

Spring 2016

FOCUS

The magazine of Union Presbyterian Seminary



SPECIAL EDITION The Black Experience at Union



THE BLACK EXPERIENCE AT UNION



Brian K. Blount

Dear Friends,

Much to celebrate. Much to accomplish. Those are the words that come immediately and, I think, appropriately to mind when I think of the Black experience at Union Presbyterian Seminary. Though I obviously have not personally experienced all of Union's 204 years of existence, I have across these past nine years held the unique vantage point of president and, as a result of that role, previewed Dr. Bill Sweetser's wonderful history of the school (to be published in April by Westminster John Knox Press). From Bill's history, I have learned just how far Union has moved in terms of the Black experience.

Bill chronicles a movement that begins with probable institutional and certain faculty ownership of slaves to a time when faculty and students alike joined in marches and protests for African-American Civil Rights. A school that once championed the so-called "spirituality of the church," which argued that the church, because of the theology upon which it was grounded, should not engage social issues and concerns, would ultimately pioneer a biblical theology particularly interested in addressing matters of social and racial justice.

Today, of Union's 22 full time faculty, three, including its president, are African-American. Our current student body, across the Richmond and Charlotte physical campuses and the hybrid Extended campus, is 14 percent African-American.

While celebrating the level of diversity we have, we recognize that much work needs to be done. The Board of Trustees, which includes four African-Americans, along with members of the student body, has encouraged the faculty to give the highest consideration to persons of color when new faculty openings occur. Our Office of Admissions is currently working on an enrollment management plan that will include an even stronger focus on recruiting students of color. Our Richmond Student Government Association has petitioned the board and faculty to be more conscious of experiences of African-American students when developing policy and curriculum for the school. Both board and faculty have welcomed the student action and have committed their support for the initiatives expressed.

Our aim is to live into our vision of a seminary whose multi-racial, multi-denominational, and multi-cultural experience of teaching and learning prepares graduates for the diverse world in which they will do ministry. God's call is as much a challenge as it is an invitation in this regard. We are committed to using all our resources of admissions, hiring, and teaching to accept this invitation and, in so doing, meet this challenge.

Faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Brian". The signature is stylized and cursive.

Brian K. Blount, President

A Copious Fountain: A History of Union Presbyterian Seminary, 1812-2012, by William B. Sweetser Jr. tells the two-hundred-year-old story of Union Presbyterian Seminary in Richmond, VA. Dr. Sweetser is an adjunct professor of church history at Union's Charlotte campus and serves as the pastor of First Presbyterian Church in Spruce Pine, NC. Published by Westminster John Knox Press, it is available at www.wjkbooks.com.



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RICHMOND CAMPUS 3401 Brook Road • Richmond, VA 23227 • 800.229.2990 • 804.355.0671
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MISSION AND VISION

*Union Presbyterian Seminary equips Christian leaders for ministry in the world—
a sacred vocation that requires deep learning, commitment to service, and an ability to read culture
and circumstance in the light of the rich resources of scripture and theological tradition.*

*The seminary's core mission is to participate in the mission of the church by forming and equipping leaders
for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ (Eph. 4:12).*

*We confess the Lordship of Jesus Christ. We believe that Jesus is God in the flesh, the Son of that One whom
he called Father. His life, ministry, death, and resurrection have transformed the world.*

As the risen and living Lord, Jesus has called us to bear witness to his transformative presence in the world.

*We serve as a theological resource for church and society. We weave together distinctive approaches
to theological education for pastoral and educational ministries. We educate, inspire, and empower leaders
for congregational life, theological scholarship, and bold Christian service to the world. We seek to participate faithfully
in the Holy Spirit's transformation of the seminary, the church, and through the church, the world.*



Photo by Duane Berger.

Embodied Memories, Embodied Ministries

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Paula Owens Parker (M.Div. '94), adjunct assistant professor of spiritual formation at Union Presbyterian Seminary and senior program developer of Roots Matter LLC

“Without Union’s emphasis on academic excellence, and love and care toward its students, my ability to pastor, create innovative community ministries, speak, serve on denominational ministries and serve God with my whole heart, would not be a reality today.” – Gwen Magby

When I stepped on Union’s campus the fall of 1991, I was not aware of its history as the flagship seminary of the Southern Presbyterian Church. I had never heard of Robert Dabney and the *Defence of Virginia and through her, of the South*. I was not aware of the active participation of Union students and faculty in the 50’s and 60’s in the Civil Rights movement. I did not know **Samuel Govan Stevens** (Th.M.’37) was the first African-American to graduate from Union. I had no idea I was part of an intentional effort to bring African Americans students to the seminary. But **Karen Brown** (M.Div.’92) was aware of the effort, and in the newsletter *In Media Res* in 1988, she noted a “Black Phenomenon” on campus; an entering class that brought the number of African-American students to four—herself, **Ernest Hood** (M.Div.’91), **Kecia McMillian** (attended 1988-1989), and **Michael Simpson** (attended 1988-1991)—and hoped her class of African-Americans would be just the beginning.

This constituency would like to affirm Union for its efforts in being inclusive. However, we hope this number does not remain a phenomenon, for its own sake as well as for the sake of the church. The seminary is moving in the right direction, as it prepares for the second annual Racial Ethnic Conference in the spring. The church is one and this is an ideal atmosphere for all to grow in our diversity. As of this writing, the seminary has broken this phenomenon as Cheryl Watts will be joining our community in January.¹

Karen Brown and Shirley Hutchins (M.Div.’92) reported they had to rub their eyes when they saw Luther Ivory on his first day as an African-American professor at Union.²

Richard Clements, Jr. (M.Div.’94), **Gwendolyn Magby** (M.Div.’94), **Leslie Stokes** (attended 1991-93), and **Florence Canada** (M.Div.’94; Ph.D.’04) joined me as first-year students the fall of 1991. We leaned heavily on the experience and wisdom of Karen Brown and **Linda Stevens** (M.Div.’93) on how to navigate the seminary landscape because change was happening on multiple fronts in the larger church community. The ordination of women and the LBGTQ community, inclusive language, the “Re-Imagining Conference,” Afrocentrism, and spirituality were hot topics and sources of tension.

At the end of our first semester, we formed the UTS Black Caucus whose purpose was to bring an awareness of the contributions by the African-American religious community to the seminary. Seminal and radical works and theological texts were being published nationally and we felt the rest of the campus community needed to know about these resources. Karen, our first president, helped us lay the groundwork by organizing a retreat and scheduling a worship service during Black History Month. Linda Stevens, our second president, expanded it to a week-long celebration the following year. We displayed our African and African-American books, artifacts and art in

“Richard, Gwen, Linda, and I felt like we had come home as soon as we stepped off the plane in Accra. The familiar faces and perspectives, the experience of the comfort and safety of being in the majority were culturally life-affirming.”

Richmond Hall. We led worship in Watts chapel all week and invited Dr. Cain Hope Felder, author of *Troubling the Biblical Waters* and editor of *Stony the Road We Trod* and the *African Heritage Study Bible*, to lecture and fellowship with students and faculty from Union, the Samuel DeWitt Proctor School of Theology at Virginia Union University, the Baptist Theological Seminary, and the Presbyterian School of Christian Education.

I contacted Linda, Gwen, Richard, and Karen and asked two questions: 1) what were some of the significant experiences for them during their matriculation to Union? and 2) how did Union shape their ministry?

For each one of them, the very first comment was how the quality of theological education at Union continues to shape their preaching and teaching. Another shared experience was Associate Professor of Bible and Biblical Languages Carson Brisson’s Hebrew class. Gwen commented, “Hebrew was my lifeline of all my courses. It was exciting, rewarding, culturally connecting, and an inspiration for my spiritual seminary journey.” Richard said, “Carson’s class not only introduced me to the language, but it is also where I learned about the communal nature of the Hebrew language and theology”. For me personally, Carson acknowledged the “*imago dei*” in all his students and helped us understand the sacredness of the scripture.

The travel seminar to Ghana was another important event for us in both painful and comforting ways. Karen mourned for a full day after visiting the slave castles, but since graduating from Union, Karen has visited the slave castles and dungeons in Ghana eleven times. Richard, Gwen, Linda, and I felt as if we had come home as soon as we stepped off the plane in Accra. The familiar faces and perspectives, the experience of the comfort and safety of being in the majority were culturally life-affirming.

Each of us received a distinct call to ministry, and therefore, our individual experiences were unique. For Richard, scripture and liturgy took on new dimensions. Professor Nora Tisdale encouraged him to contribute to the *Journal of Reformed Liturgy and Music* and become a member of the Presbyterian Association of Musicians and the African Heritage Presbyterian Association of Musicians. As a result of these opportunities, Richard served as the worship leader at a Presbyterian Peacemaking Conference.

For Gwen, separation from family, long distance travel, the academic challenge, and the strange and foreign experience of Presbyterian worship was a dark night of the soul experience. It was two years after graduation before Gwen could appreciate the valuable academic lessons learned at Union. As a result of now Professor Emeritus of Hebrew and Old Testament Interpretation Dean

McBride's encouragement, Gwen earned her Doctor of Ministry degree.

The most memorable class for Karen was Urban Ministry. Seminarians who enrolled in Urban Ministry traveled from Richmond to Atlanta, Georgia, visited churches of various faiths and traditions, and learned how to do urban evangelism. As a result of this course, Karen formed several community-based organizations, youth businesses and CDs. Having been instrumental in forming the UTS Black Caucus, Karen tapped into her seminary training and experiences to organize the African-American Clergy Women's Caucus in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). She also served as a board member of the National Black Presbyterian Caucus for more than eight years. Currently, Karen is a member-at-large in the Baltimore Presbytery and writes grants for nonprofit organizations, agencies, and institutions in Baltimore, Maryland.

In Professor Bill Arnold's Pastoral Care Seminar, Linda was assigned to the psychiatric unit at the Medical College of Virginia (MCV), now VCU Medical Center. One of the patients was a 28-year pastor diagnosed with HIV. He was there because of suicidal ideation as a result of the isolation and dehumanization he experienced. Linda's opportunity to listen to this patient prepared her to be open to the deacon of her church who came to her two weeks later with the same diagnosis. Without this experience at MCV, Linda said she would have been a "Pharisee" and judged this member of her congregation. Linda started an AIDS/HIV educational program on the Eastern Shore of Virginia for churches. *The Richmond Times Dispatch* featured her story in its June 19, 1994, edition.

Several classes at Union impacted my understanding of my vocational call. Reading

The Invisible Institution and Black Religion Black Radicalism in my History of Black Religion class connected so many dots for me. These texts allowed me to see in print for the very first time what I already knew and understood about the Black Church. Rebecca Weaver and Bill Arnold's seminar in Pastoral Care and Spiritual Formation confirmed the specificity of my call. An outcome of these classes prepared me to join the staff at Richmond Hall Ecumenical Christian Fellowship and Residential Community after graduation, which in turn, enabled me to actualize the founding of the following ministries: SOZO: School of Healing Prayer, The Daughters of Zelophehad, a transitional housing program for women and children in crisis, and Roots Matter: Healing Generational Trauma.

Currently, Richard is serving as the director of music and art at Mt. Tabor Missionary Baptist Church, Miami, Florida. Linda is pastor of Jerusalem Baptist Church in Temperanceville, Virginia, on the Eastern Shore. Karen is resource developer for Newborn Holistic Ministries in Baltimore, Maryland. Gwen serves as pastor of Trinity Presbyterian Church in Key West, Florida. In essence, the following closing words by Gwen speak for most of Union's Black Alums: "Without Union's emphasis on academic excellence, and love and care toward its students, my ability to pastor, create innovative community ministries, speak, serve on denominational ministries and serve God with my whole heart, would not be a reality today."

¹ Karen Brown, "The Black Phenomenon," *In Medias Res* (Richmond, VA), September 1988, 7.

² Karen Brown and Shirley Hutchins, "The Welcome We Received," *In Medias Res* (Richmond, VA), Fall 1991, 5.

Footprints of Praise



Pat Olds

My journey through the Union Presbyterian Seminary's Master of Christian Education (M.A.C.E.) program inspires the old and traditional Negro song, "I get joy when I think about what He's done for me." The song not only celebrates opportunities, provisions, progress and answered prayers, but it also expresses thankfulness to God for the journey. Even now as I look back upon my journey through the M.A.C.E. program, and by faith look forward to what is yet to come, my heart is overwhelmed with praise.

Before I even heard or understood the word "call" I knew that Christian education was and is my passion. My call to Christian education was confirmed by my first course in 2000. Imagine my excitement when I learned that my first Christian education class was taught by a Union

alumni, Dr. Gloria Taylor. She had earned her M.A. in 1978 and Ed.D. in 1995 from PSCE (now part of Union Presbyterian Seminary). My thirst to earn a degree in Christian education grew even more after I took my first course, Theology and Culture, in the fall of 2002 with Dr. Katie Geneva Cannon. My decision to seek a M.A.C.E. degree was confirmed during my internship at Baptist General Convention of Virginia. Mrs. Sheryl Blowe-McDowney was my supervisor, a graduate of Union Presbyterian Seminary's M.A.C.E. program, and is the director of Christian education for the Baptist General Convention of Virginia. Through her, I was introduced to other African-American M.A.C.E. graduates.

Having successfully completed the Master of Divinity degree program at the Samuel DeWitt Proctor School of Theology at Virginia Union University without having an undergraduate degree, I was accepted into the M.A.C.E. program at Union Presbyterian School of Christian Education. In the fall of 2003, I became a full time student. In the winter term, my husband and I moved into Advance Apartments which became our home for the next two years.

In the M.A.C.E. program, I was encouraged to explore, examine, and experience God in a variety of ways. I was pushed and probed, mentally and spiritually, through Dr. Cannon's free-writes and required readings. Even now I often find myself quoting her and referring to her lectures and required readings. It was Dr. Kathy Dawson, former associate professor of Christian education, who introduced me to new and exciting teaching models. Through Professor Emerita of Christian Education Gwen Hawley's class, Aspects of

In the M.A.C.E. program, I was encouraged to explore, examine and experience God in a variety of ways. I was pushed and probed, mentally and spiritually, through Dr. Katie Geneva Cannon's free-writes and required readings. Even now I often find myself quoting her and referring to her lectures and required readings.

Human Faith Development, I learned the process of faith development and formation. In my course with Dr. Jane Vann (Theory in Religious Education) and Dr. Fernando Cascante's course (Contemporary Theologies and Education), most of the time I left wondering or asking myself questions like, "How much do they know about the Black Church?" and "Will what they are teaching work in the Black Church?" However, the learning center exercise in Dr. Vann's class and the two required readings, *Congregational Megatrends* by Jeffrey Woods and *The Church and the Future Educational Perspective* by Letty Russell, awoke and brought together my imagination and creativity. This allowed me to see the potential and opportunities for doing ministry in a broader context.

Had I not attended Virginia Union and Union Presbyterian Seminary, I would not have been introduced to the voices of James Cone, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Samuel DeWitt Proctor, Henri Nouwen, and the works of teacher, philosopher and activist, Paulo Freire. These voices and others have shaped my understanding of my theology and faith formation. Womanist voices like Yvonne Delk, Carol Lakey Hess, Teresa Fry Brown, Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza, and Susan Taylor helped me to see and claim my Womanist theology. I would have missed the opportunity to study with Professors Israel Galindo and Donald

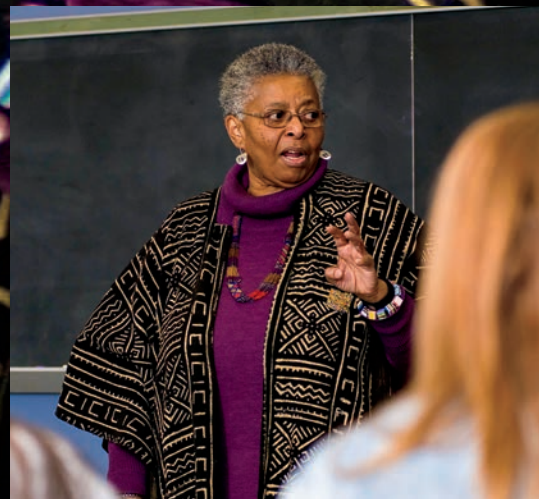
Griggs, who taught me how to write and evaluate curriculum. Both seminaries offered meaningful memories of worship, leadership (Black Caucus presidency), community social activities and projects, fellowship and fun with local, national, and international classmates. Maintaining close connections with both seminaries permits my participation in the Union Presbyterian Seminary Black Alumni Association (founding and board member) and as a classroom assistant for Senior Seminar at the Samuel DeWitt Proctor School of Theology.

Even though I graduated in May 2005, I continue to give God praise for the meaningful memories, connections and the plans He had and has for my life, and the promise of a hope and a future. Morton Library is still one of my favorite hangouts and, from time to time, I still interact with professors, current students and maintain substantive, life-long relationships with Union colleagues and friends from other programs, denominations or faith traditions across the states and from other countries. Whenever I can, I participate in campus luncheons and other events. Now can you see why "I get joy when I think about what God has done for me!"

Patricia Turner Olds (M.A.C.E.'05) is presently writing her first book, Outside Looking In: Griot Intergenerational Faith Formation in a Digital Age.

Going Back Before the Beginning

The Institute of Womanist Studies at Union Presbyterian Seminary



“In order to begin the experience of fully human living whatever gender we are, we are called to refuse to be what others require us to be. We must resist becoming instruments against our own convictions.”

What distinguishes Womanist work is a conscious decision to provide women of African ancestry opportunities to gather and give voice to values, meanings, and interpretations of our justice-making ministries. With multistep reasoning, cross disciplinary interplay, and analytic ability, African-American women of faith are discerning creative ways “to go back before the beginning,” in order to enhance the well-being of Black girls and women on the African continent and females throughout the African Diaspora.

Embracing Toni Morrison’s concept, “there is always a ‘before’ that makes our beginnings possible,” the Womanist Institute has moved from an inaugural event, “Prophetically Moving Towards Womanist Possibilities” in November 2012, to significantly expanding the depth and breadth of our Womanist work by facilitating an international conference, “Emancipation’s Unfinished Agenda: What Shall I Tell My Children Who are Black?” in April 2013, to a vibrant, engaging symposium, “The African Experience of God Through the Eyes of an African Woman,” with Professor Mercy Amba Ewudziwa Oduyoye in November 2015 (see back cover).

On November 17 in the Early Center, Professor Oduyoye spoke to a room full of African-American women, an eclectic assembly of academics and practitioners, students and faculty, clergy and laity, health care providers and business executives, millennial, generation X-ers, and baby boomers. She held the audience spellbound

with stories about creative ways to resist religious teachings within the structures of the dailiness of life. Quoting from her book, *Christianity in Africa*, Professor Oduyoye said “In order to begin the experience of fully human living, whatever gender we are, we are called to refuse to be what others require us to be. We must resist becoming instruments against our own convictions. As a people, we must never acquiesce to our own marginalization.”

Professor Oduyoye presented a number of theological and ethical challenges, including insights from her groundbreaking essay, *Troubled but Not Destroyed*. In cogently straightforward language, Professor Oduyoye stated, “Africa is not poor. Africa is the richest among the continents.” Shifting from the indicative mode to prophetic inquiry, Oduyoye asked, “If Africa is not poor, then why is there so much carnage, so much annihilation, so much disease, and so much warfare due to poverty on the continent of Africa?” In closing, Dr. Oduyoye said the answer to this soul-wrestling question can be found in an Akan proverb enjoining us not to be—“*A people who takes out of its own stomach and fills the void with straw.*”

Katie Geneva Cannon is the Annie Scales Rogers Professor of Christian Ethics. She was the first African-American woman ordained in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). Cannon focuses her work in the areas of Christian ethics, Womanist theology, and women in religion and society.

Where are they now?

Members of the Black Alumni Association of Union Presbyterian Seminary tracked down and interviewed alumni to find out what they were doing now and to learn how Union had impacted their call.



Angela S. Hardy-Duncan
(M.Div.'03)

Assistant Dean, VCU School of Allied Health Professions and Manager, Bereavement Services, VCU Health, Richmond, Virginia.

What made you decide to come to Union?

I felt a call to ministry and Union-PSCE offered the education that I believed would prepare me for where I felt God was leading me.

Who was your favorite professor while studying, and why?

Dr. Katie Geneva Cannon. She believed in me, saw my gifts and encouraged me to further my education by obtaining a doctorate. Dr. Carol Schweitzer encouraged my interest in pastoral care as a profession.

What were you doing in the five years immediately following graduation?

I was in school working on another master's degree and working as a chaplain. This experience led to the pursuit of a Ph.D. in Health Related Science and research interests in spiritual, religious and culture and how they impact coping with chronic illness. Also, African-American spirituality and faith and how it's used to cope with illness and death.

What did you take away most from your experience here?

I felt prepared to take on anything. My writing experience grew and improved and prepared me for doctoral studies.

How has your education here been instrumental in your current calling?

My ministry skills and gifts honed in seminary have been used in my work as a chaplain and also as the dean of student affairs and community engagement. My clinical pastoral education (CPE) ignited my passion for working in the healthcare arena.

Have you accomplished the goals you set for this time? What factored into achieving them or not?

I've accomplished more than I thought. I wasn't sure where my seminary education would lead. I now see the doors opened and I was prepared for the challenges and the work that lay ahead of me.

As a result of your vocational experiences, what do you consider to be critical for inclusion in the preparation of Union students?

More cultural diversity training. In my opinion, some Union students have an idealistic view of what justice and culture look like. Cultural immersion experiences with underrepresented minority groups might be helpful.



Marc Fields (M.Th.'15)

Call chaplain at VCU Medical Center, providing spiritual and emotional support to patients, Richmond, Virginia.

What made you decide to come to Union?

I came to pursue further graduate work with Dr. Katie Cannon. Her brilliance, insight, and understanding helped me to grow at Union. Having her as a mentor was crucial in guiding me through the process at seminary.

What did you take away most from your experience here?

What I will take away most from my experience is the teachings of Professors Cannon

and Joshua Ralston along with the help from Simeon Joseph Kierulf and Erica Kierulf.

How has your education here been instrumental in your current calling?

Education at Union as it relates to my current calling is helpful from the standpoint that life is sacred. My education helps me to see things from different viewpoints.

As a result of your vocational experiences, what do you consider to be critical for inclusion in the preparation of Union students?

Having a healthy understanding of “Who is my neighbor?” and realizing no matter color, creed, or denominational belief that we are ALL God’s children!



Angela D. Sims (Ph.D.'08)
Robert B. and Kathleen Rogers Chair in Church Society, Associate Professor of Ethics and Black Church Studies, and Dean of Academic Program, Kansas City, Missouri.

What made you decide to come to Union?

I had an invitation to study with Dr. Katie Cannon that I could not resist! It was a decision that is best described as a defining moment in my life.

Who was your favorite professor while studying here and why?

This is a loaded question. I studied with some amazing individuals during my matriculation at Union. My principal advisor and dissertation chair, Dr. Cannon, guided my process and demonstrated an approach to learning and mentoring that continues to influence my own interaction with students in a variety of learning contexts. The other members of my committee with whom I also took classes and served as a teaching assistant, Dr. Samuel Roberts and Dr. Stanley Skreslet, introduced me to thinkers,

concepts and ideas that I consider essential to my own development as a Womanist scholar whose research interests examine the relationship between religion, race, and violence.

What were you doing in the five years or less immediately following graduation?

Teaching at Saint Paul School of Theology; participating actively in the American Academy of Religion and the Society of Christian Ethics; presenting at numerous guilds; participating in professional development programs sponsored by Wabash and the Association of Theological Schools; obtaining funding for and serving as principal investigator for an oral history project, “Remembering Lynching: Strategies of Resistance and Visions of Justice”; spending a sabbatical year at the Interdenominational Theological Center and Baylor University.

What did you take away most from your experience here?

A renewed commitment to peace and justice.

How has your education here been instrumental in your current call?

It prepared me to be a co-learner; to create an environment that welcomes and invites others to engage in informed dialogue; and to contribute in positive ways to the communal life of an institution.

Have you accomplished the goal you set for this time? What factored into you achieving it or not?

I have accomplished most of my goals as I learn to reprioritize what is of most importance to my ongoing personal and professional development

As a result of your vocation experiences, what do you consider to be critical for inclusion in the preparation of Union students?

Community conversations on relevant current issues that serve as a framework for students to articulate a theologically informed response.



Richelle B. White
(M.A.C.E.'03; Ph.D.'11)
Professor of Youth
Ministry and Director
of Youth Ministry Field
Practicum at Kuyper
College in Grand Rapids,
Michigan, helping to
prepare competent
youth workers to serve

in ministry settings with young people. Serves in the local church as the founding director of Daughters of Imani-Christian Rites of Passage for African-American Women.

What made you decide to come to Union?

This is an interesting story. I love to learn, and there is something exciting about being in a classroom setting. I relocated to Virginia at the end of 2000. In the Spring of 2001, I was driving South on Brook Road, and I noticed the signs for Union-PSCE. I took a walk around campus. I loved what I saw. I went to the library, pulled up the website to specifically look at the faculty. At this time there were no African-American faculty members listed. Because of that, I decided not to continue my search into being a student at Union-PSCE. As an African-American student it was and is important for me to have role models, teachers and mentors that look like me, because they help me to see what I can aspire to and become. A year later, I decided to look at the faculty line up again. Dr. Cannon and Dr. Roberts had been hired. I immediately submitted my application. I knew that Union-PSCE was a place I needed to be.

Who was your favorite professor while studying here and why?

This question is problematic for me simply because it is desiring that I give an answer that would identify a professor that has special favor or preference or is liked better than another. I will answer the question in this way. Dr. Katie Cannon and Dr. Pamela Mitchell-Legg are the

two professors who have been the most formative in the evolution of who I am as a college professor. Many of the assignments that Dr. Cannon required of me, I require of my own students. Her engaging pedagogical praxis has made course development fun and exciting for me as I seek to promote the reality that students are responsible for their own learning. Dr. Pamela Mitchell-Legg is a master at teaching others how to teach. I learned to improve my lesson planning and teaching skills under her guidance. Today, I teach a course, teaching my students to do the same.

What were you doing in the five years or less immediately following graduation?

Immediately following my graduation in 2003, I began my Ph.D. in Christian education. In 2007, I was hired at Kuyper College. I graduated in 2011. From the time I left campus in 2007, I've been teaching in the college classroom.

What did you take away most from your experience here?

My take-away from Union is that being a creative, inspirational and transformative teacher looks different on different people depending on gifts, passion, talent and strengths.

How has your education here been instrumental in your current call?

My education has been instrumental in my current call because it has prepared me on a holistic level to serve in the church and academy.

Have you accomplished the goal you set for this time? What factored into you achieving them or not?

I rarely set goals, simply because it has been my experience that when I design my own plans/goals, God, without fail turns them around, and I am compelled to follow His will for my life. Occasionally, our plans meet, but I am content following His voice and obeying His

plan. Scripture reminds me *“For surely I know the plans I have for you, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope.”* (Jeremiah 29:11)

As a result of your vocation experiences, what do you consider to be critical for inclusion in the preparation of Union students?

Mandatory counseling sessions, I believe would be beneficial for all students. Oftentimes we bring a lot of baggage into ministry. Working with a professional counselor could help with unpacking the bags.



Larry L. Enis (Th.M.'04; Ph.D.'13)

Pastor of Pleasant Grove Baptist Church in Mechanicsville, Virginia, and adjunct professor of biblical preaching at the Samuel DeWitt Proctor School of Theology at Virginia

Union University. Also teaches Introduction to Religion and African-American Religion at Randolph-Macon College in Ashland, Virginia.

What made you decide to come to Union?

I decided to study at Union because of its reputation for producing the very best biblical scholars in the world.

Who was your favorite professor while studying here and why?

This is a tough question, because I was blessed with what I deem the strongest dissertation committee in the New Testament in the country, comprised of Dr. Frances Taylor Gench (committee chair), Dr. Brian K. Blount, and Dr. John Carroll. In different ways, each has played a significant role in my development as a scholar, teacher, writer, and preacher.

What were you doing in the five years or less immediately following graduation?

I graduated in May 2013. Immediately after graduation, I continued my work as an associate minister at Saint Paul's Baptist Church in Richmond, Virginia. In this capacity, I taught weekly Bible study and offered exegetical courses for other associate ministers. In April 2014, I was called as pastor of Pleasant Grove Baptist Church. In Fall 2014, I began teaching at Randolph-Macon College. In winter 2014, I began teaching biblical preaching courses at the Samuel DeWitt Proctor School of Theology.

What did you take away most from your experience here?

My experience at Union has reiterated the importance of preaching sermons and teaching lessons that are not only theologically and exegetically sound, but also culturally relevant.

How has your education here been instrumental in your current call?

Because of the rigorous training I've undergone at Union, I believe that I am equipped to lead a congregation and teach students in a biblically responsible way.

Have you accomplished the goal you set for this time? What factored into you achieving them or not?

Upon matriculation from Union, my goal has been to become a full-time faculty member and a full-time pastor. Although I have accomplished the latter, I am currently teaching in an adjunct capacity. My hope, however, is that I will become a full-time professor in due time.

As a result of your vocation experiences, what do you consider to be critical for inclusion in the preparation of Union students?

As a pastor and teacher, I believe that Union does an excellent job training students in the area of biblical exegesis. This, in my view, is the most important aspect of my ministry.



Byron Anthony Wade
(M.A.C.E.'94)
Teaching Elder of Davie Street Presbyterian Church in Raleigh, North Carolina. Wade was the vice-moderator of the 218th General Assembly of the PC(USA).

What made you decide to come to Union?

I have always had an interest in Christian education, especially in how we find various teaching methods to educate people for faith formation. I was also interested in examining the theological bases for Christian education.

Who was your favorite professor while studying here and why?

Professor Estelle McCarthy was my favorite professor! She taught the basic course, Teaching in the Church, which gave me a solid foundation as to how, why, and what we do as Christian educators.

What were you doing in the five years or less immediately following graduation?

Upon entering PSCE (Presbyterian School of Christian Education), I was in the Advanced Standing program, where you could earn the M.A.C.E. in one year if you had at least one year of seminary beforehand (I entered PSCE after my second year at Johnson C. Smith Theological Seminary in Atlanta, GA). After graduation, I returned to finish my final year at Johnson C. Smith to earn the Master of Divinity degree. I worked temporarily for UPS (United Parcel Service) until I received a call to pastor Davie Street Presbyterian Church in Raleigh, NC, where I currently serve.

What did you take away most from your experience here?

I took with me the belief that Christian education is the primary focus of life within a congregation. A former professor had a saying, "Christian education is the ministry which undergirds all other ministries of the church."

Whether it is Sunday School, adult education classes, church family night dinners, or worship, Christian education revolves around these activities. I learned a lot about the stages of growth and development of human learning and that there is more than one method of teaching; it can be interactive, not just lectures. The student will not be excited unless you, the teacher, are passionate about learning. The student must be given many opportunities to participate and not be left passive.

How has your education here been instrumental in your current call?

It has helped me to think through Christian education from a theological standpoint. Now I do homework before teaching. I examine the group/persons I am going to teach and their particular context and experiences, which allows me to choose the appropriate method of teaching. Also, I will venture out and use a particular method that I am not as familiar with so we can all learn something new.

Have you accomplished the goal you set for this time? What factored into you achieving them or not?

One goal was to reinvigorate our Sunday morning educational time (Sunday School). We had tried the traditional model, which was not working. Along with the Sunday School teachers and Christian education ministry team, we examined various educational models along with curriculum options. We eventually settled on a rotation model which is intergenerational and it seems to be working so far.

As a result of your vocation experiences, what do you consider to be critical for inclusion in the preparation of Union students?

I would say two things: (1) Gain a theological understanding of the Bible, a book of salvation history of what God has done, is doing, and will do through the example of Jesus Christ, and (2) despite the importance of preaching and pastoral care, they must know the importance of the teaching ministry of the church.

“The Genesis”

In the beginning...

In the spring of 2009, after a conversation with a concerned former board member, President Brian K. Blount sat in his office discerning the opportunities available regarding the lack of an African-American presence among the student body. A student intern position in the admissions office, working alongside then Director of Admissions Brint Pratt Keyes, was created in order to increase the matriculation of African-American students.

I was the student chosen by Dr. Blount to assist in the process, perhaps because I had been vocal about the disparity between our words and our actions in regards to race relations in the church and the formal educational system of its leaders.

In conversations with Dr. Blount and Rev. Keyes, we decided the most effective way to increase numbers with the resources we had immediately available was to be more intentional about conveying what Union had to offer students through the most effective means of reaching African-American students historically—alumni and pastors with whom they have personal relationships. Within a few weeks, Rev. Keyes and I were on our way to the Hampton Minister’s conference, where we would meet the man who would match our intensity and help build what would become the first fully constituted alumni association in Union’s history. Rev. **Hoffman Brown** was a 1981 D.Min. graduate of Union, and he was the only African-American student during his time there. Before we had finished a pre-conference lunch at a nearby seafood hangout, the three of us were receiving the blessings of an administration eager to lead Union into fulfilling its potential.

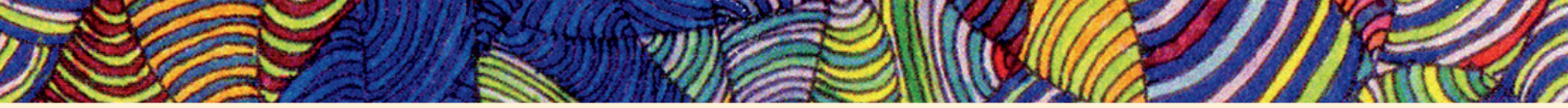


The 2015 Black Alumni Association Board of Directors Executive Committee pose in Lake Chapel on the Richmond Campus. (Front row, left to right) **Patricia Turner Olds** (M.A.C.E.'05), **Marilyn Heckstall** (M.Div.'97), **Veronica Thomas** (M.Div.'07), **Angela Duncan** (M.Div.'03), **Willie Woodson** (M.A.C.E.'84); (Back row) **William Freeman** (M.Div.'01), **Ronald Hopkins** (M.Div.'99) and **Jason Callahan** (M.Div.'11). **Delano Douglass** (M.Div.'04), president, and **Helen Bessent Byrd** (M.Div.'07), treasurer, are not pictured.

Gathering a group/Herding cats

A difficult part in forming what would become the core leadership of the Black Alumni Association was identifying those individuals we had access to who were going to give the most life to the cause. With no shortage of brave leadership, we looked to familiar faces in different places. We searched all around for African-American alumni who varied in experience so that the net could be widened and the truly diverse landscape of ministry could be accurately reflected.

It is true when they say, gathering those in ministry is like herding cats, but God made a way for about a dozen alumni and one edgy future alum to meet on campus. They included **Hoffman Brown**, **Helen Bessent Byrd**, **Delano Douglas**, **William Freeman**, **Derrick Parson** (M.Div.'00), **Jonyrma Singleton** (M.Div.'85), **Veronica Thomas**, and **Willie Woodson**.



Before the day was done, we were already calling ourselves the Black Alumni Association. Most of the people at the meeting had at some point during their education served as president or another leadership position in the Black Caucus. Because of that, we were able to accurately review a history of our experiences on campus and develop a consensus on a mission and purpose outline that would guide our involvement, loosely based on that of the caucus with an alumni twist. Once everyone felt as if their strengths would be highlighted, the machine picked up steam and we began to meet monthly via an alternating face-to-face meeting and conference call.

Attaining official status

Before we knew it, we were organizing opportunities to highlight the achievements of African-American alumni through our annual Trailblazer Banquet. This gave us an opportunity to honor the lives and ministries of those who made it possible to get to this point. Once I realized that this was going to continue to grow, I searched the Internet for the constitutions and bylaws of hundreds of black alumni organizations throughout this country's higher education system, and identified the core themes facing African-American students and alumni while identifying with our unique position among them.

As all groups affiliated with Presbyterian life do, we formed a committee, ate a lot of food, drafted our own bylaws and constitution, and then tore it to pieces in the parking lot. In February 2013, with the support of the advancement office, we held our first Covenanting Service and annual meeting, officially making the Black Alumni Association an alumni association not bound by geography and already active in community life.

You never know until you try

Throughout our formation, there were many areas in which we excelled, but also areas where we struggled. As with all volunteer organizations, leadership and involvement changed. Finances are a consistent question mark as more resources need to be allocated to different areas. Somehow we always found a way and now we are becoming more active in the lives and ministries of students. In addition, we have set and met financial giving goals to support the mission of the seminary. It is the conveying of The Spirit through experienced eyes of African-American alumni that sets this group apart and connects us to the community in a way that was not present before.

Focus on the future

Some of the most rewarding opportunities we have are in our interactions with the students. It should be an expectation that every student that passes through these halls become a part of an alumni association. To that end, I say we would love to have you as a member of the BAA. I know that not everyone will join. The diversity in interest and opportunity developed while a student at Union should motivate others to form other alumni associations as not everyone is going to share the same specific calls, but nevertheless they should answer that call in the appropriate arena.

As a hospital chaplain, I hope to see the establishment of a chaplain's alumni association. Church educators, lay persons, and those pursuing professorships can all use support and be of support to so many others through similar organizations. I challenge the bravest of you to take that task upon yourselves. Just know that you don't have to do it alone. A blueprint and willing partners are available for you when you're ready.

Jason Callahan (M.Div.'11) is a hospital chaplain, Inpatient Palliative Care, VCU.

The Black Alumni Association

by William Freeman (M.Div.'01)
Retired United Methodist Church clergy

The Black Alumni Association (BAA) of Union Presbyterian Seminary was born in 2009 out of a discussion between **Jason Callahan** (M.Div.'11), a Master of Divinity student at the time, and President Brian K. Blount, on how best to honor the contributions made by Black students to this great institution of religious education.

The impetus for this discussion was to tap into the knowledge, skills, abilities, and resources of the seminary's alumni of African-American descent; many whom, while students, served as officers and/or members of the Black Caucus.

After several phone calls, emails, texts, and many on-campus meetings, a constitution as well as by-laws were written and approved; and the BAA was certified as the seminary's first alumni chapter.

The Black Alumni/ae Association (BAA)

Trailblazer Award

In February, 2012 at its annual meeting, the BAA sponsored its first three-day conference entitled "Ministry on the Ground" at which alumni of African-American descent were honored with the "Trailblazer" award at the Trailblazer Award Ceremony and Banquet.

The purpose of this award is to recognize exemplary accomplishments by African-American alumni of Union Presbyterian Seminary. It is awarded by the Black Alumni Association.

Persons selected to receive the award meet the following criteria:

- Pioneered in giving exceptional service to Christ in community at the local, regional, national, and/or global level
- Rendered laudable leadership in exercising the responsibilities of their call to ministry
- Demonstrated support of Union with financial and/or human resources
- Must be a graduate of Union Presbyterian Seminary

At least one but not more than three awards are given annually.

The BAA Board of Directors solicits nominations and makes the final selection of the honoree(s). The deadline for submissions is November 15th to be awarded during the spring term of the subsequent year.

TRAILBLAZERS

2012

Dr. Alix B. James (Th.M.'49; Th.D.'57)
Bishop Leontine T.C. Kelly (M.Div.'76)
Rev. Dr. Gloria Taylor (M.A.'78; Ed.D.'95)

2013

Chaplain, Colonel Albert A. Hockaday
(M.A.'80)
Rev. Dr. Edward D. McCreary
(Th.M.'45; Th.D.'51)
Rev. Paula Owens Parker (M.Div.'94)

2014

Dr. Ophelia Garmon-Brown (M.Div.'08)

2015

Rev. Dr. A. Elaine Crawford (Ph.D.'99)
Dr. Angela S. Duncan (M.Div.'03)
Rev. Jonyrma R. Singleton (M.Div.'88)

In 2014, the BAA also honored the following persons: **Brenda Foster** (M.A.C.E.'06) and **Rev. Veronica Cannon** (M.Div.'06) with the Genesis Recognition Award; **The Rev. Dr. Katie G. Cannon** with the Vanguard Professor Award; and the late **Rev. Dr. Samuel K. Roberts** with the Faithful Servant Award.

The 2016 Trailblazer Award Ceremony and Banquet to be held on the Charlotte campus will honor **Rev. Dr. Byron Wade** (M.A.C.E.'94), former vice-moderator of the PC(USA) and pastor of Davie Street Presbyterian Church, Raleigh, NC.

Stewardship Manifest Generous Giving

by Veronica Thomas and Helen Bessent Byrd

Our faith teaches us that God is the one who endows us with gifts and talents. We are taught to think more of the interests of others than of ourselves (Phil. 2:4). Furthermore, God teaches us to give with a cheerful heart (2 Cor. 9:7). Making this edict come alive in our lives leads us all to generous giving. As alumni of Union Presbyterian Seminary, we teach and preach the practice of generous giving in our ministries. John D. Rockefeller is said to have believed that, "every right implies a responsibility; every opportunity an obligation; every possession a duty." The Black Alumni Association encourages each alumnus and believes that each has a duty to manifest stewardship by giving back to Union.

The goal of the Black Alumni Association is to support the seminary. All alumni are encouraged and invited to make generous gifts to the seminary. For giving options, please refer to Union's website at www.upsem.edu/giving/. Join us by raising funds, increasing the visibility of the seminary, and supporting students in need as well as helping spread the gospel of Jesus Christ through all nations (Matt. 28:19-20).



Veronica Thomas leads in prayer as only Veronica can!



William "Bill" Freeman was one of the founding members of the Black Alumni Association and is one of its staunchest supporters.



Helen Bessent Byrd (right) introduces **Brenda Foster** (M.A.C.E.'06) at the 2014 Trailblazer Banquet. Foster was presented with the Genesis Recognition Award.

The Ghana Travel Seminar

A particularly stimulating part of the education at Union Presbyterian Seminary is its regular cooperation with the Presbyterian churches of Ghana and their theological college. An on-going exchange is carried on between Union and colleagues in Ghana, so that there is enrichment and strengthening of ministry on both sides of the Atlantic.

Ghanaian pastors selected by their Presbyterian synod officers come to Union's Richmond campus in the Ghana Connection Exchange program. Funded by Union, the pastors spend an academic year at Union taking academic courses and interpreting Ghanaian church life to the Union community. This opportunity is ordinarily offered every other year.

In reciprocity, the Ghana Travel Seminar travels regularly to Ghana every two years for the purpose of visiting and observing the life and mission of the Presbyterian churches in various parts of Ghana. Partially subsidized by Union, this learning opportunity affords students and faculty the chance to see Christianity as a vital, thriving force within a developing nation.

"Uniformly, participants have highlighted that the travel seminar experience was an extraordinary and enriching experience," President Blount reported upon co-leading the seminar in 2014, "one that broadened their understanding of the global church, deepened their passion for effective ministry in the church and world, and shaped them profoundly as future church leaders."

The seminar continues to be one of the most desired of the curricular experiences at the seminary. Professor of Christian Education Karen-Marie Yust and Visiting Assistant Professor of Evangelism John Vest will lead this year's Ghana Travel Seminar in April 2016.

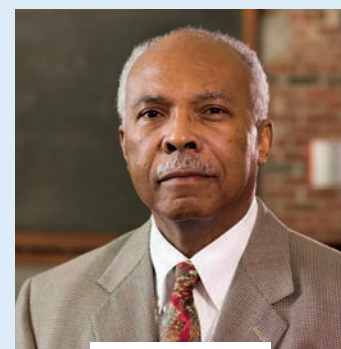


In Memorium

Dr. Samuel K. Roberts, Professor Emeritus of Theology and Ethics at Union Presbyterian Seminary, was a much beloved teacher, mentor, leader, and friend. He retired from the faculty in 2014.

With the recommendation of the faculty, Dr. Roberts was granted emeritus status with the following resolution from the board:

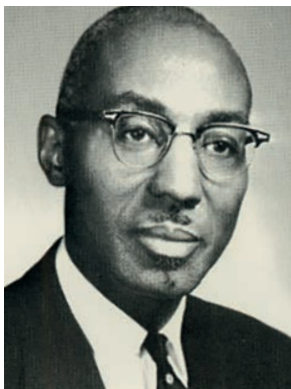
"With gratitude to God for his 13 years of service (2001-2014) as the Anne Borden and E. Hervev Evans Professor of Theology and Ethics at Union-PSCE, and now Union Presbyterian Seminary; remembering his thoughtful and collegial cooperation with colleagues; his leadership in key faculty committees over the years, and the ever-present positive spirit that he brought to institutional endeavors; and finally, celebrating his path-breaking contributions to African-American theological ethical scholarship, and his encouragement of others to pursue these paths, the Board of Trustees declares that Samuel K. Roberts be honored with the title Professor Emeritus of Theology and Ethics."



1944-2015

Highlights in History

- **1937:** Samuel Govan Stevens, first African-American to receive a post graduate degree, the Th.M., from Union Presbyterian Seminary.
- **1945:** Joseph T. Hill was awarded the Th.M.
- **1952:** Board of Trustees affirms that Presbyterian African-American applications are considered on their merits without regard to race, two years before Brown vs. Board of Education becomes law.
- **1956:** Union desegregates housing.
- **Late 1950s,** PSCE professor Wade Boggs invites an African American teenager named Arthur Ashe to play on the seminary tennis courts when the city courts were closed to him.
- **February 23, 1960:** Three students from Union – Aubrey N. Brown III (1959-61), George Conn (B.D.'62), and T. K. Morrison (1959-60) – joined Virginia Union University students on the first day of a march against segregation. Their pictures were prominently featured in a *Richmond Times Dispatch* story on March 6 and subsequently picked up by the Associated Press.
- **1961:** Isaac Crosby was the first African-American to earn the B.D. (predecessor to the M.Div.) degree from Union.
- **March 15, 1964:** 300 people in Richmond marched from Virginia Union University to the state capital in support of the Voting Rights Act and in sympathy for the murders in Selma during the march the previous week. One of the leaders was Dan West (B.D.'65) of Dallas, TX, a white Presbyterian student at Union. Every faculty member, except two, and most of the student body participated.
- **March 21, 1964:** Professor James Mays together with three students – John D. Turner (B.D.'65; Th.M.'66), Dan West (B.D.'65), and Louis Weeks (B.D.'67) – joined the march from Selma to Montgomery, AL, protected by 2,000 soldiers, 1900 federalized Alabama National Guard troops, as well as scores of FBI agents and Federal Marshals.
- **1973:** James D. Roberts was the first African-American instructor at Union.
- **2007:** Brian K. Blount becomes first African-American president of Union Presbyterian Seminary, and of any Presbyterian seminary.

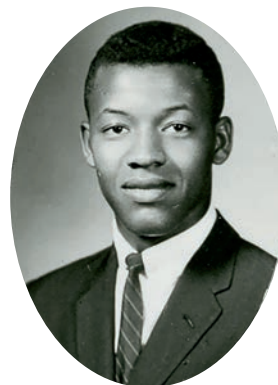


Samuel Govan Stevens
Th.M.'37

Photo courtesy of Lincoln University



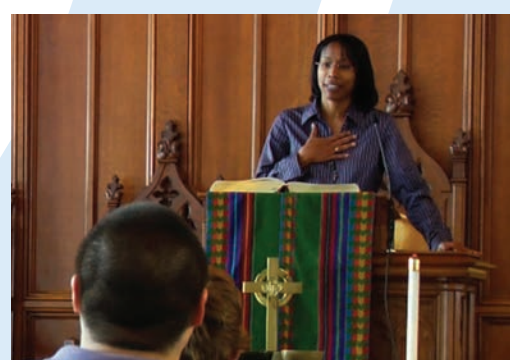
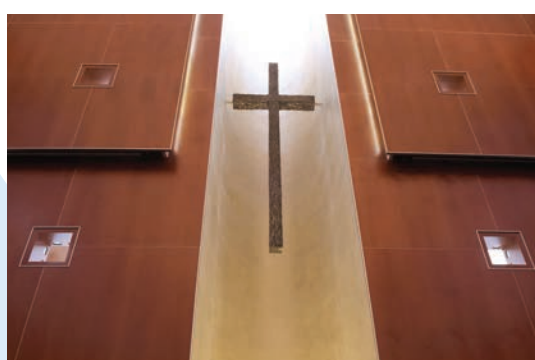
Joseph T. Hill
Th.M.'45



Isaac Crosby
B.D.'61



James D. Roberts
First African-American
instructor



Plan for the Future Church.



Be a part of the future of the church by supporting our mission. A thoughtful planned gift to Union Presbyterian Seminary will ensure the future of theological education. Union Presbyterian Seminary can and will help form that future through our nurturing of candidates for ministry.

Whether you want to support the seminary today or design a plan that benefits us after you're gone, we will help you find a method that is right for you. Discover the many ways to make a gift at www.upsem.edu/giving/.

For additional information regarding opportunities to support Union Presbyterian Seminary, please contact **Bernie Howell**, legacy@upsem.edu, (804)278-4243 or (800)229-2990 x243.



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Dr. Mercy Amba Ewudziwa Oduyoye, the former deputy general secretary of the World Council of Churches (1987-1994) and initiator of the Circle of African Women Theologians, engaged participants at the symposium entitled “The African Experience of God through the eyes of an Akan Woman,” sponsored by the Squaring the Womanist Circle! project at Union Presbyterian Seminary.



INSIDE THIS ISSUE —

- *Alums remember their seminary years*
- *Where are they now?*
- *Professor Katie Cannon explains Womanist Theology*