

VOICES



"God, Semester 2" (2021) by United student Andrea Rosselle, Doctor of Ministry, Theology and the Arts

"Each semester at United, I have made a painting reflecting on God's nature in response to that semester," said Andrea Rosselle. "Semester 2" was based on the idea of spiritual community. I was in the Social Transformation class with Rev. Dr. Gary Green II, and we read and spoke a lot about solidarity and suffering. In this painting I was conceptualizing the idea of how our spirits commune with God. So all of those little dots, or larger oval shapes that layer and overlap, are a visualized companionship of the body of Christ in spiritual form. The large black dot is intended to be God. Another aspect of our dialogue in Professor Green's class was about the sort of historical symbols and systems that uphold white supremacist ideology. One simple one is the conceptualization that the color black is often portrayed as evil in common religious depictions. In science all color (refracted in light) put together actually equals a bright white light, but in the materials science of painting, it is the opposite. All color put together equals the darkest deepest brown--what we know of as black. So truthfully in art, the community of color combined is indeed black. I felt that this representation of the community of God made sense in light of what I was learning. My experience at United has helped me explore how we conceptualize God in images and ideas. I have been challenged to see God from various perspectives and encouraged to deepen my personal theological framework."



Rev. Dr. Molly T. Marshall

SPRING SNAPSHOT: This spring term, United is educating 206 degree-seeking students. The last time United surpassed 200 students was in 2006.

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

Dear Faithful Friends of United,

You are reading this brief letter because you care about this beloved seminary, and we are grateful for your interest and investment. It is a good season here primarily because our faculty, staff, and students are resilient. Never has the word resilience meant more than in this challenging season. From the Latin *resiliens*, it is the capacity to respond to change, withstand adversity, and spring back into shape with a measure of elasticity. This community has demonstrated its resilience at every turn.

It is this kind of seminary that endures, that continues to make the world more just. This fall we will celebrate the 60th anniversary of this fine school, which has always led with courage and pioneering scholarship. From its inception, United has been a bold experiment in ecumenicity as it gathered varieties of ecclesial traditions into its generative identity. In more recent decades it has enhanced its distinctiveness among theological schools by its interfaith engagement. United recognizes that it inhabits a religiously plural world and seeks to cultivate respect for the spiritual identity of all.

In these pages of *Voices*, you will find many reasons to be encouraged about the renewal of the seminary. You are vital to the flourishing of the school, and I give thanks for each of you.

Gratefully,

Molly T. Marshall
President

MOLLY T. MARSHALL NAMED PRESIDENT OF UNITED

On January 19, the United Board of Trustees unanimously selected Rev. Dr. Molly T. Marshall as its president. Previously serving a one-year term as interim president, Marshall began her new role, a term of up to three years, to continue the progress the school has experienced under her leadership, including growing enrollment; an increase in the number of financial gifts; a renewed strategic plan; a new endowed chair in World Religions and Intercultural Studies; and a \$1 million grant from Lilly Endowment Inc. to establish a leading-edge Leadership Center for Social Justice.

“Over the last year, with the presence and good work of Rev. Dr. Molly T. Marshall as interim president, United has embarked on a promising new future,” said David Anderson, chair of the Board. “There is still much to be done and Rev. Dr. Marshall is, no doubt, the person for such a time as this...”

Read the full announcement in the News section of the United website (www.unitedseminary.edu).



David Anderson, chair of the United Board of Trustees, and President Molly T. Marshall

FACULTY BOOK EVENT | MARCH 2



Celebrating the release of Dr. Jennifer Awes Freeman's *The Good Shepherd: Image, Meaning, and Power* (Baylor University Press, 2021), United invites members of the community to a book event on Wednesday, March 2 at 9:00 AM CT. Join us on campus or via livestream for a discussion and Q&A with Dr. Awes Freeman, assistant professor and director of theology and the arts, and special guest Dr. Robin Jensen from the University of Notre Dame. They will discuss the figure of the Good Shepherd which never became humble or docile but always carried connotations of empire, divinity, and defensive violence even within varied sociopolitical contexts. Register: <https://bit.ly/freeman-book-event>

UNITED TO ESTABLISH LEADERSHIP CENTER FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

Thanks to a \$1 million grant from Lilly Endowment Inc., United is launching a leading-edge Leadership Center for Social Justice in the fall of 2022. It is a unique project that will train cohorts of pastors to move social justice to the center of congregational life. Every year for three years, a cohort comprised of 16 pastors will complete curricula in social justice, learning the skills needed to implement initiatives in racial justice, eco-justice, gender and sexuality justice, and economic justice. The project will produce original research testing the thesis that practices of justice move congregations toward flourishing. In addition, the Center will lead community-based programming and continuing education, contributing to the vitality of local communities and leaders. Learn more on the United website under the News section (www.unitedseminary.edu).

CAROLYN PRESSLER SCHOLARSHIP UPDATE

Generous donors and alums have given over \$50,000 to permanently endow a new Carolyn Pressler Scholarship for Women. This scholarship, created in honor of Rev. Dr. Carolyn Pressler, professor emerita of biblical interpretation, will support students who come to United beginning in the fall of 2022.

"We are grateful for the support of many friends and alums who made this new scholarship happen," says Rev. Dr. Cindi Beth Johnson, vice president for advancement. "We give thanks for Carolyn's legacy as a teacher, mentor, leader, and scholar. We also thank you for your gifts and invite you to join us in celebrating this moment."



JOIN US FOR UPCOMING LECTURES AT UNITED

SUSAN DRAPER WHITE LECTURE

Monday, February 28, 7:30 PM CT
On campus and via Zoom

Rev. Dr. Nancy Victorin-Vangerud will deliver this year's Susan Draper White Lecture, "Re-Soil/ing the New Jerusalem: Dream-Reading Revelation (22:2) and Women's Speculative Fiction for Futures that Feed Us."

Victorin-Vangerud is a retired clergy member of the MN Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church, former chaplain and director of the Wesley Center for Spirituality at Hamline, and she is currently an adjunct professor at United.

Register: <https://bit.ly/SDWlecture>

PICARD LECTURE

Monday, April 4, 7:30 PM CT
On campus and via Zoom

Dr. Catherine Keller will deliver "Apocalypse After All? Climate, Politics, and Faith in the Possible" as part of the Picard Lectures on Environmental Theology and Ethics.

Keller is the George T. Cobb Professor of Constructive Theology in the Theological School and Graduate Division of Religion of Drew University.

Register: <https://bit.ly/PicardLecture>

FACULTY FAVORITE LECTURE SERIES

Due to popular demand, the Faculty Favorite Lecture Series continues this semester at United.

Every month, members of the public and the United community are welcome to step into a virtual classroom and to experience transformative theological education with our dynamic faculty.

Learn more and register:
<https://bit.ly/UnitedLectures>

Questions? Contact Ashley Hovell at 651-255-6162 or ahovell@unitedseminary.edu. Please note that United's COVID policy requires visitors on campus to wear a mask and to be vaccinated.

JOIN US FOR UPCOMING LECTURES AT UNITED



Samantha Carwyn

As a former foster child called to serve as a foster parent, educator, advocate, and activist, Samantha “Sam” Carwyn’s (MDiv, Social Transformation) powerful voice for justice comes from both professional and lived experience.

“Resiliency is about owning your own story,” said Carwyn, who has served the nonprofit sector in various ways to help the marginalized—youth, low-income families, the African American community, the LGBTQIA+ community, and individuals who have experienced violence—through work in child protection services, reproductive justice, mental health case management, and foster care.

Carwyn frequently can be found as a presenter on local and national stages. She is an adjunct lecturer at the

AN ETERNAL OPTIMIST PLANTING SEEDS FOR CHANGE SAMANTHA CARWYN, MDiv, SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION

University of Colorado Boulder where she teaches leadership skills focusing on community-based internship and dialogue-based learning. She also speaks about social justice issues, like tokenism and coercion in systems, at conferences.

Strong in her faith, Carwyn strives to be Christ-like in her volunteer work. She has brought her gifts to the National Black Lives Matter Steering Committee, Nebraska’s Foster and Adoptive Parent Association, and the Omaha Mayor’s LGBTQ Advisory Board.

In the midst of all of her advocacy, Carwyn says she was called to an education at United “to expand my justice work through a faith lens” as she pursues ordination. Unlike other seminaries, United’s leading distance offerings allowed her to not uproot her family and to keep a full-time job in her community.

Given that this was her third degree, Carwyn says financial support was key to enrolling. With previously acquired student loan debt, she, like other Black mothers who are burdened with some of the highest student loan debt, sought an affordable program to help further her career prospects.

At United, Carwyn says she is part of a community that engages in questions and conversations that are important

and relevant to her work, helping expand her gifts as a community leader. “It has given me the words for what I was already thinking, to help implement the ideas I’m passionate about,” she said.

Carwyn has found support from Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) students in a school that is primarily white, and she appreciates that teachers intentionally assign readings from writers who are BIPOC and come from a wide variety of faith traditions.

Exposure to the arts at United has also helped Carwyn weave them into her teaching, and the requisite Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) inspired her to receive training in order to coach individuals and help organizations build greater intercultural competence.

Looking to the future, Carwyn is pursuing ordination through the Metropolitan Community Church (MCC), where she has been appointed to the Commission on Rites and Sacraments.

And still the holy work for justice continues. Carwyn describes herself as an “eternal optimist.” She knows that she can’t change everything, yet she can still “plant the seeds of change.” Her justice work will continue after she graduates, but with more words, deeper understanding, and broadened perspectives.

REMEMBERING ART MERRILL | 1930-2022 PROFESSOR EMERITUS OF OLD TESTAMENT | 1958-1995

Rev. Dr. Arthur L. Merrill taught Old Testament Theology for thirty-five years at Mission House Seminary and United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities. He served as the chair of Exegetical Theology, Old Testament at Mission House. From there he moved to United and became a founding member of the faculty.

Merrill and the original members of the faculty established a strong curriculum, rooted in classic theological disciplines, yet cutting edge in its focus on the dialogue between those disciplines and social issues. Of his influence as a teacher, Rev. Dr. Wilson Yates, President Emeritus & Distinguished Professor Emeritus of Religion, Society and the Arts, writes, “Students who worked closely with Art Merrill moved deeply into the study of the Old Testament and its meaning for the Christian faith. Their witness to his teaching and his work with the Hebrew Scriptures became his finest legacy.”

In addition to teaching the Old Testament, Merrill served for ten years as the Director of Library Services. He also guided the library and its users through major

physical and technological renovations. Merrill’s goal was always to serve students and faculty members with access to the most helpful resources.

Merrill was born of American Baptist missionary parents in India and was educated at the College of Wooster, Berkeley Baptist Divinity School, and the University of Chicago where he received his Ph.D. He was an ordained minister in the United Church of Christ. Merrill did post-doctoral studies at Uppsala University in Sweden, the University of Minnesota, and the Ecumenical Center for Theological Studies in Jerusalem. He spent two sabbatical leaves in Israel at the Albright Institute.

Among his publications have been *Biblical Witness and the World*, *Scripture in History and Theology*, and articles in the field of Old Testament studies. He also did extensive work cataloging Byzantine mosaics at archaeological sites in Israel. Merrill is also the author of the book *United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities, An Ecumenical Venture* in which he wrote, “The telling of the story of United is an important task.... It is not just an institutional history...it



is also a window into theological education in America in the latter part of the twentieth century.” You can watch him speak about the book on United’s YouTube channel.

Merrill was predeceased by his first wife, Jean, who worked in the Library at United, and by his second wife Rev. Margaret Morris (‘79). He is survived by his children (Peggy, Katherine, and Bob) and Margaret’s children (Sarah and John) along with many other family members and friends and countless graduates who are better preachers and teachers because they had the privilege of learning from Art Merrill. Memorials can be made to the Merrill Scholarship fund at United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities.



A RETIREMENT CELEBRATION FOR REV. DR. ELEAZAR FERNANDEZ | MARCH 24

After nearly 30 years at United, Rev. Dr. Eleazar Fernandez, professor of constructive theology, has retired. Fernandez has been a beloved professor, a leader in seminary education, an internationally important voice in liberation theology, and a global theologian. At United, Fernandez taught numerous courses in the areas of Constructive Theology, Liberation Theology, Theological Voices from the Global South, and a wide variety of courses in ethics and justice.

United President Molly T. Marshall writes, "For nearly 30 years United students and faculty have benefited from the expansive ministry of Dr. Fernandez. This commitment to scholarship and the service of theological education has made a stellar contribution both at United and internationally. We celebrate with him the conclusion of his service as a treasured theology professor."

Fernandez is an ordained minister in the United Church of Christ in the Philippines and is the president of Union Theological Seminary of the Philippines. Subsequent to his retirement from United, he is focusing his full attention on his work in the Philippines.

United has planned a retirement celebration for March 24 at 7:30 PM CT to wish him well in his next endeavors. Join us online or on campus for this festive occasion. *Register and read a full biography:* <https://bit.ly/FernandezRetirement>



HOLY POSSIBILITIES AT AN INSTALLATION

PRESIDENT MOLLY T. MARSHALL

The congregation of Spirit of Peace UCC in Sioux Falls, SD held a special offering for United at the installation of lead minister Rev. Charles Owens ('14).

On November 14, I journeyed to Sioux Falls, SD, for the installation of 2014 alum Rev. Charles D. Owens at Spirit of Peace UCC. Although he had already served for 20 months, it was only possible to hold the service at this late juncture because of the pandemic. Suffice it to say, there was pent up enthusiasm in the congregation.

He requested that the church take up an offering for his alma mater, United Theological Seminary, to honor the occasion of his installation. It was a first for the church to have a United grad, to have a seminary president visit, and to receive an offering on behalf of the school he richly praises as forming him for creative ministry.

An alum such as Rev. Owens is truly a “letter of recommendation” for United, a metaphor the Apostle Paul uses for those who have heeded his message (2 Corinthians 3:2). This treasured alum embodies the transformative education received at United. His ministry demonstrates the mission and vision of United; his passion for justice expresses the deepest values of the seminary.

Privileged to participate in his installation, I witnessed a deeply moving scene: children, adolescents, adults old and young, all streaming down the center aisle to place their gifts in the large offering bowl at the

edge of the chancel. They were not only honoring their pastor; they were placing trust in a seminary to continue to form pastors to lead in this season.

As I watched this cloud of witnesses, I imagined that some of the young ones, some newly confirmed, might actually benefit from the generosity of their congregation when they discern that they have a calling to ministry. As the United Church of Christ likes to say, “God is still speaking . . .” and we trust others will respond to God’s calling, as did Rev. Charles Owens.

If you would like President Marshall to visit, preach, or speak at your church, house of worship, or institution, please contact Ashley Hovell at ahovell@unitedseminary.edu or 651-255-6162.

MEET DUSTIN WILSOR: MDIV, MA (THEOLOGY & THE ARTS) DUAL DEGREE STUDENT

With plans to become a Presbyterian minister, Dustin Wilsor is an active student at United, helping to plan and lead chapel services and presenting at both Arts Lunches and Symposium Week. Here he expresses how the transformative education at United is preparing him to be the pastor -- and person -- he always wanted to be.



"I was initially attracted to United’s progressive approach to theology in creating thoughtful faith leaders, as well as their commitment to theology and the arts. I thought that I was coming to seminary to learn to be a pastor; I never imagined that engaging in a theological education would teach me how to be a better artist. The holistic nature of my education at United, along with the thoughtful mentorship and relationships that the faculty are always so willing to give, has led me into a new level of relationship with myself, with my craft, and with God. I am most thankful for the way so many of the courses are set up to allow us to incorporate new learning into a specific area of focus in which the individual student is passionate; this has allowed me to spend a lot of my time studying, analyzing, and writing about theological themes in popular culture, including musical theatre, television, movies, and novels. It has given me the opportunity to explore my own artistic form of iconography; and it has given me the opportunity to dream of the style of church leader that I want to be, and tailor my learning to fit that dream. Thanks to United, I feel like I am not only growing into a strong and confident faith leader, but also into a more complete and full version of the person I always wanted to be."

A MESSAGE FROM ADVANCEMENT: WANT TO DO MORE FOR UNITED? CONSIDER A PLANNED GIFT SUPPORTING FUTURE GENERATIONS OF FAITHFUL LEADERS REV. DR. CINDI BETH JOHNSON, VICE PRESIDENT

While each of us approaches this task in a different way, it is an important part of a planning process for all of us. Planned gifts reflect our greatest passions and give us an opportunity to express those passions to our family through our legacy. For most of us, a planned gift will be the largest gift we ever make. At United, the Barnabas Society recognizes friends and alums of United who have included the seminary in their estate plans or made the seminary the beneficiary of a retirement account or insurance policy.

Recently we received a legacy gift from Barnabas Society member Tom Caswell.



Tom Caswell

During his life, Tom Caswell ('94) honored his mentor, Rev. Wilys Claire Nelson ('79), by giving a gift to endow a scholarship in her name. Caswell understood that scholarships remove financial barriers for our students, and he was passionate about making a difference. In addition, Caswell had informed United in 1989 about his

planned estate gift and became a member of the Barnabas Society.

Caswell embodied the intention of the Barnabas Society. Not only did he have a planned gift, but he also invited friends and family to join him by including his intention in his obituary, asking that gifts in his memory be made to United for the Wilys Claire Nelson scholarship. Even Wells Fargo, Caswell’s bank, called and said that they wanted to make a gift in lieu of sending flowers. We are grateful for Caswell’s generous gifts and commitment. Planned gifts like Caswell’s ensure the longevity and vitality of the seminary and help United live out its mission.

This year, in lieu of an in-person get together, we sent all of our Barnabas Society members a Valentine’s Day card. The card is an expression of our gratitude because their planned gift supports the education of our students and the communities they will serve. The Valentine features the artwork of alum Bundy Trinz ('10, '15).

Trinz found a home at United that encouraged her to think and act more deeply as a theologian. As a student she found that her creativity was rekindled. Trinz writes, “My own planned gift is a testament to



Artwork by Bundy Trinz ('10, '15): "This heart is meant to represent what's at our center, the twists and turns of the journey, and how it radiates out to the world through our actions."

United for supporting me in reimagining myself and what I can offer to others.”

Our hearts are full of gratitude for donors like Tom Caswell and Bundy Trinz who bear witness to their values in their planned gifts.

If you would like more information on the Barnabas Society, or if you are already a member and didn't receive a card, please contact Cindy Schriever, United's donor engagement officer, at cshriever@unitedseminary.edu or 651-255-6111.

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

DID YOU KNOW?

Thanks to United's beloved community, **over 25% of our students enroll because of referrals.** This encouragement and support for tomorrow's faith leaders has contributed to the expansion of United's mission and values across the world. Do you know someone called to a theological education? Ronny Bradtke, director of enrollment, welcomes your emails and calls at rbradtke@unitedseminary.edu or 651-255-6119.

Stay connected with United:

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OF THE TWIN CITIES

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UNITED'S MISSION, VISION, AND VALUES

In January, the United Board of Trustees adopted an updated Mission, Vision, and Values. These statements of identity capture the seminary's distinctive ethos and vocation in theological education.

MISSION

United Theological Seminary prepares innovative and compassionate leaders for the equipping of churches, other faith communities, and society toward justice and peace.

VISION

United will be recognized as a progressive Christian seminary that engages its multifaith world respectfully to create a beloved community both within the seminary and beyond.

VALUES

Community

- **Building upon its heritage** as a seminary of the United Church of Christ
- **Ecumenical engagement** as an expression of the unity of the church
- **Interreligious engagement** that embraces religious diversity
- **Intercultural engagement** that appreciates a multiplicity of lived experiences

Commitment to Intersectional Justice

- **Racial justice** that dismantles every aspect of white supremacy
- **Sexual and gender justice** that affirms and values every person
- **Eco-justice** that cares deeply for all living beings and our planet
- **Economic justice** that builds sustainability and wholeness for all

Creativity and Curiosity

- **Rigorous academic studies** as an expression of the human spirit
- **Formative practices** that shape spiritual, ecclesial, and community leaders
- **Integration of arts and theology** that awakens imagination and intellect
- **Public witness** for the common good