



VOICES
Spring 2020

Welcome to a new issue of VOICES. This publication is meant for United donors and friends and serves as a way for you to know what is happening at United! We have a new address and we hope that you will visit us in our new location. The space is compelling, fresh, and still all about the things United holds most dear: education for transformation, ethical leadership, and building a more just world!

Welcome Gary Green and Justin Sabia-Tanis to United's Faculty!

Gary Green

Assistant professor of Pastoral Theology

Gary Green is a PhD candidate at Brite Divinity School. His dissertation is entitled, "Playing the Game: Subverting Scripts of Inhumanity in Young Black Men." His broader research interests involve raising consciousness to issues of race, masculinity, and power, particularly in spaces often overlooked by Church and Academy. An ordained minister, Gary has served the Black Church and facilitated public conversations about theology, sport, and justice. Gary values critical engagement with congregations and faith leaders, inviting them to become more theologically and culturally aware. He believes these critical conversations can help religious leaders better recognize the complexities of privilege and oppression both inside and outside of the church. Gary was installed at United in the spring of 2020.



Justin Sabia-Tanis

Assistant professor for Social Transformation and Director of Social Transformation



Justin teaches and directs the Social Transformation program at United. Justin earned his PhD from the Graduate Theological Union in Interdisciplinary Studies, focusing on sexuality, art, and religion. He has an MDiv from Harvard University and DMin from San Francisco Theological Seminary. As a pastor, he served congregations in Boston, Honolulu, and San Francisco and as Director of Leadership Development for Metropolitan Community Churches; he is now with the United Church of Christ. Justin directed communications at the National Center for Transgender Equality and for Out

& Equal Workplace Advocates. He served as managing director for four years of the Center for LGBTQ and Gender Studies in Religion at Pacific School of Religion (PSR). Justin has taught at Iliff School of Theology, PSR, University of Arizona, and Pima Community College. He is the author of *Transgendered: Ministry, Theology, and Communities of Faith* and is a contributor to *Transgender: Four Views*. He has also contributed chapters to the *Queer Bible Commentary, Take Back the Word: A Queer Reading of the Bible, Transfaith: A Transgender Pastoral Resource* and a forthcoming book, *Unraveling Systems from Within*. Justin was installed at United in the fall of 2019.



Student and Alum Stories

Stacy Craig, '20 MDiv

As a student who will graduate in the spring, I carry all of United's strengths with me--deep encounters with compassion, art, theology, and ministry. I bring perspective from my diverse classmates and faculty. I bring my whole self, without shame or hiding, from my work in formation. And because of the careful council and generous scholarships, I leave without a heavy burden of debt. My work is in theology, ecology, and pastoral care and as I've just accepted a part time pastoral position, I look forward to sharing all of the gifts I've received at United with that community. Stacy began serving as the minister for Chequamegon Unitarian Fellowship in Ashland, WI on January 1, 2020.



Anthony Jermaine Ross-Allam, '14, MA

The social and intellectual culture at United not only developed my capacity to think historically and critically about the development and legacies of Protestant theologies, it also catalyzed the process by which I am now able to begin discerning how our nation's complex social ecology produces and reproduces extralegal racist violence, along with imperial dreams of market expansion, and cultivated religious evasions of historical responsibility. Historical theology, biblical studies, womanist ethics, and constructive theology offered the perfect balance of traditional, analytical, ethical, and creative thought in an environment that rewarded thoughtful and faithful risk-taking. Jermaine is working on his PhD at Union Seminary in New York.

Distinguished Alum Award given to Meg Riley, '92

United celebrates 2019 distinguished alum **Meg Riley, '92**. Meg has focused her ministry around world peace and justice for over 25 years. She has inspired and mentored many church leaders in this community and beyond. Her mantra is, "live out your faith and values in your own life and in ministry."

This year the Board of Trustees of the Unitarian Universalist Association announced its unanimous nomination of **Meg Riley** and Charles Du Mond for election as the next co-moderators of the UUA, at the special election to be held at General Assembly (GA) 2020, in Providence, RI. If elected, they will serve in this position for a term beginning at the conclusion of GA 2020 and ending at the conclusion of GA 2025.



United's new St. Paul campus and an update from Global Academy in New Brighton



Chapel Pavers

Did you know that the pavers are now in the Spencer Library? They are located on a wall under a large expanse of windows.

Memories and Milestones began in 2012 during United's 50th Anniversary. Led by Julie Brown, former director of development, the project offered alums and friends of United the opportunity to purchase engraved pavers for the courtyard outside the chapel.

The pavers represent key pieces of our history and include dedications to past presidents, deans, board chairs, faculty and staff. For others the pavers provided a chance to remember a loved family member.

When you are on campus visit this important part of United's rich and significant history.

Global Academy at the former United Campus

Last fall Global Academy moved from a strip mall in Columbia Heights to United's former campus in New Brighton. A charter school, of over 500 students between first and eighth grade, Global can now provide their students with a much more spacious place for learning.

Many parts of the campus retain their beauty including the prairie. The former chapel is now called

Bigelow Hall and is used as a gathering space for students and staff. The lawn includes playground equipment and picnic tables built by volunteers.

Administrative areas have become classrooms that will provide a space for learning. The most significant change was raising the roof of the Steckel Learning Center which creates a space for an indoor gym. Global students and their families, along with the teachers, are thrilled to be in this new learning space.

For those who loved this space for so many years there is a great joy in knowing that it continues to educate future leaders. And not only is it well loved but it is being well cared for by new stewards of that sacred land.



Planning for Tomorrow Today....

A Message from Cindy Schriever, Vice President for Advancement

The Barnabas Society

There is nothing more profound, inspiring, and moving, than generosity. Sacred philanthropy is a spiritual power that can save and change lives - the act of freely giving without expecting anything in return.

Whether you are an alum expressing gratitude for your United experience, or a friend who resonates with United's transformative mission, your generosity by joining the Barnabas Heritage Society makes a sustaining and vital impact on United to continue preparing leaders for the church, local community or world for many future generations.

When you give a gift (also known as a "bequest") to United in your will, you model to your loved ones a legacy of generosity. You also help ensure that United Theological Seminary will continue to make a difference well beyond your lifetime.

VOICES contributors: Carla Barnhill, Cindi Beth Johnson, Justin Sabia-Tanis, Cindy Schriever

The Barnabas Heritage Society of United recognizes those friends who have included the seminary in their estate plans.

If you have not communicated your intention to us, please do so, as we would like to recognize your membership in the Society.

Please contact Cindy Schriever, 651.255.6111 in the office of Advancement and let us know that United is in your estate plans or if you would like information on becoming a member of the Barnabas Heritage Society.

Benefits of Gifts in a Will

Legacy. Extend the impact of your generosity well beyond your lifetime.

Capacity. You can potentially make the largest gift you'll ever have the ability to give.

DID YOU KNOW?

- We welcomed a large incoming class of 64 students, bringing our active enrollment to 123.
- Current students represent more than 30 faith traditions.
- Average student age is 44.
- 38% of those students take courses via Zoom-video conference technology.
- United hosted UCC Seminary presidents and deans this fall. John Dorhauer, general minister, spoke.
- Our accrediting agency, ATS, visited this fall and has recommended we be approved for another seven years.



“God Is Doing a New Thing”

*Rev. Mark Steiner
'62 and Eleanor Steiner*

*“Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old. I am about to do a new thing.” -
Isaiah 43: 18-19*

Mark Steiner was a graduate of Mission House's last graduating class in 1962. Although his loyalty to Mission House was strong, he said that he looked upon the merger of Mission House and Yankton Seminary to form United in Minnesota's Twin Cities area as “moving to the promised land.” He hoped that the move to a larger metropolitan area would help the new seminary flourish.

“I was shocked when United's campus in New

Brighton was sold,” he said. “But then I read Isaiah 43.” In verses 18 and 19a, it reads: “Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old. I am about to do a new thing....” “It hit me square between the eyes,” Mark said. “Maybe God is doing a new thing!”

When Mark attended Mission House, students did not pay tuition; the denomination covered the cost of seminary. Mark has stated that his gratitude for that investment in his education has inspired him to give to United as way as “paying it forward” to the next generation. He also was inspired to give by selfless people like Rev. Dr. Louis Gunnemann, who came to lead United as dean without even asking what the salary was. The Steiners' first call was serving three churches in Buffalo, South Dakota. Two of their three children were born there: their daughter, Julie, and a son, Joel, who, sadly,

lived only four days. (Daughter Amy was born later in Ohio.) People from congregations in the surrounding area sent money to help pay for Joel's funeral. After the funeral expenses were paid, the Steiners chose to donate the remaining contributions to United's scholarship fund.

“We didn't make much money at first,” Mark said, “but we still supported the seminary with what we could. Now we are able to do more, and we have done more.”

Mark and Eleanor are members of the Joshua Society, the Barnabas Society and the Bossard-Ward Society. Using the support of people like the Steiners, God will continue to hit us square between the eyes with new things at United for many years to come.

James B. Nelson

Remembering his legacy

James B. Nelson, professor emeritus of Christian Ethics, served on the faculty of United Seminary from 1963 to 1995. During his tenure he had a deep impact on his students. At the same time he was a public theologian who had a great influence on church and society. Ordained in the United Church of Christ, Jim had a BA from Macalester College, and a BD, MA and PhD from Yale University. Prior to his appointment at United he served a UCC congregation in South Dakota.

Jim, along with Rev. Jim Siefkes, engaged the University of MN's Program in Human Sexuality, developing a seminary component of this program that became a national model of seminary sexuality education, including a strong LGBT component. Jim, along with his wife Wilys Claire, were among the early members of the United Church Coalition for LGBT Concerns.

Jim moved into the national spotlight with the publication of an article, "Homosexuality and the Church," in Christianity and Crisis magazine in 1977. The article was later reprinted in many other venues and referred to in numerous other writings. His book *Embodiment: An Approach to Sexuality and Christian Theology* provided new Christian attitudes and approaches to human sexuality and homosexuality.

Jim wrote prolifically over the next two decades on the subjects of sexuality and homosexuality from a Christian perspective. He lectured extensively at conferences across the U.S. as well as around the world. Jim was honored with an Excellence in Teaching Award from the General Synod of the UCC in 1989 and an Award of Distinction from Yale Divinity School in 1997.

John C. Dourhauer, UCC general minister and president said of Nelson, "His groundbreaking work on human sexuality and ethics help set the stage for a United Church ready to become open and affirming....He helped us understand that sexual expression and intimacy were gifts of the sacred. He was ahead of his time, and endured much abuse and vitriol."

Jim served on the UCC's Task Force on Transgender Issues. He wrote the foreword to *Crossing Over*:

From 1963 until his retirement in 1995 Jim Nelson taught generations of United students, I among them, about Christian ethics, biomedical ethics, and sexual theology and ethics. He was also a pivotal figure in challenging the larger church to review its theological assumptions about sexual minorities. He and his beloved wife, Wilys Claire, opened their hearts to many seminarians who needed safe space, I among them. Jim Nelson was a stellar teacher, and a stellar scholar for the academy and the church.

Sue Ebbers, United Theological Seminary alum and Professor Emerita of Theological Bibliography

Liberating the Transgendered Christian by Vanessa Sheridan and a prepublication review and book jacket endorsement of *Transgender Good News* by Pat Conover.

Jim was open about his struggle with alcoholism, including in his 2004 book *Thirst*. In a 2007 article about addiction he described himself as "a Christian ethicist (retired) and a recovering alcoholic (from which there is no retirement)." In all, Jim wrote 12 books and had one in process at the time of his death in 2015.

It would be difficult to talk about Jim without also talking about his wife and partner Wilys Claire. Jim met Wilys Claire at Macalester College. Wilys graduated from United Seminary and was also ordained in the United Church of Christ. She worked for many years as a hospital and hospice chaplain at Abbott Northwestern Hospital. After her death, Jim wrote and taught about the experience of grief.

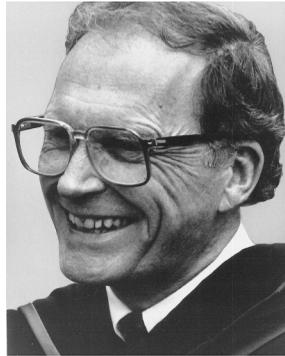
While Jim was known as a national thought leader and a brilliant writer his greatest passion was as a teacher.

Excerpts taken from The Christian Century, LGBTQ Archives and more.

Remembering a Mentor

An interview with Judith & Jim Scoville by Justin Sabia-Tanis

Have you ever considered putting the words of a noted theologian to the tunes of the Wizard of Oz or writing a newspaper to showcase the ideas of a prominent ethicist? Students in James Nelson's classes did as part of a creative assignment designed to help students dig deeply into important ideas and



remember them. Decades after taking Nelson's classes and after downsizing, alum Judith Scoville '90—a retired scholar and educator herself—still cherishes her notebooks full of lectures, notes, and assignments documenting her course work with Nelson at United, which she recently shared with us.

Nelson pioneered new avenues of critical thinking and ethics. His work on embodiment theology has inspired generations of scholars to this day (including current United faculty), shaping theories on the vital importance of the body for theological and spiritual thought. His work sparked ideas among feminist and womanist schools of thought, queer theology, Black embodiment theory and much more. Nelson was also an activist who embodied what he wrote and taught, marching in the Civil Rights Movement and advocating for the inclusion of LGBTQ people.

Scoville, however, most remembers Nelson as a teacher, noting, we "know him as a scholar, as a writer, as a thinker, but he was just an extraordinary teacher. ... He inspired students, you came out thinking better, more clearly, more creatively, more sympathetically, more responsibly, more profoundly, it took you to a new level." His classes were affirming and positive, where students were encouraged to think for themselves and to see theology like a circle, where each vantage point offers a different perspective. Judith has great stories of his innovative style, such as a time in his Incarnation and Ethics class when a student led an experience of literal tree-hugging to listen to the sap on an area of the campus outside the office of President Wilson Yates. Scoville recalls Nelson saying on that occasion, "I'm really glad I have tenure."

Nelson was a mentor for Judith and many others. It was due to his encouragement in class one day that she decided to pursue a PhD and her own academic career.

She credits his teaching at United with enabling her to stand out even among Ivy League trained scholars. She also remembers that he shaped the culture of the seminary through his deep openness to ideas and differences, and his steadfast encouragement of students. He led all day classes that began with a lecture—a "very good lecture," Scoville recalls—followed by small group work, case studies, and discussions. Ethics students would be assigned to different groups, one putting forth a deontological analysis, the other a teleological one, to examine the issues more carefully and learn more thoroughly.

But when asked what was most important that we remember about Nelson, Scoville replied simply and emphatically, "Love. He was a very loving person."

Committing to a society that is faithful, creative, and just

Prompted by Judith and Jim Scoville's scholarship gift of \$25,000 to support United's students who continue to embody Jim Nelson's legacy of ethical leadership; we will honor Jim by dedicating our largest classroom to him. We invite you to join us at a date to be determined, as together, we invest in the students who will fill our classrooms by contributing to United's scholarship fund.

To give you a sense of the scholarship need and potential impact of your gift consider the following:

- ▶ 89% of our student body received financial aid for the school year 2019-2020.
- ▶ Financial aid totaling \$498,656 was awarded in 2019-2020.
- ▶ Depending on the course load, a student's tuition can be as high as \$15,480 or as low as \$1,935 for one year.
- ▶ An average financial aid package is \$6,561 per student.
- ▶ The cost of books and supplies for one course is estimated at \$225.

While this represents an overview of actual costs, a heartfelt scholarship gift of any amount will make a difference in the lives of our students. You may designate scholarships by giving online www.unitedseminary/culture/giving.edu or mail to United and include Jim Nelson scholarship in the memo section.

Thank you in advance. Your generosity changes lives by sustaining our faith communities and developing strong, ethical leaders.