



# UNITED THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY OF THE TWIN CITIES

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NEWSLETTER  
January 2010

## LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT



Dear Members of the United Community,

During its January 21 meeting, the board of trustees adopted a new strategic plan. This plan is intended to address the question of who we are called to be and, in so doing, provide guidance for the development of United's academic program and its community service, marketing, and development efforts. The plan commits the seminary to academic excellence and a prophetic voice, focusing in the areas of spirituality, art, and healing, and in justice and reconciliation. It also commits the seminary to the development of distance education and working in partnership with other institutions of higher learning, churches, and other religious entities. The following, excerpted from the plan's introduction, describes United's commitments:

"Over the past decades the context of theological education has become increasingly complex as the population of the United States has become more diverse, denominational loyalty declined, and religious conviction more open to challenge. Membership in mainline Protestant churches is now significantly reduced. Even now the Protestant denominations continue to be characterized by significant internal diversity and fragmentation. Congregations and seminaries are more likely to struggle than to thrive. These changes proceeded in parallel with the rise of racial, gender, and other more specific identity commitments. Today seminaries serve students and others within an increasingly international and interracial context. Christian vitality is now more evident in the Southern Hemisphere than the Northern, where the quest for meaning is pervasive.

"United Theological Seminary was created to be ecumenical, reflecting a bold vision of unity and partnership. We hold dear and seek to model values such as justice, integrity, fairness, tolerance, and academic rigor. We seek to make sense for the student and for others the competing claims of religious experience, knowing that many draw a profound connection between personal experience and discernment of God's providential presence and guiding hand. The effort to provide high quality, valuable, and meaningful education within multiplicity, to honor individual conviction while educating toward spiritual and pastoral formation, and to assure readiness for ministry and other service, especially service seeking peace and justice, marks our life at United. Dialogue here is lively and wide ranging, providing a context and skill for engagement with other publics, in the hope that all will emerge better informed, more thoughtful, and more faithful. This is United's educational role.

"United also has a call to ministry to the public. We seek the good of all by working toward openness, justice, and peace while serving the educational and leadership needs of churches, governing bodies, and other religious institutions. We are guided by the statement of Martin Luther King Jr., who advised his followers, 'Let us be those creative dissenters [of the architecture of American society] who will call our beloved nation to a higher destiny, to a new plateau of compassion, to a more noble expression of humaneness.' This is United's public role."

Mary E. McNamara  
President

## Tend the Garden – Make a Bequest

United Theological Seminary has been planting seeds for theological education for nearly 50 years, and our students have grown and flourished intellectually, spiritually, and ethically because of it. Many of you have contributed generously to this transformative outcome by giving to the Annual Fund, scholarships, endowment, Bigelow Chapel, and other purposes.

It is these thoughtful gifts that have nurtured our students and supported their readiness for ministry and other service in society that seeks peace and justice. You have responded many times over to our growing needs; however, to ensure United's longevity and vitality and to provide extraordinary resources during healthy times and when needed, we ask you to 'take care' of the seminary beyond your lifetime by making a bequest.

A bequest is the easiest kind of planned gift to make because it is whatever you give to a charitable institution in your will. It is a plan for the future, a win-win situation for you and for the organization you want to continue supporting. It is a strong and lasting statement of your commitment.

By making a bequest to United, you will benefit in several ways:

- Decide during your lifetime what kind of meaningful gift you want to make
- Know that you have contributed to the future of United, an institution you have supported for years
- Fund the work of the seminary indefinitely
- Make a larger gift possible through your estate rather than through your current assets
- Give incentive to others
- Reduce the taxable portion of your estate
- Allow United to thank you during your lifetime



*If you have already made a bequest, please let us know. If you would like information on how to make a bequest, contact Julie Brown at 651.255.6111.*

*Thank you for the generous gifts you make during your lifetime and for considering making a bequest that will enable you to 'Tend the Garden' at United for years to come.*

## Student Recruitment

A visit in December from Vanderbilt Divinity School's director of admissions helped United's admissions staff take a much needed long-range view of our work on behalf of the seminary. Strongly urged was a well-defined five-year plan to assure meeting the goal of increasing enrollment by 20 FTE's over the next several years. We look forward to finalizing and implementing our plan with full support from faculty and staff. We will call upon them and our students as we regularly evaluate our work.

We are off to a good start, having admitted nine new degree students since September (the beginning of this academic year); there is potential for enrolling three more last-minute degree students for spring term. In addition, the number of new inquiries in 2009 (205) is far higher than the previous two years (118 each). This provides a larger pool of possible applicants as we follow up with each of them according to their interests and needs.

Each year, the Entering Student Questionnaire (ESQ) offers a look at first-year students in a variety of ways, including where they come from, how they got here, what drew them here, and what they are seeking at United. This information becomes very helpful as we seek to increase admissions and enrollment for the next year. Some highlights:

- Our Web site is the primary way new students are learning about United, followed by graduates and friends.
- The Internet is the route of first contact with United; prospective students can make inquiries on our Web site, and the admissions team responds within 24 hours.
- The most important factors in a student's decision to attend United are theological 'fit,' faculty quality, academic reputation, and good financial aid.
- Theological perspective, ecumenical setting, and location were key factors in the decision to come to United.

There are interesting gender differences in the responses, but the overall data is quite helpful as we consider how, where, and with whom we can best spread the good news about United.

### DO WE HAVE YOUR E-MAIL ADDRESS?

United is working to improve its lists of e-mail addresses. If you know of friends of the seminary, potential friends of the seminary, or alumni/ae who are not receiving this newsletter or other e-mails from United, please send the person's name and contact information, including address, phone, and e-mail, to [rflsner@unitedseminary.edu](mailto:rflsner@unitedseminary.edu) or Renee Flesner, United Theological Seminary, 3000 Fifth St NW, New Brighton MN 55112.

## A New Church for a New Generation

'A church outside institutional walls where the field is large and wide,' is how United graduate Bryan Olson and his wife Emily envisioned their call to plant a new UCC church. That church, created in 2009 in Bucks County, Pa., is named Field of God United Church of Christ, using 1 Corinthians 3:9 for their vision: "For we are God's servants, working together; we are God's field, God's building."

Field of God UCC was brought into existence through "the grace of God and the generosity of Trinity UCC." Originally a thriving inner-city church in Philadelphia, Trinity experienced significantly declining membership over the past decade and decided in early 2009 to take a leap of faith and support a new church start while also trying to revitalize their present church. To do so, they made a generous financial contribution to Pennsylvania Southeast Conference (PSEC) to launch a new church. PSEC is experienced in new church starts and provides crucial support, educational resources, and oversight to Bryan and Emily.



Bryan and Emily's mission is to help people experience the love of God and neighbor, explore their faith, extend a hand in service, and engage in discipling others. Their initial focus has been working with the "Missing Generation," young adults in their 20s and 30s who have little or no church background.

One of their first initiatives was to form a vocational support group and accompanying prayer session as a way to reach out to area young people who have lost their jobs. Bryan and Emily also started monthly mission teams that perform community service projects, organized a Bible study group, and hope that, in 2010, there will be a group of people ready to experience worship in a new church setting.

Bryan attributes his deep commitment to creating this new church model to, first, his theological education at United, and second, his ministry at Cottage Grove UCC in Minnesota. At United, Bryan learned how to think theologically and see God in different places. He greatly values the supportive relationships he formed with classmates and professors, as well as his classes in Christian history, spiritual formation, liturgy, and worship. Those courses anchored him in Christian theology and gave him the vitally important skills a pastor needs to teach, preach, and be a caring minister and good administrator.

After earning his Master of Divinity degree in 2005, Bryan was called to serve as youth pastor at Cottage Grove UCC, where he eventually became senior transition pastor. Bryan stated, "The congregation ... nurtured my evangelical spirit and prepared me well for the daily joys and challenges I face in this new church-planting adventure."

Bryan and Emily consider Field of God a success if they are "daily *Engaging, Encouraging, Equipping, and Empowering* people to live into their missional identity as Christ's disciples." To learn more about Field of God UCC and how to support Bryan and Emily's ministry, visit [www.fieldofgod.org](http://www.fieldofgod.org).

### Nominate an Alum for the Distinguished Alum Award 2010

We invite you to nominate a person for United's Distinguished Alum Award 2010. Nominees must have graduated at least 10 years ago from United, Yankton, or Mission House Seminary and need to demonstrate exceptional achievements and special qualities in her/his ministry in the church or in another role in society. The deadline for nominations is February 25; anyone can nominate an alum for this award.

The nomination form can be accessed at [www.unitedseminary.edu](http://www.unitedseminary.edu) under "News and Events," or you may contact Ruth Lunceford at 651.255.6110 for a form.

*This annual recognition was established in 1990 by the Alum Council; the first recipient was John Krueger '63. Last year's recipient was Howard Vogel '78.*

## 2010 Winter & Spring Events

January 3	Launching of 12-week series, "Justice: What is the Right Thing to Do?" on TPT Life, 2:00 PM – study guide available from United
January 29	Seminar: Power and Evil Using Shakespeare and Scripture ( <i>in conjunction with 'Macbeth' at the Guthrie</i> )
February 2	A Map to the Soul: Exploring a Creative Faith with <b>Jan Richardson</b>
February 9, 16, 23	Black History Month Chapel Series, Bigelow Chapel, 11:35 AM
February 11	Evenings at the Bigelow: "Readings and Reflections on Love" with <b>Leslie Ball</b>
February 16	<i>Macbeth</i> Panels: Power and the Corruption of Power ( <i>Guthrie Theater</i> )
February 17	Ash Wednesday
March 1 & 2	Susan Draper White Lectures in Women's Studies with <b>Joyce Ann Mercer</b>
March 2	<i>Macbeth</i> Panels: Power and the Corruption of Power ( <i>Guthrie Theater</i> )
March 2, 13	What's Next? – a seminary exploration event
April 11	New president <b>Mary E. McNamara's</b> inauguration and reception at Plymouth Congregational Church, 3:00 PM
April 12 & 13	Multicultural Lectures with <b>Justo L. González</b>
April 17	<b>Geoffrey Black</b> installed as general minister and president of the United Church of Christ ( <i>Cleveland, Ohio</i> )
April 28-29	Spring Convocation featuring <b>Craig Wright</b> , American playwright and television writer
May	Joshua Society Luncheon ( <i>date TBA</i> )
May 1	What's Next? – a seminary exploration event for second-career, mid-life folk and their partners or spouses, with local musician <b>Neal Hagberg</b> ( <i>of Neal &amp; Leandra</i> )
May 23	Commencement

For more information, check our Web site at [www.unitedseminary.edu](http://www.unitedseminary.edu)

Also on our Web site, please see the Academy for Vital Christianity classes offered throughout the spring term.

## UNITED ROCKS!

### STUDENTS REPORT UNITED IS PROVIDING FINE EDUCATION

All students from United's class of 2009 went into parish ministry or chaplaincies, except for three who were undecided on their vocation at the time of their graduation last June. Five years from now, about 85% plan to be in parish ministry, chaplaincy, or specialized ministries. The remainder plan to teach in colleges or universities.

Also, annual summaries compiled from graduating student questionnaires by the Association of Theological Schools (ATS) indicate that our students are very pleased with their preparation for ministry and the quality of courses offered at United. To see these results, please go to [www.unitedseminary.edu/PDFs/ATSResults.pdf](http://www.unitedseminary.edu/PDFs/ATSResults.pdf).



### Student Profile-Heather Giffen

If genetics had anything to do with it, Heather Giffen's enrollment in seminary might seem a natural event. There are five generations of Presbyterian clergy on her father's side of the family, and Heather's grandfather on her mother's side, Zane Pautz, graduated in 1947 from Mission House Seminary, a predecessor of United.

Heather grew up in Ohio and attended Muskingum University in New Concord, another family tradition. Her family roots are so deep at Muskingum that Heather was asked during her senior year to co-author a history of the college. She graduated in May 2009 with a B.A. in International affairs and History.

But clearly there is more to Heather's call to ministry and enrollment at United than nature. Heather credits a nun in the Catholic Montessori kindergarten she attended for instilling in her a passion for Native American culture and religion. In high school, on a mission trip to the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota, Heather became involved with the Native American Indian Center of Central Ohio. As Heather's involvement with the Center grew, partly through hands-on projects, her own Christian faith was challenged and re-shaped by what she learned of Native American spirituality.

While attending the UCC General Synod in Minneapolis in June 2003, the possibility for a ministry that might bridge these two worlds was awakened in Heather. At that General Synod, the UCC offered an apology to Native Americans for the damage done through boarding schools on the reservations. Both traditions, she came to realize, "have very valuable knowledge that could be a powerful force in the fight for social justice."

Heather visited Earlham School of Religion while looking for a seminary and talked with a student who had also done work on a reservation. Heather was told, however, if she wanted to pursue that in her ministry, United was where she needed to go.

Recognizing the potential to "accomplish my goals to help with the social initiatives for Native American with the... *Leadership Toward Racial Justice* program" at United, Heather came for a visit, applied, was accepted, and began her Master of Divinity degree studies this fall.

Although she had heard about the diverse population on campus, Heather was surprised by the number of second-career persons in her classes. At first intimidated by their life experience, she quickly realized that their experience is met by the fresh perspective she brings to the study of theology and the possibilities for a new and renewed church.

Thank you Earlham!



## Evenings at the Bigelow: "Readings and Reflections on Love" February 11, 2010, 7:30 PM

Evenings at the Bigelow, a series of events showcasing the arts as sacred expression through music, literature, visual arts, and performance was inaugurated following the completion of the seminary's award-winning Bigelow Chapel. The chapel embodies in wood, glass, and stone the deep connection between the arts and spirituality.

"Readings and Reflections on Love" is a unique evening of music and readings celebrating the universal themes of love. The musical headliner is local musician, **Leslie Ball**, whose first solo recording, *Loring Park*, earned her a Minnesota Music Award for best female songwriter. Leslie's considerable musical abilities are surpassed only by the warmth and genuine love she shares with her audience. Joining Leslie will be **Moussa Foster**, a vocal artist dedicated to the joy and pain in a poet's soul.

Interspersed throughout the evening will be selected readings on love of family, earth, God, and country, romantic love, love of pets, and more. This year's readers include poet **Sam King** (Susan Deborah King), author of *One-Breasted Woman*; seminarian **Aaron Lauer**, master of arts student in religion and theology at United; and journalist **Linda Mack**, former architecture critic for 21 years at the *Star Tribune*.

This popular annual event is always an enjoyable and magical celebration. A reception with chocolate will immediately follow. Open to the public. Walk-ins welcome.

**Fee:** \$20.00  
**Students:** \$10.00

Register on our Web site at [www.unitedseminary.edu/CommunityPrograms/index.asp#ball](http://www.unitedseminary.edu/CommunityPrograms/index.asp#ball). You may also contact Renee Flesner at [rflesner@unitedseminary.edu](mailto:rflesner@unitedseminary.edu) or 651.255.6138.

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DEEPENING FAITH.



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United Theological Seminary is an ecumenical seminary  
of the United Church of Christ.