

Holmes envisions diversity in ethnicity and in thought

Written by

Monday, 09 September 2013 14:49



The Rev. Dr. Barbara A. Holmes began her tenure as the first African-American president of United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities (United) one year ago.

Her vision for the seminary has a strong focus on creating a diverse community, not only in race and ethnicity, but also for those who are diverse in thought.

To this end, Holmes has taken major steps toward creating a learning environment that will continue to actively invite members of all communities to study and prosper at United. Addressing the common barriers for students of color, there are new scholarships to assist with tuition, a recently appointed director of diversity and student affairs and new faculty and adjunct faculty with backgrounds that make them uniquely qualified to teach United's incoming students.

In order to ease the financial burden, two new scholarships for incoming students are now available. These scholarships were created to introduce theological education to those pursuing a career in ministry, seeking professional development, following a new career path or engaging

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a deeper understanding of their own spirituality.

Because of the generosity of Robyn and Frank Sims, African-American former board members and Twin Cities residents, a scholarship fund has been created to provide one full year of tuition in any master's degree program (Master of Divinity, Master of Arts or Master of Arts in Religious Leadership) for African-American students. The Sims scholar can choose when the scholarship can be of the greatest financial help for them and use it over the course of several semesters. Even without a bachelor's degree, a certain number of students can be admitted into a master's program at United.

For those interested but unsure about theological education, United is awarding a limited number of "Test the Waters" scholarships. This award provides an opportunity for a qualified student to enroll in a degree program to test the waters of theological study before making a decision to enroll in one of United's master's degree programs.

Changes to the staff have also been a part of the plan to bring diversity to life at United.

Margaree Levy has been promoted to the position of director of diversity and student affairs, and her role encourages diversity in the institution through creating multicultural programs and events. Most recently, Levy organized events such as Out in Gospel and brought award-winning jazz artist Kirk Whalum to Minneapolis to perform from his album trilogy, "The Gospel According to Jazz."

United also announced two new African-American professors joining the faculty in the 2013 fall semester.

Joining the faculty as assistant professor of pastoral care and pastoral theology, Trina Armstrong, an ordained itinerant elder with the African Methodist Episcopal Church (A.M.E.), will begin her first term this fall teaching two pastoral care courses, Caring for Families and Relationships and Pastoral Care in Grief and Loss.

Visiting professor of theater and culture, Sarah Bellamy, associate artistic director at Penumbra Theatre, will teach a new course in the fall term, Bearing Witness: The Power of Story. This course will look at the power of theatre to promote social justice and equity through story, performance and post-play dialogue. For additional information about the scholarships, contact Michelle Turnau, director of financial aid, at mturnau@unitedseminary.edu or (651)255-6117.