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Sharon & Brook

CONNECTING THE UNION PRESBYTERIAN SEMINARY COMMUNITY

ISSUE 6 / SUMMER 2020



“The faculty is working in wondrous ways... Students have also risen to the challenge.”

— PRESIDENT BRIAN BLOUNT

Dr. Rebecca Davis, Associate Professor of Christian Education, Charlotte Campus, teaching class on Zoom

We Are Part of a Broader Community

Union Presbyterian President Brian Blount expresses appreciation for faculty, students, staff, and alumni during the time of the coronavirus pandemic. He acknowledges the pain and offers the comfort of scripture when he reads from 2 Chronicles: “We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you.”

When asked to share how Union Presbyterian Seminary has been faring during the COVID-19 pandemic, President Brian Blount instantly expresses his admiration and appreciation for the Seminary’s faculty. “I start with that,” he says.

“I reflect on this experience we are all going through and so much that is out of our control, and I am so grateful for the each of them,” Blount explains. “They have shown remarkable energy, patience, and grace. The school operates based on the ability and drive of the faculty. It’s where everything begins and ends. The faculty is working in wondrous ways.”

Students have also risen to the challenge. “There is a tremendous spirit about them,” says Blount. He notes that attendance on Zoom video classes has been very good on both the Richmond and Charlotte campuses.

As far as how he himself is doing, he responds, “I’m doing well.” But he still has concerns.

“A friend of mine said recently that another title for a school president should be ‘Chief Anxiety Officer,’ and I am anxious for the Seminary. I particularly think about those who are graduating this year and will not have a graduation ceremony. This is an important moment in their lives. People have worries about their futures, about their finances. I worry about that.”

“It’s been wonderful hearing from alums and friends who ask how students are doing and how faculty are doing,” he continues. “That’s given me a sense that we are part of a broader community. Alums still care about what goes on at the school. They have their own churches and ministries to care for, and they’re still taking a moment to pray about the Seminary.”

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Seminary Students Share their Stories of Life and Study During the Coronavirus Pandemic

QUICK PIVOT TO REMOTE LEARNING

“Nothing I’ve Experienced Has Been Comparable to This”

Jayne Babczak did not know that the first week of March would be the last time she would sit in a classroom at Union Presbyterian Seminary. She did not know that she would not have a chance to say goodbye to fellow students and professors in person at the end of her final spring semester. The coronavirus pandemic changed everything dramatically.

In mid-March, in response to COVID-19, the Seminary moved all of its activities online, including graduation. Babczak recently received her dual degree, Master of Divinity and Master of Arts in Christian Education.

“Everything was turned upside down,” Babczak says from her campus apartment. “It was so unexpected. I’m a visual learner, and I learn from in-person discussions, so transitioning to online was not something I would have chosen. But we adjusted.”

She credits faculty members with a quick pivot to remote learning, singling out Dr. Frances Taylor Gench, professor of Biblical Interpretation, for retooling her two-hour weekly Women in the Biblical World class for online instruction.

Using the VoiceThread website, which was designed to “fill the social presence gap” common to online learning, Dr. Gench uploaded slides and recorded short videos and audio recordings and memos for her classes. “We uploaded videos of ourselves and watched other classmates’ videos,” says Babczak, “and we could answer questions and respond to images in the slides. Dr. Gench did as much as possible to recreate the class experience.”

Still, it was often lonely and isolating. “It felt awkward to be doing everything alone,” Babczak says. “Nothing I’ve experienced has been comparable to this. I always appreciated running into classmates and faculty members in Richmond Hall...and offhand conversations about class or worship. With COVID-19, those things did not happen, and they won’t happen anytime soon.”

During the time of isolation, she checked in on classmates and stayed in touch with others who planned to graduate this year. “Our community has done a great job of staying socially connected,” she adds. “Our chaplain, Mairi Renwick, has kept us spiritually connected.”

“Yes, my experience has been full of disappointment and unexpected changes. Yes, my search for a call after graduation has been affected by the pandemic. But I have a job that continues to pay me because I work from home. I do not have children of my own who are at home, and I’m not trying to figure out homeschooling. I have an apartment that I was not asked to vacate when the school moved to online instruction. I have health insurance. My family members are healthy.”

“We each face our own unique set of challenges, but I have a great amount of privilege when it comes to dealing with social distancing and pandemic response,” says Babczak. “I know this is not the same for all members of our community.”

PUSHING US OUTSIDE OF OUR COMFORT ZONES

“God Is at Work in the Midst of this Pandemic”

Jason Smith is a “second-career” pastor, having worked as an attorney for 20 years and currently pursuing a Master of Divinity at Union Presbyterian Seminary’s Charlotte campus. He lives and works in one of the most beautiful parts of the country—the mountains and hills west of Asheville, North Carolina, in Haywood County.

He is minister at two United Methodist churches that are a mere 20 minutes apart, with names as pastoral as their surroundings: Shady Grove and Piney Grove.

“The two churches were previously served by retired pastors,” Smith explains. “While those pastors clearly had far more experience and expertise than I, they would have struggled to provide the technological needs currently facing these congregations. It is more than coincidence that I was led to these churches to be present during this time.”

Now, with the coronavirus threat, church can be challenging, he says. “These are older congregations, and we try to reach out and connect. There is not a lot of technological confidence among the members, but we’ve become proficient on Zoom.”

“I have not always made the pandemic the focus of my sermon, but I have at least referenced our current situation at some point. My message has been that we can protect ourselves from this virus, but what for? We can preserve our lives, but what for? If we’re not living the Gospel, then what’s the purpose of sheltering ourselves from this virus?”

Smith, a former defense attorney and prosecutor, is also continuing his legal career with Lexipol, a national group specializing in policy development and implementation for the public service sector—law enforcement, fire, EMS, custody, and probation. In addition to his two careers and his two churches, he and his wife have two sons, ages 12 and 15. He spends time with them while he works and studies at home.

He plans to graduate in 2022, and in the time that he’s been a Seminary student, he has built relationships that he says make the online experience today much richer. “It makes the connection richer. It’s not ideal, but you get to see other students’ kids and pets, and it adds a dimension. We talk and pray together.”

“One of my Preaching and Worship classmates’ kids would always ‘Zoom-bomb’ her screen when we were in class. She was concerned, but it was cute to see how her children seemed so excited to see their mother’s friends gathered together virtually for class.”



Jason Smith’s sons celebrate his birthday while sheltering in place

Smith says Seminary faculty have been doing a great job at “trying to keep a normal routine going.” He offers kudos to Charlotte chaplain Jane Mitchell, in particular, for reaching out and coordinating Zoom communications and prayer requests.

“The Gospel message is being professed,” he says, “even on major news networks in non-religious terms. God is at work in the midst of this pandemic, and we are seeing so many both coming to know Christ in these times, but also living out the Gospel in their lives.”

“This virus has caused us to change and adapt. It has pushed us outside of our comfort zones—a reality that is expanding our witness to this world.”

GOD IS ALWAYS WITH US

2020 Graduate Appreciated “Sense of Solidarity”

As Jay Morgan headed into graduation and the awarding of his Master of Divinity degree, he was looking ahead to July and performing his duties as a multi-faith chaplain at Virginia Commonwealth University Health in downtown Richmond. He completed a 12-week Clinical Pastoral Education unit there as an intern last summer, so he would be heading in this summer with experience providing pastoral care to patients, their families, and staff.

But he knows summer 2020 will not be like summer 2019.

“There’s a lot of loneliness felt at the hospital even when we aren’t experiencing a pandemic,” Morgan says, “and the threat of the coronavirus is amplifying that sense of loneliness.”

“Chaplains want to accompany people on their worst days. They listen for clues about where people find meaning in their lives and try to witness to those things. One situation might call for spiritual or religious language, another might call for a conversation about music, another might call for silence.”

Morgan expresses his appreciation to Seminary faculty and staff for the ways they have maintained what he describes as “a real sense of solidarity,” particularly through communications from President Brian Blount.

“Even before March, there was a level of foresight and care from the leadership level,” he says. “That made us feel we were paying attention and doing what we could. This continues to be a comfort.”

But completing his studies during a time of social distancing has still been difficult. “Zoom is not as good as being with others. The place of Union and the space between us matters. And it breaks my heart that we’re graduating and we can’t be *there*.”

He is grateful that both he and his wife, Rebecca, have family in the area. Their seven-month-old puppy, Murphy, also does his part. “We’re doing fine,” Morgan says.

Looking ahead to his chaplaincy in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic, he says, “It’s scary not knowing what will happen. Unfortunately, there will be plenty of opportunities to try and accompany people on their worst days.”

“Grief is exacerbated by the need to physically separate and contain the virus, so chaplains all over are working to find new ways to connect loved



Jay and his puppy, Murphy, curl up with a good book

ones and offer pastoral care. I think it’s a good time to practice hospital chaplaincy with so much anxiety and fear in the air.”

“It’s easy to feel alone right now, and we need reminders of what gives our lives meaning,” Morgan adds. “My understanding that God is always with us and will never leave us gives my life meaning, so that’s what I’ll be trying to remember and affirm.”

PRACTICING A POSITIVE ATTITUDE AND FLEXIBILITY

Newly Minted Minister Finds “Creative Ways” for Church and Study

Wanda Altman was a full-time minister already when she graduated with her Master of Divinity from Union Presbyterian Seminary in April. The 64-year-old grandmother serves Bethlehem United Methodist Church in Pamplico, South Carolina, about a half-hour south of Florence and a three-hour drive from her Saturday classes on the Seminary’s Charlotte campus.

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought changes to her church.

“The biggest change I have noticed is, of course, that we just can’t visit like I want to. My shut-ins and elderly...I really should not go see at all. They’re older. Some are on oxygen. They definitely don’t need the additional risk of taking anything in to them.”

But she celebrates the good that is occurring.

“We’ve created a drive-in worship service in the church parking lot, with one space between every two cars. I can preach to them—and to the whole neighborhood,” she says with a laugh. “Last Sunday, we had 41 people. We sang hymns. I preached from Isaiah, about the Suffering Servant. God knows our suffering, what we’re going through—and we know what Jesus went through for us.”

“I am thankful that people are making a way to worship together, trying to find creative ways,” Altman adds. “For the first time, we’re doing a Zoom Bible study—the most recent one on Luke. When all is said and done, maybe we’ll just continue with this online approach. That will be good for our members who don’t like to go out after dark.”

Her positive attitude and flexibility extend to her appraisal of the pandemic’s effect on her own life as a Seminary student. In the past, she would leave Pamplico each Saturday for the Charlotte campus around 5:15 a.m., get home around 8:30 that night, and then preach the next day. “To tell you the truth, not driving the six-hour round trip on Saturdays has been a plus!”

She was already accustomed to hybrid classes, using online components such as Blackboard, so the switch to completely remote learning at the end of the semester was not a big deal, she says.

Altman has also added some new quarantine duties to her roster, reviewing her homebound 10- and 11-year-old grandsons’ school homework. They are currently working on math equations, she says, and they seem to be doing well.

As the semester’s end approached, she thought about what graduation would be like with no ceremony on campus. “They’re sending us our gowns and diplomas,” she says, “and at the appropriate time, we’ll put up our hoods. We’ll figure it out.”

And for this student, who attended her first undergraduate class at the age of 50 and just recently received her advanced degree, she can now say, “I am finally done.”

THOUGHTS FROM UNION FACULTY

Some Things Remained Constant... We Were Holding on to Hope

Union Presbyterian Seminary faculty were asked to consider three questions about their experience with the coronavirus pandemic this spring. These are excerpts from the answers and reflections we received.

What have you changed in your approach to teaching due to the coronavirus?

Melanie Jones, Instructor of Ethics, Theology and Culture and Director of the Katie Geneva Cannon Center for Womanist Leadership:

“I realized I could not separate our learning about social ethics from addressing COVID-19 in the classroom. Students were invited to take up ethical responses to COVID 19 as a primary case study for the final project. In many ways, our ethics class brought both the church and the world back into the center of our classroom dialogue.

Christian ethics does not start or end when times are convenient. Ethics always begins with a moral crisis. Our class had to ask the hard questions about power, vulnerability, greed, leadership, responsibility, death and life, health, and faith in the wake of a global pandemic that living generations have never seen before.”

Christine Luckritz Marquis, Associate Professor of Church History:

“I built an intentional check-in into the beginning of every class. Even though I always place student wellbeing at the forefront of my classes, by even more intentionally reflecting with them, we deepened our sense of community. Several students reflected that this time helped them re-center and actually look forward to classwork even in the midst of other pressures. I also moved a few assignments to an asynchronous model so that students could work on tasks as they were able.”

Sam Adams, Professor of Old Testament:

“I’ve tried to include as many student voices as possible. And we celebrate when children or pets enter the screen [in video classes] so we can keep our spirits high. I am particularly excited about my May term class on the Bible and film since an online format works well for this subject matter.”

John Carroll, Professor of New Testament:

“Some things remained constant, even as the forms of delivery and interaction changed. To mention just a few:

- » The students’ resolve to continue their studies, and to explore thoughtfully the biblical text’s meaning and its relevance even for times such as these;
- » The students’ persistence in showing up—yes, even on Zoom—for collegial conversation about what they have been learning and thinking; and
- » The depth of caring the students have continued to express for one another, with even greater urgency and strength in light of the disruptions and challenges so many of them have faced.”

What are the most difficult conversations you’ve had with students during this time?

Luckritz Marquis: “The hardest conversations have been when students have shared that family members, friends, or mentors have fallen ill or died, especially from COVID-19.”



Jones: “Our last face-to-face class was difficult. We were all grieving as we said our goodbyes with full awareness that this would be the last time our class would gather in a physical classroom. Some students were graduating. Some

“Our class had to ask the hard questions about power, vulnerability, greed, leadership, responsibility, death and life, health, and faith in the wake of a global pandemic that living generations have never seen before.”

international students were planning to return home abroad. Other students were planning for the summer with trepidation about whether jobs or opportunities would remain. We all felt a sense of uncertainty because we did not know what the days ahead would look like. And still we were holding on to hope.”

Carroll: “There is no question that students and their teachers have navigated unprecedented challenges. Some have been ill themselves or contended with the illness and, in two cases, the deaths of extended family members. There has been anxiousness about health, of course, and also about finances, job loss, and prospects for a ministry call—a future that now appears so uncertain.

At the same time, there has been realization that church and ministry and faith may need to look very different in the future—and beyond fear, that can inspire hope, as well. Crisis can provide an opportunity for us to imagine new possibilities for the people of God. We don’t control as many things as we may have been inclined to think, and that can summon from us deeper trust in the one who is sovereign.”

Adams: “By far, the hardest conversations have centered on the loss of daily physical community on the campus and the fact that graduation ceremonies have to occur online.”

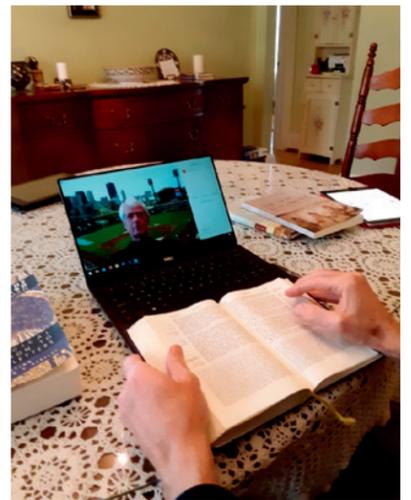
What is the one big thing you hope your students will see differently in the future?

Adams: “I hope my students—and I—will learn from this experience by exercising self-care and having a more spiritually grounded and centered approach to teaching and ministry. What I mean by that is we could all stand to slow down and be fully present with each other rather than rushing off to the next task.”

Jones: “What a privilege it is to learn together and belong to this resilient community. Theological education offers resources for students to follow their vocational calls with the necessary tools, skills, and resources for careful, insightful, and sustained engagement for such a time as this. Even when we do not know what to do, faith seeks understanding. We must continue to do the work our souls must have even when it feels like taking a stab in the dark. God does God’s best work in the dark.”

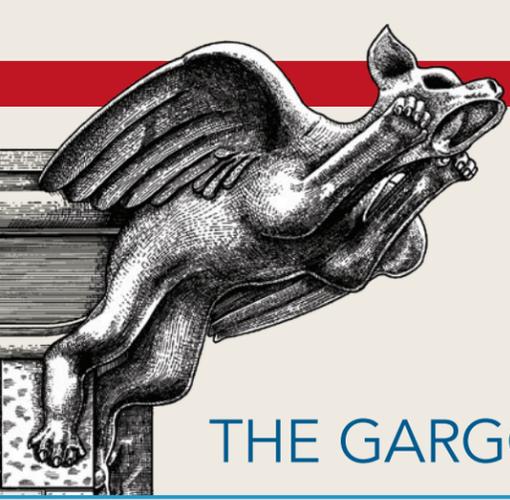
Luckritz Marquis: “I hope that when students face hardship again, or when their lives are turned upside down, they will remember the presence of the Spirit in their lives and their communities just as there is now, in our shared study and communion. I also hope they remember that there is deep wisdom in the stories of our Christian forebearers.”

Carroll: “One thing as a takeaway from this experience? The fragility of human life and love, and, with it, how crucial it is to embrace each gift—not alone, but in tenacious commitment to others and their flourishing.”



John Carroll, Professor of New Testament, teaching via Zoom

Melanie Jones, Instructor of Ethics, Theology and Culture and Director of the Katie Geneva Cannon Center for Womanist Leadership



THE GARGOYLE SPEAKS

Professor Carson Brisson

We Were Sojourners in the Land of Zoom

Most of us were new to Zoom as a class format, but it was working. There had been glitches, but no insurmountable difficulties.

I wondered when something bigger than a glitch might occur. I think some of the students wondered, too. We did not have long to wait. After it happened, I asked for and received permission to share it.

We were in open-microphone mode. On one student's Zoom screen, we saw a man emerging in the background. He was walking carefully toward the student, a retired educator who had given more than 35 of her vocational life in service to public schools. The man was balancing a plate in one hand and holding a glass in the other. The student's back was turned to him. We could see him approaching. She could not.

When the man reached the student, a dialogue unfolded:

Unidentified man with plate in one hand and glass in the other, whispering loudly enough to be heard: "Your favorite: Spaghetti! Low-sodium recipe. You know what the doc says: 'low sodium.' Low sodium for you and low sodium for me!"

Being fairly new to Zoom, I was caught completely off guard. I didn't know what to do. I hoped our classmate might mute her microphone or block her video, or both. She did neither. For my part, I froze.

The exchange continued:

Retired educator, looking up from her screen in surprise and with a smile, also whispering: "No, no, Love. Not now. It looks delicious, and thank you for making it low sodium, but I don't think this teacher likes us eating during class."

I was a bit surprised. I racked my brain. I could not remember a "no-eating-during-class" clause in the syllabus. Had I said something about not eating during a previous class session?

Retired educator, still whispering: "Take it away, Love. I'll eat after class."

Man called "Love," now speaking slightly above a whisper: "But it will get cold."

Retired educator, whispering back: "Then we'll warm it up. It will be delicious. I shouldn't eat during this class. This teacher doesn't like it."

Man called "Love," not quite whispering any longer, staring at the plate—a hint of hurt in his voice: "But it's not so good warmed over. The noodles

don't come back right. And it's low sodium. It's your favorite. It's *our* favorite."

Awkward moments of silence...

Man called "Love," now speaking a bit louder, glancing at the Zoom screen between sentences: "This teacher who won't let you eat—he's not the brightest balloon in the parade, is he? Where'd they find him? Is it a he? He thinks Jesus didn't eat? Jesus ate. He ate with everybody. And he could cook, too. And his buddies ate. Oh, yeah. They ate. Jesus even fed people. Sometimes he fed them while he was teaching!"

I had never been compared favorably to Jesus, but I couldn't think of many times when I had been so completely unfavorably compared to him. And, more importantly, we were now way off course—way, way off course. It had taken mere seconds—and one plate of spaghetti.

I hoped all of our internet connections might suddenly glitch for a minute or two. They didn't. The internet never seems to fail when you want it to.

The man turned and began to walk away—spaghetti in hand, so to speak. The student looked at her screen, cast a glance around at "Love" slowly retreating in the background, looked back at her screen, and then clicked the video and audio off.

The Zoom Chat feature lit up. A debate was in full swing. It was not about the subject of the class.

Mercifully, a private Chat note addressed to me quickly caught my eye: "Carson, maybe a good time for a short break? And you might want to encourage us to get a snack? That might reset the moment, and that's probably what we all need, including you?" It was framed as a question. I interpreted it as divine intervention.

I declared a 10-minute break. I then immediately amended it to 15 minutes. I mentioned that maybe that would be time enough for a snack if anyone felt so inclined. The "thumbs up" icon popped up from more than a few students.

A final Chat entry then appeared: "Teacher, do you require low-sodium snacks during breaks? Anything about that in our syllabus?"

I decided not to respond until after I had returned from the kitchen.

AN EXCEPTIONAL SCHOLAR

Dr. Samuel E. Balentine Retires

Dr. Samuel E. Balentine, Professor of Old Testament and Director of Graduate Studies for Union Presbyterian Seminary, Richmond, will retire in June 2020. He has served at Union Presbyterian Seminary since 2004.

Balentine has authored numerous books, including *The Torah's Vision of Worship* (Fortress Press, 1999), a renowned commentary on Job for the Smyth and Helwys Bible Commentary series (2006), and *Have You Considered My Servant Job? Understanding the Biblical Archetype of Patience* (University of South Carolina Press, 2015). He has been a member of the editorial board for *The New Interpreter's Bible* and currently serves as the general editor of the Smyth and Helwys Bible Commentary series; series editor of *Interpretation: Resources for the Use of Scripture in the Church*; and editor-in-chief of the *Oxford Handbook on Ritual and Theology* (forthcoming).

"Sam Balentine is an exceptional scholar and one of the most gifted lecturers I have been privileged to know," says Samuel L. Adams, Mary Jane and John F. McNair Chair of Biblical Studies and Professor of Old Testament. "He is attentive to detail and does very interesting interdisciplinary work. I have learned much from him about how to interpret the Bible and engage in effective teaching."

Dr. Samuel E. Balentine, Professor of Old Testament and Director of Graduate Studies Emeritus





GREETINGS

W. Clay Macaulay

Grace and peace to you in this season before us!

And what a season it has been, as our nation and world have sheltered in place when possible, learned to practice social distancing as a common endeavor, and joined with others virtually via videoconferencing for meetings, “gatherings” with family and friends, and worship on an almost daily and weekly basis!

And that is exactly what we did for the 2020 Sprunt Lectures, in this historic year of renewed understanding of global community in the midst of the novel coronavirus pandemic. More than 300 alumni, friends, students, faculty, and staff registered and attended all or part of our Virtual Sprunt Lectures May 5–6, 2020, via Zoom webinar. Some of the screen shots taken throughout the event are included here.

Dr. Allan Cole, Professor and Senior Associate Dean for Academic Affairs at The University of Texas, Austin; Dr. Evelyn Parker, Professor of Practical Theology at Perkins School of Theology, SMU, Dallas; and Dr. Gene Roehlekepartain, Vice President of Research and Development at Search Institute – Minneapolis spoke on the theme “Faith Formation with children, youth, and young adults in a multi-religious world.” They also participated in a panel discussion moderated by Dr. Karen-Marie Yust, Professor of Christian Education for UPSem.

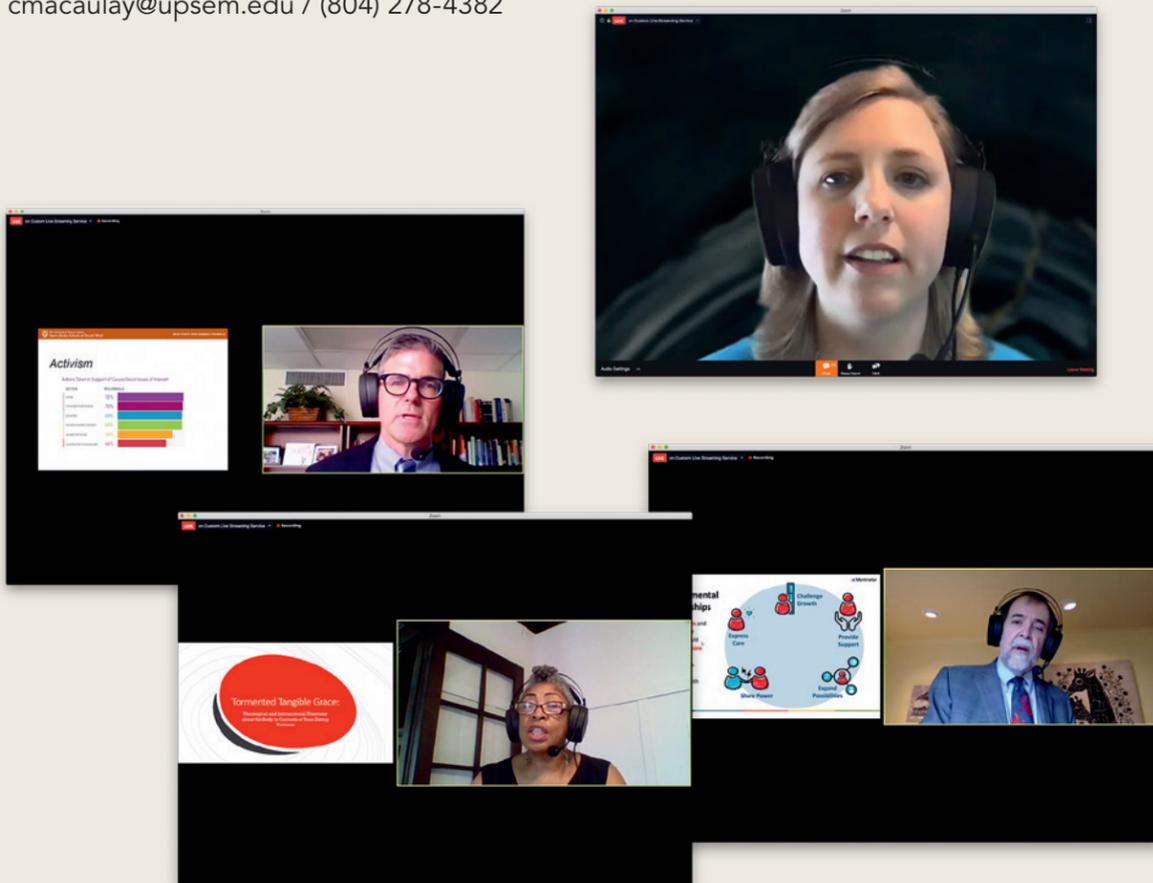
Preaching in our service of worship was Rev. Jessica E. Tate (M.Div., M.A.C.E. '07), Director of NEXT Church. Rev. Amantha Barbee (M.Div.'11), Senior Pastor for Oakhurst Presbyterian Church in Decatur, Georgia; Hannah Garrity, a sacred visual artist based in Richmond; and Doug Brown, Adjunct Instructor of Music at UPSem-Richmond, also served as worship leaders.

It was a Sprunt Lecture series for the books that most of us will long remember!

We encourage you to send news of your life and ministry to Alumni Associate Nicole Smith at alumni@upsem.edu. We love hearing from you! Also, check out our alumni web page at www.upsem/alumni

Plan to join us for the Sprunt Lectures next May 3–5, 2021, here in Richmond. Perhaps the event will be offered online, as well. I sure hope so!

W. Clay Macaulay (D.Min.'85),
Director of Alumni Development
cmacaulay@upsem.edu / (804) 278-4382



Sprunt Worship (upper right) was led by Rev. Jessica E. Tate (pictured), Amantha Barbee, Hannah Garrity and Doug Brown. The lectures (upper left to lower right) by Dr. Allan Cole, Dr. Evelyn Parker and Dr. Gene Roehlekepartain were attended online by a record number.

Alumni Notes

TRANSITIONS

Jennifer M. “Jenny” McDevitt (M.Div.'09) has been called as Pastor-Head of Staff of Shandon Presbyterian Church in Columbia, SC. Her first Sunday was May 17, 2020.

Robert S. “Bob” Osborne (M.Div.'86, D.Min.'03) was honorably retired as Pastor of Berkeley Springs Presbyterian Church, Berkeley Springs, WV, as of July 7, 2019.

W. Rush Otey (D.Min.'73) was honorably retired as Co-Pastor of Selwyn Avenue Presbyterian Church in Charlotte, NC, as of March 15, 2020.

IN MEMORIAM

Carolyn W. Arbuckle (M.C.E.'66)
April 9, 2020

Joellyn S. “Jo” Blandford (M.A.'88)
February 4, 2020

Sheila Kennedy Burns Cordle (PSCE'62)
March 27, 2020

Hugh F. Halverstadt (M.Div.'63)
April 14, 2020

Cora Jean Hubbard (M.C.E.'63)
December 17, 2019

Ruth “Kamuanya” Metzler (B.R.E.'54)
March 21, 2020

Marilyn J. “Lyn” Sutterlin (B.C.E.'67)
March 11, 2020

Jane M. Towner (widow of former
UTS professor Dr. W. Sibley Towner)
February 24, 2020

George Conrad Wilson (D.Min.'83)
March 26, 2020

Louise Maxwell “Coffee” Worth (B.R.E.'44)
March 25, 2020

CELEBRATIONS

Sam Bush (first-year M.Div. student, Richmond) and his wife, Maddy, welcomed a son, Elliott Jonathan Bush, on February 17, 2020.

D. Todd Davidson (M.Div.'11) was installed as Associate Pastor of West End Presbyterian Church, West End, NC, on March 8, 2020.

Linda M. Kurtz (M.Div., M.A.C.E. '19) and Daniel H. Burch (M.Div.'16, Th.M.'17) were married on March 26, 2020, at Smith Mountain Lake, VA.

Rev. Christopher Tweel (M.Div.'14) was installed as Pastor-Head of Staff for Three Chopt Presbyterian Church in Richmond on March 1, 2020.

This list reflects notes received by the Alumni Office as of April 23, 2020.

MORE ONLINE For a complete and updated list of transitions, retirements, in memoriam, and publications of our UPSem alums, visit:



bit.ly/UPSem-Alumni-Notes

2020 CHARLOTTE COMMENCEMENT

Zooming to the Future

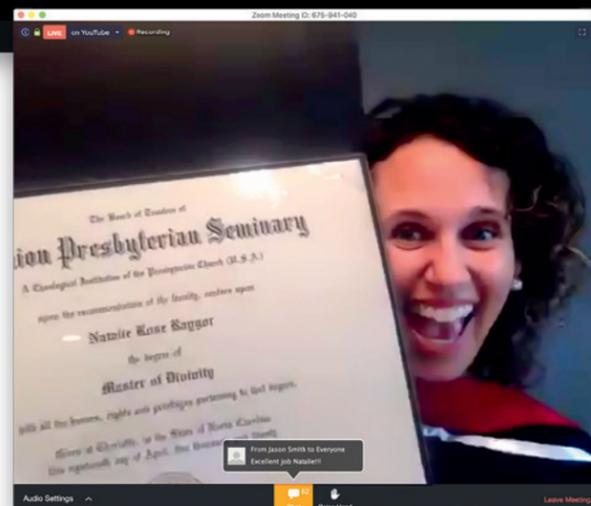
The glow of monitors replaced the flickering of altar candles as Union Presbyterian Seminary's Charlotte commencement exercises took place online on April 18. Nine master's degree students gathered around their individual home computers to join Seminary faculty, administrators, and ceremony preacher Rev. Dr. Jerry Cannon from C.N. Jenkins Memorial Presbyterian Church.

Many others shared in the celebration by watching the event take place in the virtual space. Yet the space created that day was not just a virtual space. It was also a sacred space—space set aside for a holy moment marking the end of years of dedicated study and earnest answers to faithful calls, while also reflecting on the adaptability required to minister into tomorrow.

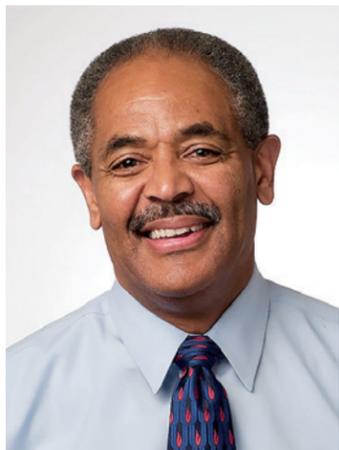
Echoing this sentiment, Marcy Doak, M.Div.'20, said, "Graduating from seminary in an online format was not at all what I anticipated to mark this milestone; however, I think it was a reflection of the often unplanned nature of ministry." While it was not what was originally wanted, the day became exactly what was needed.

"To be honest, I was pretty sad about the loss of the traditional graduation, but what a week full of surprises! I received packages with items carefully chosen by UPSEM staff to make the day brighter. Then, when graduation day arrived, the ceremony was beautiful."

— CAROL SCHIERLMANN, M.A.C.E.'20



Natalie Raygor receives her Master of Divinity



President Brian K. Blount

A Broader Community *continued from page 1*

"Personally, I've been blessed that my daughter Kaylin is here with Sharon and me. We take walks on the campus. We even flew a kite. But it's hard not seeing people, not having conversations, and seeing people only at a distance."

Asked about events in the Seminary's history that might compare to current ones, he recalls the recession of 2008, during his second year as president. "That, too, was very painful, and it affected us significantly—with layoffs and reductions not only in faculty, but in the size of the

student body. The adjustments we made then have helped us deal with this current crisis. But it was painful. Difficult. Emotional."

"There's not a lot of silver lining in this current situation, but I do think we can be hopeful and perhaps see some opportunities," he says. "For

example, we are moving faster with thinking about technology. That is part of our strategic plan. It's just sooner than we wanted."

Blount thinks about a message from the book of Revelation that he preached about recently and paired with Luke's account of Jesus' birth—a message that we are not alone during times of struggle and we should not be afraid.

He shares an Old Testament passage that comes to his mind during this time: 2 Chronicles 20:12. "...For we have no power to face this vast army that is attacking us. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you."

He also cites John 11:40, a passage he preached on in his 2008 inauguration sermon: "Then Jesus said, 'Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?'"

"These are the passages I meditate on," Blount says. "This experience takes an emotional toll—a spiritual toll—but I like to look at the hopeful possibilities."

Sharon&Brook

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Editors

Richard Wong, *Vice President of Advancement*
Michael Frontiero, *Director of Communications*
Clay Macaulay, *Director of Alumni Development*
Tim Moore, *Director of Donor Relations*

Copywriter Joe Slay

Copy Editor Susan Stewart

Designer Edith Ridderhof

Richmond Campus:

3401 Brook Road, Richmond, VA 23227
(800) 229-2990

Charlotte Campus:

5141 Sharon Road, Charlotte, NC 28210
(980) 636-1700

www.upsem.edu

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RICHMOND CAMPUS

3401 Brook Road, Richmond, VA 23227 / admissions@upsem.edu

CHARLOTTE CAMPUS

5141 Sharon Road, Charlotte, NC 28210 / Rev. Lisa McLennan (M.Div.'14) / lmclennan@upsem.edu