



Roland Porter grew up in a segregated Covington, Tenn.

He was not permitted to attend school with white students. Drinking fountains and rest rooms were labeled “Whites Only.”

But even in those discouraging days, he dared to dream of a society with expanding opportunity.

“I thought we’d have black senators someday, I could see that as a possibility,” says Porter, now associate professor of business in the McAfee School of Business Administration and director of Union’s new Center for Racial Reconciliation.

“I dared not hope for or imagine a black president,” Porter continues. “Obama heard about the American dream, and he believed it fully. I believed it, but with reservation.”

In the election of Barack Obama, Porter sees an important opportunity for American society that has nothing to do with partisan politics. He sees a chance to change the way people from diverse backgrounds get along together.

“We just about have everything we’re going to get, doing what we’ve been doing,” he says. “So, if we want something different, we’re go-

but he also observes many do not participate.

“Some of that is due to our sinful nature. Otherwise, it’s the status quo. If things are going reasonably well, why bother?”

One of Porter’s goals during the Center’s first year is to encourage further diversify in Union’s student population. But the goals don’t end there.

“I would hope we can have more African-American and other non-Caucasian staff,” he says. “I would hope we could have more African-American students in fraternities and sororities.”

The Center has plans to host “brown-bag” and other gatherings in connection with Black History month. Campus-wide discussions of George Yancey’s book “Beyond Racial Gridlock” are planned. A special chapel service was held Feb. 11 with Frank Anderson, pastor of True Light Baptist Church in Memphis as the featured Speaker.

“We have to acknowledge that we have been parties to each other’s pain,” says Porter. “If we do that and then say ‘we really want to move forward from here’ we can move forward from here by generally caring for each other.”

Caring strategies are already unfolding at Union.

Toward a Great Commandment campus

Roland Porter Directs Union’s Center for Racial Reconciliation



Roland Porter

ing to have to do something different.”

Porter sees the next step in race relations to be candid and ultimately productive discussions in which people put aside their fears of being misunderstood or insulted and work instead within a model of trust and acceptance.

At Union, Porter sees the new Center for Racial Reconciliation as a place where that level of discussion can be encouraged.

Within the Center, people will develop what he describes as Christian strategies to reverse the unjust consequences of racial discrimination and to prevent their recurrence.

To achieve those goals, Porter wants to make use of research, advocacy, clinical studies, internships, public forums and scholarships.

Porter says Christians of all races should be playing an engaging role in this important work,

Campus citizens – the group Mosaic, Greek letter and non-Greek letter organizations, as well as individual students, staff and faculty – are proactively seeking to broaden relationships with people who are racially different from themselves.

Racial reconciliation has practical value beyond obedience to the Great Commandment. It is also preparing students to live and work in a world much different than the place where young Roland Porter grew up. It will be essential for them to interact with people from a wide range of backgrounds and native languages.

“I think that will help us to prepare our students better to go out into a world that is becoming different than the world I grew up in.”