Convocation celebrates grads

The June 13 Convocation celebrated the achievements of five graduates and marked the end of DDH's 119th academic year. Alumna Sandhya Jha spoke about “The Myth of Book Smart versus Street Smart” (published here). The service, planned by the graduates, was followed by festive food prepared by Emily Mulder, who was the Monday dinner chef this year.

Two DDH Scholars received their degrees the next day at University convocation ceremonies: Alexandra McCauslin received the MDiv degree, and Brandon Cook received the MDiv and MA in Social Service Administration degrees. On August 24, Alex will be ordained at her home congregation, Central Woodward Christian Church in Troy, Michigan; Brandon was ordained on June 29 at May’s Lick [KY] Christian Church. DDH Scholar Patricia Duncan will receive her PhD in Bible in August for her dissertation on the Pseudo-Clementine Homilies. DDH Scholar Kristel Clayville (Religious Ethics) and Emanuelle Burton (Religion and Literature), who also anticipate receiving their PhDs later this year, will teach at Centre College in Danville, Kentucky, next year.

Scott grant for “the House” beyond “the House”

Disciples Divinity House has been awarded a grant of $15,000 from the Oreon E. Scott Foundation to launch, test, and evaluate two peer-driven projects in leader development: 1) The Constructive Theologies project and 2) a Resourcing Young Clergy Leaders event.

These creative and experimental projects were initiated by current students and alumni/ae. Both projects effectively move “the House” beyond “the House,” insofar as the reach of each project extends beyond current Disciples Divinity House students, not only to DDH alumni/ae who serve across the U.S., but also to other emerging Disciples theological leaders, in one project, and, in the other, to their former ecumenical classmates (and now fellow graduates) at the Divinity School of the University of Chicago.

The grant provides resources for these projects to come to fruition in ongoing conversation between these emerging leaders and Associate Dean Yvonne Gilmore, who will serve as project manager.

Disciples students Andrew Packman, a PhD student in Theology and co-founding pastor of a new Disciples church, Root and Branch Church; MDiv student Allie Lundblad; and Christian Watkins, a 2014 Yale MDiv graduate, initiated the Constructive Theologies project. They wanted to connect with peers across the country to construct compelling ideas and practical solutions in response to the challenges and possibilities that face the Disciples of Christ.

This “idea trust” ensures space for the peer development of creative, faithful, risk-taking theological thinking. The project envisions
“Life Journeys” project

Don Burk, Warren Copeland, Marshall Dunn, and Steve Duvall, alumni from the 1965-69 entering classes, returned on April 25 to DDH common room to talk about their “life journeys.” House Scholars Alexandra McCauslin and Jeremy Fuzy moderated the forum, which was presented for current House Scholars and members of the Board of Trustees and the Alumni/ae Council.

Steve Duvall, a member of the Alumni/ae Council, had started the conversation months before. He had described his “life journey” in one page and invited his cohort to do the same, with the ultimate hope that their reflections “might be helpful for the DDH community (and others) who are getting ready to start on their life journeys.” Loel Callahan, David Kohl, Leonard O’Brien, Michael Stone, as well as Messrs. Burk, Copeland, and Dunn, participated in the project by email.

Mr. Duvall’s study of religion, coupled with the turbulent Vietnam era, led him into a 37-year career in the mental health field. “I was particularly interested in what the problem of addiction was all about and how a confused value system often compounds that problem.” During the forum, he and the others described their work—Don Burk now in finance; Warren Copeland presently the Mayor of Springfield, Ohio, and a professor; Marshall Dunn a very active emeritus congregational pastor—and the big questions that animated their lives. They offered a vivid horizon of vocational possibilities and meaningful questions about public theological engagement. The Alumni/ae Council looks forward to inviting other cohorts to share in this model of alumni/ae engagement and involvement with current House scholars in the future.

Scott grant
(continued from previous page)
cultivating innovative ideas that “move” across racial, vocational, intellectual & economic lines with an initial cohort of twelve theological thinkers from varied schools, intellectual interests, and contextual settings. They will meet biannually in Chicago. Participants in this project are peers in the sense that they share a common generational frame of reference (ages 25-35) and a common hope to create effective roads to personal and ecclesial transformation, and especially to becoming a pro-reconciling and anti-racist church.

The Resourcing Young Clergy Leaders event was developed out of an appeal by alumnus Beau Underwood and former resident Ben Varnum to their fellow Divinity School MDiv alumni/ae. Initially it will take the form of a “Ministry Alumni/ae Retreat” in collaboration the Divinity School on October 3-4, 2014 in Hyde Park.

A pilot group of MDiv alumni/ae who have been actively engaged in ministry landscapes and graduated between 2007 and 2010 have been invited to return for a time of peer driven reflection and renewal. Dean Kris Culp’s work on vulnerability will be engaged to equip participants with theological resources for leadership and creativity. Rev. Dr. Cynthia Lindner’s work on theories of multiple-mindfulness that offer wisdom about living the ministerial life profoundly and well will also be introduced to resource participants as they navigate contextual challenges and changing understandings of their roles.

The event will provide an opportunity to resource current leaders as they serve transforming and new congregations as well as an opportunity to assess the shape of the theological education that current students receive.
Brown to DSF & GTU

Alumnus Frank Burch Brown has accepted a joint appointment for 2014-16 as Dean of the Disciples Seminary Foundation in Northern California and as CARE/GTU Visiting Professor of Art and Religion with the Center for Arts, Religion and Education at the Graduate Theological Union.

Mr. Brown has been the Kershner Professor of Religion and the Arts at Christian Theological Seminary. For three years, he also served as the Alexander Campbell Visiting Professor of Religion and the Arts at the University of Chicago Divinity School.

Author of five books, including the award-winning Good Taste, Bad Taste, and Christian Taste (2000), he is editor of the Oxford Handbook of Religion and the Arts (2014) and Senior Editor in Religion and the Arts for the Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Religion. A composer, he has written over 20 commissioned musical works.

Nguyen accepts call to “give back”

Alumnus Vy Nguyen has been called as the next Executive Director of the Week of Compassion of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), effective September 1. An ordained Disciples minister, he now serves as Southwest Associate Field Director for Church World Service (CWS), one of Week of Compassion’s largest ministry partners. He formerly served the Lutheran Volunteer Corps in Berkeley, California.

“Through his work with CWS and local congregations, he has sought to foster among communities a deeper understanding and awareness of both the challenges that individuals and families face in the world as they struggle for refuge, as well as the importance of building local capacities and movements towards sustainable development in international relief and long-term development work,” according to Week of Compassion.

He knows firsthand the life-changing work that Week of Compassion effects. It was through the efforts of CWS and Disciples Refugee and Immigration Ministries that Mr. Nguyen arrived in the US as a young refugee from Vietnam. He earned a BA in religious studies with a minor in environmental sciences at Texas Christian University before entering the University of Chicago as a Disciples Divinity House Scholar and earning his MDiv from the Divinity School. He was ordained to the ministry at East Dallas Christian Church, the congregation that helped to welcome him to the U.S. He is “committed to giving back to the ministry that shaped him and to work to empower individuals and communities to build better lives.”

Trustee news

Alumna Angela A. Kaufman began service on the Board of Trustees in January. She has been Minister to the University at Texas Christian University since 2004, where her duties include oversight for the Office of Religious & Spiritual Life, the Robert Carr Chapel, and the Office of Church Relations.

She is a BA graduate of TCU in religion and philosophy, who entered DDH in 1995 and earned the MDiv at the Divinity School. She reads widely about young adult faith development, religion in American culture, and the relationships among spirituality, resilience, and mental health. She recently served on the board of the Tarrant Area (TX) Food Bank and on DDH’s Alumni/ae Council. She and her spouse Jack Poelman are parents to two small children.

Holly McKissick, founding minister of Peace Christian Church UCC and, previously, of Saint Andrew Christian Church, concluded twelve years of service as a trustee in December. A widely sought speaker and innovative leader, she is the author of Tall Poppies, a book on leadership, and You Are Blessed: Prayers for Checkout Lines, Ice Cream, and Other Simple Moments. We are grateful for her generosity and service over many years, which includes supervising three full-time DDH internships and speaking at Convocation and on numerous occasions.
The Myth of Book Smart vs. Street Smart

Convocation address
June 13, 2014
by Sandhya Jha

I looked, and a hand was stretched out to me, and a written scroll was in it. He spread it before me; it had writing on the front and on the back, and written on it were words of lamentation and mourning and woe. He said to me, O mortal, eat what is offered to you; eat this scroll, and go, speak to the house of Israel. So I opened my mouth, and he gave me the scroll to eat. He said to me, Mortal, eat this scroll that I give you and fill your stomach with it. Then I ate it; and in my mouth it was as sweet as honey.

–Ezekiel 2:9-3:3

They say we lose our greats in threes, and that has certainly been true this month: we have lost Vincent Harding, heroic leader of the civil rights movement; we have lost the great poet Maya Angelou and we have lost Yuri Kochiyama, Asian American activist, Black Power leader and survivor of the American concentration camps.

Yuri Kochiyama, as a Japanese American, understood something of the double consciousness W.E.B. DuBois wrote about in the early 1900s, when he described it as “this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.”

I suspect that Yuri Kochiyama understood this double consciousness as a child who strove to be so American that people would forget she was Japanese, and then during World War II discovering that no amount of Americanness would stop her from being sent to an internment camp in Arkansas.

In some ways, DuBois and Kochiyama lived with the reality of code switching. That’s a term that has caught on a great deal of late, but it’s a concept that has existed for a very long time. My mother remembers the slang that you used on the streets of Glasgow so people knew you were one of them, and she remembers that if a child used that slang in the classroom, he was roundly mocked by the rest of the class. The friends I work with at POOR Magazine in Oakland talk about the culture and history of poor people and that, in shifting to the language and values of the middle class, there are benefits gained like knowing where your next meal is coming from, but huge costs like losing your connection to your own people.

When I was getting ready to go to seminary and said I wanted to go into urban ministry, my otherwise incredibly supportive boyfriend responded, “You’re a mixed race Asian girl from the suburbs; what would you have to offer people in the ‘hood?”

I happened to have the privilege of interviewing Jonathan Kozol during that same time. I raised this question with Kozol, a brilliant sociologist and author of Savage Inequalities, which talks about the apartheid system of American public education today. He told me the story of his early days in the civil rights movement, advocating for busing in the city of Boston. He had gone to Harvard, but when he went to community meetings led by less educated community leaders, he tried to hide his education, use the right slang, use smaller words, not bring attention to the fact that he had more education. One day, one of the leaders said to him, “Johnny, you went to HARVARD. We need that clout, and we need your education. Stop pretending you’re us. We need you to be you, for our sake.”

I find myself thinking of that story and thinking of the myth of people being either street smart or book smart, with no mixing of the two.

Shane Claiborne lives in poverty in intentional community in Philadelphia and advocates for economic justice. A year into his seminary education, he proclaimed, “There are people DYING! I can’t waste time with all these books and all this theology!” and he left to start his movement in Philadelphia. Shane believed there were book smarts and street smarts, and he did not want to lose his street smarts because he got consumed with book smarts.

On the flip side of that, I remember a colleague of mine here at the Divinity School, a PhD student in Ethics who once said to me, “Sandhya, you’re going to make yourself crazy, because any time we talk about Christian ethics, you want to know how it works in lived people’s experience. You know what my slogan is for Christian ethics? ‘That’s great in practice, but how does it work in theory?’” My colleague believed there were street smarts and book smarts, and he did not want street smarts contaminating his book smarts.
There are limits, though, to keeping this a dichotomy. I work with homeless people in Oakland, and conventional wisdom these days is that when someone has been homeless for six months, they generally enter the ranks of chronic homelessness; it is incredibly hard to get them into housing they will be able to hold onto. The skills they learn to survive on the streets are incompatible with the skills they need to survive in a housed environment.

If you’ll forgive me for being flippant, the inverse of this problem was really well illustrated in the recent “Black Jeopardy” sketch on Saturday Night Live. Louis CK played a professor of African American History from Brigham Young University, but no matter how broad his book learning was, he lost the game because he didn’t know the meaning of the expression, “It’s been a minute.”

That’s why I was so compelled by the graduates’ selection of the scripture from Ezekiel. Ezekiel was both priest and prophet: two distinct and not usually overlapping ways of mediating between God and humanity—one grounded in much study and knowledge about day-to-day practices and rituals of worship and purification, the other mediating a direct message from God in a particular situation and time. These were rarely ministries both borne by the same person, but in Ezekiel they were. In the book of Deuteronomy, the prophet was usually referred to with the grandiose term “person of God.” Ezekiel was referred to almost incessantly as “child of humans.”

This act of intentional humility is something Ezekiel and Yuri Kochiyama had in common. It is what opened doors to them in both book and street smarts, and it is what allowed them to break down the dichotomy between book smarts and street smarts. That humility is what led to Yuri Kochiyama being the woman who cradled Malcolm X in her arms as he died in the ballroom in Harlem. She had studied at his feet and gone to Freedom School, and she also described living in Harlem as the best university she ever attended.

I believe we need to break down that dichotomy: the scroll is crammed, there is not an inch of space on it, and not everyone can read it or digest it. And it is full of lamentation and mourning and woe. Ezekiel had the skill to read the scroll, and he had the skill to verbalize it to a community that needed badly to hear the words the scroll held.

That scroll is equally crammed today, full of lamentation and mourning and woe: on Saturday night, 15-year-old Samantha Alvarado was shot and killed in East Oakland, joining 40 other homicide victims this year in Oakland, population 400,000. They join the 108 homicide victims in Chicago already this year. Oakland Police Chief Sean Whent said, “Our murder rate is down about 15 percent; our non-fatal shooting rate is down about a third. But it doesn’t do any good if you are in the wrong two thirds.”

But sweet? Ezekiel said the scroll tastes as sweet as honey in his mouth. How can a scroll of such magnitude and such sorrow taste sweet?

In my first year of seminary, the professor in our Public Church course assigned us to prepare a Christian ethics lesson based on a popular movie of our choice and to teach it to the rest of the class as if it were an adult Sunday School class. “Remember that you’re teaching it as if to a class at a church and not to a room of graduate students,” he said. I responded, “So avoid big, confusing words and keep the concepts pretty simple?”

He looked at me with something bordering on contempt and said, “They. Are. Not. Stupid.”

I remembered that moment vividly when I read ahead to Ezekiel 3:5: “You are not being sent to a people of obscure speech and difficult language but to the House of Israel.”

(continued on next page)
“The Myth”  
(continued from previous page)

A couple of years into my pastorate at First Christian Church of Oakland, one of my favorite congregants came up to me after church and said, “When you preach, I feel like I should have a thesaurus in my lap,” and I said back, “And the thing is, I know you’re smart enough to follow everything I’m saying.”

During my pastorate, and today as I do advocacy and grassroots organizing work, I work with people who are told over and over in lots of subtle ways that they are stupid. But they’re not stupid. Our wisdom interplaying with others’, our bringing together of prophet and priest, the mingling of book smarts and streets smarts within us but also between us—I believe that is where the sweetness lies.

We have received great and powerful wisdom, and when we translate that wisdom from people who could not read the scrolls we can read, and when we likewise open ourselves to the wisdom they hold, that is where we taste something as sweet as honey, something the poet Gloria Andaluzia refers to as “potent meshings.”

Many of you know the prophetic arc that Walter Brueggeman describes as showing up in every prophetic book in the Hebrew Bible and in the prophetic messages of Jesus: (1) You are going down a bad road and horrible things are about to happen because you are not aligned with the will of God. (2) Here is the alternate thing God wants you to do instead. (3) Here is the great and glorious thing that will unfold for you through God when you get in line with God’s will.

I think that great and glorious thing is “Beloved Community.” I see glimpses of it every day: In the gay pride march in Uganda, where people are publicly claiming their identity in solidarity with each other even though they live in a country where being gay can get you executed by the government; in my friends at POOR Magazine taking over abandoned homes in east Oakland and creating a movement of “homefulness” in a city that does not do enough for homeless people while criminalizing poverty; in the ministry students here spending time with people at Cook County Jail, hearing their stories, and beginning to engage in conversation about our broken criminal justice system and what an alternative of true justice could look like. These are powerful movements, and they need you—and you need them. Movements need wisdom, and wisdom is dead without action.

All of us here today have received the pearl of great price (Mt 13:46)—without having to give up all we had to purchase it. The question to the graduates today and to all of us is, how will you use it?

In your response lies the potential of bringing together of book smart and street smarts, the merging of prophet and priest, and the building up together of Beloved Community. Amen.

Alumna Sandhya Jha is an organizer, anti-racism trainer, speaker, and ordained minister. She is Director of Interfaith Programs for the East Bay Housing Organizations; the director and founder of the Oakland Peace Center, a collaborative of over 30 peace organizations; and the author of Room at the Table, a book about the 200-year multicultural history that makes up the Disciples of Christ. She previously served as Senior Pastor, First Christian Church of Oakland, and as Minister of Transformation and Reconciliation for the Christian Church in Northern California and Nevada.

DDH celebrates NAPAD connections, hosts Convocation

The North American Pacific Asian Disciples (NAPAD) will hold its 18th Biennial Convocation in Hyde Park, August 6-9. The gathering will bring 150 Disciples together for worship, fellowship, business meetings, and educational events.

Sixty years ago in June 1954, David T. Kagiwada, a second generation Japanese American Disciple who suffered internment during the Second World War, graduated from DDH and the Divinity School and was ordained. Together with Soongook Choi and Harold John- son, he became a founding force in the establishment of the American Asian Disciples (later NAPAD). A pastor and compassionate advocate for justice, he would become its first convener and the first of many DDH graduates to give leadership to NAPAD.

Following him are NAPAD moderator-elect John Roh and past moderator and historian Timothy Lee, as well as Disciples leaders April Lewton, Vy Nguyen, and Sandhya Jha. JoAnne Kagiwada, a retired attorney and nonprofit leader, is a longtime DDH trustee; April Lewton and Gaylord Yu also currently serve as trustees.
News

Find more news and more details at http://ddh.uchicago.edu and on our Facebook page, Disciples Divinity House of the University of Chicago.

Frank Burch Brown (1974) is editor of the newly released Oxford Handbook of Religion and the Arts. He is also a contributor to the volume, along with thirty-six international scholars representing multiple arts and religions, Larry Bouchard (1974) among them.


University Christian Church in Adel phi, Maryland, has become the first Disciples “Bridge of Hope” congregation, joining a 25-year-old ministry with the goal of “Ending Homelessness, One Family at a Time.” Marshall Dunn (1960; trustee) will coordinate the program, working with a social worker to train mentors who offer support and friendship to a homeless mother and her children while helping her to achieve independence.


Clark Gilpin (1970; trustee) is the acting director of the Martin E. Marty Center at the Divinity School for 2014-15. He continues to lead the Disciples History and Thought Seminar at DDH.

Dorsey to HELM

Bernard “Chris” Dorsey (2001), currently Assistant Professor of Theology and Preaching, Western Theological Seminary, has been called as the Transitional President of Higher Education and Leadership Ministries of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) for a three-year term. He received his BS from the University of Texas, a Master of Divinity from Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary, and is a PhD candidate in Theology at the Divinity School. He was previously Vice President of Development and Marketing for Chicago Theological Seminary.

Congratulations to Thandiwe Goble-dale (2009) and Darryl Ferguson (former resident), who will marry on September 20 in Sturgeon Bay, Wisconsin. Thandiwe is completing a residency in clinical pastoral education at Advocate Christ Hospital in Oak Lawn; Darryl is a PhD candidate in religious ethics at the Divinity School.

Lari Grubbs retired as the regional minister of the Christian Church in the Capital Area at the end of 2013, having served the region for 11 years. The CCCA is one of two regions with which DDH has comity; DDH celebrates Rev. Grubbs’s service as an ex officio member of the Board of Trustees.

Laura Hollinger (2001) is now Director of Religious Education at First Unitarian Church of Chicago.

Hope (IL) United Church of Christ hosted a celebration of the 50th anniversary of the ordination of Frank Hoss (1960) on June 29. Lowell Handy (1979) spoke about Frank’s service at First Christian Church of Fort Dodge, Iowa. Frank was presented with the Honored Minister Pin by the Pension Fund of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and was also honored by the UCC. The occasion also marked ten years of his ministry at Hope UCC.

Congratulations to Alexis Vaughan Kassim (2010) and Jacob Kassim, who were married in October.

Welcome to the world, Hogan Francis Lambert! He was born to Daette and Mark Lambert (2011) on March 12 at 10:46 am, weighing 8 lbs 10 oz. Congratulations also to Mark, who has been admitted to the PhD program in Theology at the Divinity School for this fall as a Disciples House Scholar.

House Scholar Andrew Langford, a PhD candidate in New Testament and Early Christian Literature, and Rachel Brocker, Associate Director of Admissions and Financial Aid at the Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago, are planning an August 2 wedding in Chicago. Congratulations!

On June 27, April Lewton (2004; trustee) addressed the Disciples Women’s Quadrennial Assembly in Atlanta, giv-
On July 1, Richard Miller (former resident) became Professor of Religious Ethics at the Divinity School. A 1985 PhD graduate of the Divinity School, he was most recently Provost Professor in Religious Studies at Indiana University. From 2003-13 he was Director of the Poynter Center for the Study of Ethics and American Institutions at IU. The author of five books and numerous other works, his research includes religious and public life, political and social ethics, theory and method in religious thought, and practical ethics.

Vy Nguyen (2004) and YenLinh Bui were married on May 24 at Saint Joseph Basilica in Alameda, CA; Sandhya Jha (2001) and Kyle Rader (former resident) were among the participants. Earlier this year, Vy was honored by the Christian Church in Northern California and Nevada as the 2014 recipient of Martin Luther King Jr Award. Previous recipients include Robert Lemon (1944), Esther and Carl Robinson (1944), and JoAnne Kagiwada (trustee).

Bonnie Osei-Frimpong (2005) is now Project Coordinator for NBA XPLOR, a new residency and service program for young adult Disciples.

Laura Jennison Reed (2009) was installed as pastor of the Christian Church of Villa Park, Illinois, on May 4. Cynthia Lindner (1978) preached; House Scholars Andrew Packman and Allie Lundblad were among the participants.

Pumsup Shim (former Disciples resident), who is now back in Korea, helped with the Korean translation of “Disciples Thumbnail Sketches.”

Felipa and Ryan Singleton (2005) have moved to Minneapolis, where Felipa accepted a position with the Target Corporation.

On July 1, Garry Sparks (2001) became Assistant Professor of Latin American Religion in the Department of Religious Studies at George Mason University in Fairfax, Virginia. He recently published “Constructing Hyperlocal Theologies: Ethnohistorical Contextualization of ‘Indian Theology’ and Ḧaṭṭat Samuel’s Legacy,” Journal of Hispanic/Latino Theology 19 no. 1 (Fall 2013).

Lena Noelle Staton arrived just in time for Christmas on December 15 at 4:09 pm. She was 6 lbs, 7 oz. and 19 inches long. Parents are Matt and Sara Anable Staton (2003); big brother is Evan. On Easter Sunday, Sara concluded 6 ½ years as Associate Minister of First Christian Church, Albany, Oregon.

Michael Swartzentruber (2007), Youth Minister at Middletown Christian Church, Louisville, led 69 youth to Chicago for a mission trip in early July. The trip focused on poverty and justice and included an evening at DDH with a sermon by Associate Dean Yvonne Gilmore and reflections facilitated by current students Kiva Nice Webb and Kathryn Ray—and ice cream.

Laura Jean Torgerson (2002) and Tim Donaghy and their daughters have returned from Nicaragua, where they served with the Division of Overseas Ministries. They were at DDH on April 7 to reflect on Theology without Climate Control: Reflections on Mission in Nicaragua. Laura Jean has been admitted to the PhD program at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, California.

Beau Underwood (2006) has been promoted to Senior Director of Advocacy and Communications at Sojourners in Washington DC.

**Downers Grove celebrates 50**

On July 20, the First Christian Church of Downers Grove, Illinois, will celebrate its fiftieth anniversary. The congregation, started in 1964 by William E. Crowl, who was then a DDH Scholar, is now led by alumna Teresa Hord Owens, who serves as Senior Minister and also as Dean of Students at the Divinity School.

A number of Disciples House Scholars have completed their field education at Downers Grove during those fifty years, including current scholars Hye In Park and Danielle Cox. Katherine Newman Kinnamon was the first Disciples House Scholar to serve. Commitment to and support of ministry students has been an important part of the congregation’s ministry. For example, when former intern Michael Karunas (now Senior Minister of Central Christian Church, Decatur) was ordained in 1998 in Ann Arbor, Michigan, the congregation attended—by the bus-full.

“Our congregation has a real heart for our community, a love that stretches from Downers Grove to children across the globe in Belarus,” Terri Owens says. That commitment goes back to the church’s early years. Bill Crowl tells the story of the Planning Commission hearing to approve the plans for the building.
In memoriam

Josephine Gilstrap Blakemore died May 10. She was 99. Her death, while not wholly unexpected, marks the passing of an era.

Josephine Blakemore was an indomitable woman whose great loyalty, intelligence, and spirit were committed to W. Barnett Blakemore, to his deanship and legacy, to their family, and to the Disciples Divinity House and the University that they both loved and served. A fierce defender of excellence in ministry, she leaves her own legacy of service and leadership.

Born in Oregon on October 21, 1914, she was the daughter and granddaughter of Disciples ministers. From 1939-41, she served as Director of Student Work at First Christian Church in Columbia, Missouri, with C. E. Lemmon. Dr. Lemmon, a DDH trustee, also proved to be a matchmaker. In the autumn of 1941 at the “C” Shop in Hutchinson Commons, Josephine Gilstrap met Barnett Blakemore, a newly-minted PhD who had recently been appointed to the Divinity School faculty with varied duties at the Disciples Divinity House. They married on June 2, 1942, in the Chapel of the Holy Grail, a space she considered that 90th Surprise Birthday.

In 1945, W. Barnett Blakemore became the fourth dean of the Disciples Divinity House, where he continued until his death in 1975. He would lead the DDH into its second half-century and through its 75th anniversary, teach as professor of ecumenical theology at the University of Chicago Divinity School, serve as Associate (acting) Dean of Rockefeller Chapel (1959-65), chair the Panel of Scholars for the Disciples of Christ and edit its three-volume report, and become a delegate observer to the Second Vatican Council. Josephine Blakemore served alongside him, accompanied him, and immersed herself within the community and University.

She was active with the University Laboratory Schools; she became president and a life member of the University Service League; she gave decades of service to and was an honorary life member of the Chicago Lying-In Hospital Board of Directors; she was active in the Women’s Board and with the Library Society. She traveled with Dean Blakemore around the world, including to New Delhi for the World Council of Churches and to Rome for the Second Vatican Council. She organized DDH’s Willett Library and its collection. With Dean Blakemore, she oversaw a project of refurbishing the Chapel of the Holy Grail.

She and Dean Blakemore welcomed generations of students and their families to the DDH. In those years, there were no women among the Disciples Divinity House Scholars. Mrs. Blakemore offered lessons in hospitality and grace to students’ wives—and became a lifelong friend to many of them. Margie Vargas and David Vargas, now President Emeritus of the Division of Overseas Ministries of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), recall, “The warm hospitality she provided us when we most needed it, her friendship and support for our work during the past four decades, her love for Jesus’ church, and her passion for the ministry of the DDH will never be forgotten.”

After Dean Blakemore’s death, Mrs. Blakemore prepared his papers for the University of Chicago Library Special Collections. She met new generations of House Scholars and befriended new deans. In 2005, she served as the honorary chair for the DDH luncheon at which William E. Crowl was honored as the Distinguished Alumnus. Indirectly, those greetings voiced and affirmed a vision of excellence that had animated Mrs. Blakemore’s own life: “In your generous and diligent sharing of your many inner strengths—finding so many kind and original ways to fulfill the biblical call to affirm each other in the faith—you have strengthened and lifted our spirits with your cheerful countenance, your energy, your ingenuity, and the professional focus of your steadfast ministry of love in an ever-changing world.”

She herself had witnessed immense change in the long span of her life. With generosity, diligence, energy, and ingenuity, she remained constant to causes and deeply loyal to persons. She sought also to uplift future generations and to strengthen the organizations that could equip those generations in an ever-changing world.

In addition to her son, William B. Blakemore, III, and her daughter, Jory Blakemore Johnson (Calvin M. Johnson), she is survived by two granddaughters, two great-grandchildren, and by a sister, Fernel Downing.

As her son and daughter explained, “She said she didn’t want a memorial service—she considered that 90th Surprise Birthday
Robert M. Grant, the Carl Darling Buck Professor Emeritus of New Testament and Early Christian Literature at the Divinity School, died June 10, 2014 in Hyde Park. He was 96. (The following is adapted from news. uchicago.edu.)

An influential historian of ancient Christianity, he taught at the University of Chicago from 1953 until his retirement in 1988 and was the author of over thirty books. His landmark works, including The Letter and the Spirit (1957), The Earliest Lives of Jesus (1961), and Augustus to Constantine: The Rise and Triumph of Christianity in the Roman World (1970; revised ed. 2004), anticipated many trends in New Testament scholarship by emphasizing social history and situating early Christian literary culture within the context of the wider Greco-Roman world. (He also published several books on German U-boats, a topic that had fascinated him since childhood.)

He was president of the Society of Biblical Literature, the Chicago Society for Biblical Research, American Society of Church History, and the North American Patristics Society. He was elected to the American Academy of Art and Sciences.

Margaret M. Mitchell, Dean of the Divinity School and the Shailer Matthews Professor of New Testament and Early Christian Literature, commented, “He was an excellent scholar and an unforgettable human being.”

Mr. Grant is survived by his wife Peggy (née Margaret Huntington Horton) and by their four children, six grandchildren, and two great-grandchildren.

Richard N. Johnson died September 4, 2013, in Oklahoma City. He was 79.

He was born in Bartlesville, Oklahoma, in 1934. After graduating from Transylvania University in 1956, and receiving his BD from Yale Divinity School, he entered the Divinity School as a Disciples House Scholar in 1959. While he was at DDH, he had the opportunity to study at Boser, Switzerland, where he met and married his spouse, Virginia (Ginny).

Dick Johnson devoted his career to congregational ministry. He retired from Putnam City Christian Church in Oklahoma City, where he held a long pastorate. Alumna Kay Northcutt completed an internship with him there and remembers him as a brilliant and important mentor.

He is survived by his spouse Ginny, their daughter Michele (Ted Uhlig), and two grandchildren.

G. Parker Rossman died October 18, 2013, in Columbia, Missouri. He was 94. (The following is adapted from The Missourian.)

Mr. Rossman spent his life working toward solving global problems through his work as an educator, a minister, and a futurist. After earning his BA from the University of Oklahoma in Norman, he entered the University of Chicago as a Disciples Divinity House in 1941. He earned his BD from the Divinity School in 1944, where he wrote a thesis on “The University Community and Its Churches” with Disciples sociologist Samuel C. Kincheloe.

Following World War II, he worked with the Student Christian Movement and, later, for the World Council of Churches in Geneva and with the Greek Orthodox Youth Movement in Beirut. He earned a PhD in Education at Yale University and then taught at Yale Divinity School. He was a freedom rider and traveled the world on World Council of Churches fact finding missions.

Mr. Rossman wrote more than a dozen books including Hospice: New Models of Care for the Terminally Ill; After Punishment What; Family Survival; Computers: Bridges to the Future; a children’s book, Pirate Slave; and his three-volume online book, The Future of Higher (Lifelong) Education. Adopting technology early, he was frequently a keynote speaker on using computers and the internet at international conferences, especially in the area of providing worldwide education to the developing world.

Mr. Rossman is survived by three daughters, six grandchildren, and a great-grandson. He was preceded in death by his wife Jean and their son.

Woodrow W. Wasson died December 10, 2013, in Nashville, Tennessee. He was 97.

Raised in Tennessee in a large family and in the Church of Christ, he attended David Lipscomb Junior College before receiving a BA (1939) and MA (1940) in Sociology from Vanderbilt University. Chicago was then the center of the study of religion from a sociological-scientific point of view, and Woody Wasson decided to continue his studies as a Disciples Divinity House Scholar at the University of Chicago. One of his Vanderbilt professors, George Mayhew (himself...
a Chicago graduate and the founder of the Disciples Foundation, later DDH, at Vanderbilt, wrote to Dean E. S. Ames: “[T]his young man has an open mind and has great possibilities for leadership and has the courage to follow his convictions.”

Mr. Wasson earned his BD at the Divinity School in 1943 and was ordained at University Church with E.S. Ames, W.E. Garrison, and Irvin Lunger among the ordaining ministers. He earned a PhD from the Divinity School in 1947, writing his dissertation with historian Sidney Mead. His 1952 book, *James A. Garfield: His Religion and Education*, was based on his dissertation; it examined the Ohio Disciples minister, abolitionist, and Union general who became president in 1880.

In 1944, he married Frances Marie Tallmon, who had earned her BS in 1942 from Peabody College at Vanderbilt. While he continued his doctoral studies, she studied medical sciences at the University of Chicago. She later became an Instructor in the Department of Pathology at the Vanderbilt University Medical School.

In 1949, Mr. Wasson became Professor of Religion and founding dean of the Christian College at the University of Georgia. He supervised Disciples students serving in ministry in local churches, raised money for their support, and offered courses relevant to the practice of ministry that also counted for undergraduate credit at the university. He spoke at Disciples gatherings and conventions and authored numerous articles. However, the position placed him in stressful cross-currents; eventually, the Wassons returned to Nashville.

Mr. Wasson lectured at the Vanderbilt University School of Religion, did postgraduate study at Oxford in 1955, and then served as archivist at Vanderbilt University. He received a certificate in Archival Administration in 1962 from American University and a Masters in Library Science from Peabody College in 1967. Later and until his retirement, he taught sociology and religion at Middle Tennessee State University.

At his memorial service, Mark Miller-McLemore, Dean of DDH at Vanderbilt, commented: “He was an intellectual, extremely well-educated, a scholar in service of the church, who wrote and led and taught at a high level. He felt the life of faith was a matter of absolute seriousness, deserving of our very best in clear thinking, truth telling, in joyous and full living with the best of all human expression in culture and the arts—all leading to faithful, understanding, discipleship.”

The death of Marie Wasson, his beloved wife for 58 years, “was a blow from which he could not escape. He slipped further into dementia, and a fine intellect was lost.” He is survived by four godchildren, including Susan Hammonds-White, who remained close through his final years, and by the educational institutions he esteemed and helped to shape.

William N. Weaver Jr, former treasurer of the Board of Trustees, died November 25, 2013, in Chicago after a long bout with emphysema. He was 79.

Bill Weaver insisted on excellence—in fact, he was impatient about its necessity—and his savvy, expertise, and generosity helped to ensure it. He was astute about DDH’s investments during a period of changing investment opportunities, yet he was also aware of the difference between ensuring good investments and ensuring the organization’s mission. In that regard, he was always future-oriented in his approach to expenditures and believed that investing well in students was at least as important as investing the endowment well. Among his enduring contributions was the creation of the William N. Weaver Entering Scholarship. The award remembers his father, William N. Weaver (Sr), who was a beloved dean of students at the Divinity School and a 1989 recipient of DDH’s Distinguished Alumnus Award.

Bill Weaver was born in New Orleans in 1934. He attended Oberlin College. In 1964, after attending the University of Chicago Law School for two years and serving in the Army for another two years, he graduated first in his class from the John Marshall Law School.

“He joined a five-person Chicago law firm that eventually became Sachnoff & Weaver Ltd., which grew to 160 lawyers by the time it merged in 2007 with Pittsburgh-based Reed Smith LLP,” according to the Chicago Daily Law Bulletin. Mr. Weaver retired in 2009.

“[H]e fostered an atmosphere at his namesake firm that ran counter to the zealousness that sometimes characterized the profession and the era. Lawyers at his firm were allowed to dress casually, encouraged to complete *pro bono* service and play pool or darts after work. Making money was important. But so were family outings and vacation time.”

Mr. Weaver also served on the board of the American Civil Liberties Union for 12 years. “‘Bill was a progressive. He refused to call himself a liberal, but he believed a lot of things the ACLU did were important,’ said Lowell E. Sachnoff, one of Weaver’s closest friends and law partner. ‘He was very careful to pick his causes.’”

“William N. Weaver Jr. has been described as a ‘consummate negotiator’ and a ‘brilliant tactician,...’ One local news report once called him the ‘dean of Chicago tech lawyers,’ the Daily Law noted. “He leaves behind his wife, Frona, two children, two stepchildren and 10 grandchildren—and one giant legacy in the Chicago legal and tech-startup worlds.”

![Image](image-url)
An ovation for Dennis Landon

At Disciples general assemblies, Dennis Landon often had roles in zany skits that featured some of the denomination’s most promising emergent leaders. On June 30, he retired from those productions—and from Higher Education and Leadership Ministries, a general ministry of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) whose work motivated the skits and their casts.

He became president of HELM in 1997, when it was known as the Division of Higher Education. It represents “over a century of organized Disciples commitment to the ministries of higher education as manifested in colleges and universities, campus ministries, and graduate theological education.” He led the organization in “identifying, cultivating, equipping and supporting transformative leaders.”

Creatively marshaling limited resources in response to a gap in leadership recruitment and development, he inaugurated the Leadership Fellows program for Disciples college students. Mr. Landon also worked, astutely and humbly, to strengthen and connect campus ministries, faculty and scholars, undergraduate institutions, and graduate theological education institutions—DDH most appreciatively among them.

An ordained Disciples minister who is a graduate of Columbia University and of the Disciples Divinity House and the Divinity School, he served congregations and as the executive for a cluster of colleges before coming to HELM. Dennis and Lana Hartman Landon, who is also a DDH alumna, plan to move to Pennsylvania.