



For the Church in the World

Office of the President
Jacqueline E. Lapsley, President

Board of Trustees
Christopher H. Edmonston, Chair
Mindy L. Douglas, Vice Chair
Lori Archer Raible, Secretary

July 9, 2025

Dear Alumni and Friends of Union Presbyterian Seminary,

In Paul's first letter to the church in Corinth, he told the community, "If all were a single member, where would the body be? ... If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it" (1 Corinthians 12:19, 26). You are an integral member of our beloved community, whether you studied with us or love someone who did. Your dedication to Jesus Christ and furthering God's mission echoes in your steadfast support of Union Presbyterian Seminary, and we are humbled by your generosity. With humility and in the hope of moving forward in unity, we write to you to share our vision for the future of the Seminary as valued members of this beloved community.

Updates to Academic Programs: Calendar, Curricula, and Modality

In April 2025, the board agreed upon a **strategic academic initiative to transition the educational teaching modality** on the Richmond campus to a hybrid format that is partially in-person and partially online beginning in the 2026–27 academic year. This was followed by two key decisions made by our Faculty. In August 2024, the Faculty initiated a **process of curriculum revision**, and in May 2025, the Faculty moved to **unify the academic calendar**, shared by both the Charlotte and Richmond campuses, and advance a new curriculum through a consensus decision-making process built around a common core for the three basic professional degrees: the Master of Arts in Christian Education, Master of Divinity, and Master of Arts in Public Theology. The common core and calendar increase the possibility for faculty collaboration and student access to courses offered by faculty on both campuses.

On April 28, 2025, the transition concerning educational modalities on the Richmond campus was first announced internally to students and staff. On June 2, following commencement exercises in Richmond, an update on all three educational changes was shared externally to the Seminary's full email mailing list (including students, alumni, current and former staff and faculty, trustees, donors, and friends). The Seminary added a "Frequently Asked Questions" page to our website to provide more details about these decisions.

We intended to clearly communicate these changes to the entire Union Presbyterian Seminary community. We fell short, and we apologize. We are aware that some of our friends and alumni did not receive this news due to issues with our email distribution system, which we are working to resolve. Two things stand out in the feedback we have received: the reasons behind these decisions remain unclear to many, and many members of our community are grieving the loss of Richmond as a full-time residential campus.

Therefore, it is our hope to first and foremost acknowledge the grief that comes with this kind of change: it is real, and we honor it. Secondly, we would like to provide some context and rationale for the academic program decisions that were made. Finally, we invite you to join us to learn more at regional gatherings and online events planned in the coming weeks. As board officers, alumni, and stewards of Union Presbyterian Seminary – shaped by this institution’s educational rigor, exceptional faculty, and commitment to embodied pastoral formation – we deeply value our experiences on the Richmond (Christopher and Mindy) and Charlotte (Lori) campuses. Together with our president (Jacq), we write to address four key issues that have emerged.

Mission-Driven Decision-Making

We have heard concerns that the decision to transition to hybrid education is financially driven. At the April board meeting, we confirmed our healthy endowment and our commitment to offering robust student aid. This decision is not cost-motivated; indeed, the initial shift to hybrid education requires a significant investment in technology to meet our standards of excellence. This decision was not made quickly and is an outcome of our strategic planning process. In October 2023, the Board invited alumni and friends to share feedback on inter-campus access and the importance of maintaining strong formation experiences. These voices guided our discernment process, and the decision to transition modalities at Richmond is driven by our call to fulfill Union Presbyterian Seminary’s mission in a time of significant change in the church and culture. Our strategic plan directs us to welcome a variety of students, pastors, and practitioners to experience learning in accessible, affordable, and embodied ways. This strategic shift will ensure that the Seminary remains capable of providing high-quality theological education for leaders, and that neither distance nor financial constraints will be an obstacle to a Union Presbyterian Seminary education.

Distinctive Hybrid Modalities

Richmond’s education model will remain distinctive. In Charlotte, students typically meet in person once a month for classes on a Saturday. While this model works wonderfully for many, an implementation team composed of faculty and staff will explore new models for a unique Richmond hybrid education that meets the need for less frequent travel, backed by low-cost campus lodging. This will better serve students who are looking for different rhythms of formation and flexibility. By leveraging Richmond’s robust facilities and residential capacity, our distinctive Richmond model will adapt to a changing world where community engagement can be deepened and where formation happens beyond traditional boundaries. This tailored approach underscores the Seminary’s commitment to meeting people where they are – no matter their socioeconomic status – and equipping leaders without distance or access barriers.

Renewed Vision for Richmond Campus

Our Richmond campus is the site of cherished traditions – Calvin Ball, studying in Morton Library, walking the quad with classmates, crossing “the Brook,” and making memories on this sacred ground. In 1995, the majority of Union Theological Seminary’s 235 students and PSCE’s 174 students lived on the Richmond campus. This fall, we anticipate that approximately 30 students will live on campus. God is still calling people to ministry, and interest in hybrid education has surged. The Richmond campus will become a year-round hub of embodied Christian education, welcoming students, pastors, and neighbors for critical conversations, worship, and learning throughout the year. With investments in campus lodging and facilities, the Richmond campus is now more accessible to our community than ever before.

Brian K. Blount Hall at Westminster: Continuing Purpose and Vision

Shifting degree program modalities does not affect the vision or purpose of Blount Hall. Instead, we are called to make a greater investment in our Richmond facilities to meet the needs of theological education in the 21st century. As planned, the William R. Klein Center at Blount Hall will house the Leadership Institute, host programs for non-degree learners, and provide first-rate lodging. The Peggy and Heath Rada Plaza will welcome diverse leaders to campus for theological engagement, supported by other campus assets like the Morton Library, Watts and Lake Chapels, and the Holderness Dining Room. When fully funded, Blount Hall will embody the direction our campus is moving in for continuing education.

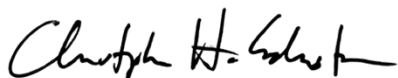
An Invitation

Theological education is in a time of transition. As the changing church influenced our decision, evolving patterns in theological education informed us as well. According to the Association of Theological Schools, over the last 11 years, out of 279 institutions, 50 mergers, closures, and accreditation withdrawals have occurred. Other schools are prioritizing strategic decisions to serve the changing church and culture.

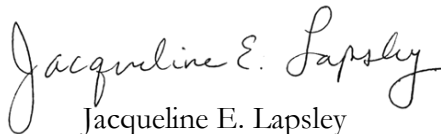
At Union Presbyterian Seminary, we are deeply committed to our 173 students across both campuses – 77 on the Richmond campus and 96 on the Charlotte campus. Rest assured, we aren't changing the quality of what we offer; we are changing how we offer it. When paired with Union Presbyterian Seminary's generous financial aid, we will continue to reach those whom God is calling. By ensuring our degree programs are more accessible to more students without compromising our long-standing commitment to academic excellence and authentic community, we can fulfill our mission in new ways.

We are deeply grateful for your love and expressions of abiding care for Union Presbyterian Seminary. Your voices make us stronger, and we invite you to join this conversation at one of our community convenings listed below. For over 213 years, the Seminary has been faithful to God in Jesus Christ in preparing people to become leaders of Christ's church. We look forward to continuing that legacy. This change is hard. Lament matters. We believe God is calling us to a faithful path forward. As one body, we will continue that legacy with hope and courage. Without each of you, "where would the body be?"

For the Church in the World,



Christopher H. Edmonston
M.Div. '99, Richmond campus
Chair, Board of Trustees



Jacqueline E. Lapsley
President of Union Presbyterian Seminary
Professor of Old Testament



Mindy Douglas
M.Div. '95, Richmond campus
Vice Chair, Board of Trustees



Lori Archer Raible
M.Div. '06, D.Min. '24, Charlotte campus
Secretary, Board of Trustees

Convenings

Registration is not required, but it is appreciated. A board officer and our president will be present at each of these meetings to provide further insight about these changes.

August 6, 2025, at 2:00 p.m. (ET) | Lake Chapel, Richmond Campus
3401 Brook Road, Richmond, VA

August 7, 2025, at 2:00 p.m. (ET) | First Presbyterian Church, Durham
305 E. Main Street, Durham, NC

August 11, 2025, at 10:00 a.m. (ET) | Black Mountain Presbyterian Church
117 Montreat Road, Black Mountain, NC

September 4, 2025, at 9:30 a.m. (ET) | Second Presbyterian Church
214 Mountain Avenue SW, Roanoke, VA

September 5, 2025, at 2:00 p.m. (ET) | Selwyn Avenue Presbyterian Church
2929 Selwyn Avenue, Charlotte, NC

September 8, 2025, at 5:00 p.m. (ET) | Online via Zoom

Register online at bit.ly/UPSemConvening, email convening@upsem.edu, or call (804) 503-0328. To review the Strategic Plan, visit bit.ly/UPSemStrategicPlan or email us at convening@upsem.edu to request a copy.