

SPRING 2021

VOICES



Detail of Miriam celebrating the liberation of her people in Exodus 15. The stained glass window was designed by Rev. Tanya Sadagopan (Doctor of Ministry student) and installed at the church she serves in Janesville, WI. See the back page to read "Creativity is at the heart of how we understand God."



UNITED
THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
OF THE TWIN CITIES
Education for Transformation

MESSAGE FROM THE INTERIM PRESIDENT

REV. DR. MOLLY T. MARSHALL

Dear United Community,

I am grateful to join the vibrant story of United Seminary as your interim president. Your story of racial justice, radical inclusion, and social transformation helped beckon me to this role for the next couple of years. In this issue of VOICES, I hope you, too, will find inspiration as you read about the many students, alums, and faculty who are living into these missional values and serving with impact *for such a time as this*.

To let you know a little bit about myself: I am an American Baptist--one of the welcoming kind--and have always been broadly ecumenical. My students have called me an "ecumaniac" over the years for my wide-ranging appreciation of other ecclesial traditions, as well as other ways of faith. The values of United are those I cherish, and I believe that together we will move into the future with grace and renewed strength.

Key goals will guide my time with you: updating the strategic plan, working on operational effectiveness, engaging donors who are generous friends of the seminary (and cultivating new ones), and attending to healing in the United community. Please know of my eagerness to get to know and work with the various constituents of the school and to serve you well in this interim period. I deeply desire to strengthen the seminary in preparation for calling a settled, long-term president.

In closing, I extend my deep gratitude for your continued, faith-filled commitments to United. Your support allows us to carry out our mission to educate leaders -- like those featured in this issue -- who are doing the work of healing, transforming, and ministering to the world *for such a time as this*.

Faithfully yours,

Molly T. Marshall

Molly T. Marshall
Interim President

Rev. Dr. Molly T. Marshall

"The values of United are those I cherish, and I believe that together we will move into the future with grace and renewed strength."

STUDENT SNAPSHOT

SPRING 2021

This term we are educating 165 students -- the largest student body in a decade!

165 STUDENTS
ENROLLED

94 MASTER OF
DIVINITY

37 MASTER OF
ARTS

34 DOCTOR OF
MINISTRY

95% RECEIVE
SCHOLARSHIPS
THANKS TO YOU!

PREPARING FOR THE DAYS AHEAD

As the trials of the former police officers charged in George Floyd's death begin, our nation -- especially the Twin Cities -- will again be confronted with the complexity of layered traumas, including racism and white supremacy. As a theological institution committed to racial justice and social transformation, part of our recent work has included holding space to lift up Black voices during this difficult time, and joining with community partners to pray for justice.

On March 2, United hosted over 200 people in a virtual space (pictured right) to witness to the ways faith and community leaders can prepare for and provide care in the days ahead. United assistant professor Rev. Dr. Gary Green II (middle) moderated the dialogue between Rev. Traci Blackmon (top), associate general minister of Justice and Local Church Ministries for the United Church of Christ, and Rev. Steven Belton (bottom), president and CEO of the Urban League (Twin Cities). You are invited to watch this transformational conversation at bit.ly/UTSwatch.

In solidarity with the George Floyd Global Memorial and other local organizations, United co-hosted a virtual Global Day of Prayer on March 8 to pray for justice for George Floyd, Black liberation, and for the strength to work for a just, equitable, and inclusive society. Faculty offered a prayer from Howard Thurman's *Meditations of the Heart* (watch: bit.ly/UTSPrayer) and collected supplies for mutual aid.



"United is more than a theological institution that provides education meant to transform the world. We are also part of the community, and we take seriously our responsibility to be present and to bear public witness with those who are hurting. This is our commitment in this moment." - Rev. Dr. Gary Green II

UNITED'S STATEMENT ON RACIAL INJUSTICE

Founded in 1962 as an ecumenical seminary by the Christian denomination of the United Church of Christ, United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities has worked for inclusion and equity since its inception. Yet we recognize that United has benefited from the legacy of white supremacy in the US and the centering of the white Christian experience, resulting in great spiritual and human cost. We confess that we have been complicit in perpetuating the dominance of white culture and theology, and that the implications of this history have too often distorted United's authentic efforts to build a more just world.

As educators charged with forming faith leaders, we are called to change the narrative and work toward an organizational culture and society in which all human beings are free from violence in all its forms. United's board of trustees, faculty, administration, staff, and students are committed to challenging structures and systems that perpetuate injustice and the oppression of Black, Indigenous, and people of color.

We will act on this commitment through the education our students receive, our advocacy on issues of justice, and our organizational and individual efforts to dismantle white supremacy and repair harm within United and the organizations with whom we work and serve. As a faith community, we aim to manifest the love at the heart of our diverse traditions through our commitment to justice within our institution and our world.



Rev. Stacey Smith leading clergy in prayer at #PrayforMN in Minneapolis on March 7. Photo courtesy of #PrayforMN.

Rev. Stacey Smith ('15, United trustee) is called to a mission for justice. Following the death of George Floyd, Smith has been organizing and leading Twin Cities clergy in silent marches and prayer rallies, uniting faith leaders to heal a divided nation.

"Just as the death of Mr. Floyd ignited a flame for justice that went across the Twin Cities, the state, and across the world, I pray that our gatherings will do the same," she said.

A WOMAN OF MANY "FIRSTS" ON A MISSION FOR JUSTICE: REV. STACEY SMITH ('15, TRUSTEE)

Most recently, Smith, the president of the board of the Minnesota Council of Churches (MCC), helped organize #PrayforMN as the trial process began for Derek Chauvin, the former police officer charged in the death of George Floyd.

Held in Minneapolis on March 7, hundreds of clergy prayed for justice for George Floyd and his family, for safety and peace during the trial, and for unity across the nation.

"It was a very spirit-filled event, and we can see the move of God is very great -- that God will do something that will change the course of history," she said.

Smith was called to ministry after two decades in the corporate world, though she wasn't sure which direction God would take her. Since answering the call, she has become a woman of many "firsts," while spending 75 percent of the week on the road to serve in several leadership roles.

In 2013, Smith was the first woman installed as lead minister of the 135-year-old St. James African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church in St. Paul. Four years ago, she was

appointed as the first woman presiding elder for the Chicago Annual Conference AME (covering Minnesota and Iowa), followed by an appointment as the first woman in the United States to preside over a Canadian AME Annual Conference. In total, she oversees the budgets and daily operations of over 20 churches.

In her local work as president of the MCC, Smith is leading a 10-year justice initiative, Truth and Reparations. This ecumenical effort will embrace truth telling through the elevation of stories about Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) who have been hidden, hurt, or marginalized. A process of land and economic reparations is being pursued to reduce racial disparities.

Looking forward, Smith's justice work led to an invitation from the World Council of Churches to develop worship material for its 2022 international assembly.

Smith noted that her time at United helped prepare her for her call: "What United gave me was the inner strength to find out who I really was. Instead of just learning, I was able to find strength in my faith," she said.



2020 DISTINGUISHED ALUM: REV. TODD LIPPERT ('03)

United celebrates the 2020 Distinguished Alum Rev. Todd Lippert! Since graduating, Lippert has served as minister to United Church of Christ (UCC) congregations in Minnesota and Wisconsin. Lippert, a UCC United Board, said, "Todd models brilliantly the ways in which a graduate theologian can serve the church."

Lippert's recent congregational ministry includes serving as the senior minister at First United Church of Christ in Minneapolis and as a community minister. He has also served the wider UCC as chair of the CUE Seminars.

As a Minnesota state representative, Lippert serves the city of Northfield and surrounding areas. He is a Board Leader and Vice Chair of the Long-Term Care Division. His membership on a diverse range of committees includes health, climate and energy, to environment and natural resources.

Lippert's work at the state capitol began years prior to his being elected to office. As a graduate of United, Lippert has been through policy proposals and coalition-building. "Good for a few is not good enough. We need to stand up for ourselves in our neighbors and realize there is more that unites us than divides us. We need to be a part of the solution."

Rev. Todd Lippert ('03) delivers the opening prayer at the Minnesota House of Representatives, March 26, 2020.

NURSING DURING COVID-19

GEORGE DAVIS-WILLIAMS (MDIV STUDENT)

The COVID-19 pandemic has sent shock waves through the health care delivery system, requiring front line workers to adapt and care for patients in innovative ways, something George Davis-Williams (current MDiv, UCC studies) knows all too well.

As a public health nurse and clinical supervisor in rural Michigan, he tends to people impacted by this unrelenting disease -- often isolated, fearful, and traumatized. Now he and his staff are working overtime to deliver vaccinations.

"I might be the only kind face some people have seen in the last year," he said. "With that one interaction, I can help get them through the rest of the day or the rest of the week knowing that someone cares."

While Davis-Williams sees hope on the horizon as vaccinations bring both tears and relief to patients, he has concerns about health care workers following the pandemic.

"This pandemic has been absolutely spiritually, physically, and mentally

exhausting for my colleagues and me," said Davis-Williams, who draws on the lessons gained at United to be a spiritual leader to his staff experiencing trauma and burnout.

"I am not a professional pastor yet, but I can still start working on God's mission, to bring further love and healing and compassion into the world," said Davis-Williams, recently recognized for his work with a statewide public nursing award.

Davis-Williams first felt called to church ministry as a child, but knowing he was gay, his truth "had to be kept quiet" for many years in his small conservative town. Instead he followed other paths as a healing practitioner: first as a funeral director, when he lived at the funeral home and tended to families at all hours in their darkest hours; and now as a public health nurse "taking care of people who are otherwise forgotten about and marginalized."

All of his experiences have given Davis-Williams an understanding of the depth of human suffering and a call to minister to it. When he found



George Davis-Williams, a public health nurse, receives the COVID-19 vaccine.

the United Church of Christ -- and United Seminary with its interactive distance learning option -- he felt welcomed to answer the call.

Following graduation, Davis-Williams plans to serve churches as an interim minister, specifically in communities that are hurting, broken, and in need of a spiritual leader to guide the repair.

"To help these congregations heal would be an absolute privilege," he said.

ing in 2003, Lippert has lived into United's missional values and a commitment to the Common Good through service as a cousin, an immigration advocate, and a Minnesota state lawmaker. Karen Smith Sellers ('76, '13), a current trustee on the local education at United Seminary prepares one for effective leadership in diverse sectors."

first UCC (Northfield, MN) from 2012 to 2020, prior to his current call at Mayflower UCC (Minneapolis, MN) as a seniors committee and as a member of the Minnesota Conference UCC Board of Directors.

unding areas (District 20B). He holds leadership roles in the Democratic-Farmer-Labor (DFL) caucus as Assistant Majority. A diverse set of committees allows him to represent the needs of the people of his district, ranging from agriculture, to behavioral

is an active member of the faith-based organizing group ISAIAH, he advocated on behalf of the immigrant community. "gh," he said. "I am a person of faith. I follow the great commandment: Love God by loving our neighbor. We need to see. We are in this together, and to solve our greatest challenges, we will need to come together in new ways."

0. Photo courtesy of the Minnesota House of Representatives.



Rev. Dwayne Dixon

THE CORPORATE MINISTER: REV. DWAYNE DIXON ON (FINALLY) ANSWERING THE CALL (MA STUDENT)

His podcast, *The Corporate Minister*, is “a safe space dedicated to the hearts and minds of professional men of color” -- or “strivers,” who Dixon says are often overlooked in ministry.

“We have been told since the time we were little, ‘You have to be twice as good to go half as far,’ and we accepted that deal. But that is not human; that is super human. That takes its toll. I believe that my ministry is to provide healing and comfort in whom that toll has been taken,” he said.

The podcast was born out of an independent study course at United. Every episode is inspired and shaped by a Bible verse and includes a conversation with a leader in the Black Church with the goal to provide encouragement and healing. (Listen at thecorporateminister.com.)

At 100 Black Men (100bmtc.org), Dixon mentors and empowers Black teenagers in underrepresented areas, serving as a role model and providing technological, educational, and life skills training and opportunities.

“We have all heard the phrase, ‘to whom much is given, much is expected,’” said Dixon. “What the

100 does is provide a framework for gentlemen who want to give back to improve the lives of youths, not just here in the Twin Cities, but in chapters around the world.”

Dwayne says United is helping prepare him for this varied type of ministry. With its commitment to transformational leadership development, United is guiding him to “deepen in the word and be credible to [his] flock,” while offering a supportive atmosphere with space for all faith traditions.

“United is a place that is a very big tent,” he said. “United has space for all faith traditions, for all kinds of people, space for all kinds of beliefs, and that is appealing to me.”

In closing Dwayne reflected on Matthew 11:28-30 (“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest...”). He said, “Sometimes it is hard to know when we will get rest. Think about this COVID season right now; it is awful and heavy and so hard. Consider Philipians 4:8: Even in these difficult times, there is much that is honorable, right, pure, lovely, and admirable, and the Bible says think on these things.”

IBM. Xerox. Unisys. Ministry. After 25 years in the corporate world, Rev. Dwayne Dixon (current MA, Directed Studies) followed the call to ministry -- and the call was clear: “minister to the needs of professional men of color.”

“The pull of your spirituality is such that God is saying, ‘No, I have something else I want you to do,’” said Dixon, whose attempts to bargain with God by playing bass in the church music ensemble fell flat.

As an ordained minister at Progressive Baptist Church in St. Paul, Dixon ministers not only to his congregation, but also to Black men of all ages through the creation of communities with quality support systems.

MAY WE REMEMBER

Since our last issue of VOICES, we marked the loss of pivotal members of the United family: Hugh Schilling, Rick Heydinger, and Dean Richard Weis. We call them to mind with gratitude for their many years of service to United and its mission.

Hugh Schilling was a trustee for over a decade ('89-'01). He was passionate about attracting young people to United and provided significant scholarship support. Hugh's daughter, Terry Gilbertstadt, is a current member of the Board, and as a group, the Schilling family has devoted years of service and financial support for United.

Rick Heydinger served as a long-time member of the Board ('02-'16), including a term as chair. At the time of his death, former president and alum Kita McVay ('96, '09) wrote, "I remember Rick as someone who appreciated all that United represents and was always looking for ways to help us succeed, from financial support, to events, to strategic planning."

During Richard Weis' tenure at United as a dean and professor of Old Testament ('98-'11), he contributed to the educational experience of countless students as a teacher, advisor, and administrator. He helped students articulate and understand their call, inspiring them for the work they are doing today in faith communities and throughout society. Blessed be their memories.

A MESSAGE FROM ADVANCEMENT

REV. DR. CINDI BETH JOHNSON, VICE PRESIDENT

In my new role as vice president for Advancement, I find myself at an exciting intersection, and I look forward to working with you in a new way. In this location, I often find myself looking backward and forward as I imagine what we can create together in this season at United.

In looking back, I am grateful for former members of the staff and faculty who, with great vision, laid the groundwork for today. I am thankful for faithful donors who have given us generous support. I remember alums who shuffled through classrooms and are now leaders of congregations. We have a rich and storied history.

I look forward and imagine current students who will minister in new ways. I picture next year's incoming class knowing that the faculty will engage their hearts and minds. I am eager to see how our new Interim President Molly T. Marshall will shape the next season of our story.

It is said that our financial gifts are our prayers for an institution. Last fall United received a significant planned estate gift from Joyce ('73, '78) and Robert Rosene following Bob's death. Kathi Austin Mahle ('78), a classmate, remembers Joyce as a "gentle spirit" and "a source of inspiration" to her United Methodist colleagues. In the early years of women's ordination, Kathi describes Joyce as "a faithful sister they counted on in that journey."

Joyce's daughter, Barb, said of her parents, "They always wanted to give gifts for things that were behind the scenes." Bob, an engineer, understood the importance of earmarking gifts for maintenance, or for supporting what was needed most. Barb said her parents lived by the conviction, "If you are able to help, it is your

responsibility to help." And help they did, in countless ways.

In 2015, *Joyce's Pastoral Prayers* was published by the Centennial United Methodist Women. The book includes prayers for renewal, gratitude, comfort, peace, strength, and more. Many of the prayers begin with the words, "Creating God." As I think about what we are creating today, I think of these remarkable friends of United who gave generously for over fifty years, offering sustaining support for United to live out its mission. As members of the Barnabas Heritage Society, Joyce and Bob provided United with one more generous prayer in a planned estate gift. We give thanks for their faithful care and support.

We are at an exciting intersection; we are building something new. I care deeply about this institution, about its legacy and its future. I look forward to what we will create together. I invite you to join me in offering your prayers and support, as together we move into this new season at United.



Rev. Joyce ('73, '78) and Bob Rosene



Rev. Dr. Cindi Beth Johnson

BARNABAS HERITAGE SOCIETY

The Barnabas Heritage Society recognizes friends and alums of United who have included the seminary in their estate plans or made other deferred gifts. These individuals have chosen to include United in their wills, make life income gifts, or made the seminary the beneficiary of a retirement account or insurance policy.

We greatly appreciate the long-term commitment of Barnabas Heritage Society members, like Joyce and Bob Rosene, whose foresight ensures the longevity and vitality of United and whose legacies will support the ministers and theological leaders *for such a time as this*.

If you are interested in talking about a planned gift, or if you have a planned gift we may not be aware of, please let us know. We want to thank you for your stewardship and welcome you into the Barnabas Society. Cindy Schriever, United's major gifts officer, can be reached at 651.255.6111 or by email at cschriever@unitedseminary.edu.

Stay connected with United!

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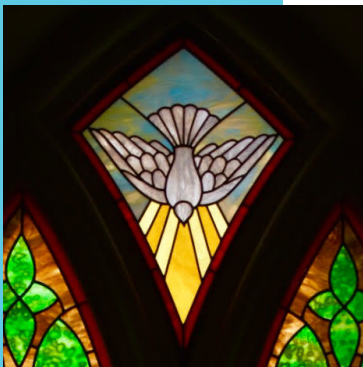
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Education for Transformation

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Rev. Tanya Sadagopan

"CREATIVITY IS AT THE HEART OF HOW WE UNDERSTAND GOD" REV. TANYA SADAGOPAN (DOCTOR OF MINISTRY STUDENT)

As the first woman installed at the historic, 176-year-old First Congregational UCC in Janesville, WI, Rev. Tanya Sadagopan (current student, Doctor of Ministry in Public Theology) noticed theological gaps in the sanctuary's stained glass windows: stories about women.

When generous donors made it possible to replace two windows, Sadagopan, also an artist, began the design process while meditating, "What is the message we want to send as a congregation about who we are and what is important to us now?"

The first two-story tall window (detail left, center) illustrates the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4). According to Sadagopan, it is the longest private conversation Jesus has in scripture, notably interfaith, crossing gender, status, and geographic barriers. As the two become equals, a spring gushes up toward eternal life, a symbol of the transformation of the woman, the city, and our lives.

Miriam is central to Sadagopan's second design (detail front cover). The first woman prophet in the Bible, Miriam is depicted celebrating the liberation of her people after safely crossing the Red Sea (Exodus 15). Miriam's hands are raised in a prophetic blessing and benediction, while the women around her are playing instruments honoring the musical heritage in Sadagopan's church. At the apex, or "kite," of the window above Miriam are golden rays of light symbolizing the Holy Spirit, radiating down to show God's actions on earth (detail left, top).

Sadagopan regularly incorporates the arts and public theology into her ministry, including photography, proposed social justice exhibits, and the recent installation of a labyrinth in their historic renovation project.

"Creativity is at the heart of how we understand God," she said. "God spoke, then created, bringing into existence that which wasn't, that which is. As partners with God, we are co-creators."