United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities celebrates 50 years of leadership in progressive Christianity

On September 17, 1962, the day United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cites held its first classes, sheriffs and police converged on the University of Mississippi campus to block the entrance of James Meredith, the first black student to be enrolled. Founded in this cauldron of the 1960s, United is celebrating 50 years of leadership in social justice, racial and gender equality, and religion and the arts. It has become the Upper Midwest's leading progressive seminary.

An evening of music and art on Nov. 11 will launch the yearlong celebration. Singer-songwriter and alum Leslie Ball has invited Kevin Kling, Simone Perrin, and other friends to share their songs and stories of the last five decades. An exhibit entitled "Seeing the Common Good: Artists Creating for Social Change" will showcase the prophetic work of distinguished Twin Cities visual artists.

The 180-student seminary in New Brighton, Minn., was founded by the United Church of Christ with an ecumenical mission. Students—Protestants, Unitarians, Roman Catholics, and non-Christians—enjoy an internationally acclaimed faculty and a hospitable community that welcomes all questions and all people. Two Jewish rabbis have enrolled and a Muslim woman pursued a Masters.

The new seminary merged two smaller institutions, Mission House Seminary in Plymouth, Wis., and Yankton School of Theology in Yankton, S.D., to create a larger presence in theological education. The Twin Cities was chosen for its strong United Church of Christ churches and educational institutions.

United's birth as the Upper Midwest's first ecumenical seminary was an exciting moment in Protestantism, said Wilson Yates, who joined the faculty in 1967 and served as president from 1996 to 2005. "From its very beginnings, United created a curriculum that welcomed people of other denominations. Its mission was to forge a theology of outreach."

That tradition of outreach extended to groups of people who struggled for equality—the poor, African-Americans, Native Americans, gays, lesbians, and transgender persons. Fifty years later, United is still known for its inclusive community and its approach to a Christian theological education grounded in the world. The most recent example: the Center for Public Ministry was founded in 2010 to equip church
leaders to be a force for social justice.

"United has been a prophetic voice, engaged in areas of conflict," Yates said. "I look out over the Upper Midwest and see our students—both ordained and lay people—making a difference."

Among United's many distinguished graduates are Peg Chemberlin, executive director and president of the National Council of Churches; Craig Wright, playwright, and television producer and writer, in particular for the television series *Six Feet Under*; United Methodist leader Kathi Austin Mahle; Presbyterian minister and philanthropist Molly Bigelow McMillan; and Gary Reierson, president of the Greater Minneapolis Council of Churches.

Reierson said, “What United gave me was a superb theological education, a passion for social justice, and a deeper understanding of how the church can be a transformative power for good in society.”

United offers graduate degrees, certificates, and diplomas for those exploring theological education and off-campus short courses through the Academy for Vital Christianity. For information on admissions, contact Glen Herrington-Hall at 651.641.1832. For information on 50th anniversary events, call 651.255.6138 or visit the Web site at www.unitedseminary.edu/events.

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United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities is an ecumenical graduate theological school of the United Church of Christ. As a Christian seminary our mission is:

- to prepare women and men for effective ordained and lay leadership in church and society;
- to pursue theological inquiry and shape theological understanding;
- to serve as a sustaining resource for religious leaders; and
- to foster spiritual formation and ethical development.