



DISCIPLES SEMINARY FOUNDATION

July 2025

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A MESSAGE FROM DSF'S EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



Dear DSF Friends,

Over the past several years, I have had the privilege to teach *Disciples History, Polity, Theology, and Ethos* several times, and every time I teach it, I learn something new. Perhaps it's a new insight, a dawning realization, an overlooked connection. And as I am preparing to teach the course again this August, I am realizing that **tenacity** is a big part of the continuing story of the Disciples. Tenacity is the story of our historical founders, the development of our institutions of higher education, groups in our churches struggling to find their own distinctive voices, our newly called theological students, our current and recent graduates, our DSF alumni doing ministry in an ever-changing world, and our DSF mentors who continue to help

others navigate and make connections in divided communities on contentious issues. Tenacity. The determined ability to stay faithful, to embody hope, to remain persistent, to relay devotion, to maintain dedication, to show grit.

Throughout the turbulence of the past several months, tenacity has enabled me to become more committed than ever to the core values of DSF: Diversity, Integrity, Inclusion, Generosity, and Innovation. These values form the bedrock of DSF. And while many institutions in higher education — including our partner schools — have faced financial threats recently, DSF has readily stood in partnership, doubling down on the ideals that continue to shape and guide this Foundation and our church. DSF staff have also provided a safe space and sounding board for many of our students who feel threatened by the rhetoric and actions of current government employees. In this time, part of the ministry of DSF is to offer a committed, hopeful alternative to the hatefulness that has been unleashed. This political climate provides the backdrop to the important work of DSF that continues unabated. We continue the work of relationship-building with partners and stakeholders and creating a transparent, collaborative, creative organizational culture. This work ensures that all DSF programs and endeavors align with our mission, vision, and values.

So, it is in the spirit of tenacity that I invite you into this latest edition of the DSF Graduate Newsletter. In addition to our graduates, these pages will introduce you to some of our recently ordained alumni, DSF alumni who are working in chaplaincy and ministries outside of congregations, and DSF alumni who are serving as mentors to current DSF students. We celebrate each of them! They model the kinds of courageous and empathetic leadership the world desperately needs.

I hope you find inspiration in these pages. And I hope you experience some of the tenacity that helps define who we are. Thank you for your commitment to DSF and our mission to seek out and support diverse theological leaders for the church in a challenging world. We are grateful for you!

Blessings,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Christy Newton". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal line extending from the end.

DSF'S NEW CERTIFICATE PROGRAM "PASTORAL LEADERSHIP IN A DIVIDED WORLD"

The DSF Certificate Task Force held their first meeting on April 29, 2024. We immediately discovered that it was a monumental task we had set for ourselves – creating a multi-lingual, multi-cultural certificate in pastoral leadership that would reflect the values of DSF and engage the realities of the world we see around us, a certificate affordable for students and also financially solvent for DSF.

I would describe our beginnings over a year ago as hesitant, somewhat tentative. We had researched all current ministry certificates offered by Disciples and Disciples-related seminaries and the six DOC regions formally related to DSF. We became clear that our certificate would not be patterned closely to them. Rather, DSF values and world realities were calling us to create something new that filled the existing needs of the partners we serve. In the end, a focus on Korean-speaking, Spanish-speaking, and English-speaking DOC congregations was named.

When a fledgling curricular outline was completed, Christy Newton sent it out to approximately 20 Disciples leaders from Obra Hispana, Convenciones in our partner Regions, NAPAD, National Convocation, and other Regional and General Ministries. We were elated to hear back from most all of them! In great detail, those contacted expressed great enthusiasm for the project and also suggested changes in language, content, and form of the course of study. We paid close attention, incorporating their suggestions into our work.

From there, the curriculum has found purchase, descriptions of the 10 courses have expanded, potential faculty and program mentors are being gathered. Excitement builds. Who might consider being a student? A lay person who wants to contribute more to the local congregation or is in a process of vocational discernment, a person seeking commissioning in a DOC Region, a pastor who needs CEU's. We hope that students who are entering theological education for the first time will have their interests and imaginations piqued and consider seminary education. Many churches in DSF Regions are facing a crisis in that pastors are soon to retire, and there is no one preparing to replace them.

We will hold a pilot course in October 2025 and begin the one-year Certificate in January 2026. We are hopeful that congregations and regions will identify young adults with leadership potential and help support them through the Certificate process, giving them opportunities to share what they are learning. It will be online, asynchronous for three weeks with group conversation on the fourth week. For more information, please visit dsf.edu/certificate-programs.

Rev. Dr. Mary Donovan Turner
Carl Patton Professor of Preaching and Vice President for Academic Affairs, Emerita
Pacific School of Religion

FOR UPDATED INFORMATION ON
OUR CERTIFICATE PROGRAM, PLEASE VISIT
[DSF.EDU/CERTIFICATE-PROGRAM](https://dsf.edu/certificate-program)



Letters to our Graduates

Great people of God, DSF Cohort 2025,

It's hard to find good news these days, but indeed, knowing that you have obtained your degree is a remarkable achievement. Good news of salvation! Congratulations!

Your clever work, dedication, and perseverance have paid off. You're now ready to take on the next chapter of your journey.

You cannot say as the apostle Paul, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day." (2 Timothy 4:7-8 NIV) For sure, the Lord has an amazing crown for you on this day, since you've graduated, but your race has just started. Now that you've grown, learned, and evolved over the years, it is when the good fight begins. As you stand at the threshold of this new time in the U.S., remember that the world needs your talents and gifts, your passion and energy, and your unique perspective. You have equipped yourself with the skills, knowledge, and resilience to overcome political, economic, and religious challenges of our era.

Do not be afraid! There's a community in need waiting for your support, love, and compassion. There's a community that has been praying and waiting for someone like you. Yes, trust me! The orphan, the widow, the sick, the poor are there in the corner, and God is calling good-hearted graduates who go, serve, and live among God's people. You have the abilities, capacities, and values that the community needs. Just pack your belongings, trust in God, and trust in yourself! Keep the faith up!

You will become part of that community that will shape the present and future of our country. In that sense, stay open-minded, remain committed to making a positive difference, and always stay curious.

Congratulations once again! May this milestone not be the end of the race, but the beginning of an exciting, fulfilling journey.

Best wishes!

In Christ,

Rev. Dr. Néstor Gómez

Lead Director/Pastor - First Congregational Church of Stamford in Connecticut
DSF/University of Denver/Iliff School of Theology graduate (Ph.D./2019)



Letters to our Graduates

Congratulations 2025 DSF graduates!

Attending seminary was never a journey I had envisioned for myself, but when I felt a nudge from the PSWR leadership, DSF board members, and the DSF mentors who surrounded me (like Rev. Dr. Jo Ann Bynum and the late Rev. Dr. Mark Parsons), I decided to answer God's call to dedicate myself to a life of chaplain ministry. I had been a caregiver all my life, and with the encouragement of these wonderful leaders, mentors, and friends, they guided me forward into embracing the very blessed journey of a hospital chaplain for the past 16 years. I am so very grateful for the encouragement and support they gave throughout my challenging and demanding seminary experience, most especially during those times when I doubted that I could ever master the calling to pastoral care.

I trust that many of you may have shared similar seminary experiences where you sought out the true meaning and purpose of a life in faith ministry in whatever tradition you embrace. We often experience difficult struggles when looking for spiritual answers or searching for spiritual encouragement within our faith beliefs. These are the best times for us to embrace the truth of our spiritual selves (CPE phrase!). As we focus on nurturing our relationship with the Spiritual One we believe has created us, who cares for us always, then the purpose of our faith calling will find us, no matter what path we decide to travel. The most important aspect in creating a meaningful faith ministry is the commitment to the journey, hopefully in ways that will encourage and allow for the continued growth of our own spirituality, no matter the distractions which may lie ahead.

Congratulations fellow DSF alumni! What a uniquely special, demanding, challenging, and invigorating spiritual journey you have just begun! I pray that you continue embracing the Holy Loving Spirit of the One who surrounds and guides you on this journey, and may your spiritual calling yield rewarding and amazing experiences ahead.

Blessings!

Rev. Chaplain Robin Stallings, APC/BCC
DSF/SFTS/CST (M.Div./2014) graduate
Pediatric Trauma I Staff Chaplain
Methodist LeBonheur Children's Hospital, Memphis TN



DSF'S CLASS OF 2025 SEMINARY GRADUATES *In Their Own Words*



PATRICIA LEONG

ILIFF SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY
M.DIV.

iliff
SCHOOL of THEOLOGY



I got an old-fashioned calling from God as I drove down the freeway. [Seminary] was not on my radar until that moment. I had been slowly, steadily, and painfully going through the deconstruction of the evangelical concepts I had learned about Christianity, and then once God sent the idea down to me, I realized I might as well get a degree out of it.

I am a teacher, and I view everything through this lens. I want to learn things, and then I want to teach them to other people. My seminary education has given me multiple opportunities to learn something new and then wonder: “How I can help other people learn something like this, if they want to?” I also bring calmness to chaos because I must. It’s a way that I cope with my own racing thoughts, which I’m learning to bring outside of my brain and into the open when necessary.

As the situation in the world becomes scary, I tend to direct my focus for action locally because there is plenty to do here. What I would like is for myself and the people I am around to learn about how the little things we do consistently can impact the world, although not in ways we can necessarily control. My vision for the local church is education and then local action that springs from that education.

What was meaningful for me outside of the classroom was the housing program through the Central Rocky Mountain region that allowed me to stay with my fellow DOC/UCC schoolmates. The people I met through this program are the people I will remain friends with after seminary is over. I protected my physical health by

consistently wearing an N95 mask to every class. I would crochet during the four-hour intensives because I’m not able to be in a classroom that long only doing academic work. I have also let go of quite a lot of perfectionism and have turned in many papers that were only “good enough” in my opinion rather than exactly what I wanted them to be. I’ve also learned to stand on my own opinions and actions and not worry too much about what other people think of me.

I will be transitioning from an intern at Saguaro Christian Church in Tucson, AZ to mentoring a Green Chalice intern at the same church over the summer. I am [also] planning to be ordained.





SEVEN ALEXANDER GARDNER ILIFF SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY M.DIV.

I did things a little backwards. I started CPE before seminary at St. Mark's Hospital in Salt Lake City, Utah. This was a year before COVID-19's two big rounds. I was primarily the ICU chaplain during COVID-19. I saw so much and felt so much that I knew serving God was what I needed to do for the rest of my life. One of those steps was seminary, but I had no idea how I would do this at the time. DSF's support changed my life. My missing piece was the education, and DSF came to my rescue. Not only was I supported financially, but I have also been taken care of emotionally and spiritually by Dr. Newton and Jess Kim. I wouldn't have met my goals if it weren't for the help and strong personal support of these individuals.

My education changed me. It has been transformative and has opened my eyes to a theological world I had always wanted to study but never had the opportunity. My schooling has directly prepared me for ministry by opening my eyes to history, religions other than Christianity, spiritual care, and so many other things. I will translate this education to meet my goals of service to others. If it's in the cards, one day, I hope to go back to school and obtain my Ph.D.

I feel the strongest passion for serving marginalized people. I am interested in a ministry that supports those ends. I am most interested in LGBTQ+ and refugee and asylum issues. I love both chaplaincy and being a working pastor. I don't know yet in what capacity I will serve, and I eagerly await my calling. I was commissioned as an Associate Pastor for three years at the Utah State Women's Correctional Facility as well as having served as a chaplain in hospice and pediatric care.

One of the most important things I learned is that self-care is so important in ministry. I was bad at self-care and thought some of it was silly. I took a class where reporting on self-care was required, and I had a difficult time with it. It was time to ask myself why. In searching for that answer, I began to find quiet spaces where I could feel a connection to the Lord. As I cared for myself, I found it easier to care for others, and it struck me that "love others as you would love yourself" was a pretty clear directive for self-care. Now, I regularly do intentional, spiritual gardening. I take time for quiet walks with my dog, and I set aside time for spiritual reading, all of which refresh my soul.

I hope to be ordained, and if I am blessed with that, it will take place in the Mid-America Region. When I consider what has helped shape my vision of ministry, it has been working with others and hearing their stories, both good and bad. There is something holy about being a part of the meaning-making in someone's life, and I am forever grateful to have been given the chances I have had.



**ILIFF GRADUATES SEVEN ALEXANDER GARDNER
AND PATRICIA LEONG WITH REV. DR. ERIC SMITH**

JENNY JAHN

PACIFIC SCHOOL OF RELIGION

M.DIV. AND MA IN SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION (MAST)



Sitting in a quirky little church in Juneau, Alaska, I sat in awe of a female pastor who conducted service in her own right, and it was then that I realized I was being called into parish ministry.

However, it would take another seven years until seminary. I feel that the church can be a welcoming place for those who are re-constructing and a community for people. The country needs trained clergy leading churches.

I am currently the Supply Pastor of a small rural UCC church in Idaho. I am praying for ordination this year. I have been accepted into the D.Min. program at PSR and will start in Fall 2025, focusing on religious justice through poetry.

My vision is for the church to feel like home and as a community resource for people again. The local church doesn't need to be a trigger of bad memories, not a sense of duty; it can be fun and holy and sacred and welcoming.



My passion is to create a welcoming, peaceful community that is not stuck in toxic positivity and cultivating reverence alongside praise. PSR has secured my foundation of social justice and anti-racism. We are called to serve the poor, widows, orphans, and those in need...so let's!

Rumination and repetitive singing help me to be grounded in the Spirit's presence. Also, sleep. It does wonders for me.

My field education was at my local church. Before becoming Supply Pastor at another church, I was the bridge pastor, intern, and Interim Pastoral Associate. The internship and bridge pastor positions I held during seminary helped to reinforce my calling into parish ministry. I am praying to be ordained through the UCC or DOC.

CONGRATULATIONS!

BLESSING FOR THE GRADUATES OF 2025

by Jessica McFarland

Beloved, we pray on this day that you know you are called not to be perfect – only to be willing.

Be assured:

at times, your work will feel small –
days of spreadsheets, transactions, and checklists.
On these days, we urge you to call upon your imagination.
Envision yourself, knees on the ground and trowel in hand,
shoring up the foundation of the church, grain by grain.

Be assured:

At times, your work will feel urgent, creative, and connected.
On these days, we urge you to call upon your humility,
knowing that God weaves together our efforts
into tapestries beyond our vision.

Be assured:

At times, your work will be an enormity
that your shoulders, however sturdy, cannot bear.
On these days, we urge you to call upon others.
God has shaped us from our first moments to be in community.
Even leaders are not made to walk alone.

Like Elijah, you have been called into a wild and windy world.
But your purpose cannot be undone –
not by storms or injustices or cruelties or temptations.
Without question, God has promised you
sustenance, wisdom, emboldening, and accompaniment.
May you embrace the incomparability
of all that you have been, all that you are, and all that you will be
as you accept this invitation.



Jessica McFarland was commissioned into ministry in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in 2016. She is a graduate of Harvard Divinity School, where she studied Ancient Christianity and classical languages. Jessica is a former DSF student at Pacific School of Religion and the Graduate Theological Union and the 2015-16 Driskill Scholar for Spirituality in Ministry. In the years since, she has embraced the call of service in a variety of forms including parish ministry, nonprofit leadership, and teaching. She resides in Georgia and is a poet and mother to Amie and Olivia, who are pursuing environmental and artistic endeavors in college.

CONGRATULATIONS TO OUR 2025 NAMED SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS



BRY BRANNAN



PATRICIA LEONG

BAILEY SCHOLARSHIP

THE C. WILLIAM BAILEY SCHOLARSHIP PROVIDES A SCHOLARSHIP EACH YEAR TO DSF STUDENTS ENROLLED IN THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION, PREPARING FOR MINISTRY, IS PART OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH (DISCIPLES OF CHRIST) OR THE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST, AND WHO HAS DEMONSTRATED FINANCIAL NEED.



TEILA CREEKMORE

BROWN SCHOLARSHIP

THE JANIS BROWN SCHOLARSHIP IS GIVEN EACH YEAR TO A DSF STUDENT AT CLAREMONT SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY WHOSE WORK SPECIALIZES IN CHAPLAINCY AND/OR SPIRITUAL FORMATION.



SHANNON MARCKX

DRISKILL SCHOLARSHIP

THE JOSEPH D. DRISKILL SCHOLARSHIP IS GIVEN EACH YEAR TO A DSF STUDENT IN NORTHERN CALIFORNIA WHO BEST EMBODIES PROFESSOR DRISKILL'S COMMITMENT TO SPIRITUALITY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE.



**REV. KATHEREN
CAMPBELL HUDSON**

LACEY SCHOLARSHIP

THE JON AND MELBA LACEY SCHOLARSHIP IS GIVEN EACH YEAR TO A DSF STUDENT, WHETHER A LGBTQ PERSON OR ALLY, WHO ARE MOST LIKELY TO MAKE A STRONG WITNESS FOR INCLUSION THROUGHOUT THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH (DISCIPLES OF CHRIST).



JENNY JAHN

MCCORMICK SCHOLARSHIP

THE MCCORMICK SCHOLARSHIP IS INTENDED TO A STUDENT IN GOOD STANDING WITH DEMONSTRATED FINANCIAL NEED.



ELIZABETH FAGAN

PARSONS SCHOLARSHIP

THE PARSONS SCHOLARSHIP IS INTENDED FOR A DSF M.DIV. STUDENT AT CLAREMONT SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY WITH STRENGTH AND INTEREST IN MUSIC, WORSHIP, OR PRACTICAL THEOLOGY.

HELP US CELEBRATE OUR RECENT ORDINATIONS!

Rev. Sandy Roberts
DSF/CST graduate (M.Div./2023)
February 8, 2025

Rev. Shannon Gomez
DSF/PSR graduate (M.Div./2022)
January 4, 2025

Rev. Braeden Storkersen
DSF/CST student (Ph.D.)
December 7, 2024

Rev. Holly Greenidge
DSF/The Seattle School of Theology and
Psychology graduate (M.Div./2024)
November 23, 2024

Rev. Christiane Swartz
DSF/PSR graduate (M.Div./2024)
November 9, 2024

DSF MENTOR PROGRAM

THE DSF MENTOR PROGRAM IS BACK! TO CELEBRATE THE RELAUNCH, WE ASKED A FEW MENTORS AND MENTEES TO SHARE WHAT THIS POWERFUL, TRANSFORMATIVE JOURNEY HAS MEANT TO THEM.



REV. REBECCA LITTLEJOHN
DSF/PSR graduate (M.Div./2001)

My experience with my mentee has been delightful. Our conversations have been filled with honesty and humor as well as refreshing openness to the Spirit. One of my favorite things about mentoring is how helping someone else reflect on their life helps me reflect on mine. It's so easy to feel like I'm still a beginner, but as I listen to this person just getting started, I can see just how much I have been through and how much I have learned.

Honestly, the seminary experience has changed so much since I went through it over 20 years ago. There are things I had that I wish today's students could have, but there are also opportunities they have that I couldn't have imagined. By nurturing these cross-generational relationships, we can both benefit.

It is a gift to be trusted to hold someone else's journey in a gentle, encouraging space. To provide the support that you had (or wish you had had) during your own ministerial formation to someone else who needs it can be a practice of gratitude or healing.

None of us really knows what the future holds or what "church" or "ministry" will look like in the coming decades. Going through a process filled with categories, labels, and requirements can make it feel like even a small "wrong" choice could spell failure. So it is a privilege to be the one to invite someone to step back and see the bigger picture, which is that it's all preparation for God's future, which is still being formed. Thank you DSF for this opportunity!



REV. ROSARIO IBARRA
DSF/PSR student (D.Min.)

I appreciate the opportunity that Disciples Seminary Foundation offers to have a mentor. Due to my busy schedule, I was unsure how this process would work. Throughout my life, I have counted on some people's expertise and experience to support me at various points, which I am grateful for, but it was sporadic.

However, while dealing with work and class responsibilities, it was refreshing to set aside time to meet with a mentor with whom I could share ideas, thoughts, challenges, be listened to, and listen to other perspectives, as well as thoughtful questions. I was very appreciative that at the beginning, my mentor took the time to get to know me and build a supportive and safe environment. I enjoy that he is affable, approachable, empathetic, incredibly encouraging, and always willing to support my ministry. I also appreciate his wisdom, vulnerability, and willingness to share his experience and expertise.

Our conversations and positive feedback have uplifted my spirit, for which I am grateful. I am glad for the quality of our interactions because we can discuss openly any issue, whether theological, religious, or practical. Hearing another perspective has made me reflect on and review my core values and approach to leadership.

Again, I highly appreciate the opportunity to count on an experienced mentor who, despite having multiple work and ministry responsibilities, is always willing to make time to meet with me, and who understands the challenges and joys of working in ministry as well as in other contexts.

In their own words



REV. CISA PAYUYO
Former DSF/CST student (M.Div.)

Mentoring seminarian Gloria Carr this year has been an honor and a rewarding experience. I thank God for Rev. Christy Newton, Rev. Siobhan Lopez, and Jess Kim for their dedication in pairing us. Our connection has been deeply meaningful.

When I first agreed to participate as a mentor, I saw myself mostly as a guide, someone to provide wisdom and direction as they navigated the complexities of theological studies and spiritual development. My intention was to share my experiences and offer practical advice. However, I quickly realized that mentoring is not a one-sided endeavor; instead, it is a dynamic and reciprocal process. As I reflect on this experience, I am reminded me of the words of Proverbs 27:17 (The Inclusive Bible): “Iron sharpens iron, and friends sharpen friends.”

It was important for me to establish a sense of safe and sacred space for Gloria each time we met. Often, our Zoom calls were squeezed between our busy schedules and appointments. Making space for pause and prayer before we began sharing our stories gave us a chance to breathe in the Divine. It allowed us to welcome the Holy Spirit to sit with us in our conversation, and for the busyness of the world to stand still, even for a moment. Doing so freed me to truly listen to Gloria and be fully present as she spoke. Gloria and I discovered that we have similar experiences in life, in church leadership, and in managing the delicate balance of work, school, and family. I feel we have poured into each other’s life and have blessed each other by our stories and co-nurturing.

Mentoring deepened my sense of purpose and connection to ministry, reminding me of the beauty and complexity of this calling – a calling defined by seeking and serving God with humility and grace.



DR. GLORIA CARR
DSF/CST student (M.Div.)

I call Cisa my great joy, my Godsend, as she was truly sent by God for such a time as this. God planted her as a seedling in my life, which has propagated into such a beautiful flower. From the outset, our spirits and hearts connected. What comes from the spirit reaches the spirit. Likewise, what comes from the heart reaches the heart.

I align her with attributes such as an insightful encourager who is kind, patient, and gentle. As I was writing about Cisa’s attributes so generously shared, the scripture from Galatians 5:22-23 rose up. Cisa consistently displayed the biblical fruit of the spirit in Galatians 5:22-23: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control with every encounter we had. At times, I would join the meeting full of “stuff” to discuss. So, I would start with my thought just rambling! Cisa would reel me in so gently and say, “Let’s pray Gloria,” and we did. We opened and closed every conversation and encounter with a prayer, inviting God through the Holy Spirit to lead, guide, and direct our sharing. These prayers were meaningful, and I know that God heard us because I felt His presence in our midst. This is significant because she was also enduring trials of life. However, she managed to ensure that I was the focus of our conversations and that she addressed everything I needed to address for that moment in time. Cisa intently listened as we engaged in personal, professional, life, and seminary conversations. This, in my estimation, is a life-long relationship built by God himself. I do give credit, and I am so grateful for Rev. Christy Newton, Jess Kim, and Rev. Siobhan Lopez at DSF for pairing us together. But ultimately, I give all honor, praise, and glory to our Sovereign, Omniscient God who is perfect in all His ways. Hallelujah!



GREETINGS AND HIGHLIGHTS FROM DSF ALUMNI

At DSF, our connection with students doesn't end at graduation — it's just the beginning of a lifelong journey together. We're proud to walk alongside our alumni as they grow, lead, and serve in new ways. Recently, we caught up with some of our graduates who shared exciting updates about where life has taken them since their time at DSF.

JEFFREY ISHMAEL



As I enter my 25th year of ordained ministry, I am happy there were people and institutions that believed in me and believed God had called me to service. I was reluctant at age 34 to pursue ministry, originally hearing the call as a 17-year-old Southern Baptist. I had many excuses: I'm too old, I'm a gay man, I have a big, crazy dog they won't allow into the dorms. I also had no money. But DSF was there to help financially, which gave me space to examine and deal with these other excuses. One by one, they fell away as I continued to take each step closer.

Attending seminary was a transformative experience that challenged me to go deeper and find the intersection where my call to God's work met needs in our broken world. The loving folks at DSF helped me find that intersection by helping me focus on what it means to be a disciple of Christ. Two aspects of the life of Jesus that have deeply influenced my ministry are healings and when he said, "Let the little children come to me." My chaplaincy education at Cincinnati Children's

Hospital helped me shape these two aspects into a foundation for my career and find my place at bedside with children and adults at the end of their lives. It is work that has broken my heart time and time again.

We do not do this alone. After seminary, I had to move back in with my parents in Kentucky to care for my father. After a year had passed, Christy Newton was in Louisville, and we met for dinner. In the course of that night as we laughed about our escapades of seminary, Christy gifted me with a nugget of truth and honesty that probably saved my calling. She said, "Jeffrey, you have to find your way back to ministry. I know God has called you to this." DSF has the leadership it needs at this crucial shift in what it means to be Church. I am glad it will continue to help others find their way in ministries not yet conceived or dreamed. We need each other to affirm our call and to see what God has already seen.

Jeffrey Ishmael is a Palliative Care and Oncology Chaplain for John Muir Healthcare in Walnut Creek, CA. He graduated from PSR in 2000 and was ordained in the CCNC-N region. He has served a broad variety of pediatric and adult, end of life, palliative, and bereavement care positions. He also serves on the Training and Care Committee of the CCNC-N and on the board of the Oakland Peace Center. He is blessed with the love of family: his husband, Henry Velasco; their two (almost grown) children Haylee and Sage; Grandma Dolly; and Sheldon the pug.

REV. MOLLY CARLSON



I arrived at Pacific School of Religion (PSR) in 1998, days after my spouse finished seminary and was ordained in Indianapolis, IN. At the time, I identified primarily as spiritual but not religious and hoped my call could be fulfilled with some good justice-centered community organizing work. However, God has continued to surprise me.

During my midler year, my spouse accepted a call in Louisville, KY. I joined him that summer and completed CPE, then commuted to Indianapolis to complete my coursework. All of those credits transferred back to PSR, and I graduated in 2001, three months after my first child was born very prematurely. I ended up staying home with them for about 18 months before going back to work.

Over the subsequent years, I have served in community organizing for all of six months. I have also served in national, regional, and local settings within both the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and the United Church of Christ. I have been a church planter, a solo pastor, head of staff, consultant, coach, judicatory staff, and interim minister. I have served small, medium, and large sized congregations. I have served in Kentucky, Indiana, California, Pennsylvania, South Dakota, Oregon, Idaho, Tennessee, Illinois, Texas, Louisiana, and Mississippi. Currently, I serve as the Interim Conference Minister for the South Central Conference of the United Church of Christ.

Somehow, God has continued to use me and challenge me. And I continue to be surprised.

Rev. Molly Carlson lives in Dekalb, IL with her husband, Michael, and several pets. She works remotely as the Interim Conference Minister for the South Central Conference of the United Church of Christ (TX, LA, MS).



CAPT. RENE J. MARTIN III

I once thought my path to ministry was untraditional. Married to a pastor from a different denomination and raised in an unchurched home, I didn't feel a "traditional" calling until biblical studies reframed my story: being called from exactly where I stood.

With 17 years of enlisted service behind me when I began seminary, the possibility of becoming an officer gave urgency to my studies – I had to finish before age disqualified me. After being lovingly called out for my vanity, I kept the saying close: "Want to make God laugh? Tell God your plans." I told myself that God was calling me toward my "true" purpose.

After graduating from Claremont School of Theology, I was ordained. That spring, I began a chaplain residency at a veterans hospital, completing Clinical Pastoral Education just as COVID arrived. When the National Guard activated, I served full-time as an enlisted Chaplain Corps member, offering spiritual care to military medical teams augmenting civilian hospitals. I also assisted Airmen and soldiers in recovering bodies from overwhelmed hospitals, preparing them for delayed transfer to mortuaries. My final mission as an enlisted member was supporting Air Crews returning from the last airlifts out of Afghanistan. Between deployments, I served as a hospice chaplain.

In 2021, I was commissioned as a Chaplain in the California Air National Guard. What once motivated me — my guiding star — had become my destination.

As a military chaplain, I'm more than a crisis caregiver. I maintain 100% confidentiality and am held to the highest legal and ethical standards. My role is to help service members integrate their spiritual lives with the military mission. One hour, I'm offering an invocation at a ceremony; the next, I'm comforting a grieving family. After that, I'm teaching Airmen how to align their faith with their service.

Arriving at your destination doesn't mean your journey is over. It means the real work has just begun.

“Arriving at your destination doesn't mean your journey is over. It means the real work has just begun.”



Rev. Rene Martin is a DSF/CST graduate (M.Div./2018). He is serving as a Chaplain in the California Air National Guard with standing and endorsement in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). He has five children and is married to Rev. Lara Martin.



What is DSF Reading?

REV. SIOBHAN LOPEZ IS READING...

"Our Unforming (De-Westernizing Spiritual Formation)" - Cindy S. Lee
"Sacred Belonging" - Kat Armas
"Crisis Contemplation (Healing the Wounded Village)" - Barbar A. Holmes
"Sisters of the Lost Nation" - Nick Medina

REV. DR. CHRISTY NEWTON IS READING ...

"Cuba: An American History" - Ada Ferrer
"James" - Percival Everett
"Demon Copperhead" - Barbara Kingsolver

ERIN ZAVALA IS READING...

"Black Liturgies" - Cole Arthur Riley
"Spirit Wheel: Meditations from an Indigenous Elder" - Steven Charleston

TOM MESSICK IS READING...

"Critical Dilemma: The Rise of Critical Theories and Social Justice Ideology - Implications for the Church and Society" - Neil Shenvi and Pat Sawyer
"Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation" - James K.A. Smith
"Becoming Human: The Holy Spirit and the Rhetoric of Race" - Luke Powery

REV. DON DEWEY IS READING...

"Grace Abounds" - Walter Brueggemann
"Jesus for Everyone: Not just Christians"; "The Gospel of John"; "Short Stories by Jesus"
- Amy-Jill Levine
"Grace (Eventually): Thoughts on Faith"; "Stitches"
- Anne Lamott
"The Big Questions: How Philosophy Can Change Your Life" - Lou Marinoff
"Walden" - Henry David Thoreau

JESS KIM IS READING...

"The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America's Great Migration" - Isabel Wilkerson
"A Man Called Ove" - Fredrik Backman

JENNY JAHN IS READING...

"The Last Week" - Marcus J Borg & John Dominic Crossan
"Up From Slavery" - Booker T. Washington
"Kitchen Hymns" - Pádraig Ó Tuama

REV. STEPHAN BRUNELLE IS READING...

"Spirit in Session" - Russell Siler Jones
"Becoming Kuan Yin" - Stephen Levine
"Until My Memory Fails Me: Mindfulness Practices for Cultivating Resilience & Self-Compassion in the Face of Cognitive Decline" - Sharon Lukert

ELIZABETH FAGAN IS READING...

"The Universal Christ" - Richard Rohr
"The Smell of Dust on Rain: Grief and Praise"
- Martín Prechtel
"LGBTQ Catholics: A Guide to Inclusive Ministry"
- Yunuen Trujillo
"Catholic and Feminist" - Mary J. Henold

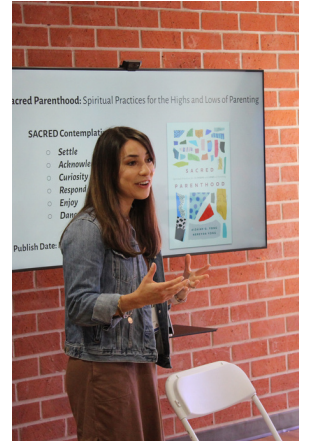
REV. DR. JONATHAN HALL IS READING...

"A Paradise Built in Hell: The Extraordinary Communities That Arise in Disaster" - Rebecca Solnit
"Stolen Focus: Why You Can't Pay Attention"
- Johann Hari
"At Your Best: How to Get Time, Energy, and Priorities Working in Your Favor" - Carey Nieuwhof

LOU DAVIS IS READING...

"Death of Conservatism" - Sam Tanenhaus
"Failing up: How to Take Risks and Aim Higher"
- Leslie Odom Jr.







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