. Munjed Murad was formally installed February 9, 2023 as United's Assistant Professor of World Religions and Intercultural Studies supported by the Johnson-Fry Endowment. Munjed also makes institutional history as United's first full-time Muslim scholar and faculty member and as program director for the school's new Eco-Justice concentration.

Though he was born in the Commonwealth of Virginia, Munjed was raised in Amman, Jordan and only returned to the US for his post-high school education. After earning a degree in international business at George Washington University, he undertook graduate studies (in religion and ecology, as well as business and the environment) at Yale School of the Environment where he ultimately earned a master's degree in environmental management.

Speaking of United's Eco-Justice Program, Munjed shares, "I hope that this program can bring the resources of religious worlds to light, for the sake of the natural world that we all share." He successfully defended his Doctor of Theology dissertation at Harvard Divinity School in 2022.

Munjed's dissertation, "A Tale of Two Trees: Unveiling the Sacred Life of

Nature in Islamic and Christian Traditions," explores traditions surrounding two trees: the Sahabi tree in Islam as well as the tree that became the cross in Christianity, both of which, he says, "were significant gateways to the life of nature."

The Sahabi tree, Munjed explains, is a live tree that, in Islamic tradition, was a companion to the prophet Muhammad and is deeply venerated. The tree that became the cross, as brought to life in the Old English poem "A Dream of the Rood," forms a base for Christian traditions. Munjed's foundational work offers new insight into a thread of ecological interconnectedness between the two religious traditions.

"The spiritual prayers of nature cannot be heard with corporal ear but with spiritual ear and with spiritual heart," Munjed stated in his address—"Loving God and the Neighbor"—during the installation. He then quoted the 13th century Persian Sufi master Rumi, who wrote, "The speech of water, the speech of earth, and the speech of mud/are apprehended by the senses of them that have hearts."

The significance of this new position cannot be overstated. As Rev. Andrea Johnson ('17), whose family made possible the Johnson-Fry Endowment,



Rev. Andrea Johnson and Dr. Munjed Murad

states, "We need all our religious leaders to be deeply responsive to the realities of religious and spiritual diversity. This chair will be instrumental in supporting United's values and relevance for future leaders. I was transformed by the education I received at United and am passionate about supporting its future."

"I am delighted and excited to have Dr. Murad as one of our core faculty," notes United Dean Kyle Roberts. "His expertise in world religions, combined with his knowledge of and passion for environmental ethics and eco-theology, makes him the perfect fit for this newly endowed chair."

"We are already seeing an increased interest in potential partnerships, student interest in our programs, and a general excitement for the impact that Dr. Murad will have in this new position. By installing our first full-time Muslim faculty member, United further demonstrates our commitment to interreligious engagement and partnering across religious lines at this strategic time in our society."

REV. DR. ANDREW PACKMAN ACCEPTS POSITION

In December 2022, Rev. Dr. Andrew Packman signed an offer letter that will allow him to remain a valued member of United's faculty after the terms of his Louisville Fellowship postdoctoral appointment conclude this June. Starting July 2023, he will hold the position of Assistant Professor of Theological Ethics and Formation under a three-year contract.

In this role he will teach sections of Introduction to Personal and Spiritual Foundation, MDiv Capstone, History of Modern Theologies, Ethics, and more. When Dean Roberts made the announcement, students offered very positive affirmations of Andrew's teaching, mentoring, and other stellar capabilities.

For his part, Andrew asserted, "It's such an immense gift to get to do this work" with fellow faculty members at United. "I'm eager to see what we build together!"



Rev. Dr. Andrew Packman

UNITED STUDENT MAKES HISTORY AS FIRST BLACK MAYOR OF BROOKLYN PARK

By Diane Riggs

On January 9, 2023, MAL in Social Transformation student Hollies Winston made history when he became the first Black mayor of Brooklyn Park, a Twin Cities suburb. Hollies, a businessman, was drawn to United by a desire to explore his personal relationship with faith and how it might provide moral grounding for public leadership roles.

Leaning into Leadership

Hollies credits his parents for sparking his interest in leadership. Both were successful in the corporate world, and “their work ethic, honesty in business, leadership skills, and sense of humor,” Hollies asserts, “have had the biggest impact on me.” He also recalls how his father worked on Harold Washington’s mayoral campaign. Washington was Chicago’s first Black mayor.

Hollies was 10 when his family moved from Chicago to the Twin Cities. It was tough leaving friends and family, and adjusting to a place where, he says, “the Black community was much more divided and dispersed.” But he persevered, attended Northwestern University, and later earned his MBA at the University of Minnesota’s Carlson School of Management, where he was class president.

In 2017, Hollies founded Guaranteed America, a firm that lobbies for BIPOC-owned businesses at the state Capitol. The organization also manages organizations that help businesses grow.

Moving into the Public Square

When Hollies started at United in Fall 2021, he was already involved in politics. He worked on President Biden’s 2020 campaign and, in 2021, helped organize a cleanup effort in the wake of protests over the police killing of Daunte Wright. Before long, he had decided to run for mayor in Brooklyn Park. He lost the first race, then came within two votes during a special election in August 2021.

By Fall 2022, after winning the primary election, Hollies took a semester off to concentrate on his third mayoral campaign. With help from his family, including his two teenagers, he ran on a platform of improving public safety, increasing funding for youth programming, and expanding the city’s tax base to reduce the onus on homeowners. Supporters lauded his skill at bringing people together, and credit him for being a “service-oriented leader,” and “true public servant.” *

The Next Chapter

“As I’ve become more politically active,” Hollies shares, “I’ve also grown closer to God in many ways, and have more questions than answers.” At United he hopes to expand his understanding of the Bible and theology and build his foundational knowledge.

Hollies also values quality, transformative education. “Although I am far from the most progressive of the progressive,” he explains, “the emphasis on social transformation, along with a great seminary education attracted me.”



Hollies Winston

Where might this ultimately take him? Hollies is not certain. It’s tough to juggle work, school, family, and political responsibilities. He credits his wife, Latrice, for helping him to balance everything. “Work/life balance is difficult,” Hollies admits, “because the work simply has to be done.” Still, he’s looking forward to continuing his journey at United. As one of his professors, Rev. Dr. Gary Green, notes, “I hope United can be a vocal source of support for the possibilities theological education holds for the world of politics.”

For now, Hollies is leaving things in God’s hands. “God works in mysterious ways,” he says, “and when you flow with God’s will it all becomes so much easier. I’m listening to hear what I need to hear.”

* Tom Gitaa, “Hollies Winston Wins Historic Brooklyn Park Mayor’s Race,” *Mshale*, 11/8/2022



Amanda McElray Hunter

ARTIST PROFILE | AMANDA MCELRAY HUNTER

Amanda McElray Hunter (’10), the artist whose work is on the cover, is a visual artist and curator. She is the Gallery Manager and co-curator of the Joseph Nease Gallery, a City Commissioner for the Duluth Public Arts Commission, co-founder and former Chair of the Downtown Duluth Arts Collective, and a former curator for Peace UCC. Currently she is preparing for an immersive art installation that will open in late April 2023.

Amanda creates multi-media visual art: art objects—handmade book forms, paper-dolls, games, collage dioramas, etc.—as well as large scale drawings and paintings. “My current series,” she shares, “is ‘Feral Biome.’” Feral Biome is a way to encourage viewers to embrace creative impulses and imagine new outcomes for their stories and our community story, using archetypal symbols and metaphors from the history of storytelling.

GETTING UNSTUCK: REV. LESLIE NEUGENT ('12) FINDS PURPOSE IN FAITH AND THE ENNEAGRAM

By Diane Riggs

Leslie Neugent ('12), an ordained UCC minister, never intended to become a spiritual leader. An only child of first-generation Americans, she was raised to be resilient and self-sufficient. After earning a master's in advertising, Leslie entered "the 'Mad Men' world of advertising." She rose quickly in her field, but life intervened, and unexpected crises set her on a new path. Leslie now works to help others improve their spiritual and emotional health.

Path to United

Though Leslie was raised Catholic and married by a Catholic priest, aspects of those beliefs—including views about homosexuality and divorce—never seemed right. After she got in trouble for wearing a pants suit to choir, Leslie left church and stayed away for a long time.

Success in the field of advertising also had its downsides when advancing her career meant pushing other people aside. Leslie remembers being on an airplane enroute to an account, and suddenly having a sinking feeling. "I remember it was like my soul was getting sucked out of me, truly."

Leslie was living in New Mexico and pregnant for the first time, when her beloved mother suffered a brain aneurysm and passed away. "My mother," she says, "was my God, and it almost broke me."

"To say that I was angry with God," she adds, "would be really an understatement of epic proportions."

Two years later, pregnant again, Leslie learned the baby would have Down Syndrome. After he was born, the baby was critically ill, spending months in the ICU. This added stress, on top of the grief over losing her mother, turned Leslie's anger with God, "into this really pronounced sort of wrestling with God."

Discoveries at United

Experiences with chaplains in Dallas who supported Leslie during her baby's early struggles, drew her to seminary—initially at Perkins School of Theology in Dallas. Still, she admits, "I went to seminary because I was furious; I went to wrestle with God."

When the family moved to Minnesota, Leslie found United. In the 10 years it took her to graduate, she discovered that the intensity of being a hospital chaplain was not sustainable. Through a course required Leaderwise assessment, Leslie also discovered a tool that would change her life: the Enneagram. As an instructor told her, "You're a powerboat and you swamp small boats in your wake." To be a minister, he said, you have to lean into your nine, stop your motor, lift your sail, and "let the wind blow your boat."

Parables and Enneagram

At Wayzata Community Church, she co-founded a "Parables" ministry for



Rev. Leslie Neugent

differently abled children. "Some of the holiest moments that I have ever had spiritually," Leslie shares, "happened in that space."

Leslie also spent seven years getting certified to guide others through the Enneagram. "The Enneagram," she explains, "goes much deeper than a typical personality test. A personality test often says, 'I am this, so deal with me,' but the Enneagram helps us see the gift of our type, and also where we get stuck. It provides action steps for growth."

The Enneagram, Leslie asserts, can help us grow into what God intends for our lives. It can be a personal tool, be used in conflict resolution, help with leadership, and more. These days Leslie has settled into her calling, providing life coaching and spiritual direction through the Enneagram. "It wasn't the call I imagined initially," she says, "but thanks to United, I found a means to spiritually nurture others without losing myself."

"I create these artworks as vehicles for retelling fairy tales, folklore, and myth and to explore intersections with social and environmental justice. My upcoming exhibit encourages participants to retell their stories and imagine new possibilities for those stories."

Amanda chose United because it offered an open, diverse, supportive, and intellectually creative environment in which to question faith, religion, culture, social, and ethical constructs through an arts lens. She asserts that several professors—Rev. Drs. Jann Cather Weaver, Chris Smith, Wilson Yates, and Cindi Beth Johnson—"really embraced and honored my vocation as an artist and created space for me to explore that vocation within their classes. Ultimately, my experience was that the practice of making art and thinking about art/theology/culture/religion was seamless to the practice of doing justice and living faithfully among others. It was this integration from concept in the classroom to practice in real life that has given me a grounding in which I am able to reach out to my community in both my own artwork and in my curatorial work."

PROFESSOR EMERITUS AND TRUSTEE EMBODIES UNITED'S LEGACY

By Diane Riggs

He was on United's faculty from 1970 to 1995, but Rev. Dr. Clyde Steckel's legacy stretches far past a quarter century. In the 1960s, he served on United's Advisory Council and as an interim faculty member. With United, he was a beloved teacher, a model donor, a consistent dean, and a loyal colleague. Since 2017, Clyde has been a valued United trustee. For all those whose lives he's transformed, Clyde is the embodiment of our legacy.

Why United

Though Clyde is an ordained UCC minister, United's UCC origin had little bearing on his decision to join the faculty. As he explains, being a campus minister during the Vietnam war and social upheaval of the times, "really changed my thinking about so many things."

"I saw at United," he adds, "the opportunity to reconfigure my discipline embracing those system outlooks rather than just individual outlooks." It also helped that he knew United's Art Merrill and Don White through his work as Campus Minister for the United Ministries in Higher Education at the University of Minnesota.

Teacher

Teaching, Clyde asserts, was a strong calling and a source of joy. What did he value most? "I most valued the give and take that went on in the classroom because my teaching method and style was to go with good preparation..., but at the same time I was interested in seeing what the students would think. I really enjoyed my teaching."

Students liked his teaching, too. Sue Ebbers ('78), Professor Emerita, notes: "Clyde was a wonderful teacher, combining his dry wit with thorough knowledge of his discipline and of the church.... He responded to our efforts with rigor, wisdom, and grace. I cherish his comment on my Senior Practicum evaluation: 'Paper is a well-argued statement representing a theological analysis known to be at odds with that of the instructor...' AND, I got an A!"

Rev. Dr. Christie Cozad Neuger ('80), a former faculty member, avers, "Clyde Steckel has had more influence on my studies and my career than any other person. I entered seminary already interested in pastoral care ministry, but his teaching—rich in both theology and practice—clarified and motivated my studies. As a teacher, he had high expectations but was always affirming."

Transformational Leader

From 1979 to 1989, Clyde held the challenging position of Dean and Academic Vice President. He served under three presidents and, Art Merrill has asserted, "brought the school through its accreditation in 1982, virtually single-handedly." *

Clyde also played a key role in counseling students and alums. Neuger recalls advice he gave when she was struggling with a career move: "The only thing that's going to get in the way of your vocation is if you doubt yourself."

* Merrill, Arthur L. *United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities: An Ecumenical Venture* (New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1993), 257.



Clyde Steckel on the phone in 1987.

"That advice served me well," Neuger attests, "and Clyde's teaching, mentoring, and friendship have sustained me for more than 45 years."

Though he experienced myriad changes at United, Clyde holds to the idea that, "Institutions can be problematic, but they can also be creative and positive." He credits United for its "commitment to understanding and responding to contemporary culture." "We didn't try to find *the* answer," Clyde says. "We tried to respond as the times went on."

For his countless contributions as a dedicated and selfless teacher, mentor, donor, leader, trustee, friend, and so much more, Clyde exemplifies United's legacy. We are eternally grateful.

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—leaders the world needs.

To learn more about Legacy Giving and membership in the Barnabas Society, contact Cindy Schriever, United's donor engagement officer. Call her at 651-255-6111 or write to her at cschriever@unitedseminary.edu.



Rev. Milton Staskal

UNITED ALUM FUNDS PASTORAL SCHOLARSHIPS

In 1962, the year United came into being, Rev. Milton Staskal graduated from Mission House Seminary during their centennial year. He served in many congregations before retiring in the late 1990s. His first congregation, Milton reports, was in a small town in southwestern Ohio where his first child was born. Milton's home congregation, he suggests, is in "driftless southwestern Wisconsin" where farmers are kidded that they are "lucky to be able to farm *both* sides of an acre." He was the first and only pastor to originate from his home church.

Because he benefited from and was very grateful for the scholarship assistance he received while attending seminary, Milton decided that he would give back. "I was determined to financially help other future seminary students who intended to take up parish ministry," he recalls.

A MESSAGE FROM ADVANCEMENT

REV. DR. CINDI BETH JOHNSON, VICE PRESIDENT

60 YEARS OF FAITHFUL GIVING | THANKS FOR YOUR GENEROSITY

As we continue to celebrate our 60th, we give thanks for alums and donors who have supported United with their generosity. We wouldn't be United without you. Let me share two examples of generosity that inspire me.

Hugh Huelster ('20) recently became a recurring donor. Recurring donors provide vital, ongoing support for the seminary. At the time Hugh set up his recurring gift he indicated that he wanted the gift to be in honor of Gail Anderson ('05). Hugh and Gail had known each other for years, and worked together long before they became interested in theological education.

Hugh knew that Gail was an alum. They met for lunch, and Gail brought Hugh to United. The rest is, as they say, history. Hugh heard in Gail's voice an invitation to consider becoming a student just as Gail heard in Hugh's voice a desire to find a place like United that would encourage his questions and honor his learning. Hugh dedicated his gift, writing, "If not for Gail, I wouldn't be an alum. After all, as you remember, she brought me to you and then you got the ball rolling. I'm forever grateful to the two of you."

Like Hugh, Linda Sanderman ('05) came to United after retiring from another career. Linda had been a trailblazer, working for the Standard Insurance Company, breaking

numerous glass ceilings. After retirement, Linda's boundless curiosity and desire to be active led her to enroll at United. Linda's sister, Marcia, talked about what a happy time this was for her, stating that she thrived at United. Upon graduation, Linda worked for many years at Valley Community Presbyterian Church in Portland, Oregon, fulfilling her new role in ministry.

Linda died in August and we recently learned that she named United as one of her beneficiaries. Linda's educational experience at United prompted her to want to give back. Thanks to her generosity, today's students will find a place in which they can thrive.

The generosity of our donors always inspires me. We would not be United without your faithful support. If you are interested in becoming a recurring donor or if you want to learn more about legacy planning, give us a call. Your gifts allow students to thrive at United.

60@60 | ART UNDER THE INFLUENCE

As part of its 60th Anniversary, United is celebrating with an exhibition of 60 works of art contributed by its alums and students. Between February 24 and May 19, we will have submissions on display throughout the campus.

Art has always been a part of the theological pedagogy at United through classes, special exhibitions, and its permanent collection. A question frequently arises: "What has the greater influence—theology on art or art on theology?" This exhibition will add to that conversation.

Come to campus this spring to enjoy the varied expressions of art and theology, and add your voice to the conversation!

This fabric art (36 X 22 inches) was submitted for 60@60 by Anni C. Brink ('05) who says, "Beloved Community is what I lift up and building it together is the way to go!"



To accomplish this goal, Milton made a habit of forwarding any and all pastoral honorariums he received—for services like weddings and funerals—directly to United. He earmarked the funds as scholarship aid for parish-bound students.

To those who provided the honorariums, Milton sent thank you letters to let them know that the funds had been passed through to the seminary. "Who knows," he would write, "perhaps your gift will help provide an education for some pastor who might serve this congregation in the future."

Through the years, Milton and his wife, Trudy, also made personal contributions to his endowed scholarship fund, the Milton K. Staskal Endowed Scholarship Fund. In all, their contributions total more than \$100,000—an amount that generates a significant amount of support for seminary students. Milton would like to challenge other parish pastor alums to follow his example. Donate honorariums to United to help support the seminary, accrue a tax benefit, and make possible a transformational education for the next generation of ministers.

STAY CONNECTED WITH UNITED

Cindi Beth Johnson

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



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CELEBRATING UNITED AT 60 | UNITED DAYS MAY 9–10, 2023

Come home to help us celebrate United at 60!

Take this opportunity to be part of a gathering of alums, students, faculty, staff, and friends. On Tuesday, May 9, hear from beloved faculty members and find out what today's students are learning. In the evening, join us for a banquet where we will recognize our distinguished alums, celebrate new members of the Bossard Ward Society, and present the new Spirit of United Award.

On Wednesday, May 10, you will have a special chance to hear from two of our newest faculty members. Rev. Dr. Jessica Chapman Lape and Dr. Munjed Murad will each talk about interreligious engagement and the role of a Christian Seminary.

Portions of this event will be offered in a hybrid format for those who can't attend in person. We look forward to seeing you in May!

To learn more about or register for United Days, visit us online at www.unitedseminary.edu.

