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#### THE UNION UNIVERSITY MAGAZINE

Spring 2025 | Volume 75 | Number 1

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#### **Numbers to Know**

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#### ON THE COVER:

The Ethos Forum dedication, March 21, 2025 Photo by Lauren Steed ('25)

## From the President

As we reflect on the past year at Union University, I am reminded of the profound ways God continues to work through this amazing community. This season has been marked by milestones that exemplify our shared mission of Christ-centered education, and one of the most significant is the opening of The Ethos Forum.

The Ethos Forum stands as a testament to what we value most at Union: the integration of faith and learning. Its

name, derived from the Greek word for "character," reminds us that education is not merely about acquiring knowledge but about shaping who we are in Christ. Our mission statement declares that Union exists to provide Christ-centered education that promotes excellence and character development in service to Church and society. Situated across from The Logos, our library that symbolizes the Word and our beliefs, The Ethos Forum represents how we

live out those beliefs in every sphere of life — whether in business, technology or creative endeavors.

This new facility is more than bricks and mortar. It is a space dedicated to fostering innovation, collaboration and excellence. Housing the McAfee School of Business and the departments of computer science and engineering, it features cutting-edge resources like a makerspace and business incubator designed to inspire creativity and entrepreneurship. Yet, beyond its physical features. The Ethos Forum is a place where students will be equipped not just with skills for their careers but with character to serve Christ faithfully in their callings.

I am deeply grateful for the many individuals, families and organizations whose generosity made this \$20 million project possible. Your support is an investment in our students' futures and in the Kingdom work they will carry out around the globe. To everyone who contributed to this vision - thank you for partnering with us in shaping lives for God's glory.

While The Ethos Forum is a significant addition to our campus, it also reflects something greater: Union's unwavering commitment to excellence in Christian higher education. As part of Protinus, our strategic plan, this building embodies our forward-looking vision to prepare students for lives of meaningful service and leadership.

To our students, faculty, alumni and friends: thank you for being part of this journey. Together, we are building not only facilities but a legacy of faithfulness that will benefit generations to come. Let's continue to press forward - "onward," as "protinus" means - with gratitude and hope as we seek to glorify God in all that we do.

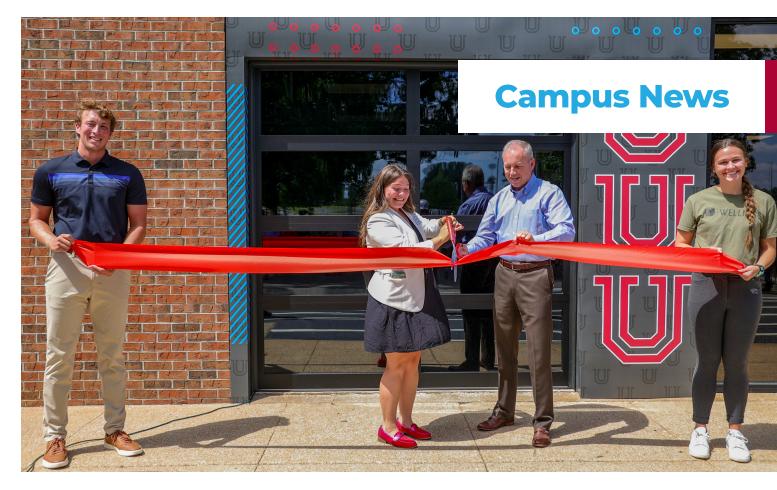
It truly is a great day at Union!

With gratitude,



Samuel W. "Dub" Oliver, Ph.D.





#### **Union Celebrates Opening of Expansive New Wellness Center**

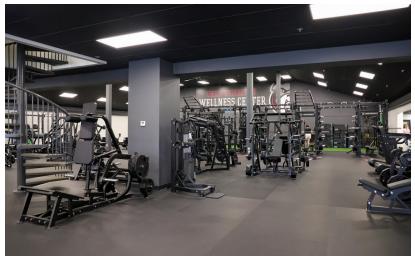
Union University dedicated its new Wellness Center Aug. 19, officially opening the new fitness facility that is more than four times larger than the previous space.

"This is a very exciting day for us," Union President Samuel W. "Dub" Oliver said. "For all of us at Union, it's a day that we've hoped for and dreamed about for several years."

Located along the main hallway in the Penick Academic Complex in the space that the library formerly occupied, the new Wellness Center features a group fitness space, turf area, a 10-station rig system, including five power racks and five half-racks, and a plate-loaded section, in addition to a Vertimax multi-faceted training system.

Taylor Construction and Restoration was the main contractor for the project.

Oliver said the new Wellness Center aligns with the fourth theme of Protinus, Union's strategic plan that the university adopted in 2023, "enhancing our culture of shared life and commitment to one another's flourishing."



"There is indeed a strong commitment to our flourishing when you get in this facility," he said. "And we recognize that a strong sense of community doesn't just happen, that it requires intentionality, and it requires diligence."

The Wellness Center is free for students and Union faculty and staff. Memberships are available for alumni and community members. For more information, email campusrec@uu.edu.



#### **Psallos Releases New Album** of Congregational Hymns

Christian music group Psallos has released a new full-length album called A Sure Hope: Hymns of Romans on all streaming platforms.

The new album is a theologically rich collection of congregational hymns designed for singing in a worship service. It covers themes of grace, living by faith and hope in the gospel and is composed to an indie-folk sound similar to the foot-stomp beat of The Oh Hellos and The Arcadian Wild.

Writer and composer Cody Curtis, Union's assistant director of residence life, and his wife Melody formed Psallos in 2012. Since its beginning, Psallos has released four full-length records each centered on individual New Testament epistles, beginning with Psallos' 2015 release, Romans.

Psallos' music is available at www.psallos.com.

#### **Union Names Five New Academic Deans**

Five Union faculty members have in recent months been promoted to dean positions at the university. The newest academic deans are:

- Dan Slater, dean of the McAfee School of Business. Slater joined the Union faculty in 2010 and replaces Karen Miller, who chose to return to the classroom after her service as dean. Slater is a graduate of Central Bible College in Springfield, Missouri, with an undergraduate degree in Bible and ministry. He completed his Master of Business Administration degree from Missouri State University and his Doctor of Philosophy degree in business administration-management from the University of Arkansas.
- Todd Stanfield, dean of the School of Social Work. Stanfield joined the Union faculty in 2007 and replaces Nita Mehr, who retired. A graduate of the Universi-

ty of Alabama with both bachelor's and master's degrees in social work, Stanfield completed his Doctor of Philosophy degree from the University of Tennessee's College of Social Work.

- Kim Iones, dean of the College of Pharmacy. She replaces Sheila Mitchell, the College of Pharmacy's founding dean, who retired. Since 2019, Jones had served as the COP's assistant dean for student services and as professor of pharmacy practice. A graduate of Middle Tennessee State University, Jones earned her Doctor of Pharmacy degree from the University of Tennessee College of Pharmacy.
- Brooke Glover Emery, dean of the School of Adult and Professional Studies and Graduate Admissions. She replaces Renee Dauer, who retired. Emery joined the Union faculty in 2010 and most recently served as associate dean

and director of internships for the McAfee School of Business and as associate professor of marketing. A graduate of Rhodes College with a double major in business administration and economics, Emery completed her Master of Business Administration degree and her Doctor of Education in educational leadership from Union.

■ Teresa Tritt, dean of the College of Education. She replaces John Foubert, who moved to a position as a full-time professor. Tritt joined the Union faculty in 2018 as associate professor of education and director of Union's Educator Preparation Program. She completed her bachelor's degree in interdisciplinary studies from Lambuth University and earned her Master of Arts in education, her Education Specialist and her Doctor of Education degrees from Union.



Dan Slater



**Todd Stanfield** 



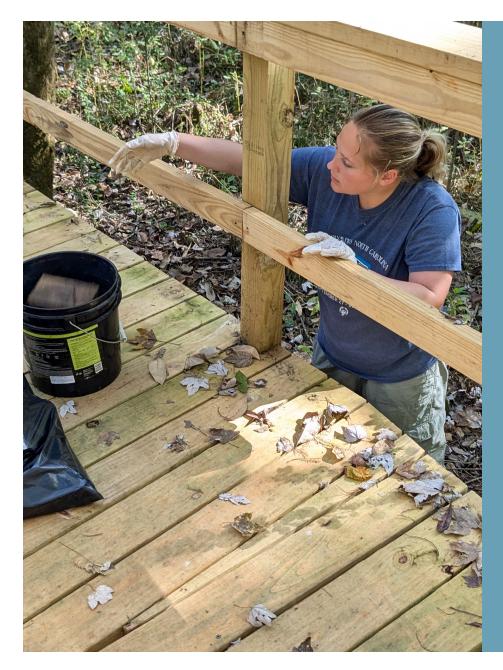
Kim Jones



**Brooke Glover Emery** 



Teresa Tritt



## **Union Gives Back** to Community **During 22nd Annual** Campus and **Community Day**

As a native of Jackson, Tennessee, Union University junior Mackenzie Cooper loves the university's annual Campus and Community: A Day of Remembrance and Service on Oct. 23 to help pick up trash at the city's Cypress Grove Nature Park as a way of showing her appreciation.

'Jackson gives a lot to Union Universi-Cooper said. "As Christians, we are called to give back to our community and to support others. Picking up trash is a great way to be part of the community and help serve other people."

Cooper, a zoology major, was one of about 800 people from Union who participated in the 22nd annual day set aside for community service. Each year, Union cancels classes for the day so faculty, staff and students can serve, in munity helped Union after tornadoes hit campus in 2002, 2003 and 2008.

projects at local schools, churches and non-profit organizations.

## **Union Students Sharpen Preaching** Skills in Partnership with Area Churches

Gaining valuable preaching experience, Union University students participated in a special preaching opportunity hosted by the Dyer Baptist Association Oct. 6, when six churches volunteered to open their pulpits to students from the School of Theology and Missions.

Adren Pearce, Union's coordinator for chapel and church relations, said this opportunity is fruitful for both students and local churches.

"It benefits the students because they learn the practice of preparing and delivering a sermon," Pearce said. "It helps with spir-

itual growth as the students spend extended time in God's Word and in prayer in preparation for their sermons. The church is benefitted by the encouragement that comes from seeing young men faithfully pursue their calling into ministry."

Ray Van Neste, dean of the School of Theology and Missions and vice president of university ministries, said churches are often excited to see that God is still calling young men to preach.

"These sorts of opportunities are vital as we seek to strengthen a ministry pipeline for churches in West Tennessee and beyond," he said.

## Getty Duo Headlines Union's 26th Annual Scholarship Banquet

A Christmas concert by hymn writers and recording artists Keith and Kristyn Getty highlighted the 26th annual Union University Scholarship Banquet Dec. 3 at the Carl Perkins Civic Center, with about 1,200 people in attendance.

The Gettys, who hail from Northern Ireland, are the founding leaders of the Getty Music organization and have written hymns, such as *In Christ Alone*, that are sung by millions of Christians in churches across the world each week.

"It was a delight to hear from Keith and Kristyn Getty and be reminded what we celebrate at Christmas," said Catherine Kwasigroh, Union's vice president for institutional advancement. "We are so thankful for the donors who support this event, and whose generosity makes an excellent, Christ-centered education at Union possible for students who otherwise might not be able to experience it."

FirstBank and Elite Contractors were the lead sponsors for this year's Scholarship Banquet.

The Gettys have long been connected to Union, performing concerts on campus in both 2009 and 2010. Several Union graduates have worked with them in their organization, and their current executive assistant is a Union alumnus.

In a pre-concert interview with Union President Samuel W. "Dub" Oliver, the Gettys expressed their appreciation for Union as they discussed their background and how they got into hymn writing.

"We live in the most exciting generation to be Christians," Keith Getty said. "I know if you are a parent or a grandparent or a supporter of a college, you know, it is easy to get down about many of the things that are happening in our culture. And it is right to mourn and grieve them because they are very serious.

"But at the same time," he continued, "the gospel that was big enough to save the Apostle Paul and Augustine and Martin Luther and sinners like me is big enough to deal with what's happening in the world. But we need deep believers. We need to take learning seriously. We need to take the Bible seriously."





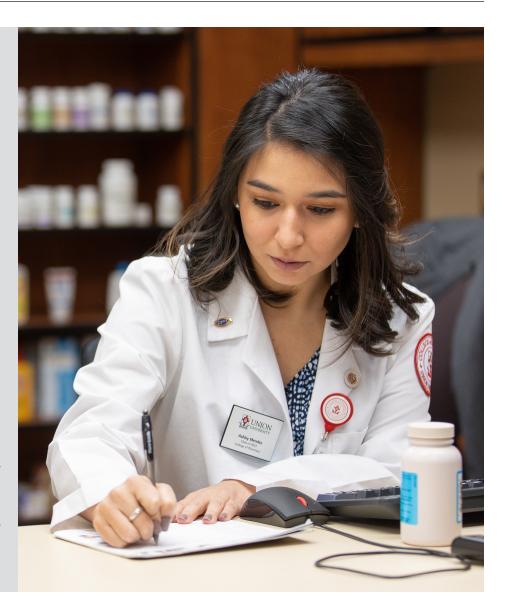
#### **Union Pharmacy Students Earn** Tennessee's Top **NAPLEX Pass Rate**

The Union University College of Pharmacy's class of 2024 scored a 91.7 percent pass rate for first-time attempts on both the North American Pharmacist Licensure Examination and the Multistate Pharmacy Jurisprudence Examination, giving Union the highest pass rate in Tennessee and 10th highest nationally on both exams

It's the fifth time in the last six years for Union to have the highest NAPLEX pass rate among Tennessee's six pharmacy schools. The average pass rate in Tennessee was 77 percent in 2024, while the national average was 77.5 percent for all graduates from programs accredited by the Accreditation Council for Pharmacy Education.

Union was also the highest performing program among Christian universities nationally.

"The class of 2024 is a fine example of our desire to be excellence-driven in all things," said Kim Jones, dean for Union's College of Pharmacy. "Earning the highest NAPLEX and MPJE scores in the state of Tennessee and thereby securing a top 10 spot in the nation is no small feat."



#### **Union Hosts More Than 200 Youth for** Annual EQUIP Apologetics Conference

Most cultural debates today are rooted in an attack on God's original design for his creation, Shane Pruitt told a group of high school students at Union University Sept. 7.

"At the end of the day, God is the originator, designer and inventor of it all," said Pruitt, national Next Gen director for the North American Mission Board. "And if God is the original designer, inventor and creator of it all, he also gets to define what things are.

"A lot of cultural agendas and a lot of cultural issues that we're trying to navigate today are really an attack on God, and it's mankind wanting to prop itself up as God instead of letting God be the authority, letting God be the definer."

Pruitt was one of the keynote speakers at the third annual EQUIP Youth Apologetics Conference, jointly sponsored by Union's School of Theology and Missions and the Tennessee Baptist Mission Board. The conference is designed to help teenagers address their doubts and questions, consider the Bible's truth claims and witness to biblical truth, with speakers trained in theology,

philosophy, apologetics, sociology and youth ministry.

Other speakers included Jay Barbier, youth ministry specialist with the TBMB; Justin Barnard, professor of philosophy at Union; and Phil Davignon, associate professor of sociology at Union.

About 230 attended the event, according to Gregory Poore, the conference organizer and Union's associate professor of philosophy, apologetics and ethics.

The 2025 conference is scheduled for Sept. 6. More information will be posted at www.uu.edu/events/equip.

#### Cardinal & Cream Wins Multiple Awards at BCA, SEJC Competitions

The Cardinal & Cream, Union University's student publication, won several awards in this year's Baptist Communicators Association Student Awards Competition in November and at the Southeast Journalism Conference's annual Best of the South awards competition in February.

Avery Chenault won the BCA's Grand Prize for Exceptional Achievement in Feature Writing for "Bikes By The Bomb Shelter," which also secured first place in the "Feature Writing - First-Person Column/Blog" category.

Other BCA winners included Toby Forehand and Ethan Voss with first place in a video storytelling category, Dawson Kinchen with three first-place awards in the same category, Lyla Dietz with a

#### **Trustees Approve Mission Leave Policy as Union Prioritizes Gospel** Outreach

Union University trustees in September approved a mission leave policy for university employees, providing up to five days every two years for faculty and staff to participate in mission trips.

Union President Samuel W. "Dub" Oliver said the institution wants to encourage its employees to live out and share the gospel of Jesus Christ, and this policy is one way to do that. The policy will allow employees to voluntarily participate, with pay, in approved church-related mission trips that occur during regularly scheduled workdays, without having to use their personal time off.

"As a Christ-centered university, we want to be clear about our priorities," Oliver said. "It's important for employees to model for our students the centrality of the gospel in the life of the institution, and giving them the necessary time away from their work responsibilities for mission endeavors allows us to demonstrate our commitment to that effort."

first-place photography award and Katherine Anne Thierfelder with first place in a news writing category, among others.

In the SEIC competition, Josiah Mancha won first place as best arts and entertainment writer, while Olivia Bell placed first as best opinion/editorial writer.

"I'm so proud of how my students have excelled year after year against the best

competition in the nation, and I'm especially proud of how they keep Christ pre-eminent and haven't changed subject matter to appease cultural whims," said Ted Kluck, associate professor of communication arts and adviser for the Cardinal & Cream. "Their continued success is a testament to their talent, and the joy we experience in our work."



## **Union Ranked Third Nationally** in Niche's Best Christian Colleges List

Union University has been recognized as one of the nation's top Christian colleges, placing third in the nation in Niche's "Best Christian Colleges in America" ranking.

The ranking highlights Union's commitment to academic excellence, strong faith-based community and high student satisfaction. Niche rankings are based on analysis of key statistics from the U.S. Department of Education and millions of student reviews.

Union also fared well in other Niche categories, ranking first in "Best Small Colleges in Tennessee," first in "Best Christian

College in Tennessee," second in "Best Colleges in Tennessee" and sixth in the nation in "Best College Dorms."

"We're thrilled to see Union University recognized for its commitment to providing a top-tier education that is integrated with our solid Christian convictions," said Dan Griffin, Union's vice president for enrollment management. "These rankings reflect the dedication of our faculty, staff and students who make Union such a vibrant, faith-centered community. We're thankful for the student feedback that underscores Union's distinct academic and residential experience."



# Union Women's Basketball Season Ends in NCAA Division II National Semifinals

The Union University women's basketball team fell to Cal State Dominguez Hills 68-50 March 26 in the semifinals of the NCAA Division II national tournament at the UPMC Cooper Fieldhouse in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

The Lady Bulldogs, seeded seventh in the Elite Eight, finished the season at 33-4 after making their second Final Four appearance since moving to NCAA Division II in 2014.

"Sports gives us the opportunity to build quality relationships in a short amount of time," Union Head Coach Mark Campbell said. "This team has grown more than any team I have ever coached over the last seven months. We knew they had good hearts and good character, but this group has exceeded all expectations.

"It has been a privilege to coach this group," he continued. "It is one of the more memorable years I have been blessed with."

Campbell earned his 775th career win in the national quarterfinal victory over Bentley University March 24. In his 26 seasons as head coach at Union, Campbell has advanced to the national semifinals in 13 seasons in NCAA Division II and NAIA competition.

This season, Union won its 10th Gulf South Conference regular season title, seventh GSC tournament title and second NCAA Division II South Region title.

#### **Campbell Chosen** for Women's **Basketball Hall** of Fame

The Women's Basketball Hall of Fame has selected Union University's Mark Campbell to be inducted as a part of the class of 2025.

Campbell joins six others including Alana Beard, Sue Bird, Danielle Donehew, Sylvia Fowles, Lucille Kyvallos and Cappie Pondexter. The induction ceremony will take place June 14 in the Historic Tennessee Theatre in Knoxville, Tennessee.

Campbell completed his 26th season as head coach of the Lady Bulldogs in 2024-25, compiling a career record of 775-120.

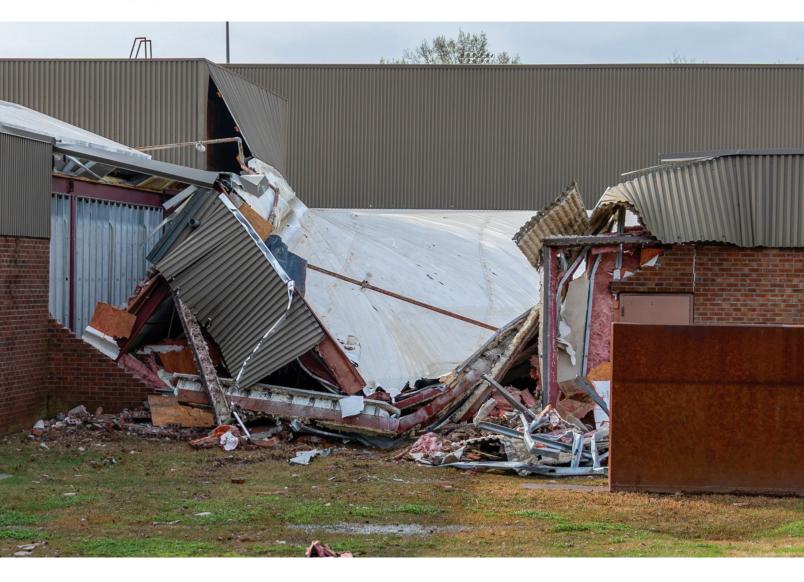
He adds the Women's Basketball Hall of Fame honor to his NAIA Hall of Fame (2020) and Jackson-Madison County Sports Hall of Fame (2021) inductions.

"Overwhelmed, very thankful and reminded about God's grace," Campbell said of the recognition. "To be able to work at Union University and be surrounded by such a great community has been one of the greatest blessings in my life and my family's life."

Union President Samuel W. "Dub" Oliver said that Campbell is the definition of excellence.

"He leads, serves and lives in ways that honor Christ and help all of us be better," Oliver said. "We are deeply grateful that his life has been invested at Union University."





#### **Storm Damage Forces Partial Closure of PAC**

A weather event, likely a microburst carrying heavy rain and intense winds, caused major damage to the west end of Union University's Penick Academic Complex (PAC) on April 3.

No students or personnel were injured. Union canceled all classes and activities in the PAC the next day as contractors and engineers assessed the damage and university leaders made plans for how to manage the disruption.

"I want to start by saying our hope is in Jesus Christ," Union University President Samuel W. "Dub" Oliver told the Union community April 4 in a special worship service in the Brewer Dining Hall. "Our hope isn't in buildings. We believe the truth of Scripture, as Psalm 20:7 reminds us, some trust in chariots, some trust in horses, but we trust in the name of the Lord our God."

Richard Newman, building consultant for Elite Contractors, said after an initial investigation, his structural engineer determined that a microburst with wind speeds of more than 100 miles per hour compromised the roof over the art department and the old Wellness Center. An exterior wall also caved in, and water began pouring into the PAC.

Newman said the damage was not a result of a faulty roof or maintenance issues. The roof on that section of the building was replaced in 2024.

The old Wellness Center space was empty, as Union opened a new and expan-

sive Wellness Center in a different part of the building in August. Plans were to use that vacant area for a new academic space, but the space had been unused for several months.

"I praise God that if any part of the PAC roof was going to fail, the very best place for it to fail was the old Wellness Center that no one has been in for seven months and didn't have anything in it," Oliver said.

When the roof gave way, it broke a water line for the building's fire suppression system, causing additional water to pour into the PAC and ruining the floors in both the Fred DeLay Gymnasium and the activities gym. Several faculty members were displaced from their flooded offices. The most heavily damaged areas were the









offices for art; languages, literature and writing; social work; and athletics.

The total square footage of the PAC, the largest building on Union's campus, is about 225,000 square feet. About 8,000 square feet of the building was scheduled for demolition because of structural instability. About 80,000 square feet were flooded, with cleanup efforts — that will take several weeks — beginning immediately.

Classes in the flooded parts of the building were relocated for the remainder of the semester. Professors whose offices were flooded were also provided temporary offices in other locations across campus.

Oliver said he hopes the entire facility will be ready for full use by the start of the fall semester.

Give to Union's PAC cleanup and restoration efforts.





## Demonbreum **Wins Award** for Excellence in Nursing

Jamie Demonbreum, a 2025 graduate from Union University Hendersonville's accelerated Bachelor of Science in nursing program, received the TriStar Hendersonville Medical Center's Flower Bud Award.

The award is given to a nursing student who has shown exceptional dedication to excellence in nursing.

"Jamie truly embodies those values," said Susan Leviticus, campus director for Union University Hendersonville. "She loves her classmates and is very intentional about building relationships and ensuring that everyone feels welcome."

## **UU Germantown Nursing Students Equip 200 High Schoolers with** Lifesaving 'Stop the Bleed' Certification

The nursing program at Union University Germantown has partnered with LeBonheur Children's Hospital and Regional One Medical Center to provide "Stop the Bleed" certification to high school students.

On April 11, Union nursing students and professors helped about 200 students at Houston High School successfully complete the certification that provides instruction on how to control life-threatening bleeding. Anita Langston, associate professor of nursing, organized the event

after she was awarded a grant from the Xi Vision Foundation of the Delta Kappa Gamma Society to fund the program.

"We are pleased to participate in this important project that empowers the next generation with lifesaving skills," said Dr. Kayla Lambert, chair of Union University's undergraduate nursing program in Germantown. "By equipping high school students with 'Stop the Bleed' training, we're helping build a safer, more prepared community - one student at a time."



#### **Oswalt Unpacks God's Covenant with** Israel at Annual Ryan Center Bible Conference

John Oswalt, visiting distinguished professor of Old Testament at Asbury Theological Seminary, spoke at Union's 13th annual Bible Conference, presented by the Ryan Center for Biblical Studies, March 21-22 about God's covenant with the Israelites and how it helped them learn about God's character.

"If you remember nothing else from these four hours, remember this: obedience to the covenant is not the way to God, but it defines the walk with God," Oswalt said.

The theme of Oswalt's teachings was "The Bible and Holiness: How Scripture Works Transformation in Our Lives." He spoke in four sessions expounding on this idea with the second session exploring "How the Israelites Learned about God's Character."

Oswalt talked about the covenants that God made with Noah and Abram before discussing the Sinai Covenant that God made with the Israelites after he brought them out of Egypt. He emphasized that having a law code in the covenant with God changes the reason for obedience

from one of fear of consequences to one of a desire to please God because he has redeemed his people.

"Suddenly ethics is no longer a civic thing, it's a religious thing," Oswalt said, "and ethics now become absolute."

Part of Union's Scripture Reading Marathon 2025 also took place during the conference as this six-day event lasted from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. on March 11-13 and March 18-20. Dozens of volunteers read the entire Bible from Genesis to Revelation during this event on the Great Lawn.



Union held the 1823 Society Weekend April 4-5, with members of the classes of 1958 through 1975 in attendance. More than 40 alumni gathered to celebrate the induction of the class of 1975 into the 1823 Society, which consists of alumni who have celebrated 50 years or more since their graduation.

#### **Union Adopts** Statement on Biblical **Anthropology**

Union University trustees in their April 25 meeting approved a university statement on biblical anthropology.

The biblical anthropology statement was developed by a group of professors who collected feedback from the university community. As one of the goals in Protinus (Union's strategic plan) to advance Christ-centered higher education, the document addresses questions of what it means to be human and provides a biblical basis for those answers that will help faculty teaching in their respective fields.

"The goal of this summary is to bring clarity and to provide guidance for our university and others so that we may more faithfully pursue God's path individually and corporately thereby pleasing God and knowing the fullness of life He intends for us," the statement says.

The full statement is available at www. uu.edu/about/framework-for-biblicalanthropology.cfm.

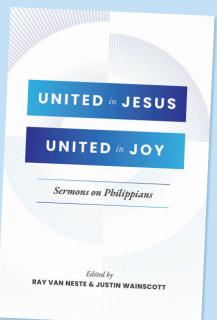
#### **New Book Features Sermons** on Philippians by **Leading Pastors** and Professors

Union University Press has published a new book, an exposition of Philippians, containing sermons preached in select chapel services during the spring semester of 2024.

Edited by Ray Van Neste and Justin Wainscott, United in Jesus, United in Joy includes sermons from Brian Arnold, Andy Davis, Ken Lewis, Phil Newton, Justin Perry, Van Neste, Wainscott and Hershael York.

"Our hope is that this work might encourage other Christians as they learn more about this particular book of the Bible, the truths it proclaims, and the Savior it exalts," the editors write in the preface. "We also hope it will be a resource for other preachers as they prepare to preach through Philippians."

The book is available for purchase on Amazon.





## **Union Mourns Loss of Ayers, Visionary Campus Champion and Supporter**



Jim Ayers, longtime Union friend and benefactor, died April 1 at age 81.

As significant as they have been, the financial contributions he made to Union over the years can be counted. The ongoing impact of those gifts, however, is immeasurable.

"Jim Ayers' unwavering commitment to education and his generous spirit have left an indelible mark on Union University," said Union President Samuel W. "Dub" Oliver. "His contributions have not only transformed our campus but have also enriched the lives of countless students, many of whom will never fully know how much of a blessing Jim was to their lives.

"While we mourn his passing, we do so thanking the Lord for his legacy and celebrating his life of generosity and service."

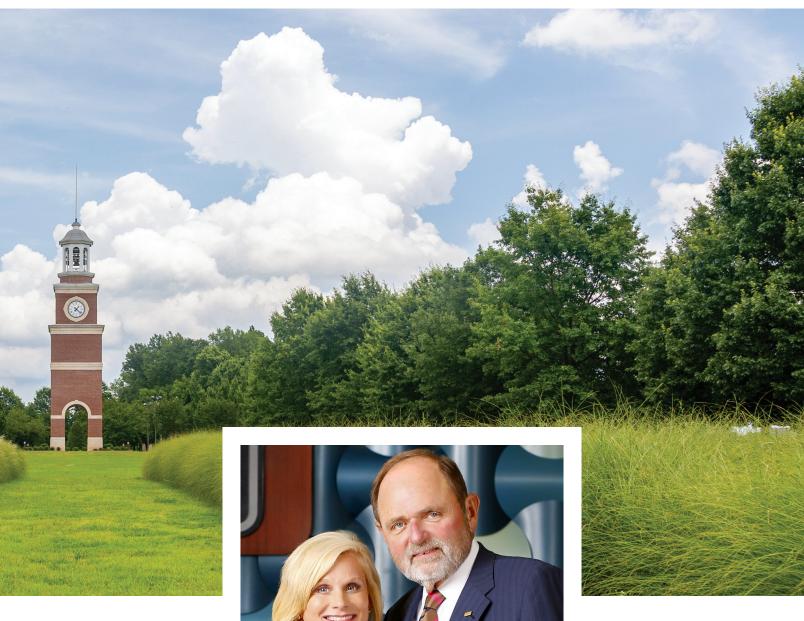
Avers' first significant contribution to Union came with the construction of Jennings Hall. When David S. Dockery became Union's president in 1996 and set forth a vision for the campus master plan and development of the Great Lawn, Ayers was one of the first to champion that vision, giving \$2 million for the Jennings project.

Jennings Hall, the first facility to be built on the Great Lawn, is named after Ayers' grandparents, William and Laura Jennings. Avers' investment in Jennings Hall, which opened in 2000, was the

spark that fueled further development of the Great Lawn. Over the next 25 years, the university added Miller Tower, White Hall, Providence Hall, The Logos and The Ethos Forum nearby.

A graduate of Parsons High School, Ayers completed his bachelor's degree in business administration with a major in accounting from the University of Memphis. In the mid-1990s, he acquired First Farmer's State Bank, which later became FirstBank.

After the 2008 tornado that decimated Union's campus, Ayers provided several hundred thousand dollars to help replace items that students lost in the storm, in addition to another million dol-



lars for rebuilding the campus. The Ayers Quad bears his name.

Away from Jackson, Ayers was instrumental in Union's establishment of a campus in Hendersonville. He helped build Union's facility there, leasing it to the university for several years before giving it to Union in 2019.

The building is named Ayers Hall in honor of its builder and donor.

Ayers has also contributed heavily to student scholarships, generously supporting the annual Scholarship Banquet for several years and providing other funding for students. He and his wife Janet established The Ayers Foundation in 1999, a

philanthropic initiative with a strong emphasis on education and rural counties.

In 2023, Union presented Jim and Janet Avers with its Robert E. Craig Service Award, named after Union's 13th president and given annually to someone who has made significant contributions to the university. Union awarded Ayers

with an honorary Doctor of Humanities degree in 1998 and named him to the Bicentennial Hall of Honor in 2022. He was also named Trustee Emeritus by Union trustees.

"It would be impossible to overstate just how much Jim Ayers has meant in the life of Union

University," said Catherine Kwasigroh, Union's vice president for advancement. "We are so thankful for his generosity, and we celebrate his life and impact, even as we offer our deepest condolences to his family and loved ones. Union University, and the students here, have forever been changed by his friendship."



#### 454 Receive Degrees at Union's 200th Annual Spring Commencement

When siblings Lily and Levi Cottrell crossed the stage May 3 during Union University's spring commencement, it marked the culmination of a journey that started with their grandparents' service at Union.

Lily, who completed her Master of Business Administration, and Levi, who earned his Bachelor of Business Administration, were two of 454 Union University graduates who received their degrees during two ceremonies on the Great Lawn. It was Union's 200th annual spring commencement.

The Cottrells are the grandchildren of Keith and Beverly Absher, both of whom held important roles at Union. Beverly served as dean of the School of Adult and Professional Studies, and Keith was dean of the McAfee School of Business.

Keith played a significant role in the MSB earning its accreditation in 2013, and his influence helped shape the very programs Lily and Levi completed. In 2015, Keith passed away following a battle with Guillain-Barre syndrome after serving as dean for 12 years.

"I am truly honored to be able to get my MBA degree from a university that my Pop worked so hard building and was so passionate about," Lily said. "When he passed away, I was 14, but even at a young age I remember seeing how hard he worked and how much he loved Union."

As part of the commencement ceremony, Jacob Carbonell, who double majored in engineering and mathematics, re-



Lily Cottrell comp<mark>leted her Master</mark>

of Business Administration.



ceived the 115th Tigrett Medal, which is awarded to an outstanding senior in each graduating class.

The university also presented an honorary Doctor of Humanities degree to Gary Taylor, a real estate developer for more than 30 years whose efforts have brought local and national retailers to Jackson.

A longtime Sunday school teacher at Englewood Baptist Church in Jackson and former chairman of Union's Board of Trustees, Taylor has also made significant financial contributions to Union over the years.

"I believe education is important, but I also believe that Christian education is more vital than education alone," Taylor said. "Education provides the building blocks of a person's life, but Christ is the foundation that holds everything together. Union's commitment to a Christ-centered education has profoundly influenced my faith, character and purpose."

Attorney Mark Lanier, founder of the Lanier Law Firm in Houston, Texas, delivered the commencement address, encouraging graduates to build their lives with intentionality, using the tools God has given them to construct lives of purpose and meaning.

"You don't want to build your house on career success." Lanier said. "You don't want to build it on material wealth. You don't want to build it on cultural values.

"Build it on the solid rock that is Jesus," he continued. "Those are lasting values. That's kingdom success, and that is active stewardship."

Lanier told graduates they have a divine calling with their name on it, and they should seek God's power as they pursue that call.

"Years from now, your memory of this ceremony will fade," he said. "The echo of my words will die a lot quicker than that. But what will always remain is what you've built with your life, as long as you're here. And you can build with wood, hay and stubble, or you can build in priceless, eternal ways,"

Although Lily Cottrell earned her bachelor's degree from Lipscomb University in 2023, she spent much of her childhood visiting campus and watching her grandparents invest in Union students during the annual bonfire they hosted at their farm.

She credits her grandmother, Beverly Absher-Bone, as her inspiration to complete her MBA.

"She told me that her MBA degree was one of the best things she did for herself," Lilv said.

Levi followed not only in his grandparents' footsteps, but also those of his older brother, Jack ('20). Spending time with his grandparents on campus and watching his brother's success and growth at Union helped cement his decision to attend.

"It's interesting how one school can impact a family," Levi said. "I look up to everyone in my family as they lead and set an example.

"Having both grandparents work here allowed for me to be around before I was even in high school," he continued. "My passions were never to be a professor but to be a leader and be as dedicated as my Pop was."

For the Cottrells, Union has been more than just a university - it's part of the family story they hold dear.











#### **Father-Daughter Duo Graduate Together: A Surprise MBA Journey**

Cecily Berry got a unique gift from her father Michael when she graduated from Union University on Saturday with her Master of Business Administration degree.

Michael had secretly been working on his own MBA degree and made Saturday's ceremony extra special by graduating with her.

Michael, who works as senior plant director for Corelle Brands in the Memphis area, had been thinking about completing an MBA for years. He completed his bachelor's degree in mechanical engineering.

In the fall of 2023, with his wife working as a realtor and no children left at home. he decided the time was right to move forward. Then the thought hit him: "What if I keep it secret from Cecily and try to graduate with her?"

Michael reached out to Union with his idea, and they helped him pull it off.

"It's been a little challenging," he said. "Naomi Van Nes has been hugely instrumental in helping me plan my classes, so that's really where it started."

Van Nes, graduate and adult admissions counselor, knew what Cecily's course

schedule would be, so she helped Michael work around that and ensure that they were never in the same class. Even in an online program like Union's MBA, students can see the names of every other person in the class.

Throughout his studies, Michael had to work with professors — and other students he knew were friends with Cecily - to make sure they kept his endeavor a secret.

One of Michael's biggest challenges came last summer when Cecily spent several weeks at home while interning with a wealth management company. He had to figure out how to get his coursework done without completing it at home.

"I would stay late in my office, or I'd come to work on Saturday and just tell her I was working on a project or whatever," he said. "I knew if I could make it through the summer that I was home free."

At the commencement ceremony on May 3. Michael and his wife Niki made sure that Cecily was already lined up with all the graduates prior to the service. Then he casually walked up to her wearing his cap

and gown and revealed the news — he was going to be graduating with her that day.

"And you somehow missed all of my classes, too," Cecily told her dad upon hearing his news. "We could have had a group project together."

Cecily said she was completely surprised by the revelation.

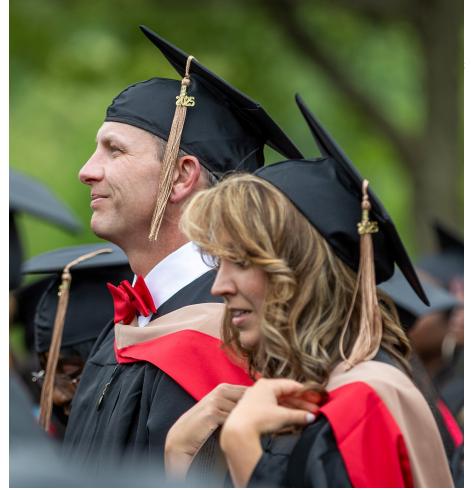
"It makes me so proud. I cried when I saw him in his robe," she said. "He's been my example in everything that I do."

Cecily completed her bachelor's degree in economics from Union in December and through an accelerated program was able to finish her master's degree just one semester later. She plans to pursue a career in financial advising.

Her older sister Gabrielle is also a Union alumna and is attending seminary at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in North Carolina. Michael said Union was a great fit for his daughters.

"Both of my daughters really appreciate the biblical worldview of an education, of preparing themselves to step out into the real world." he said.

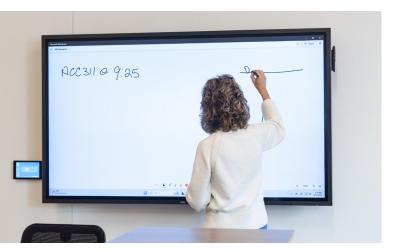




















In January of 2020, shortly after Union to make a proposal for a new facility for the McAfee School of Business.

In response to that pitch from Oliver, the McAfee family agreed to provide a lead gift for a new building, and the announce-

the COVID-19 pandemic. The announcecampus event, was canceled. Uncertainty abounded.

"We didn't know what exactly was going to happen next," McAfee said. "It's the patience that comes to mind. So many things in life are solved by patience, letting the Lord do his work in his

Sure enough, things slowly returned to the McAfees announced their lead gift. That officially began the four-year process that culminated March 21 in the dedica-

School of Business and the computer science and engineering departments.

Oliver said the facility is more than an academic building, with a name that was chosen to remind the uni-versity community of that truth. The

'While 'logos' is the word and rephow we live out our beliefs as we go about our daily lives, as we enter placmarket and as we sell."

Oliver expressed his appreciation to the McAfee family for their support. Carolyn McAfee Bruner and her late husband,













James T. McAfee Jr., were both Union graduates in 1961. Their son Tom ('94), chairman and president of Hallmark Systems Inc., and his wife Julie (Crangle, '93) are both Union graduates.

In addition, Oliver thanked the 170 individuals, families, organizations and foundations that contributed to the \$20 million project.

"We're so grateful for each of you and the part you played," Oliver said. "It really would not be possible without each of you."

McAfee said his family's prayer is that The Ethos Forum classrooms would be hallowed ground, where questions are revered and the pursuit of truth is a sacred journey.

"A place where the faculty is a shining example of inspiration, guiding with wisdom and fostering an environment where minds flourish," he said. "A place where the students who walk these halls be equipped with not only academic



prowess, but also with the courage to challenge, humility to learn and compassion to lead."

Jeff Perkins, chairman of Union's Board of Trustees, highlighted the significance of dedicating spaces to the Lord.

"As a community of believers, a body of brothers and sisters, we hold firmly to the truth that all things come from God and all things belong to God," Perkins said. "Our prayer for The Ethos Forum is that it would cultivate not only a hunger for knowledge, but a love for the Lord. While students study in the lobby or percolate ideas in our entrepreneur studios, we pray that they'll fall deeper in love with the creator of their mind and the giver of their dreams."

Lili Pettigrew, president of Union's Student Government Association, said she remembers coming to Union as a freshman and hearing about the new building, then watching its construction over the following months.

"We students have little to no idea how much has gone into this building, and just the thought of that makes me so grateful," she said. "As a student, I felt cared for to see something this impressive come to life, because this building is not just for Union, it's for the people at Union. It's for the students, and how we

can continue to glorify God in all areas of campus, old or new."

In addition to the McAfee family, Oliver recognized others who made significant contributions to The Ethos Forum - including architectural firm TLM Associates and general contractor Linkous Construction. He also recognized Hyran Barefoot, Union's 14th president, who championed the building from the beginning and gave significant gifts to ensure its completion.

The Joyce Barefoot Lobby on the first floor of the building is named in memory of Barefoot's wife, the 14th first lady of Union.

Dr. Hyran Barefoot

The Ethos Forum is designed to foster creativity, entrepreneurship, innovation and academic excellence. It includes a makerspace, a business incubator, numerous learning spaces, 171 computers, 19 classrooms and labs, 39 offices and five study rooms.









Carefully taking down the framed bulldog drawing that hangs near his desk, Robbie Graves, assistant vice president of undergraduate admis-

> sions, says, "This is a very special picture to me."

Graves remembers a local student he'd encouraged to attend Union. "He drew it for me in his high school art class." As he turns it over, he reads a handwritten note that says, "Mr. Graves, thank you for all you have done for me."

It's one of the many memories Graves cherishes in his role as an admissions counselor. For 35 years, he has worked in the world of admissions, and it doesn't take long for anyone to realize why he has remained steadfast despite the grueling cycle of admissions life.

For Robbie Graves, it's a calling.

"I just love what I do," he says. "I feel like it's ministry, a calling, work that has eternal impact, making a difference."

Graves graduated from Union in 1987 and became a sales representative for a local music store. While calling on a musician who worked at Lake County High School in Tiptonville, he saw his enrollment counselor, Elizabeth Wingo, talking with pro-

spective Union students.

"I can still picture the scene," Graves says. "It hit me right there: that is what I want to do."

Even then Graves sensed God's call and confirmation on his life's work.

This call to come alongside potential students came to fruition not long afterwards when he applied to Union and was hired as an admissions counselor in July of 1989

One of the first students to experience Graves' encouragement was Ben Garrott. Arriving at Union in the fall of 1990, Garrott was part of the first class Graves recruited.

Garrott, a Nashville native, hadn't initially considered Union until a summer baseball tournament in high school brought him to Jackson where he met Union faculty member, Judy LeForge, who first urged him to consider Union in the future.

Graves reached out to Garrott, encouraging him to apply to Union's Scholars of Excellence program. Though Garrott was one ACT point short, Graves' confidence and steady encouragement spurred him to take the test one last time. When the scores came in, it was Graves who called him with the exciting news: he'd made it.

"He may have been as excited as I was," Garrott recalls of the celebratory call, which marked the beginning of his transformational journey at Union.

As the Scholars of Excellence event approached, Graves soothed his anxieties about the interview process, encouraging him and helping him feel prepared. Garrott credits Graves for helping him start on the right track and connect him with a lifelong community.

Garrott would eventually meet his wife at Union, earn a degree in accounting and go on to build his career in West Tennessee. Later, Garrott's children would both attend Union and carry on the Union legacy within his family.

Around the same time, Jennifer Delk, associate professor of nursing and chair for undergraduate programs at Union, met Graves at a college fair when she was a high school student, and it was Graves' ability to build a relationship with her that led her to apply and eventually attend Union.

Hailing from the Nashville area, Delk wanted to leave Nashville and attend a Christian university. Union's nursing program caught her atten-





The Garrott family

tion, but she only knew one person who attended Union. Graves encouraged her to apply, convincing her that he could see her thriving at Union. Graves even traveled back to Nashville to meet Delk's family and share more about the school.

While at Union, Delk met her husband, also recruited by Graves, finished multiple degrees and went on to work in the nursing field for over 20 years.

Speaking for herself and her husband, Delk says, "We personally both thrived here, and ended up finding community here in Jackson."

She later returned to Union to teach in the same nursing program that shaped her as a student. But her connection to Union

"I just love what I do. I feel like it's ministry, a calling, work that has eternal impact, making a difference."

didn't end there. Graves has also built relationships with her children.

Delk says Graves guided her children through the process, offering just enough information without overwhelming them. Now, her daughter is at Union studying music, while her son, a soon-to-be high school graduate. eagerly texts Graves with updates on test scores and application details.

"Union is designed to draw certain people, and I think [Graves] sees that in certain people and sees that

they'd be a good fit for [Union], that they'd grow and thrive in this community here," she says.

Admissions counselors play a crucial role in engaging potential students, Delk says.

"A lot of admissions counselors come and go, but he's been a steady piece through it all," she says.

The steadying force that drives Graves is his eternal perspective. Graves has kept his focus on doing his work for the glory of God. He genuinely loves helping students find their place, but more than that, he is committed to a higher calling.

He wants to leave an eternal impact.

Graves recognizes that entering freshmen are at a "crossroads time" in their lives, and he hopes the Lord can use him to help students attend Union where perhaps their college years can become, as President Samuel W. "Dub" Oliver has stated, a "greenhouse for their faith rather than a graveyard."

"That's important stuff," Graves says. "That's ministry."



Jennifer Delk



Jacob & Keshia Shatzer's family

Before stepping into a college fair, Graves says that he and other admissions counselors often pray, "Lord, I pray you will open the path for the divine appointments that you have here tonight. Use me as your servant."

Thankfully, Graves has been ready for those encounters. He saw one of them come full circle at a college fair in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, in 2002, when he introduced a student to Union.

"I have never felt more compelled to talk to somebody," Graves says.

When this particular student passed by Union's display table without a glance, Graves did something admissions counselors aren't supposed to do: he left his table and began to search for the student.

Finding him, Graves invited him to stop by the Union table for a chat. Eventually, that student would attend and graduate from Union with his bachelor's degree, go on to complete his Master of Divinity, earn a Ph.D. and eventually return to Union in 2017 as an assistant professor and associate dean.

In 2024, that student, Jacob Shatzer, would become the current Union provost.

Shatzer remembers the night he met Graves at that college fair hosted by a local church in Cedar Rapids. On Oct. 23, 2002, he and his girlfriend, now wife, Keshia, attended the fair with hopes of pinning down their future college plans.

As a senior in high school, Shatzer had "sensed a pretty clear call to ministry" and was looking for a college where he could study and prepare for that call. He recalls seeing Union University and Jackson, Tennessee, and thinking, "Oh, that's really far away." He wasn't opposed to traveling for college, but he had not searched for colleges that far from home.

"I remember Robbie stopping me, and I kind of read it as, 'There's not a lot of people stopping at this booth be-

cause it's so far

away," Shatzer says.

But as Graves pointed out, it was more than that.

It was a divine appointment.

"Robbie took the initiative to slow me down and stop me and tell me about Union," Shatzer says.

Years later, Shatzer still recalls that Graves' "love and excitement for Union definitely drew me in."

As a first-generation college student, Shatzer was looking for good scholarships as well as a college that would grow his faith and knowledge.

At the time, Union's Scholars of Excellence program offered one of few full

scholarships available at Christian universities, and as Graves shared more about the aid Union offered, it became a viable and attractive option for Shatzer.

Graves admits that he loves telling the story of Union and holds its core values close. Sharing Union's desire to be Excellence-Driven, Christ-Centered, People-Focused and Future-Directed keeps him centered on the characteristics that embody Union.

"If you're ever talking about Union, speaking about Union, making any decision at Union, anything, you filter it through those four things," he says. "And I love those four things. I believe in them.

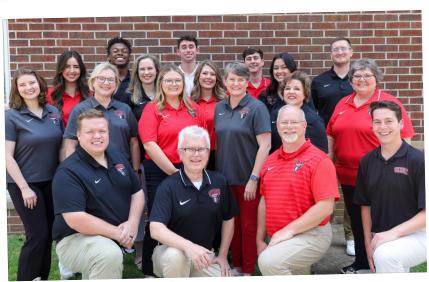
"They've kept me passionate about the place all these years." Graves says.

Shatzer notes that it's rare "for someone to do the kind of work that he's done. for as long as he's done it in the same place, and that's a gift."

"He is so intentional and personable, and will let you know, with all sincerity, that we want you at Union."

"It's a gift to Union students, and it's a gift to staff and faculty," Shatzer says.

Throughout the years, Graves kept in touch with the Shatzer family, connecting with them during visits to that same Cedar Rapids college fair. Shatzer sib-



Admissions & financial aid team— summer 24

lings would go on to attend Union, and Graves would eventually even play the piano at Jacob and Keshia's wedding.

Connie Teel, who has worked with Graves for 10 years, knows that what he offers Union and the greater community is a true gift. Teel notes that there are very few people like Graves.

"Robbie loves the Lord, loves his family and loves Union (in that order) so incredibly well," Teel says. "He is so intentional and personable, and will let you know, with all sincerity, that we want you at Union.

"He has built quite a legacy," Teel says. "He is now recruiting the children of the students he recruited 25+ years ago."

Lee Tankersley, pastor of Cornerstone Community Church in Jackson, can connect many of his key life moments to Graves. Most recently, he has had the joy of watching Graves build a relationship with his children as they entered the college application process.

Tankersley first met Graves at a college fair in western Kentucky and almost walked past the Union display table. Graves, though, caught his attention and pulled him into a conversation.

Tankersley was initially unsure about attending college in Tennessee; however, after a campus visit and a tour of the dorms, Tankersley knew Union was moving up on his list of potential colleges. But it was Graves' support that made the difference.

Called to the ministry at an early age, Tankersley began preaching while in high school, and Graves drove to Kentucky to support him while he preached one of his first sermons.

"It really felt like, here's someone who cares about me," Tankersley says.

Tankersley says the investment Graves made in him - the visitations, calls and coming to support him during that sermon - made him feel like he had a genuine friend. Graves didn't treat him like a number or a means to an end, and he notices that Graves is like that for everyone.

"You're a person in whom he's going to invest and care for and love," Tankersley says. "He does it all."

Recalling times Graves advocated on his behalf, invited him to church and helped him one summer, Tankersley says, "There was no bait and switch. The guy investing in me to get me to Union was the guy that kept investing in me as a student."

Graves became one of the most important people in his life at Union. Tankersley thrived at Union and even met his wife here. Now he has children attending Union, and it was Graves who met with them during the application process, encouraged them to apply for scholarships and cheered them on as they took tests or attended the Scholars of Excellence weekend.

As long as there are students seeking their next step, Graves will continue embracing divine appointments -

one conversation at a time. Garrott, Delk, Shatzer and Tankersley represent just a few of the many relationships Graves has nurtured during his time at Union.

Behind his desk, a dedicated filing cabinet drawer overflows with thank-you notes, birthday cards and words of encouragement from students, families and colleagues small but lasting reminders of the connections he has forged.

One day, Graves plans to sit down with the notes and memories collected over the years and reflect on the lives he has touched — each note. each story, a reminder that a life devoted to others, rooted in God's calling, leaves an eternal impact.



The Tankersleys







# From Mask Mandate to Micro School: Josiah Enyart's Journey to **Educational Independence**

#### By Tim Ellsworth

Josiah Enyart remembers getting the memo. For the fall semester of 2021, months after the COVID-19 pandemic had fizzled out and most people had returned to life as usual, the public school district where he taught in Kansas was still going to mandate face masks for students and teachers.

Enyart had been struggling in his job as a teacher in Shawnee Mission School District for months, frustrated by leftist policies and critical race theory encroachment that sacrificed student learning upon the altar of liberal ideology. The mask mandate was more than he could take.

Enyart resigned from his position, effective immediately, and began a learning academy that has since grown to almost 50 students.

"We're going to teach your kid academics," Enyart says. "We're going to teach them math, reading, science, social studies. We're not going to hide from the truth. And then we're going to teach them character traits of successful people - like resolution, responsibility, compassion, temperance, industry, humility, tranquility, empathy, sincerity and moderation."

Enyart's efforts so far have been hugely successful, both in quantity and in quality. "Most of the kids are making a year and a

half to two years of gains in a year," he says.

A native of Shawnee, Kansas, Enyart became a Christian as a teenager. He played baseball in high school and knew that he wanted to continue the sport in college.

"I didn't really know what I wanted to go to school for as long as I could play baseball and find a good church," he says.

He spent two years at a community college in Kansas before Union University offered him the opportunity to be a Bulldog. His time at Union proved to be formative in his life, with classes that he said prepared him not just for a career, but for life.

"It was beautiful," Enyart says. "The people were great. The professors all seemed to really like what they were doing and be effective at it."

A 2009 graduate with a Bachelor of Science degree, Enyart says he was especially grateful for required Old Testament and New Testament survey classes that instilled in him a knowledge of the Bible and a desire to study it deeply.

"I still have my notebooks from those classes," he says.

He met his wife Bethany at Union, and after graduating they moved back to Enyart's home state of Kansas, where each of them found jobs. Envart's first position was as lead teacher at a modified Montessori school, where he also coached, drove the bus, functioned as the principal and cleaned the facility. His long-term goal was to teach and coach at his high school alma mater, Shawnee Mission Northwest - a goal that became closer to reality when the school district hired him to teach third grade at Comanche Elementary School in Overland Park.

Everything went well for Enyart for several years at Comanche, even in a difficult environment.

"We had the highest mobility rate, the highest minority rate, the highest number of kids on free or reduced lunch," he says. "Our population was very, very challenging in the sense that they didn't have resources or as many positive influences and ways out of the poverty system."

Still, his principal was effective. Teachers were committed. Students were learning. Envart moved from third grade up to sixth grade and felt like he was contributing to his students' welfare.



But then Enyart began noticing cracks that eroded the strong foundation the school had built. One year, with a new principal in place, the school district mandated a training program called "Deep Equity" by Corwin — a "diversity, equity and inclusion" initiative that pushed "just how privileged we were as white people," Enyart says.

"Assuming, based on my skin color, that I am this certain person is to me the definition of racism that made no sense to me whatsoever."

Other questionable decisions from the school district followed - technology mandates that cost a fortune and did little to improve student learning, changes in curriculum and teaching methods that Envart says were detrimental to students.

"Every decision they made, made everything worse," he says. "We continued to do these DEI trainings that taught us

how terrible we were as white people, how impossible it is for anyone to succeed if they're not white. Just all these terrible negative messages that did not at all speak truth, speak success, bring joy, bring confidence in education, and it just started to crumble."

Upon his resignation, the district charged him a \$1,000 "liquidation fee" for not providing them with ample notice before the start of the fall semester.

Envart protested the fee, but the school board remained unmoved. By this time, his story had started to attract media attention, and some of Enyart's support-

> ers started a GoFund-Me account to raise the money the district was charging him.

> That effort garnered even more media coverage. The Daily Wire picked up Enyart's story, and he was interviewed on Fox and Friends. By the time the fundraising effort stopped, more than \$22,000 had been contributed to Envart's cause.

> He used the extra money to launch Freedom Learning Academy and to remodel his basement for classroom space. The initiative started when Enyart's cousin asked him to teach her son and

three other kids, but the media attention sparked even more interest from parents who didn't want their children in public schools anymore.

From 15 students that first semester, the enrollment has increased to 55.

"We are what we call a micro school. It's a non-accredited private school, which is the fancy term for home school in Kansas," Enyart says. "But in Kansas, you can, as a parent, choose who educates your kids and choose where your kids go to school."

Since the academy's launch, Envart has hired three other full-time teachers. in addition to himself. They instruct kids in kindergarten through eighth grade, with ninth grade being added in the fall of 2025. He also has five part-time teachers. The school quickly outgrew Enyart's basement and now meets at a local church building.



"The goal of the school was to provide a safe school environment where the kids actually have a strong academic regimen that promotes their academic growth, but also development of their character." Envart says.

Though the school is not officially a "Christian" school, Enyart says it certainly is based upon Christian themes and values. And it has found a niche in Kansas



for concerned parents who want more for their kids than what the public education system there provides.

"As a school, I want to prepare the kids to be capable of exceeding the expectations of the state," Enyart wrote in a blog post on his school's website. "I want to prepare them to have the skills they need academically and socially to be successful by the time they are ready to finish

high school. I want to prepare the kids by instilling an intrinsic motivation to work hard and follow their dreams."

That desire, in part, came from his time at Union.

"College is for acquiring the knowledge you need to be successful in a given field as well as learning how to be an adult and manage your own life," Enyart says. "I got all of that and more from Union."



When John and Diane Carbonell relocated from Florida to Jackson, Tennessee, in 2006, they were embarking on a journey of faith and new opportunities.

John had spent several years in human resources, and when Diane first told him about a job opening in Jackson, he said, "Where's that?" After a bit of research, he knew the chance to work at a Christian institution like Union University would be a blessing. With six children in tow, and a seventh arriving later, John accepted the position at Union as associate vice president for human resources, and the Carbonells embraced their new life in Jackson.

Before they discovered Union, John and Diane never imagined being able to send their children to a university like it. As a home-schooling family with seven children and one income, they both knew that college expenses would be difficult. if not impossible, to cover. Diane recalls John returning from his initial interview with Union and explaining the tuition discount program the university offers its employees. They soon realized it was a benefit they couldn't pass up.

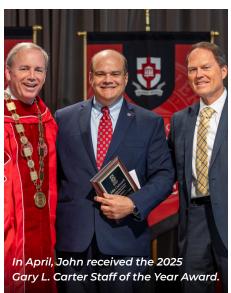
However, the blessings have extended beyond financial support. The Carbonells found a community of professors whose genuine care and support for their children's success has been one of the most meaningful parts of their Union journey.

From Jeannette Russ, professor of engineering, taking time out of her day to meet with Rachel, then a high school student, about careers in engineering to Santhosh Abraham, professor of accounting, noticing and encouraging Noah to pursue his talents in accounting, the Carbonells have felt loved and supported throughout the years.

"We've just always felt really blessed," Diane said.

Eighteen years later, they have five Union graduates, one current Union student and one high schooler taking dual enrollment classes.

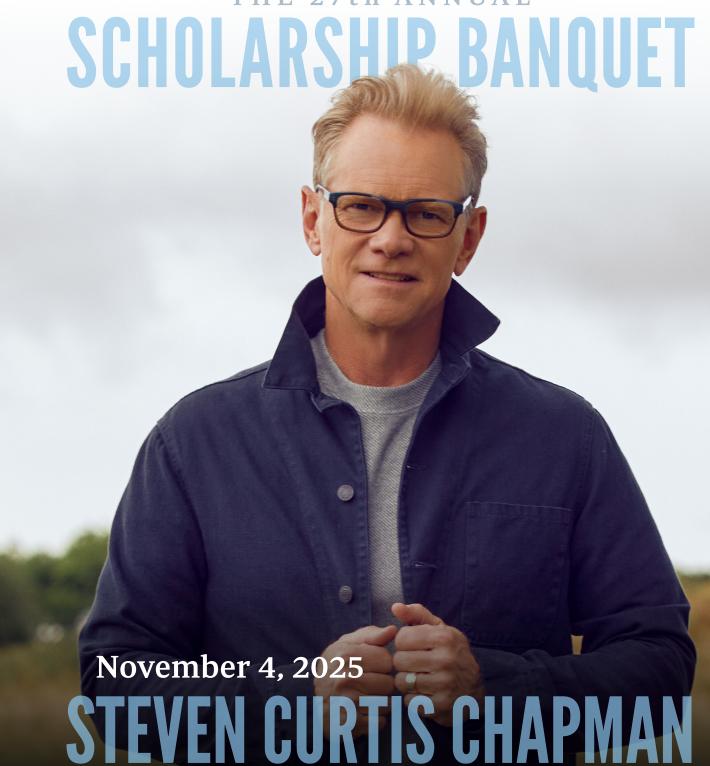
During his time at Union, John also pursued his own educational goals, earning both a Master of Business Ad-



ministration and a Doctor of Education. He also teaches business classes.

For the Carbonells, Union is more than a workplace or a school. It's a place of growth and opportunity for the entire family.







In a career that has spanned more than three decades, Steven Curtis Chapman is the most awarded artist in Christian music history. With 60 Dove Awards, five Grammy Awards, an American Music Award, and a historic 50 No. 1 singles, he has sold more than 16 million albums.

For more information, call the Office of Institutional Advancement at (731) 661-5050 or visit uu.edu/events/scholarshipbanquet.

# **Meritorious Service Awards**





Hannah Daniel ('20) **Outstanding Young Alumna** 

Hannah Daniel serves as director of public policy for the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, the policy arm of the Southern Baptist Convention. In this role, Daniel advocates for vulnerable populations in the realm of public policy. Originally from Memphis, Tennessee, she now lives in Washington, D.C. During her time at Union, Daniel earned a degree in business administration with a focus on economics.



Katy Restum ('13) **Outstanding Young Alumna** 

Katy Restum serves as the director of boards and commissions for Arkansas Governor Sarah Huckabee Sanders. Before her current role, she worked as deputy director of constituent services in the governor's office.

A native of Marion, Arkansas, Restum began her career in public service after serving on the campaign for Lieutenant Governor Leslie Rutledge during her successful run for Arkansas attorney general in 2014.



Richard Lewelling ('73) **Union Family Legacy Award** 

Richard L. Lewelling recently retired as director of missions for the Sequatchie Valley Baptist Association in Jasper, Tennessee. His ministry experience includes serving as associate pastor at Alta Loma Baptist Church in Madison, Tennessee, and West Lonsdale Baptist Church in Knoxville, Tennessee. He also served as director of Montgomery Village Baptist Center and as associate director of missions at Big Emory Baptist Association.



Lisa Rogers ('83) Lest We Forget Award

Lisa Williams Rogers is a dedicated physician and advocate for women's health, specializing in obstetrics and gynecology at The Jackson Clinic, where she has served since 1991. A native of Kentucky, she earned her Bachelor of Science in biology from Union and completed her medical doctorate at the University of Tennessee College of Medicine in 1987, receiving the Excellence in Surgery award.



**Larry and Betty Standridge Robert E. Craig Service Award** 

Larry and Betty Standridge have made significant contributions to education and community service throughout their lives. Betty supervised more than a dozen Michigan State University student teachers and participated in experimental programs aimed at improving teacher effectiveness. Larry's career in education included a pivotal role in developing a nontraditional adult degree program at John Wesley College in Owosso, Michigan, and managing Lansing Community College's off-campus classes.



Sandra Williams ('65) G.M. Savage Legacy Award

Sandra Williams has dedicated her life to education, ministry and community service, influencing countless lives through her work. With degrees from Union, the University of Tennessee and Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Williams has spent over four decades as an educator, primarily at Union, where she taught both full-time and as an adjunct professor from 1966-2025.



Chris Allison ('92) **Distinguished Achievement** in Business

Chris Allison, a Jackson native, has built a successful career and legacy of service in the Jackson community. After graduating from Union in 1992 with a Bachelor of Science in Business Administration, majoring in economics and finance, Allison co-founded Allison Insurance Group, where he has served as partner and president since 1989. He has also been deeply involved in the BIG I-Insurors of Tennessee.



**Bob Sparks ('08) Distinguished Achievement** in Education

Bob Sparks is dedicated to fostering student success through critical thinking and communication skills. Now in his 17th year in public education, he teaches English, speech and creative writing at Jackson Central-Merry Early College High School in Jackson, Tennessee. In 2022, he was recognized as Jackson-Madison County School System's Teacher of the Year and the Southwest CORE Region Teacher of the Year Finalist



**Dusty Doddridge ('86) Distinguished Achievement** in Arts/Media

Dusty Doddridge is an accomplished landscape photographer based in Nashville, Tennessee. For more than 20 years, Doddridge has been captivated by the interplay of light on natural landscapes, a passion that began during backpacking trips to the Arctic regions of Sweden and Norway. Doddridge leads photography tours across the United States and internationally, including locations such as Iceland, Norway, Finland and Canada.



Shawn Parker ('91) **Distinguished Achievement** in Church Ministry

Shawn Parker has dedicated his life to ministry and leadership within the church. He currently serves as executive director-treasurer of the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board, a role he has held since 2019. Before assuming this position, Parker spent 17 years as pastor of First Baptist Church in Columbus, Mississippi. He completed his Master of Divinity and Doctor of Philosophy degrees from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.



Jennifer Carson ('88) **Distinguished Achievement** in Research/Science

Since 2016, Jennifer Powers Carson has been employed by Washington University in St. Louis, where she is an associate professor in the Division of Endocrinology, Metabolism and Lipid Research and serves as laboratory director of the Core Laboratory for Clinical Studies, a CLIA-certified laboratory. She taught chemistry and biochemistry at Kennesaw State University for 21 years, supervising 39 undergraduate students in various biochemistry-related research projects.



George Boyte ('84) Distinguished Achievement in **Government/Public Service** 

George Boyte is in his 28th year of public service with the State of Tennessee's Office of the Attorney General and Reporter, where he serves as deputy of the Real Property and Transportation Division. After completing his Bachelor of Arts degree in psychology from Union, Boyte earned his law degree from the University of Tennessee in 1987.



JoAnn Reyes ('65)
Distinguished Achievement
in Not-for-Profit

JoAnn Reyes has spent her life dedicated to education, community service and empowering low-income families. Her passion for community impact led her to co-found the Fort Worth HOPE Center, which distributed nearly \$8 million of in-kind donations to individuals and food pantries in 2023. She also founded the School of HOPE, a program that provides low-income individuals with OSHA-compliant certifications to operate forklifts, preparing them for warehouse jobs.



George David Clark ('05)
Distinguished Achievement
in Humanities

George David Clark is an accomplished poet and editor. He is the author of *Reveille* (Arkansas University Press), which won the Miller Williams Prize, and *Newly Not Eternal* (Louisiana University Press). He has also co-edited *Playing with Fire: Christian Poets Reflect on Faith and Practice*, forthcoming from Baylor University Press. Since 2011, he has served as the editor-in-chief and executive director of *32 Poems*.



Andy Rushing ('76)
Distinguished Achievement
in Athletics

Andy Rushing finished his 10th season as Union University's head golf coach in 2024–25. In January 2024, Rushing was named head coach for both the men's and women's golf programs, after returning as interim coach in September 2023. He previously led the men's golf team from 2006–2015 and launched the women's program in 2012. He previously served as head baseball coach for 17 years.



Denese Shumaker ('92)
Distinguished Achievement
in Health Care

Denese Shumaker has dedicated her career to health care and serving the Memphis community. Her professional journey spanned more than 35 years at Baptist Memorial Hospital in Memphis, where she held various roles, culminating in her position as director of the School of Nursing. Upon her retirement in 2006, Baptist Memorial Health Care System established the Denese Shumaker Award in recognition of her contributions to the nursing profession.

#### **2024 Meritorious Service Awards**

## Outstanding Young Alumni Award

Presented to up to three Union University graduates who are age 40 or younger with a record of significant accomplishment in professional life and for service to Union University or the world.

#### **Union Family Legacy Award**

Presented to one family that has a strong tradition of attending Union University, with a minimum of three generations of graduates, and that has been consistently involved with and committed to the university.

#### **Lest We Forget Award**

Presented in recognition of longtime service and contributions to the Union University community.

#### Robert E. Craig Service Award

Named after Union's 13th president and presented to those who have made significant contributions to the university.

#### **G.M. Savage Legacy Award**

Given to a faculty or staff member for their ongoing commitment to Christ-centered education at Union University.

#### **Distinguished Service Award**

Presented to a member of the Union community for distinction in his/her profession, service to mankind and/or contribution to Union University.

## Distinguished Achievement Award

Presented to a Union University graduate recognizing significant contributions in areas of profession.

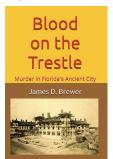


Scan the code to make a nomination or visit uu.edu/alumni/awards



### **1970s**

James D. Brewer ('72) published Blood on the Trestle: Murder in Florida's Ancient City (Brown Bear Publications) — the



second book in his Choctaw Parker mystery/adventure series. Available on Amazon.com, Blood on the Trestle features a half-white/half-Choctaw railroad detective who solves murders during the Gilded Age.

Willie M. Reed ('73) was nominated for a Lifetime Achievement Award by the Washington Society of Certified Public Accountants.

## **1980**s

Leo Percer ('82) earned a promotion to professor of biblical studies at Liberty Theological Seminary in Liberty University's John W. Rawlings School of Theology where he has taught New Testament, hermeneutics and biblical theology classes for over 20 years.



Lovoria B. Williams ('87) was promoted

to full professor with tenure at the University of Kentucky College of Nursing. She is the Sally Humphrey Professor of Cancer Health Equity at the NCIdesignated Markey

Cancer Center and a fellow of the American Academy of Nursing.

#### 1990s

Sheree Cunningham ('90) recently retired after a 35-year career in nursing.

Bryan Ready ('90) presented a paper at the 2024 annual meeting of the Mormon History Association entitled Pious Fraud: Dr. William Whitsitt's View of the Restoration and its Founders. Whitsitt graduated from Union in 1861.

Jai Templeton ('94) received his Master of Business Administration degree with a concentration in human resources management from the University of Tennessee at Martin in December 2024.

**Buster Lackey** ('95) has been appointed wellness director to the Arkansas Department of Public Safety/ Arkansas State Police. He is



responsible for the mental and physical wellness of 14.000 law enforcement officers in Arkansas.



**Pamela** (Honeycutt) Cloar ('95) was awarded the 2024 National Parent Aide of the Year award in San Antonio, Texas, during the National

Exchange Club Symposium in July 2024.

**Marc Welch** ('95) has retired from a long career in engineering and project management leadership. He and his wife of 32 years, Marsha,

have settled in New



Braunfels, Texas, where Marc serves as treasurer for Christ Presbyterian Church.

Anthony (Andy) Kirk ('96), of New Albany, Miss., was recently recognized with a special ceremony to have the softball field at Itawamba Community College named in his honor.

Rebecca Penrose Wilkes ('96) was elected president of the American College of Veterinary Microbiologists in January 2025. Additionally, she has accepted the role of director at the University of Kentucky's Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory in Lexington, Ky., beginning June 1, 2025. Becky is married to Union alumnus Nathan Wilkes, and they have two children - Cooper, 19, and Taylor, 15.

### **2000s**

Matthew Oren Collier ('03) graduated from Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary in Cordova, Tenn., with his Doctor of Ministry degree. His major ministry project was entitled Equipping and Sending Bivocational Supply Preachers from New Hope Baptist Church in Pollard, Arkansas, to Smaller Membership Churches in the Current-Gaines Baptist Association.

Luke Pruett ('06) was named head of school at St. George's Independent School, with campuses in Germantown, Collierville and Memphis, Tenn.

Jacob Lynn ('09) graduated in 2023 from the University of Maryland with a master's degree in software engineering. He lived and worked in Ukraine during the pandemic until the Russian invasion.

## 2010s

**Matthew Kuchem** ('10) completed his Ph.D. in political science at Indiana University and joined the faculty of Bethel University in St. Paul, Minn. After four years at Bethel



he joined the Bipartisan Policy Center in Washington, D.C. He is currently director of outreach at the Institute for Humane Studies at George Mason University.

Alfred Brad Ball ('13) became lead pastor of Awaken Church in Columbia, S.C., in March 2025.

Matt Cox ('13) was recognized as the 2024 Tennessee Interscholastic Athletic Administrators Association Athletic Director of the Year at the annual TIAAA Athletic Directors Conference in Knoxville. Cox serves as the athletic director at The Covenant School, a private elementary school in Nashville.

Benjamin Haws ('13), along with his wife Wilma and sister Catherine, wrote a children's book about money entitled Hooray for Carnival Day!: Give, Save, Spend the Westwood Way. The book is available for purchase at Amazon or www.hawsandco.com.

Timothy Patrick McGrath ('13) was hired as a special education teacher at Richard Yoakley School with Knox County Schools in Knoxville, Tenn.

The **UNIONITE** welcomes news from alumni. Please include contact information with your submission.



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Kate Cozart ('14). clinical pharmacist practitioner at VA Tennessee Valley Healthcare System, received the Health-System Pharmacist of the Year Award for her impact on pharmaceutical

education, leadership and support of resiliency and wellness. The Health-System Pharmacist of the Year Award recognizes one distinguished pharmacist in Tennessee for their profound contributions to the field.

**Logan Whaley** ('19) joined the sports team at WPSD-TV in Paducah, Ky., as weekend sports anchor. He previously worked at KAIT-TV in Jonesboro, Ark.



2020s



**Derek Lamont** Marshall Jr. ('23) was named the recycling coordinator for the city of Jackson, Tenn. He is also pursuing his Master of Business Administration degree.

## Births



Katelyn Walls Shelton ('16) and her husband John welcomed their fourth child, Elizabeth Jane Shelton, on Oct. 14, 2024. Katelyn is a bioethics fellow at the Paul Ramsey Institute, an opinion writer for WORLD and an alumna of the Trump-Pence administration. The Sheltons live in Cheverly, Md., near Washington, D.C.



Karyn (Caldwell) Bingemer ('06) and her husband Dustin welcomed their son, Luke, on Oct. 6, 2024.



Wayne Brantley English was born to Mason ('15, '19) and Allie Durham **English ('14, '19)** on Dec. 19, 2024.

Logan Portis ('21) and his wife Vanessa welcomed their baby Veronica Marie on Oct. 31, 2024.

## **Memoriam**

Donald Coleman ('56) died March 1, 2024, at age 89, in Hilton Head Island. S.C. He taught as an associate professor at Vanderbilt University and was a professor of mathematics at the University of Kentucky for 30 years.

Roger Aubrey Bullard ('58), age 87, of Wilson, N.C., died Nov. 25, 2024. He taught Greek and biblical studies at Atlantic Christian College (now Barton College) for his entire career.

Billy Ray Burch ('60) died Aug. 11, 2024, at Jackson-Madison County General Hospital in Jackson, Tenn. He was 88. A Baptist pastor who served at Shady Grove **Baptist Church and Liberty Baptist** Church in Fayette County, Burch also served in the Tennessee National Guard for more than 42 years.

**David Cundiff** ('60) died July 22, 2024, at age 86. He taught at several schools in the field of exercise science. including Oral Roberts University, Southern Mississippi University, Campbellsville



University and the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga.

Hugh "Frank" Miller Jr. ('60) died Feb. 1. 2025. in Louisville. Kv.. at age 86. He was a Southern Baptist minister for more than 40 years, serving as pastor of churches in Tennessee, Kentucky and Ohio.

James Baggett, age 92, died Nov. 29, 2024. Born in Columbus, Ga., he began teaching at Union in 1977 and later became dean of the School of Humanities and assistant vice president for institutional research before retiring in 1998.

He is the author of the Union history, So Great a Cloud of Witnesses. Baggett was preceded in death by his wife of 62 years, Lillian Faulkner Baggett.



James E. "JR" Ross ('87) died Sept. 12, 2024, at his home in Jackson, Tenn. He was 62.

A native of Henderson, Tenn., Ross earned both associate and bachelor's degrees in nursing from Union before completing his Master of Science in health care administration from the University of Alabama-Birmingham. He worked as an EMT while attending nursing school, beginning a 39-year tenure at West Tennessee Healthcare that culminated with his appointment as president and CEO in 2017. A member at Englewood Baptist Church in Jackson, Ross also served for several years as a Union trustee.

#### **Patsy Ann King Cunningham**

('61) died Sept. 25, 2024, at Wellington Manor in Jackson, Tenn., at age 85. She taught math in Tennessee, Florida and Texas for more than 50 years.

Thomas Harrison West ('63) died April 21, 2024, at age 84 in Richmond, Va. He served in the U.S. Air Force, retiring at the rank of lieutenant colonel after 26 years of service.

#### Richard L. "Dick" Wakefield

('63) passed away Nov. 24, 2024, at age 87 at the Lebanon South Nursing and Rehab Center in Lebanon, Mo. He was a Southern Baptist minister who served as pastor of several churches in Indiana, Kentucky, Tennessee and Missouri, and he retired in 1999 as director of missions for the Tri-County Baptist Association in Missouri.

Rev. Gary Ray Alin ('66), of Ripley, Miss., died June 18, 2023, at age 79. A bivocational minister for 48 years, he retired from the Wilder Youth Development Center in Somerville, Tenn., and previously taught in public schools in Bells and Jackson, Tenn.

Ned Boston ('66), of Iuka, Miss., died Sept. 10, 2024, at age 82. He was a partner at an accounting firm for several years.

Jerry Crossett ('66), of Milan, Tenn., died Feb. 12, 2025, at his home at age 81. He served in the U.S. Army and retired as a lieutenant colonel in 1992.

Gloria Dianne Shugart Taylor ('67), age 78, died Oct. 28, 2024, at her home in Parsons, Tenn., after a battle with cancer. She taught at Malesus Elementary School and Old Hickory Academy and supported her husband in his business ventures.

Jane McMaster Wilson ('67), age 86, passed away March 5, 2025, at her home in Paris. Tenn. She taught in the Haywood and Hardeman County public school systems for 32 years before retiring in 2000.

Doug Braden ('68), of Henry, Tenn., died Dec. 8, 2024, at age 78. He was a bivocational educator and church worship leader for more than 46 years, serving in several West Tennessee churches.

Robert Woodrow Norvell ('70), age 75, passed away at St. Bernard's Hospital in Jonesboro, Ark., on Aug. 2, 2024. He was an ordained Presbyterian minister in Arkansas and Tennessee and worked as an investment adviser for 40 years.

James Stephen Thomas ('73) died April 20, 2024, at his home in Jackson, Tenn., at age 73. He retired from Illinois Tool Works as materials manager.

Gary W. Reese ('77) died Feb. 15, 2025, at age 79 at his home in Jackson, Tenn. He served two tours of duty in Vietnam and was the owner of Reese Roofing and Sheet Metal Co.

Barry Wayne White ('77) of Jackson, Tenn., died April 6, 2024, at age 70.

Frank Jay Kemper ('81), of Somerville, Tenn., died March 3, 2025, at age 65. He was vice president of the Bank of Fayette County.

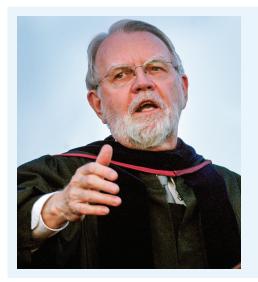
Jimmy Dale Breedlove ('84)

passed away on April 26, 2024, at the age of 79 in Memphis, Tenn. He was pastor of Parkview Baptist Church in Jackson, Tenn., for 21 years, and served several other churches in Missouri, Arkansas, Mississippi and Tennessee.

Michelle Sarratt Milam ('92), age 54, passed away Aug. 31, 2024, at her home in Pontotoc, Miss. She served beside her husband Andy in ministry both in the United States and 15 years as a missionary with the International Mission Board in Portugal.

Jack Randolph Prince ('04), age 62, passed away Nov. 12, 2022, at Jackson-Madison County General Hospital. He was an ICU critical care nurse at the Lt. Col. Luke Weathers, Jr. VA Medical Center in Memphis.

Lisa Murray Rice, age 65, died June 9, 2024, in Jackson, Tenn. She worked for Creative Dining at Union.



Longtime Union music professor Joseph Herring Blass, age 91, died March 17, 2025, at Maury Regional Medical Center in Columbia. Tenn.

Born in Utica, Miss., Blass served in the U.S. Army for two years and taught voice at Union for 45 years. He also led music ministry at several churches.

Blass received Union's Distinguished Faculty/Staff Award in 1986 and was named professor emeritus at Union.

#### Jill Taylor: Using Every Gift to Serve Others

Jill Taylor hopes Union students feel seen and inspired, knowing they are valued by their community and encouraged by the legacy of those who've gone before them.

Taylor, who earned an MBA from Union in 2004, and her husband, Mark, responsibility and inspires excellence and accountability in the workplace."

Motivated to maximize the unique strengths of their team members, the Taylors find inspiration in 1 Peter 4:10: "Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as

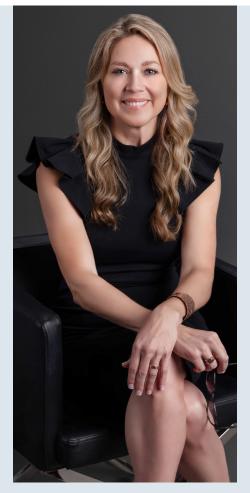
> faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms." The verse serves as a reminder to recognize and celebrate each person's talents and gifts.

Taylor also serves on the McAfee School of Business advisory board and has found joy in connecting with other business leaders

in the Union community.

The Taylors believe strongly in supporting Union's mission.

"Union is a place that exudes compassion, wisdom, humility and remains convicted by the teaching of Jesus Christ," Taylor says. "We are all called to serve and teach, so I pray that every student's heart will be pricked with a passion that reflects what Christ has taught them through their journey at Union."



# **Donor Profile**

donated to The Ethos Forum and dedicated the shop in the Hub to honor their employees at Master Medical Equipment and ReNew Biomedical.

With a heart for service and a desire for authenticity, the Taylors strive to cultivate a healthy and values-driven work environment.

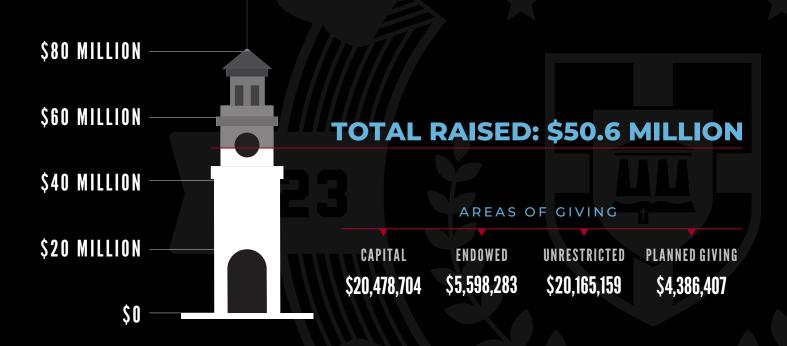
"My husband and I do our best to hire like-minded people who understand the importance of stewardship," Taylor says. "Having a servant-hearted team promotes













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