

Truth among us

Allie Lundblad

Pastor,
Christian Church
of Arlington Heights,
Illinois

Monday, October 2, 2023
Opening Chapel Service
Matthew 21:23-32

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Allie Lundblad examines the gap between the truth we strive for and the truth we live out.

If I had to give it a percentage, I'd say that I got things about 56.73% right in my senior ministry project presentation in spring 2015.

I'd spent the year examining the way theologians articulated the relationship between justice and love in order to find the configuration that might help us do something to rid the United States of white supremacy and the violence it causes. Something like that, anyway.

I honestly can't remember what I wrote or how I answered when a woman in attendance raised her hand and asked me directly what my point was. What I do remember was deciding that night not to apply to PhD programs but to be a pastor.

As I stood looking at the variety of people gathered there, it struck me: Here in academia, we spend a lot of energy trying to get our thoughts just right but, even if I had the exact right theological configuration of justice and love, there was no way I was going to get this group of people to think the same way about it. There was even less of a chance that they would then go and do what I thought they ought to do.

That's what I got half right, maybe a little more. After seven years as a pastor, I am even more certain of the impossibility of

convincing a group of people to think about things in the way I think they should.

What I got wrong was what the things we do here are about, all this thinking and writing and reading—what it does or could do, if we let it. I was wrong about the possibilities that exist in this place, even in this room.

It does not take much looking around our world to see that there is, at the very least, some static between the truth we strive for and the truth we live out. Maybe something broken.

Even in the church, in this group of people who are committed to the idea that Jesus spoke truth, we don't seem to be able to agree on what that truth means or how to live it out.

In *White Too Long*, Robert P. Jones looks at data showing that white Christians in the United States actually hold more white supremacist attitudes, more racist viewpoints (according to several different measures),

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1156 East 57th St.
Chicago, Illinois 60637

773.643.4411
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Welcome back

A letter from the dean reflects on returning after sabbatical to begin a new academic year.

Let me begin with heartfelt thanks for the sabbatical leave which I enjoyed last year, to the Board of Trustees and Divinity School Dean Jim Robinson for making it possible, and to Administrator Daette Lambert and the staff who cared for and led DDH's life and work during my absence.

The Autumn quarter began on September 26, as I was dragging one foot behind in sabbatical-land. The buzzer at DDH sounded, and Jack Veatch went to answer the door. "It's for you," he said. A lovely bouquet of autumn flowers had been delivered. "Welcome back to your very old House—and to old and new scholars. In anticipation of a triumphant year," the card read. I turned it over: "Love, Mary and Bill and John Pearson." What a glorious beginning for the year, just as their wonderful gift in memory of Sam Pearson had crowned the previous spring.

Old and new scholars had gathered around tables in the backyard the night before. Many had lingered in conversation long into the beautiful evening. Allie Lundblad spoke at the opening chapel service the next Monday,

which marked the formal beginning of weekly dinners and programs.

Since the pandemic, dinner has been catered from local eateries and served in the Common Room. Which leads me to the *very old House* part of Mary's note. Improvements will soon ensure adequate ventilation in the basement dining room as well as provide environmentally responsible ways of relieving heat that builds up in the kitchen. The commercial gas stoves will be replaced with induction stoves, the stove hood downsized, and new ductwork and an air handler installed.

Or maybe Mary wasn't thinking quite so literally. This *very old House* is not only a physical building, but also a ganglion of living connections. Those connections are palpable when alums and friends gather, as they did this summer at the General Assembly in Louisville, Kentucky. Around ninety individuals greeted each other, honored Cynthia Lindner, and heard her Distinguished Alumna address, which you can read in these pages.

I am glad to be back at this old House with its scholars, old and new—and, through these pages, also to welcome you to the new academic year.

With gratitude, Kristine A. Culp, *Dean*



2023–24 Disciples Divinity House community



2023–24 DISCIPLES HOUSE SCHOLARS

FROM LEFT Nate Travis, Kylie Winger, Delaney Beh, Tristan Spangler-Dunning, and Kevin Poe

Nate Travis, a second-year MDiv student and returning DDH resident, is the new president of the House Council. He is a 2022 *summa cum laude* graduate of Western Carolina University (BS Mathematics; BA Philosophy). He is a special ecumenical recipient of the *W.B. Blakemore Scholarship* to recognize his commitment to welcome in the church and his interest in Disciples' connections with American pragmatism.

Kylie Winger, a second-year MDiv student and returning DDH resident, is a new Disciples Scholar and the *M. Elizabeth Dey Scholar*. She is also the Head Resident. Initial connections through the Christian Church of Arlington Heights led her to DDH; subsequently, she discovered family roots in the Disciples. She was Valedictorian of her 2019 class at Middlebury College, where she majored in Literary Studies. She taught English in Japan for three years after college.

BELOW Nate Travis, Morganne Talley, Kylie Winger, and Kate Myers



Returning Scholars

Rachel Abdoler is writing her PhD dissertation on *Kitāb al-Tashih*, a thirteenth-century Coptic author's interpretation of the passion of Christ, and its background of Arabic Christian and Islamic writing. She is a MDiv alumna and the recipient of the *Barbara and Clark Williamson Scholarship*.

Preparing to lead

Students who enter the Disciples Divinity House receive substantive financial and educational support to prepare for innovative leadership, scholarship, and ministry. Thirteen have been named Disciples Divinity House Scholars for 2023–24.



Disciples Scholars commence a lifetime of service and connection, in addition to beginning MDiv, MA, or PhD degree programs at the University of Chicago Divinity School. They receive full tuition, free housing, and stipendiary awards that allow for immersive preparation. Several scholarships honor individuals and extend legacies of thought and action. A recent gift of unrestricted endowment funds that remembers alumnus Samuel C. Pearson has allowed for increased support.

New Scholars

First-year MDiv student and aspiring chaplain, **Delaney Beh**, has been named the *M. Ray and Phyllis Schultz Scholar*. Delaney is a 2023 *summa cum laude* graduate of Butler University, where they

majored in religion and philosophy, gave leadership to the philosophy club and the Interfaith Council, and wrote an honors thesis. They served as the Just Peace Intern at First Congregational UCC in Indianapolis.

William N. Weaver Entering Scholar, Kevin Poe, is a first-year MA student. He is a 2023 *summa cum laude* graduate of the College of Wooster in Ohio, where he studied philosophy, religion, and South Asian studies. He was awarded the 2022 Undergraduate Research Prize for outstanding ethnographic research. He served as a youth minister at Harmony Springs Christian Church and on the Ohio Regional Council.

Tristan Spangler-Dunning is the *Oreon E. Scott Entering Scholar*. He studies the social and intellectual history of the Disciples of Christ. He is a 2023 MA graduate of Union Theological Seminary in New York City and a 2022 *cum laude* BA graduate of Chapman University in History. He was a HELM Fellow and served on the Interfaith Council at Chapman University. Both of his parents are Disciples ministers.

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Joan Bell-Haynes (1994) will conclude six and a half years as Executive Regional Minister of the Central Rocky Mountain Region in November to become Interim Regional Minister in Georgia.



Jean Newcomer has joined the DDH staff as a part-time administrative project manager after having retired a year ago from University Church as its administrator.

Chuck Blaisdell (1976) reviewed John O. Humbert's memoirs, *Claiming a Legacy*, for the *Journal of Disciplina*, Vol. 76, No. 1.

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2023–24 Scholars CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3



Marissa Ilnitzki, the *Martin Family Scholar*, is a third-year dual MDiv/MA student who is preparing for hospital chaplaincy. She completed CPE at Northwestern Memorial

Hospitals and is studying this year at the Crown Family School of Social Work, Policy, and Practice. Marissa also received the Walker Ministerial Scholarship, which recognizes promise in preaching and ministry and is administered by Brite Divinity School.

Kate Myers is a second-year master's student in the Crown School who is practicing clinical therapy in her field work. She was raised in the First Christian Church of Bloomington, Indiana. She is the recipient of the *Florence Drum and Eleanor Tenant Scholarship*, which was created by the late Katherine Dey to remember dear friends who were formidable churchwomen.

The *Rolland and Laura Frances Shear* Scholarship has been awarded to **Charlie Platt**, a third-year MDiv student. He is an intern in the University's Office of Spiritual Life. This summer, he studied Buddhist-Christian dual belonging in Oaxaca, Mexico, thanks to an international ministry grant from the Divinity School.

Luke Soderstrom has received the *Henry Barton Robison Scholarship*. Luke's PhD dissertation explores the concept of children in American Moravian theology and practice and its role in shaping Moravian piety.



Justin Carlson is engaged in a full-time, DDH-sponsored internship in a congregation this year as the *Bernard F. and Annie Mae Cooke Scholar*.

He has completed two years of MDiv studies and is exploring creativity and pastoral authority in relation to congregational ministry. First Christian Church in Tacoma, Washington, led by alumnus Doug Collins, hosts a Tiny House Village and has a Center for Spirituality and the Arts.

His internship is also supported by the Edgar DeWitt Jones Scholarship of Central Woodward Christian Church.



Morganne Talley is the *Dr. Geunhee and Mrs. Geunsoon Yu Scholar*. A second-year MDiv student, Morganne's field placement is with Pride in the Pews, an organization

that advocates for black LGBTQ+ communities within and outside black churches. Thanks to a program of the Divinity School's Martin Marty Center, Morganne interned with *The Christian Century* magazine this summer.

Virginia White has received the *Edward Scribner Ames Scholarship*. She is writing a PhD dissertation on "Reckoning with Social Evil: Performativity as a Foundation for Re-envisioning Lament and Laughter as Moral Practices." Virginia taught in the University's summer program for high school students. On November 3, she preached for the service in the Chapel of the Holy Grail. ✦

The William Daniel Cobb Alumni/ae Scholarship enabled eight Scholars to attend the 2023 General Assembly of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Louisville, Kentucky. They participated in business sessions, educational opportunities, and worship—and made connections with alums.

Varieties of Cynthia's gifts

April Lewton borrowed some themes from Cynthia Lindner's own writing to introduce the 2023 Distinguished Alumna.

In her book, *Varieties of Gifts: Multiplicity and the Well-Lived Pastoral Life*, Cynthia Lindner writes, "Our vocations are nuanced conversations between our giftedness, our relationships, and our contexts." Let's begin with those themes.

Giftedness. One of the first memories I have of meeting Cynthia is sitting across from her in her office in the ministry suite of Swift Hall. It's a setting that many of you have also been in. She invited me to share about where I grew up and some of the major influences in my spiritual life and upbringing. With every answer I provided, there were more questions that she eagerly placed upon me. I recall wondering that maybe my responses were not adequate or that I was not getting at the heart of her questions.

Cynthia's practice of exploration and discovery is very much a part of the gifts she brings into all that she does. In her conversations, she asks to know more from you. In her research and writings, she invites revelation. In her teaching and preaching, she reminds you frequently and often to be sure to bring God's good word of hope and renewal.

Relationships. From the first time of sitting across from her in her office, Cynthia has been at tables with me and with so many of you—from communion tables at ordinations, installations, and wedding and commitment ceremonies, to tables in the classroom discussing methods of pastoral care, approaches to preaching, or developing liturgies and worship.

Foundational to who she is and how she works is her commitment to nurture relationship, connection, and belonging. In the midst of deep connection, Cynthia can offer a critical analysis and critique—and do so while smiling. She's inviting us to think a little more about what can be done better in the future.



Contexts. Because of her training in psychotherapy and her work in the academy directing the Divinity School's Ministry program for the past twenty-one years, her skills at analyzing, researching, and reflecting on context are authoritative and second nature. I'm going to give you two examples.

On her first visit to our home in northern Virginia, Garry and I introduced her to our newly adopted six-month-old puppy. In our minds, our dog was expressing all the typical things that puppies do. After a few minutes, Cynthia observed that ours was a puppy that "needs a job." She diagnosed our dog's need to be occupied and to feel a sense of purpose. To this day, whenever we give our dog a toy—which he knows very systematically how to disembowel and strategically take apart—we think of Cynthia. Manchas is just doing his job!

On a more serious note, there have been so many settings and communities in which Cynthia's work on nurturing healthy pastoral identity has offered insight and clarity. One of the first things that we did when moving to the Capital Area was to convene a group of clergy, including the regional minister, to work through her book.

We celebrate and honor you today, Cynthia. Thank you for the giftedness, relationships, and contexts through which you have helped us to understand and explore vocation and religious leadership. Thank you for all the ways that you have helped to strengthen and deepen the flourishing of our DDH community. ✦

APRIL LEWTON, a vice president of the National Benevolent Association, is the immediate past president of DDH's Board of Trustees.

Franklin I. "Chris" Gamwell, Dean of the Divinity School from 1980–90 and Shailer Mathews Distinguished Professor Emeritus of Religious Ethics, died September 8. He was 85. He was the author of many books on the divine good, democracy, and the contributions of religion to public life. He worked for economic and racial justice as pastor of Chicago's West Side Christian Parish, as a participant in the 1965 Selma to Montgomery March, and as a cofounder of Protestants for the Common Good. As his former student Joe Pettit said, "Recognizing the difficulties that come with trying to think clearly, Chris was never content with anything less."



Landon Wilcox (2019) has accepted a call as the next minister of Bethany Christian Church in Fort Washington, Maryland, a congregation that has a long history of providing scholarship support for ministry students at DDH.



Alexa Dava (2020) has begun a three-year appointment with the World Council of Churches as a project officer assisting the member churches to facilitate the realization of human dignity in the context of reproductive health. She is seconded to the WCC through the Office of the General Minister and President.

On November 19, **Marshall Dunn** (1965; trustee) was celebrated as Minister Emeritus of University Christian Church, College Park, Maryland.



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Begotten, bewildered, and beholding

Distinguished Alumna Cynthia Lindner reflects on the practice and promise of learning in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).

By Cynthia Gano Lindner
August 1, 2023, Louisville, Kentucky

This award is not, in the end, about any one of us. It is a celebration of a lively community of learning and service that has been, is being, and will be Disciples Divinity House.

There are neither sufficient words nor enough minutes in this program to express how much this recognition has touched me—and moreover, how my relationship with the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), and with Disciples Divinity House and its great cloud of witnesses have shaped my mind and heart, and blessed my life and my vocation.

I am by nature and by profession a watcher, an instigator, and an encourager of others' lives, projects, insights, and visions. Rarely do I pause to take stock of my own. For this singular opportunity to remember and recall; for a lifetime of companionship, conversation, and collaboration; for the wisdom and witness of our DDH forebears; and for the wisdom and witness that lives and moves in the creativity and courage of those gathered here today—I am so grateful.

Has been, is being, will be Disciples—that's the phrase I commend to our reflection. The word *disciple*, before it gained partisan

inflections aligning its subject with this teacher, that school, or a particular denomination, takes its meaning from the Latin verb *discere*, “to learn, to discern,” and from a related verb *discipere*, “to grasp or comprehend; to dispute or debate.”

What might it mean not simply to identify as Disciples, capital ‘D,’ but to practice being disciples, lowercase ‘d’—that is, to live and move, to engage and to love this world that God so loves, as learners?

If you are thinking that there's nothing more predictable than a Divinity School professor touting the virtues of learning, you may be right. But just hear me out. The roots of my preoccupation with lowercase ‘d’ learning reach far beyond my last twenty years in the classroom or even my twenty years in the pulpit before that.



RIGHT Alumni/ae Council Co-President Laura Jennison Reed with Cynthia Lindner

When I use the word *learning*, I'm reaching for something bigger, less routinized, more organic. I'm thinking of learning as that curiosity, that restlessness, that eagerness to engage, explore, and understand that is an essential part of our creatureliness. It is a sliver of what it means to be made in the image of God; a spiritual practice more akin to breathing, seeing, yearning, or loving; a thoroughgoing orientation to life, of which the practices of our beloved academies are only one part.

There's an iconic image from our faith tradition that comes to mind when I imagine what this learning looks like. Let me take you home with me for a moment, and I'll show it to you. I was born and raised in Jacksonville, Illinois, a sleepy midwestern county seat when I was a child. Much earlier, in the decades leading up to the Civil War, it was a hotbed of progressive thought, home to a community of abolitionists who were active in the underground railroad. A certain Barton W. Stone moved from Kentucky to a farm near Jacksonville around 1832, choosing to live in a free state with free-thinkers. He founded a new congregation in his new hometown, which eventually came to be called Central Christian Church.

Over a hundred years later, I was baptized in the sanctuary one Easter Sunday, at the ripe old age of nine. (Nine was the “age of reason,” according to the church elders. *Who knew?*) What so distinctly shaped my young understanding of the life of faith was not that dramatic immersion, but rather, the stained-glass window that stretched high and wide above the baptistry and just below the gilded stenciling of our founders' polar star of unity.

That nineteenth-century window did not depict Jesus' own baptism or any of Christianity's other “greatest hits.” Not Jesus' birth, last supper, death, or resurrection, not his teachings or his miracles. Rather, the ten-foot-tall image commanding the place of honor was an intricate rendering known as Jesus in the Temple. Twelve-year-old Jesus, center stage, was surrounded by the teachers in the temple. Both boy and elders were absorbed in conversation, leaning in, reaching towards one another and a large open text, the seemingly living presence around which they clustered.



ABOVE Alumna and Disciples GMP Terri Hord Owens with DDH Board President Pamela James Jones.

The colorful scene was brightly illuminated most Sundays by the morning sun. I was fascinated by this scene and lost myself in it on a regular basis. The expressions on each face, child and adults, were not saintly or dispassionate; they were animated, alive with curiosity, intensity, and wonder.

As an argumentative and opinionated child, I was intrigued by the possibility proclaimed by that window. Perhaps *this* was an illustration of the life of faith: a vibrant conversation, an energetic give-and-take inclusive of all ages and perspectives, an immersion in deep listening and hard questions that takes our relationship to God and God's creation seriously, even as it is always pushing towards more—more beauty, more truth, more wholeness, more justice.

What if learning—that is, discerning, debating, reaching to make sense of ourselves, our communities, our cosmos, and our Creator, and then considering and ordering our relationships and responsibilities to all these things—*what if such learning is the very essence of our personhood, of life in community, of our worship of God?*

And, if that is the case, what might a community that calls itself *Disciples*—faithful folk who understand themselves to be learners, first and foremost—have to offer our own time and place when the very activity of learning itself has become instrumentalized, commodified, computerized, even, of late, suppressed, in a sensorium that values comfort over contestation, easily-accessed information over carefully-cultivated wisdom, and labels, brands, and slogans over complexity, nuance, and comprehension?

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Follow Your Bliss and Other Lies About Calling by **Bonnie Miller-McLemore** (1978) is forthcoming from Oxford University Press in early 2024. This spring, Bonnie and **Mark Miller-McLemore** (1975) moved to Evergreen, Colorado.



Nate and **Katherine Raley Alexander** (2008) with big brothers, Michael and Parker, welcomed June Charlotte Alexander into the world on October 20.



Current Scholar **Kylie Winger** ran the Chicago Marathon on October 8.



Teresa Hord Owens

(1999) was elected to a second six-year term as General Minister and President of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and installed at the General Assembly in Louisville, Kentucky.



Congratulations to **Burton Guion** (2016) and **Ellie Leech** (2019), who were married on October 21 in Virginia. **Jack Veatch** (2016) officiated and **Victoria Wick** (2017) participated in the ceremony.

Ron Eslinger

(1964) died April 17, 2022, in Des Moines, Iowa. He was 79. In his forty years of active ministry in the UCC, he worked for racial and social justice and to encourage stewardship for creation.

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Lindner

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In a word, I believe that what *disciples*—life-long, curious, careful learners—have to offer a frightened world, a violent world, a world-on-fire (literally and figuratively) is the life-giving, world-changing power of humility. Humility, from the word *humus*, meaning earth, soil, rootedness, from the same root as human.

Humility. That may not be the word you were expecting to fall from the lips of a professor from the University of Chicago. You were expecting, perhaps, to hear about “rigor”? I mean no disrespect to the advocates of critical inquiry. I am deeply indebted to the teachers and mentors who trained us to be disciplined and strenuous scholars. Indeed, the fruits of such “rigorous” exercise are many—and that’s precisely my point. Some of learning’s greatest gifts have been undervalued by a culture so driven by acquisition, control, and mastery.

Among the less-celebrated fruits of a life-long practice of learning is the constant recognition of our God-given place in the scheme of things—the *re*-cognition of our earthly, *humus*/humble/human relation to all that is. The core practices of learning require paying close attention; submitting ourselves to texts, discourses, persons, communities, and events;



Beau Underwood and David Vargas

attending to those near to us and those whose locations are so different from our own; shifting our emphasis from acquisition to inquisitiveness. They demand that we de-center our own assumptions, experiences, causes, and even our own altars, to be humbled by the daunting prospect of not-knowing.

I don’t mean the not-knowing that is rife in our culture right now—the “I dunno” or “I could care less” sorts of not-knowing. Those



Stephanie McLemore with DDH Development Assistant Ryan Haefke

are decisions not to know or not to care that reject the fullness of our humanity and devalue our abilities to wonder and to care. Rather, to be *disciples*, and *Disciples of Christ* at that, means to approach every aspect of our experience from a stance of humility, open to both the course corrections and the end-less possibilities that arise from our thorough apprehension of our own limits, in contrast to the need to defend, augment, or promote ourselves by possessing or weaponizing knowledge.

Three attributes or attitudes are characteristic of this humble *discipere* learning—this learning-as-not-knowing, this learning-as-spiritual practice.

First, such learning acknowledges that we are *begotten*, as the old English would say. We are not here on our own recognizance, but by way of the lives and loves of others, the creativity and faith of others, and for the blessing and flourishing of others. We are not self-made, self-taught, self-directed, or self-realized. In fact, our very selves—and they are multiple—are the reflections of others’ apprehensions of us. We are not our own, and neither is our knowing our own certain and sure possession. What we know, and what we do not yet know, is knowledge gained at the feet of and on behalf of the whole creation.

Second, such learning acknowledges and even promotes *bewilderment*. The word means, just as it sounds, being in the wilderness, perhaps even being *wilded*. (Isn’t that a lovely possibility?) It’s not a word we use much these days, perhaps because there’s too little wilderness left to wander in, or perhaps because there’s not enough wild left in us. When the word was at the height of its usage, Daniel Boone was asked if he ever got lost in the forest, to which he reportedly replied, “No,

not exactly lost. But I have been bewildered a few times. Why, once I was bewildered for more than a week, *but I just kept on going.*”

Our Disciples forebears, Thomas and Alexander Campbell and Barton Stone, were moving west at about the same time. They displayed a Boone-like embrace of the wilderness and their own bewilderment, as they pushed past the limits of conventional wisdom and doctrinal politics to plant communities of lively learning. Sometimes their embrace of the wilderness was problematically entwined with settling and conquering “the frontier”; at their best they allowed themselves to be wilded and to find a way together. There were obstacles, arguments, tragedies, a Civil War, *but they just kept on going.*

Nearly a century later, their inheritors pushed past the limits of conventional theological education to collaborate in the planting of a Divinity School in the heart of a major university that was just taking root in a wild and bewildering young metropolis on the shores of Lake Michigan. Our Chicago forebears were bewildered for much more than a week. In fact, they had the temerity to call themselves a “house”—Disciples Divinity House—a full thirty years before there was an actual house to inhabit. There were obstacles, arguments, tragedies, one world war and then another one, but they just kept on going.

It is of the essence of learning and also the very substance of faith, to be, by seasons, bewildered and to *just keep on going*. To move toward that which we are still straining to imagine, to see, to actualize—toward that which is more true, beautiful, just, and capacious; toward the God who keeps on imagining, keeps on creating, keeps on reaching towards us.



Alumni/ae Council Co-President Aaron Smith welcomes the crowd.



David Cobb

There’s a word for that, too—the third attribute or attitude of holy, humble, *discipere* learning—and that word is *behold*. Behold is used nearly 1300 times in our scriptures: in Hebrew, *hinneh*; in Greek, *eido*; in Latin, *ecce*. It means not simply to look, but to see, to be sure to see, to observe, to perceive—and in such a way as you are changed thereby. Life-long learners, *disciples of Christ*, embrace their begottenness and allow themselves to be bewildered so as to behold the Kin-dom which is always near at hand.

I hope that by now you are recognizing yourself and one another as learners who have been begotten by the imaginations of those who came before us and who are willing to brave bewilderment. If you’ve made your way here today, it is because you cannot resist the lure of this at once holy and humble practice of life-long learning which is so close to the Spirit of God herself, the spirit sometimes called *Sophia*, Holy Wisdom.

As I look around this room, I am once again fascinated by vibrant images of disciples—not in stained glass this time, but in the flesh. You are leaning into encounters with teachers, students, congregants, and patients, with texts, communities, and powers. You offer images of disciples in the name and for the sake of the one who says, “Behold, I tell you a mystery. Behold, you shall conceive and bear a child. Behold, I make all things new.”

Behold new models of higher education, new forms of church, new venues for ministry, new expressions of Christianity, new partnerships that uncover deep continuities with other traditions and disciplines. Behold new language, new commitments, new worlds—the works of your hands, the charism of life-long learning, the life of lively discipleship made visible in all of you. Behold. Amen. ✚

Aaron Smith (2007) is developing a new initiative in retirement education for the Pension Fund.



Judith Guy Thomas (2013), **Lee Hull Moses** (2001), and **Yvonne Gilmore** (2001) discussed the power of narrative and the power of preaching at the Monday forum on October 16.

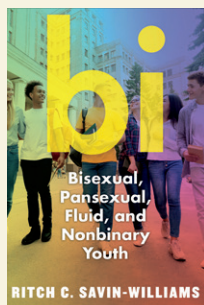


This fall, **Andrew Packman** (2009) was installed as Assistant Professor of Theological Ethics and Formation at United Theological Seminary, following a two-year appointment as a Louisville Institute Post-Doctoral Fellow.

On September 17, **Joel Brown** (2014) was installed as President of the Disciples of Christ Historical Society in a service at the historic Old Meetinghouse in Bethany, West Virginia, where Alexander Campbell once preached.



New York University Press released a new book by **Ritch Savin-Williams** (1971), *Bi: Bisexual, Pansexual, Fluid, and Nonbinary Youth*. Ritch has discussed its findings with South Korean high school students and before audiences of researchers and community activists in Sweden.



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Lundblad CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

than white people in the United States who don't go to church, independent of political party, geographical location or denomination. That suggests the Christian churches in the United States are not simply infected with the white supremacy of American culture but are, in fact, producers of it.

In and around and underneath the truth at the heart of our tradition, there are a million other stories, expectations, assumptions, fears that come to us through our past, through our present, through the way we imagine the future. A million other things that shape the way we view the world and the way we translate that view into our actions.

These other kinds of truths take hold of us, grab onto us, not just in our minds but in our bodies, in our nervous systems. Resmaa Menakem, in *My Grandmother's Hands*, talks about racism in the United States as a kind of trauma—not just as something that causes trauma, but as something that is caused by trauma, caused by our reactions to one another embedded in our bodies. We react with fear before we have time to think and that fear shapes our perception of reality itself. Over and over again, our minds tell one story while our bodies enact something else altogether.

That's how we get moments like the one in Jesus' parable. Two sons receive instructions from their father, and perhaps curiously—or perhaps not—the second son tells his father that he will go and then he doesn't.

Jesus' story makes it clear that the issue of white supremacy in the church is only one example of this phenomenon. I am sure we could all tell stories about the good church folk who speak love and enact something altogether different. We've probably been those people too.

Jesus is speaking to the chief priests and the elders about the kingdom of God which has, as he's been saying for years now, drawn near. Somehow, they have missed it, despite the fact that John had put on his best camel hair outfit and gone out into the desert to tell people it was there.

Now, I make no pretense of being able to give you a definitive description of the kingdom of God, what it looks like or how one enters it. But when we speak of God we are, by definition, speaking of a truth that somehow transcends and somehow includes and

somehow connects all the truths we glimpse in our lifetimes and that we articulate with our lives. If that's the case, then the kingdom of God must be a particularly real reality, one that perhaps does not yet resolve all the tensions and the paradoxes of life but at least allows them to usher us into something we might call a fullness of life.

This was the extra-real reality, the unshakable truth that had showed up in their midst. It was right there, plain to see; the tax collectors and the prostitutes saw it. Jesus says to the chief priests and the elders, "You saw them see it, you saw some kind of truth touch their lives, you saw people who could have told you about God's presence in your midst, *but still you didn't change your minds and believe.*"

Why? Why?

It is both ironic and illuminating that at the very moment Jesus is offering this warning, they are in fact making the very same mistake again. John had come to speak to them about the kingdom of God and they hadn't been able to hear it. Now Jesus was standing here and still they weren't looking for the truth of things.

They were looking at something else, it seems.

These particular chief priests and elders were only having this conversation with Jesus at all because of the ruckus that he had caused in the temple the day before. He'd just shown up and started turning over tables and driving people away, shouting something about a house of prayer.

That was yesterday. Today, Jesus was back, as though he hadn't caused enough trouble already, and they wanted to know not quite why, but why he thought he had a right to be there, causing trouble and pronouncing judgment on everyone else.

"By what authority are you doing these things? And who gave you this authority?"

It's one of those questions that comes along with a million other questions, each launched by its own story, assumption, expectation, fear. As they engage with Jesus, Matthew's gospel seems to suggest that they are afraid of being wrong, they are afraid of appearing foolish, they fear the opinion of the crowd, and they fear the presence of Jesus, too. All of it looks like threat to them.

They are looking for an answer that will make sense of it all for them: an answer that



will either fit into their understanding of the way things should be or will at least prove Jesus to be wrong, unjustified in even being in this place.

If that's not clear as they ask Jesus by what authority he is doing these things, it becomes clear once Jesus asks them a question back.

"I'll tell you that," he says, "if you'll tell me this. The baptism of John—did it come from heaven or was it of human origin?"

The chief priests and the elders huddle together trying to decide what to say, talking things through. "If we say heaven, then he'll ask why we didn't believe him. But if we say it was from human origin, we're afraid of the crowd."

They are busy looking for a right answer that might soothe their fears, impress the crowds, show Jesus who's boss, and reassert their authority over whatever authority Jesus thinks he has.

Fortunately, in their efforts to capture such a truth they stumble upon just the right answer anyway.

"We don't know," they say.

We will continue to miss the presence of the kingdom of God in our midst if we continue to believe that the point of a question is to answer it correctly.

We will continue to miss the reality of truth among us if we continue to choose our answers based on what soothes our fears, meets our expectations, and fits into the stories we are already telling in our own minds.

And, as far as I can tell, we will miss the possibilities of this place as long as we continue to act as though the truth is something we can capture and wrestle onto the page, the perfect argument to prove the authority that our work, our being, our presence ought to have.

Because here's the thing: your ability to critique the thoughts of others is never going to be the most important thing about you.

But your ability to understand others might be. Not just because understanding other people is a good thing, though certainly it is, but because of what that understanding requires of us.

To understand others, we have to be

willing to come to know our selves, to claim what's ours: our stories, fears, and assumptions. We have to be willing to make space for the truth in us, then we have to make space for the truth that others bring.

That is not simply a matter of words, what we say or what we hear. It is something we do, something we train our bodies for. We can't begin to understand what's going on inside us if we are ignoring our body's need for things like sleep and exercise and food. We can't understand each other if we are constantly being triggered by our own fears. We can't receive the truth that is taking shape among us if our nervous systems are eternally on high alert. That's the lesson we have to learn with our bodies.

The truth that emerges between and among us is not one that we can grasp in a frantic effort to get things right. It's not one that we capture in our words, take captive in our argument.

Instead, we'll find it when we trust that we are already justified, already beloved, already good enough, and, trusting, open ourselves up to receive the truth in those around us.

That's the foundation of love, and of the kingdom of God. Because if we believe that the presence of God is in our midst—that the kingdom of God among us is a particularly true truth, a particularly real reality, and that kingdom of God was and is proclaimed by the one who told us the most important thing was that we love our God and our neighbor—and if it is defined by the law of love, it only makes sense that in order to glimpse that reality, in order to see others as they are and touch the truth they bring, we have to be willing to love them. Then, we might just see justice too.

Those of you who have been listening closely might be wondering whether I've just offered you a ten-minute postscript to a paper that remained disappointingly incomplete eight years ago.

I think that's exactly right. That's the thing about the truth we encounter in this place, in the questions we ask, the conversations we have, and the ideas we wrestle. That truth stays with you, pulls you in with its mystery, its beauty, its grace, welcomes you—incomplete as you may be—and does not let you go.

Amen. ✚



Stephanie McLemore (1992) and **Michael Swartzentruber** (2007) were among several alums who told stories at a special GA edition of StoryHour. **Yvonne Gilmore** (2001) and **Rebecca Anderson** (2007) hosted the evening.

Claudia Highbaugh (trustee) has moved to Southern California. She continues to lead educational trips to Civil Rights sites, including an upcoming trip for Country Club Christian Church and Swope Park Christian Church—two historic Kansas City, Missouri, congregations.

Current Scholar **Kevin Poe** presented "At Home in a Storied World: How Narratives Shape Humanity's Relationship to the Divine" at the Midwest Conference on Asian Affairs on October 1.



A Recognition of Generosity

Between July 1, 2022, and June 30, 2023, Disciples Divinity House received gifts and grants from 218 individuals, churches, and other organizations, which totaled \$853,227. These generous gifts help ensure the generative work of DDH and the flourishing of its students. Of these total gifts, donors provided \$143,451 for ongoing support, including \$35,781 given through the Disciples Mission Fund of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). Gifts for permanent funds totaled \$709,776, or 83% of all gifts.



Gifts are for ongoing support to the annual fund unless otherwise noted.

Donors to the Richard and Dolores Highbaugh Fund and the Amy A. Northcutt Scholarship Fund are listed separately.

† Indicates deceased.

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A magnificent gift of \$510,000 for unrestricted endowment funds remembers alumnus Samuel Campbell Pearson Jr., and the transformative education that he received as a Disciples Divinity House Scholar.

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Established in 1994, the Sutcliffe Society recognizes individuals who ensure the mission of Disciples Divinity House by provid- ing for a gift through their estate. It is named in tribute to the woman whose vision and gifts built the original endowment, furnished the building, and completed the chapel. The Society encourages others to follow her example and honors those who carry forward the tradition of vision and action.

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1994 L. Del and Ann Butterfield
1995 Hoover Foundation
1995 Herbert L. Willett, III
2005 Chapel 75th Anniversary Renewal
2009 Capital Area Library Refurbishment
2020 University Christian Church, Seattle,
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2020 Theodore and Beulah Beasley Foundation
2020 Thomas V. Stockdale memorial, sculpture commission



3

2023–24
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Scholars

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5

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6

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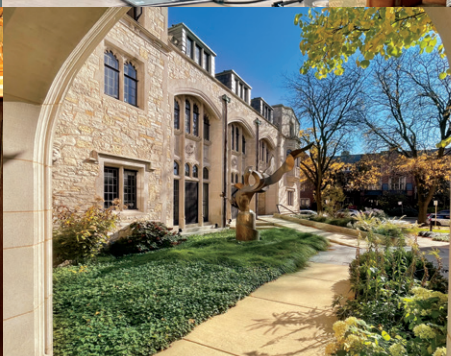
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LIFE AT THE HOUSE

Scenes from Autumn quarter

Monday night dinners, worship in the chapel, after dinner conversations with Gilpin, Palmer, Robinson, Gilmore, Hull Moses, Thomas, and Ettress Veatch. A campus filled with stunning fall colors.

