

SPRING 2022

VOICES

UNITED THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY OF THE TWIN CITIES





Rev. Dr. Molly T. Marshall

"Our graduates display the impact of your gifts to United... When you make a gift to United, you are sowing an enduring legacy as you support the formation of creative leaders who will help make the world a place of flourishing for all."

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT REV. DR. MOLLY T. MARSHALL

Dear Faithful Friend of United,

Commencement, more than any other event, demonstrates the seminary's mission; it celebrates the hard work of persons who are summoned to lives of service and significance. The class of 2022 was a robust cadre of 27 graduates from across the United States, literally from shore to shore and beyond. The joy of completion was palpable as they processed to soaring organ music at Plymouth Congregational Church in Minneapolis, following the treasured faculty who have shaped their graduate theological education.

As one current student and recent master of arts graduate put it:

In my vision of ministry, there is a thread that starts in my own experiences of trauma and alienation, and it runs through my experiences of spiritual healing, practice, and transformation. The thread now moves through my ministry work, as I work on facilitating spiritual transformation for others. I love the art of worship design and preaching. I love small group ministry and pastoral care. I love social justice work done in faith communities. I have truly benefited from developing that through-line in my ministry at United and enriching it with theological education here.

Jill Braithwaite, MDiv student ('15, MA)

Our graduates display the impact of your gifts to United. Your faithful giving helps them leave with less educational debt as they take up work as pastors, chaplains, leaders of nonprofits—all public advocates for justice. When you make a gift to United, you are sowing an enduring legacy as you support the formation of creative leaders who will help make the world a place of flourishing for all.

The good work of United continues because of faithful friends who offer resources of time (such as our board and volunteers), finances (those who read this letter), and prayers (hopefully all of us). It has been a remarkable academic year, and I thank you for your participation in it.

Gratefully,

Molly T. Marshall

**Molly T. Marshall
President**

ANSWERING THE CALL TO CARE FOR CREATION

The cover art by alum Sarah Holst ('20) for this issue of *VOICES* celebrates the rich biodiversity of our sacred lands and wildlife, and harkens to United's commitment and call to care for creation through the new master's of art concentration in eco-justice.

Through the lens of a religiously-formed and scientifically-informed framework, United's eco-justice curriculum will uniquely prepare ministerial and future PhD students to be change makers and leaders in the areas of environmental ethics, ecological justice, and eco-theology. It's part of what Professor Demian Wheeler describes as United's "long history of engaging cutting-edge social issues."

CONGRATULATIONS TO THE CLASS OF 2022!

On Sunday, May 1, United celebrated 27 graduates at the school's 60th Annual Commencement Exercises. Held at Plymouth Congregational Church in Minneapolis, it was the first in-person graduation since the pandemic. The joyous occasion featured an address from Dr. Monica A. Coleman, Professor of Africana Studies at the University of Delaware, special music and readings from current students, and prayers by United's new chaplain, Rev. Nikki Frontz. We pray for blessings over these graduates as they go out into the world to minister to churches, to heal hearts, to lead organizations, and to transform society.

Photos clockwise, right to left: The class of 2022; United President Molly T. Marshall; Dr. Monica A. Coleman delivers the commencement address; academic award recipients; a prayer by United Chaplain Nikki Frontz; celebratory kites; Devin Parrish '22; marshal Rev. Dr. Justin Sabia-Tanis processes with the ceremonial mace created by Doug Abbott '10; proud family members snap photos. Photo credit: Michele Jokinen.



Academic Dean Dr. Kyle Roberts explains, "This new concentration was inspired in large part by our current students' interest in and passion for caring for our planet and for all of creation, particularly at a moment of looming ecological crisis. Our planetary home is sacred and a divine gift, upon which we all depend; we are responsible for taking care of that gift, not just for our sake but for that of our children and their children. My hope is this degree will prepare many leaders to do just that."

Locate more information about the concentration in the News section of the United website (www.unitedseminary.edu). Courses begin fall term of this year.

INDONESIAN MINISTER INTERWEAVES LESSONS FROM HOME AND UNITED

REV. HARDIYAN "ADI" TRIASMORADI (DOCTOR OF MINISTRY STUDENT, DIRECTED STUDY)

By Diane Riggs

Ordained as Reverend of Indonesia's East Java Christian Church (*Greja Kristen Jawi Wetan*) in 2005, doctoral student Hardiyhan "Adi" Triasmoradi leads through three interwoven fundamental ecclesiological principles which he developed in previous academic research. He calls them the "3M theses." They are: "Mengatur" (regulating), "Membebaskan" (liberating), and "Merengkuh" (embracing). He came to United to examine, test, and further develop the "3M theses" through a new lens and perspective.

In his many leadership roles at the church and synod, Adi keeps these principles in mind. He is secretary of the church order revision team, convenes the synod's organizational and managerial team, and facilitates a new retreat house, all while attending United via distance learning.

How does Adi manage to bridge the cultural, time zone, language, and myriad other differences between his church life in Indonesia and seminary work at United? "It was not easy," he admits, "but I'm grateful for this opportunity."

"I feel like this is me being forged. The distance learning United offered has *not* been making me live out of my context. I'm able to inhale local concerns and breathe in my church's challenges. At the same time, I'm able to inhale the insight I've gotten from classes and exhale solutions that contribute to my synod and my ministerial setting.

"I am grounded in local action and church context while at the same time I have a chance to drink from the cup of wealth offered by United's professors' and classmates'

wisdom. This hybrid process and multidirectional perspectives I have gotten have inextricably enriched my pilgrimage and my spiritual foundation as Reverend of the East Java Christian Church."

United's focus on art and creativity is another touchstone for Adi. A drummer and percussionist, he is interested in music and theatrical performance art for liturgical purposes. "I love to sketch," Adi adds, "since my course last fall encouraged me to retrieve my doodling spirit."

In addition to being a student and church reverend, Adi is a devoted husband and the father of two children, 12-year-old Adhya and his eight-year-old sister, Lulu. He describes his mother as a "warrior princess" for working to make sure he received a quality education. "Her persistence," Adi asserts, "inspired me to courageously face every obstacle in life."

Recent challenges have included the pandemic and sectarian violence in his country. These factors have brought Adi's church, he reports, to a liminal or transitional space.

"Liminality," Adi observes, "is an opportunity from which I can learn to pause, embrace the Unknown, celebrate the Mystery, and enter discernment space through United Seminary."

"I hope," he adds, "United empowers and navigates me to walk the unknown path through its intertwined

perspectives on arts, theology, and social transformation. With the help of United's progressive and constructive character, hopefully, I can listen mindfully to my church problems, map our past glorious and bad time stories, embrace trauma and uncertainty, clearly see the reality, and reveal the soul of my own church organization."

Taking lessons from the apostle Mary Magdalene, Adi concludes that "being a vulnerable pastor and leader is a must... In such a crisis that brings humankind to the depth of trauma and misery, a vulnerable leader who compassionately and passionately ministers from the margin, rooted in the awareness of Jesus' path, is urgently needed. With the help of United Seminary, hopefully, I can fulfill that expectation and diligently work on it!"

Doctor of Ministry student, Rev. Adi Triasmoradi



THE JOJOS

DISCERNING THE STRENGTH OF COMMUNITY

By Diane Riggs

How does the value of community come to life at United? The JoJos—five women who attended United more than a decade ago—are a perfect example. Each came to the seminary from an arts-based or private sector career, heeding a call to service that could not be denied. At United they found their purpose and each other.

The group began when Ruth MacKenzie ('11, MDiv), a former vocal performer and stage writer, asked fellow students to meet outside of class. Initially the idea was to study the book of John (thus the JoJos), but as the women kept gathering, the focus grew broader and deeper. Ruth explains, "Pretty quickly we realized we were more than a study group. We wanted to be a group for support, accountability, and helping one another be better ministers."

Since that initial meeting in 2012, the JoJos—Ruth, Jackie Falk ('12, MDiv), Karen Larson ('12, MDiv), Zoe Kuester ('11, MDiv), and LuAnn Sulimann ('11, MDiv)—have been connecting almost every month. The group is a safe space in which they can explore questions about theology, answer the call to service, and delve into deeper questions.

As Ruth explains, "The JoJos have this unique intersection of being close friends who are deeply spiritual, and we talk about our spirituality and our understanding of theology and our ministry...and try to support one another through the ups and downs of that."

The inspiration for starting the group actually came from a United class where the students were advised to "have trusted colleagues"



The JoJos from left to right: Karen Larson ('12), LuAnn Sulimann ('11), Zoe Kuester ('11), Ruth C. MacKenzie ('11), and Jackie Falk ('12).

after leaving seminary. Having a group during seminary was also essential. As Karen shares, "JoJos were key to helping me understand my call...and they are incredibly inspiring."

A special, spiral necklace that they all wear when they meet signifies the strength of their bond. Wearing the necklace, notes Jackie, helps them "remember the JoJo mojo" and that they are never alone.

Time has not dimmed the JoJos' commitment to one another or United. Notes Zoe, "It has been an honor and a privilege to walk with these women and to grow and change with them." "We all," Ruth confesses, "have a serious soft spot in our heart for United." Karen is even on the Alum Council.

What path have they taken since leaving seminary? Since November 2017, Karen has been the pastor at Zwingli United Church of Christ and advocating for social justice in rural

Minnesota. Ruth, a Minister Emerita at First Universalist Church of Minneapolis, just signed on as a part-time pastor-in-residence in Dallas. Though Jackie recently retired from being a chaplain at a county jail, she is still committed to finding better ways to heal abuse victims. Zoe has served at several UCC churches in Minnesota and Wisconsin and is now pastor of Spirit of Peace, an interdenominational church in Minnetonka.

LuAnn, who grew up in a Roman Catholic family, and now ministers individuals in her community, believes her experience at United was transformative. "I don't know what I'd be like if I never discovered anything about progressive religion," she confesses. "I have profound gratitude for the person I am today that I owe to United and the JoJos."

Jackie sums it up this way: "We're holding hands to the end."

To learn more about the JoJos, read an in-depth blog post at www.bit.ly/TheJoJos.

GENERATIONAL GIVING STRENGTHENS FAMILY LEGACY

THE KUENTZEL FAMILY

The Agnes D. Kuentzel Foundation, which has awarded scholarships to United students since 2011, commemorates the lives of Walter and Agnes Kuentzel, a couple whose ties to United Seminary run deep.

Walter was the great-grandson of H.A. Muehlmeier—a founder of Mission House College and Seminary near Sheboygan, Wisconsin, which later merged with Yankton School of Theology to create United. Walter earned a bachelor of arts from Mission House College in 1945, and a bachelor of divinity from Mission House Seminary in 1946. He then spent two years teaching Greek and Hebrew there before entering Princeton Theological Seminary.

While at Princeton, he met Agnes, a spirited woman from South Carolina who was determined to bypass the Christian education route and earn a bachelor of divinity instead. When Agnes graduated in 1950, she was only the third woman at Princeton to earn a pastoral degree.

Walter and Agnes married that summer and moved back to Mission House in the fall. Walter, who was primed to replace Karl Ernst in the New Testament theology chair, was part of the group of new faculty hired in the 1950s. Others included Louis Gunnemann, Frederick Herzog, Theophilus Hilgeman, and Brevard

Childs. For the next seven years, Walter taught classes, started a family of three sons, and traveled to Princeton to work on his dissertation.

In June 1957, Walter earned his doctor of theology. Tragically, just months later, he died in an automobile accident.

At that time, Mission House Seminary's future was uncertain. As the merger between Mission House Seminary and Yankton took shape, Childs and Herzog moved to Yale and Duke Divinity Schools respectively. Gunnemann joined United and Walter, who was devoted to Mission House, intended to join him there. Appropriately, Under Gunnemann's leadership, United posthumously established the annual Walter F. Kuentzel student award in New Testament theology in 1957.

After Walter's death, Agnes returned south with her sons. Once they graduated from college, she started her own pastoral career. Agnes became just the second woman ordained in the Concord Presbytery in North Carolina. She then earned a master's in psychological counseling and worked for nearly 15 years in the career development center at Lancaster Theological Seminary providing



Walter and Agnes Kuentzel

psychological screening and pastoral counseling for UCC ministerial candidates.

In the late 1990s, with returns on money she invested after Walter's death, Agnes established the Agnes D. Kuentzel Foundation in his memory. Given Walter's love for Mission House, it is a great honor for the family to continue supporting the mission of United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities.

United is very grateful to Walt Kuentzel, Jr., Agnes' and Walter's son, for supplying information for this profile.



I am grateful for the Agnes D. Kuentzel Foundation scholarship that launched me into my God-given calling as a minister. When I applied to United, I did not think I would get in due to financial reasons. But when God opens a door, God opens it wide. Getting a scholarship allowed me to go through my Master of Divinity Program without any debt. It was my ticket into the United Church of Christ, in which I have been serving as a minister for nine years. Coming from a culture where women are looked down on for being in leadership, United gave me confidence that yes, I can be a leader. Yes, I can fully be me and who God created me to be. I continue to apply what I have learned at seminary in our Bible Study group, in offering pastoral care to my members, and in my practice to 'walk humbly with our God.' -Rev. Asafa Rakotojoelinandrasana ('13)

A MESSAGE FROM ADVANCEMENT REV. DR. CINDI BETH JOHNSON, VICE PRESIDENT

HOW YOUR INVESTMENT MAKES A DIFFERENCE

"...part of theological education was finding my voice and learning to trust it."

Dear Friends of United,

Your investment in United makes a difference. Your unwavering partnership results in increased enrollment, gifted faculty, and a transformative learning experience for our students.

As I write this, we are a month from the end of United's 59th fiscal year. You, our beloved alums and friends, have been instrumental in making it happen; you have supported us and helped us to get to this place, the cusp of our 60th year of educating students for transformation.

In her article, President Marshall includes a quote from alum and current student Jill Braithwaite ('15) who talks about a "through line" that she has developed as a student at United. As donors, your support is part of United's through line, part of what binds these 59 years together.

Last month Dr. Catherine Keller delivered our Picard Lecture on Environmental Ethics and Theology. Catherine has studied and written about the environment and offers words that are both prophetic and encouraging. The Picard Lectures began with an endowed gift from alum Rev. Frank Picard ('02).

The night of the lecture, Frank and his wife, Betty, were in attendance. I asked Frank what United meant to him, why he invested in United. Frank said, "United was important to me because part of theological education was finding my voice and learning to trust it. A big part of my work has always been caring for God's creation. I have worked to help the church find its voice and role as caretakers of God's handiwork."

Frank continued, "When I began funding the Picard Lecture in Environmental Ethics and Theology, it was with the hope that future pastors and religious leaders would see the care of our planet as part of their mission."

Caring for the planet is not a new thing at United. Last week an alum wrote to tell me about what he thinks was the first Environmental Theological/Ethics class held at United in the late 1960s. The class was initiated by students with the support of then Dean Gunneman. It was facilitated by Rev. Dr. James B. Nelson, who helped the students develop the curriculum, though each class section was student-led. The course ended with each student writing an Environmental Credo.

In this issue of *VOICES*, you will see the through line about the environment. From the cover artwork by Sarah Holst ('20) to the new concentration, also initiated by students.

The work of United deepens, expands, and renews, but the through line of justice continues. You, too, are part of that through line. You have invested in what has made it possible for us to live through the opportunities and challenges of these last 59 years.

From the bottom of our hearts, we thank you for your faithful support of United's mission to prepare innovative and compassionate leaders for the equipping of churches, faith communities, and society toward justice and service as we prepare to turn 60!

Cindi Beth Johnson can be reached at cbjohnson@unitedseminary.edu or 651-255-6137.

MEET THE ARTIST SARAH HOLST ('20)



Cover art: "Chesler Park," 2015, pen and colored pencil, Biodiversity Series.

Sarah Holst ('20) is an artist, theologian, spiritual director, facilitator for social justice movements, and "parent to two littles" in Duluth, MN.

Sarah was drawn to United because it "could match my multi-faceted vocation," she says.

"United is a seminary that is unafraid to adapt to the changing world," she notes. "Learning alongside classmates of various religious backgrounds nourished my ability to hone my own ideas while holding compassionate and curious space for the journeys of others."

Sarah says it was the community at United that helped empower her vocational pursuits.

"The communities formed in classes at United are practice grounds for a just and loving world . . . Going to United is an experience of unveiling communities stretching backward and forward in time: today I am gratefully aware of how I am never alone in the work of transformation," she explains.

In her art, Sarah lifts up the biodiversity of particular watersheds, "calling us to lament, take action, and work in right-relationship with the indigenous caretakers of the whole broad sweep of sacred life."

View Sarah's portfolio at www.sarahholstart.com.

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LEADERSHIP CENTER for SOCIAL JUSTICE

APPLICATIONS NOW OPEN FOR THE INAUGURAL COHORT OF THE LEADERSHIP FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE PROGRAM

The Twin Cities have been at the epicenter of a worldwide movement for racial reckoning, and United is acting on its commitment to promote faith-filled social transformation with its new Leadership Center for Social Justice.

Starting this fall, cohorts of pastors from Minnesota and surrounding states will learn, through a tuition-free, hybrid continuing education program, to lead and create social change in their congregations and communities. This is something “clergy have been clamoring for,” says Rev. Dr. Justin Sabia-Tanis, assistant professor and program director for social transformation. Thanks to a \$1 million grant from Lilly Endowment, Inc., the center can “further equip, inspire, and empower religious leaders to engage in new and innovative social change projects.”

Rev. Dr. Ry Siggelkow, the center’s newly appointed director, is no stranger to this work. He is an ordained Mennonite minister, former pastor, and co-founder of Pueblos de Lucha y Esperanza (Peoples of Struggle and Hope), a faith-based, women-centered, and immigrant-led empowerment organization. At the University of St. Thomas, Ry founded and was director of Initiatives in Faith & Praxis and an adjunct theology professor.

Ry is excited about the possibilities of promoting a “contextual ministry for social justice” through classes that include skill building to create “infrastructures of care built on faith, hope, and love.” To extend its impact, the Center will also develop a resource page on United’s website, establish a podcast, and share content on social media.

Visit <https://www.unitedseminary.edu/LCSJ> to learn more and apply by July 1, 2022. For more information, please contact Ry Siggelkow at 651-600-4575 or rsiggelkow@unitedseminary.edu.



Rev. Dr. Ry Siggelkow