

SPRING 2024

UNI NITE

THE UNION UNIVERSITY MAGAZINE



Dub Oliver

CELEBRATING 10 YEARS
AS UNION'S PRESIDENT

Kristen Lowry

A VOICE FOR
THE VULNERABLE

Tristan Kelly

RUNNING TOWARD
REDEMPTION



MICHAEL AND MARIE TANKERSLEY (SIBLINGS)

*Biblical Studies /Languages
and Christian Ministry & Missions majors
Jackson, Tennessee*

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ON THE COVER:

*Dr. Dub & Susie Oliver
Photo by Karley Hathcock ('22, '23)*

FROM THE **PRESIDENT**

You crown the year with your bounty; your wagon tracks overflow with abundance. Psalm 65:11

I deeply appreciate the imagery of this verse which so beautifully depicts God’s goodness to us. The whole psalm is a praise song to God, and this line pictures the culmination of a year being crowned and then looking back to see that the wagon tracks all along the way have been overflowing such that they simply spill out on the path.

Often, we use birthdays, a new year and anniversary celebrations to remember and reflect. I’ve been doing that a good bit since Feb. 10, the date 10 years ago I was named the 16th president of Union University.

The lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; indeed, I have a beautiful inheritance. Psalm 16:6

King David recognizes in this psalm a realization of how gracious the Lord has been to him throughout his life. We know there were difficult moments and challenging seasons for David, just as there have been for each of us these past 10 years. Still, we acknowledge the lines have fallen for us in pleasant places — God has provided for us in every way. And, in his goodness, one of the most important ways he provides for us is people to share life with.

A few people I’m thankful for over these years include...

Susie, my wife and our amazing first lady at Union. Proverbs 18:22 reminds us, “He who finds a wife finds a good thing and obtains favor from the Lord.” That is certainly true. Thank you for loving me. It is true that lives of significant service and leadership depend upon lives of support. Simply, I could not carry these responsibilities without you. I thank God for his favor upon my life through you.

Callie (‘17 and ‘24), our daughter, and Zach (‘19), our son-in-law. I’m so proud of you! Thank you for making me a Union dad, for

faithfully living out God’s call on your lives and for your constant love. And, for giving us Betsy (future class of 2041), Oliver (future class of 2043) and Henry (future class of 2046).

advisers they succeed.” Union trustees’ good, godly and wise counsel mean the world to me personally and to Union as an institution.

Students! Goodness, I am so so grateful for you! Thank you for sharing life with me over these years, for letting me be a part of your journey and for spurring me on to love and good deeds. You have been a tremendous blessing in my life and to us at Union. There have been 9,984 degrees



The Executive Council at Union (Bryan Carrier, Dan Griffin, Catherine Kwasigroh, John Netland, Rick Taphorn and Ray Van Neste). Each, in their own right, is incredible, and even more so as a team seeking to advance Union. Thank you for your partnership in advancing our Christ-centered mission. Union has been and is blessed with excellent leadership. We thank God for that.

The Board of Trustees, and especially the Board chairs (Norm Hill, Lisa Rogers, Chad Wilson, Robyn Hari and Jeff Perkins), with whom I have served. Proverbs 15:22 couldn’t be more true — “Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many

awarded during these 10 years, each a precious life. I am overwhelmingly grateful for these lives and what they will do to touch and shape the lives of others through the years.

Protinus! Let’s press on in the days and years ahead. May we be faithful stewards of all that Union has become, and may it always be a place where students are in the process of discovering God’s purposes for their lives. Help us to always remember, Lord, that the purpose of our work is to bring you glory.

With immeasurable joy,

CAMPUS **NEWS**



‘TOPPING OUT’ CEREMONY MARKS KEY EVENT IN CONSTRUCTION OF NEW ACADEMIC BUILDING AT UNION

Union students, employees and friends signed a steel beam and participated in a “topping out” ceremony on campus Feb. 5 to celebrate a milestone in construction of the new academic building on the Great Lawn.

The beam they signed is the highest piece of structural steel in the building. The facility will house the McAfee School of Business and the computer science and engineering departments. Construction began in September and is scheduled for completion in the spring of 2025.

“First, foremost and always, we acknowledge God’s hand,” Union President Samuel W. “Dub” Oliver said. “Psalm 127 begins, ‘Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain. Unless the Lord watches over the city, the watchman stays awake in vain.’ We know that it is in the Lord’s providence that we are gathering here today to celebrate this topping out.”

The ceremony featured recognitions of architects TLM Associates, structural engineers Clay Williams and Associates and general

contractor Linkous Construction, in addition to Union trustees and business, computer science and engineering faculty and staff who have provided input on the building.

Oliver recognized Tom McAfee, his mother Carolyn McAfee Bruner and their family who provided the lead gift for the project, as well as other donors, such as former Union President Hyran Barefoot, who has made significant contributions to fund its construction. So far, more than 200 donors have contributed \$15.5 million to the project.



UNION EXPLORES POTENTIAL PARTNERSHIP WITH NIGERIA'S BOWEN UNIVERSITY

Union welcomed a delegation from Bowen University in Nigeria in July, marking the initiation of a potential partnership aimed at fostering collaboration between the two Baptist institutions.

The contingent from Bowen University included Joshua Ogunwole, the vice chancellor (equivalent to president); Joan Ayo, the pro chancellor (similar to chair of the Board of Trustees); and Israel Akanji, the president of the Nigerian Baptist Convention.

Union University President Samuel W. “Dub” Oliver said a partnership would align with one of the themes in “Protinus,” Union’s strategic plan that was adopted in January 2023 — advancing Christ-centered higher education.

“An objective under that is providing leadership to like-minded, Christ-centered higher education institutions,”

Oliver said. “We thought this might be a way we could partner with a sister institution on the African continent.”

The focus of the discussions was identifying areas of potential collaboration, with a particular emphasis on integrating faith and learning, maintaining biblical fidelity and developing academic programs. Additionally, both institutions discussed potential partnerships in emerging fields, such as cybersecurity and social work. Union’s recent launch of a cybersecurity program and its expertise in computer science were of particular interest to Bowen.

Bowen University is the largest Baptist university in Nigeria and is named for Thomas Jefferson Bowen, the first Southern Baptist missionary to Nigeria. The Nigerian Baptist Convention is made up of 14,000 churches and numbers 10 million members.



OLIVER AFFIRMS BIBLICAL VIEW OF HUMANITY AND GENDER AMIDST CULTURAL SHIFTS

“In a culture that is increasingly post-Christian and that rejects the truth about the nature of humanity, Christians must uphold Scripture’s teaching,” Union University President Samuel W. “Dub” Oliver said at fall convocation in August.

“By and large, the spirit of our age no longer discerns or delights in the beauty of God’s design for human life,” Oliver said. “Many deny that God created human beings for his glory, and that his good purposes for us include our personal and physical design as male and female.”

Oliver based his message on Genesis 1:27: “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.”

“Human beings are valuable — each of you are valuable — not because of what you can do, or what you can create, or what you can contribute, but because of whose image you are made to reflect,” Oliver said. “The ‘imago Dei’ reminds us that every person is valuable because God created them. The ‘imago Dei’ is what sets human beings apart from the rest of creation.”

Oliver said that Genesis 1:27 — the university’s theme verse for the 2023-24 academic year — is one of the most controversial statements to make in today’s age. Some will call Christians who believe it hateful and bigoted, and some will go so far to say that Christians shouldn’t be allowed to say it at all.

“But it is still true,” Oliver said. “And, because it is true, we must still speak it.”

Churches, and institutions connected to them, need clear and unambiguous articulation about what Scripture teaches concerning the most important and contested questions of the day, Oliver said. Today, those are questions about biblical anthropology and sexuality. Even leading scientific journals and publications have abandoned science in favor of a radical gender ideology.

As a leading institution of Christian higher education, Oliver said Union wants to be clear and helpful while encouraging Christians who seek to live faithfully. Union wants to see its neighbors flourish and wants students to be well grounded in the truth of Scripture, with a biblical vision of life and how to live it for God’s glory and mankind’s good.

“The bottom line is that we must be willing to say hard but true things,” Oliver said. “The true and beautiful vision for humanity in Genesis is good for human flourishing, regardless of whether it is popular.”

UNION SCHOOL OF EDUCATION SCORES HIGH ON STATE REPORT CARD

Union's School of Education received excellent ratings on the effectiveness of teacher training programs from the 2023 Educator Preparation Program Report Card, published by the Tennessee State Board of Education.

The UU School of Education candidates achieved an 88.9 percent first-time pass rate for literacy assessment. In addition to this, Union received higher-than-average placement rates and retention rates compared to other Tennessee public schools, and Union's candidate assessment rating exceeded expectations, demonstrating pass rates above the state averages in all categories.

In the area of candidate profile, Union University's percentage of racially diverse cohort members was 13.8 percent above the state average.

"This report card ranking is tangible evidence of the hard work of our students, program completers, local education partners and university faculty and staff," said Mandy Cates, director of accreditation and assessment at Union's School of Education. "We are grateful to see students living out our mission of being Christ-centered educators who transform lives through their daily work in classrooms."

The full report card is available at uu.edu/programs/epp/.



UNION RECEIVES GRANT OF NEARLY \$300,000 TO MAKE SAFETY IMPROVEMENTS

A major grant from the state of Tennessee will help fund safety and security upgrades on the Union University campus over the next several months.

The Higher Education Safety Grant from the Department of Finance and Administration and the Office of Criminal Justice Programs totals \$290,689.

"We are grateful for the State of Tennessee and for their financial assistance," said Bryan Carrier, Union's vice president for student life and dean of students. "This Higher Education Safety Grant is an enormous blessing and will help us better care for the safety of all those who work, learn, live and recreate at Union University."

The grant will fund such projects as:

- concrete barriers, in the form of planters, that will be placed at strategic locations to limit vehicular access.
- electronic access control for academic buildings on the main Union campus.
- enhanced security camera coverage.
- installation of a new vehicular control gate at the Walker Road entrance to permit electronic access.

The grant, which was awarded in January, allows 17 months for the projects to be completed, but Carrier said he expects Union to finish these projects much earlier.



New officers for Union's Board of Trustees are, from left, Jeff Perkins, chairman; Kay Griffin, secretary; and Josh Dougan, vice chairman. (Photo by Karley Hathcock)

UNION TRUSTEES SELECT PERKINS AS NEW BOARD CHAIR

Union University's trustees approved new leadership during their September meeting on the Union campus, selecting Jeff Perkins as chairman. He had served as vice chairman of the Board and chairman of the finance and audit committee for the last two years.

Perkins succeeded Robyn Hari, who rotated off the board along with trustees Jim Farmer, Steve Gaines, Noe Garcia, Peggy Graves and David Guthrie.

Joining Perkins as trustee officers were Josh Dougan, who previously served as Board secretary, as vice chairman and Kay Griffin as secretary.

Perkins, of Greenfield, Tennessee, graduated from Union in 1989 with a bachelor's degree in management and marketing. He recently retired from a family-owned wholesale produce distributor, Akin and Porter Produce, where he was the vice president and chief operations officer.

Perkins has been the worship leader at Bethel Baptist Church in Greenfield for more than 25 years. He and his wife Tammy have four children (all of whom are Union graduates and all of whom are married to Union graduates) and 13 grandchildren.

UNION LAUNCHES MASTER OF ARTS IN BIBLE AND THEOLOGY

Union University trustees have approved a new graduate theology program for the university.

The Master of Arts in Bible and Theology begins the fall of 2024 (pending approval from the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges). The cohort-based, in-person classes will be taught at Union's Midtown/Memphis campus.

The MABT is designed for pastors and church leaders who want in-depth

biblical and theological preparation. The 42-hour degree will include 18 hours of biblical languages and 24 hours of theology. The MABT is designed for students with a high level of undergraduate academic preparation. The degree will open doors for students who desire further study after completing the program.

For more information about the program, visit uu.edu/mabt.



LEWIS JOINS UNION AS MCUTS DEAN

Kenneth Lewis has been named dean for the Memphis College of Urban and Theological Studies at Union.

Lewis previously taught at Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary and served as the associate dean of graduate programs and director of information services there. He is pastor of Briarwood Community Church in Cordova, Tennessee, a position he will continue to hold.

Lewis completed his bachelor's degree in computer science from Mississippi State University. After being called into the ministry, he completed a Bachelor of Theology degree from Huntsville Bible College. He earned his Master of Divinity and Doctor of Philosophy degrees from Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary.

After graduating, he served as the dean for the Doctor of Ministry program at Mid-America and as assistant professor of practical theology, New Testament and church history.



UNION UNIVERSITY HENDERSONVILLE, VOLUNTEER STATE FORGE PATHWAY TO ADDRESS NURSING SHORTAGE

Union University Hendersonville has partnered with Volunteer State Community College to provide a pathway for Vol State graduates to matriculate into Union's traditional and accelerated bachelor's degree programs in nursing in Hendersonville.

"This articulation agreement aids in the continual effort to streamline processes for students to pursue careers in nursing," said Allison Davis, associate dean of Union's College of Nursing and Health Sciences.

Davis said a national nursing shortage continues to be a significant concern within the health care industry.

"It is Union's hope that this partnership will help address this issue by educating future nurses and providing students with degree options within Sumner County," she said.

Union University offers two degree options in nursing on the Hendersonville campus for students who have completed the required coursework and meet the criteria for admission. The traditional Bachelor of Science in Nursing degree can be completed within 22 months, and the accelerated BSN degree can be completed within 15 months. Courses are taught on the Hendersonville campus, and clinical rotations are held at health care facilities in Sumner County and Middle Tennessee.

The articulation agreement took effect with the fall 2023 semester.

UNION HOSTS 2ND ANNUAL APOLOGETICS CONFERENCE FOR YOUTH

Over 250 youth, parents and church youth leaders attended the EQUIP Youth Apologetics Conference at Union's Carl Grant Events Center in September.

Hosted by Union's School of Theology and Missions in partnership with the Tennessee Baptist Mission Board, the conference sought to equip middle schoolers, high schoolers and recent high school graduates to properly

wrestle with doubt. Four talks throughout the day sought to answer students' real questions about Christianity.

"If you are going to be equipped to answer other people's questions with both patience and humility, and also with deep, persuasive answers, you have to wrestle with those questions yourself and discover what you believe and why you believe it," said Gregory Poore, associate professor of philosophy, apologetics

and ethics at Union. "Apologetics is not about winning arguments. It's about winning people and loving people. You have to understand what are their needs, their questions and their doubts, and let that set the agenda."

Church groups, individual middle school and high school students, and Union families made up the bulk of attendees. Learn more at uu.edu/events/equip.

A third-annual EQUIP conference is scheduled for Sept. 7, 2024.

NEW VOLUME FROM UNION UNIVERSITY PRESS CELEBRATES UNION HISTORY

Ray Van Neste and Justin Wainscott have released a new book through Union University Press sharing Union's rich history through Founders' Day addresses, the bicentennial commencement address and a new alma mater song.

Van Neste, dean for Union's School of Theology and Missions, and Wainscott, STM associate dean, edited the book, "Lest We Forget: Founders' Day Addresses from Union University," with contributions from Bob Agee, Keith Bates, Cody Curtis, David S. Dockery, Kay Griffin, Samuel W. "Dub" Oliver, Eric Smith, Marion Smothers and Wainscott.

Wainscott said they wanted to celebrate the university's history while passing that story on to those who will come after them.

"As both alumni and faculty of Union, we recognize that we are part of something much bigger than ourselves," Wainscott said. "We owe it to those who have gone before us not to forget their sacrifices, and we owe it to those who will come after us to pass on this history so that it will be appreciated and preserved."

"Lest We Forget" is the second volume of the Founders' Day addresses series from Union. The original book, "From the Cloud of Witnesses: Founders' Day Addresses from Union University" was published in 2014. Scan the code to purchase from Amazon:



Jeremy Blaschke, associate professor of biology, speaks at the EQUIP conference. (Photo by Lauren Steed)



WINANS HIGHLIGHTS UNION'S 25TH ANNUAL SCHOLARSHIP BANQUET

Union celebrated its 25th annual Scholarship Banquet Oct. 25 at the Carl Perkins Civic Center in Jackson with a concert by Christian recording artist CeCe Winans.

With more than 1,500 donors, students and community members in attendance, the 2023 Scholarship Banquet was the largest event to date.

"What we do at Union matters. And the reality is, we can't do it without people who support us," Union President Samuel W. "Dub" Oliver said. "We want students to have a transformative, Christ-centered experience."

Union's first Scholarship Banquet was held in 1997 with featured speaker Lou Holtz, former football coach at Notre Dame. Since then, the banquet's keynote guests have included such world leaders and entertainers as George W. Bush, Margaret Thatcher, George H.W. Bush, Tony Blair, Mikhail Gorbachev, Condoleezza Rice, Mercy Me, Chris Tomlin and many others.

The banquet was not held in 2008 following a campus-ravaging tornado and in 2020 during a global pandemic.

Winans, the bestselling and most-awarded female gospel artist of all time, said she was grateful to be part of an event that raises support for student scholarships.

"I'm so glad that there are people who care and people who understand the importance of being generous," she said. "We serve a God that teaches us how to give, how to love."

NURSING GRADS ACHIEVE PERFECT PASS RATE ON NATIONAL LICENSURE EXAM

The latest graduates from Union University’s Bachelor of Science in Nursing program in Jackson have achieved a perfect pass rate on the national registered nurse licensure examination.

Of the 66 May 2023 graduates across the Jackson, Germantown and Hendersonville campuses, 64 passed their National Council Licensure Examination on the first try (for a total pass rate of 97 percent across all campuses). All 31 nursing graduates from the Jackson campus passed the exam on their first try. The national pass rate in 2023 was 87.62 percent.

Kelly Harden, dean for Union’s College of Nursing and Health Sciences, said the program is not new to high pass rates, but this is the first time since 2015 that one of Union’s campuses has earned a perfect first-time pass rating.

The National Council Licensure Examination for Registered Nurses is created by the National Council of State Boards of Nursing. A passing score on the exam is required for each graduate to be licensed as a registered nurse. The NCLEX-RN tests graduates on topics that cover the entire human lifespan — from newborn to geriatrics.

Harden attributed the high pass rates to the dedication of nursing students and the hard work of the faculty members.

“Nursing is a challenging program, and our faculty are committed to helping students succeed,” she said. “Faculty members are highly trained, involved in professional organizations and have a rich experience in the many facets of nursing.”



GREEN, PINGEN, JOYNER EARN TOP FACULTY/STAFF AWARDS

Union University presented more than 80 awards to students, faculty and staff April 21 at the annual Awards Day chapel service.

The Carla D. Sanderson Faculty of the Year Award went to Georg Pingen, professor of engineering. Marcia Joyner, coordinator for educational leadership programs, received the Gary L. Carter Staff of the Year Award.

Brad Green, professor of theological studies, received the R. Keith Absher Faculty Researcher of the Year Award, which recognizes a full-time faculty member who has made significant and sustained scholarly contributions to his or her discipline and the academy.



GERMANTOWN CHAMBER VIDEO FEATURES WESTBROOK

Kevin Westbrook, professor of marketing at Union University Germantown, was featured in a video from the Germantown Chamber of Commerce promoting the McAfee School of Business’ Master of Business Administration degree.

The video was shared in the Chamber’s e-newsletter and social media channels. “Here at Union, we foster academic excellence, teach ethical leadership and help students develop essential skills for professional growth,” Westbrook said. “We blend academic rigor with a Christian worldview and Christian values.” Scan the code above to watch the video.



VAN NESTE NAMED UNION’S VICE PRESIDENT FOR UNIVERSITY MINISTRIES

Union has named Ray Van Neste, dean of its School of Theology and Missions, as vice president for university ministries.

Van Neste will continue to serve as dean in addition to his new role, where he will oversee Union’s chapel program, church relations and pastoral care responsibilities for the university community.

Van Neste has served on the Union faculty since 2001 and became dean of the School of Theology and Missions in 2018. A native of Millington, Tennessee, Van Neste graduated from Union in 1992 with a major in religion/Greek. He finished his Master of Arts degree in New Testament from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School and his Doctor of Philosophy in New Testament from the University of Aberdeen in Scotland.



SHATZER NAMED UNIVERSITY'S PROVOST

Jacob Shatzer, associate provost and dean of instruction at Union University, has been named the university's provost, effective July 1.

Shatzer will replace John Netland, who has served as Union's provost since 2017 and chose to return to the classroom as a professor in the Department of English.

Shatzer joined the Union faculty in 2017 as assistant professor of theological studies and associate dean of the School of Theology and Missions after serving at Sterling College and Palm Beach Atlantic University. A 2007 graduate of Union with a bachelor's degree in biblical studies-languages, Shatzer earned his Master of Divinity degree from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and his Doctor of Philosophy in theological ethics from Marquette University in 2014.

THE 26TH ANNUAL SCHOLARSHIP BANQUET

FEATURING
KEITH AND
KRISTYN GETTY

Join us for the 26th annual
Scholarship Banquet

TUESDAY, DEC. 3, 2024

Featuring a Christmas concert with Keith and Kristyn Getty, the banquet will celebrate the generous donors who have made a Christ-centered education at Union possible for so many students.

For more information, call the Office of Institutional Advancement at

(731) 661-5050 or visit uu.edu/events/scholarshipbanquet.





FEATURE **STORIES**

DUB OLIVER: RUNNING THE RACE

BY ETHAN ORWIG ('25)

During his transition from high school to college, Samuel Simpson found himself in a position common to a lot of freshmen. The first couple of months are usually the hardest, with new living dynamics, friendships and responsibilities.

Finding the right community of friends proved difficult for Simpson during those early days of his freshman year. He realized he just needed someone to talk to. That person happened to be Union University President Samuel W. "Dub" Oliver.

Dr. Dub had given freshman students his cell phone number during new student orientation and told them to reach out if they ever needed guidance. Simpson did so, and Oliver replied with an invitation for Sam to come to his office.

"I think it's cool because most people would probably not invite you into their place," Simpson says. "Like, that's his office. Sure, that's part of the reason for an office, but also, it's your personal and private space... which is just insane and crazy. I love it."

They didn't talk about anything pressing. They simply had a conversation about life, which was exactly what Simpson was craving. Visiting the president in his office allowed Simpson to feed his need for community. Although Simpson didn't come to his office to talk about business, it was business to Dr. Dub.

This year marks Oliver's 10-year anniversary after he was elected as Union's 16th president on Feb. 10, 2014. Over that decade, his influence and commitment to the school has shown itself in many ways, ranging from the well-being of the physical campus to his immeasurable impact on students and faculty through friendships and mentorships.

The Oliver family, Dub and Susie Oliver with their daughter Callie Bearden, her husband Zach, and the Olivers' grandchildren Betsy and Oliver.



Dr. Dub is known for being proactive on campus. Students often spot him at Union sports games and events wearing red and white just as much as any other student. Not only that, but he can be found anywhere students are found: Whether that's in the dining hall or the line to get coffee at Barefoots Joe, Dr. Dub is there making conversation and developing relationships with people. Oliver explained that he wants to be present across campus and encourages others to do the same.

"I want to be engaged in as much as possible," Dr. Dub says. "I want to be at baseball games, I want to be at fraternity and sorority events, theater plays, music events and academic lectures. I want to cheer on everything Union is doing, because it's good stuff."

This idea of "being present" is an absolute necessity to Dr. Dub. Not only is it a crucial part of the job, but he's doing his part in running the Union race.

"I'm the 16th president of Union," he says. "I like that because it reminds me

that I wasn't the first, and I won't be the last. I have a stewardship responsibility."

He thumbed over his shoulder at a red track baton resting on one of the dozen bookshelves behind his office desk. "You can probably see over my shoulder, but there's a red baton," he says. "David Dockery, who was the 15th president, gave that to me on the day I was named president."

Oliver explained that the purpose of the baton is to symbolize the idea of continuing his role as a steward.

As president, Dr. Dub is running the race that was started by 15 presidents before him. To him, the title "president" isn't just a name; it's a role directed by a mission. That mission has been passed down to Dr. Dub by the previous president of Union just as the last did to him.

"First, foremost and always, I want Union to be faithful as a Christ-centered institution," Oliver says. "And beyond that, I want us to ensure that we're living out our core values."



David Dockery, Union's 15th president, handing off the baton.

Dr. Dub said these core values — excellence-driven, Christ-centered, people-focused and future-directed — are what drive him to pour into the school and its students with such intentional care. Being personable and treating people with love and care is the way Oliver lives and fulfills his duty as a steward. It's being a friend to those who need one and reflecting the light of Christ through his position as Union's president.

"I don't want people to think of Union as me. I want them to think about it as Union," Oliver says. "And so, I'm not trying to build a platform for Dr. Dub. That's not the point of this. The point is to say, hey, here's Union. Union's pointing people to Christ, so if we can draw people to Union, they're going to be pointed to Christ, as opposed to any individual."

That's another key reason why Dr. Dub takes initiative to start conversations. He sees how some incoming students may feel isolated when transitioning to college. Most incoming freshmen are overwhelmed and feel underprepared when finding a community right away. On Move-in Day, Dr. Dub can be seen

“

**FIRST, FOREMOST
AND ALWAYS,**

**I WANT UNION TO BE
FAITHFUL AS A CHRIST-
CENTERED INSTITUTION...**

—DUB OLIVER

carrying boxes to dorm rooms. He's doing the heavy lifting so unfamiliar faces can feel welcome and cared for.

Beyond everyday conversations in the hall, or sitting with students during chapel, Oliver has mentored several students throughout their time at Union. Mary Helen (English) Holt is a 2022 Union graduate who has been heavily influenced by Dr. Dub's intentionality with students.

"When you're making an impact, you never realize when you're making the impact until after," Holt says. "I didn't realize the incredible impact that was being made upon me: the impact of Dr. Dub's leadership, the impact of how he cares for students."

Oliver's care for students is not limited to the having a personal connection with

them. He goes above and beyond to give the best experience Union has to offer, all while pointing them toward Christ.

"I think the highest level of impact is seen just by his actions," Holt says. "I think you can tell that Dr. Dub has a heart for the Lord, has a heart for students, has a heart for college students, has a heart for that whole process, by watching the way that he lives his life. To me, that is the greatest impact, that he's leading by example."

Ashley Blair, associate professor of communication arts and chair of the department, has seen how Dr. Dub addresses issues behind the scenes. Before his arrival, some critical funding for faculty professional development had been removed from the budget. As chair of the

Faculty Development Committee, she sent a letter to him asking that the lost funding be restored.

Oliver graciously received the request, and within the first semester of his presidency restored that funding to the budget. Blair said she and the rest of the committee felt heard, and they were touched by his intentionality in addressing a problem that wasn't entirely visible.

"One of the primary contributions to the wholistic legacy of Union is definitely financial," Blair says. "He has been very intentional in a time where higher education and Christian higher education is struggling with the number of students available and the costs. He has been very intentional about paying down debt and being fiscally responsible to ensure



“

I THINK YOU CAN TELL THAT DR. DUB HAS A HEART FOR THE LORD...

HAS A HEART FOR COLLEGE STUDENTS, HAS A HEART FOR THAT WHOLE PROCESS, BY WATCHING THE WAY THAT HE LIVES HIS LIFE.”

—MARY HELEN HOLT

Union's financial viability and being able to offer Christ-centered education."

When Dan Griffin, vice president for enrollment management, began working at Union in 2015, the university was nearly \$45 million in debt and suffered from significant cash flow issues. Not only has Dr. Dub slashed the long-term debt to just over \$6 million, but he has also helped Union accumulate more than \$19 million in the bank to aid the execution of the campus master plan and to prevent an environment that relies on borrowing money.

"That's him being a very good financial steward and making sure we live within our means," Griffin says. "In my nine years working with him, he doesn't cut corners financially."

Before Union University, Griffin had experience at three other universities under a total of eight college presidents. Now, having served nine years under Oliver's leadership, Griffin believes Dr. Dub particularly stands out.

"He understands every aspect; whether it's finances, enrollment, student life, academics; he just has a really good grasp of what's going on at the university," Griffin says. "Couple that with his time in the Word, and his ability to preach and his ability to build relationships, it would take a lot for me to leave Union."

Since Oliver took the role as university president, he has looked toward the future to build new buildings



and open more opportunities for students. This was evident when The Logos, Union's 150,000-book library, was completed under Dr. Dub's leadership. It opened in 2015 and allows students to access important study resources and space to work.

He also capitalized on introducing more student common areas such as the coffee shop, Modero, to better the student community. Currently, a new academic building for the McAfee School of Business and the computer science and engineering departments is being constructed on the Great Lawn and will be the newest addition to the Union vision.

"We want to do that because I want students who follow to have the very best learning environment possible to pursue what God's calling them to do," Oliver said. "I don't want anything to be second-rate. I want it to be excellent. Because, we are also serving the Lord, and he deserves the very best."

The Union community isn't the only group that's constantly on Dr. Dub's radar. During his 10 years, Oliver has continued the Union tradition of Campus and Community Day, a day dedicated for students and faculty to dive into the Jackson community to work and beautify the city of Jackson without being paid. But Dr. Dub isn't one to send his students off while he toils away in his office. He is right there in the thick of it, sweating harder than anyone else with a smile on his face.

"He's not above anything," Holt says. "On Campus and Community Day, he's going to be in the middle of it. He's going to be picking up trash, he's going to be sitting alongside students in the highest of highs and also the lowest of lows."

Hayden Phillips is a senior at Union majoring in chemistry. He has known Dr. Dub longer than most students, as Phillips and Oliver have been fellow members at Englewood Baptist

Church for years. Now, Phillips is on the difficult journey of learning to be a pastor. Dr. Dub has been discipling him and regularly meets with Phillips to mentor him in pastoral ministry.

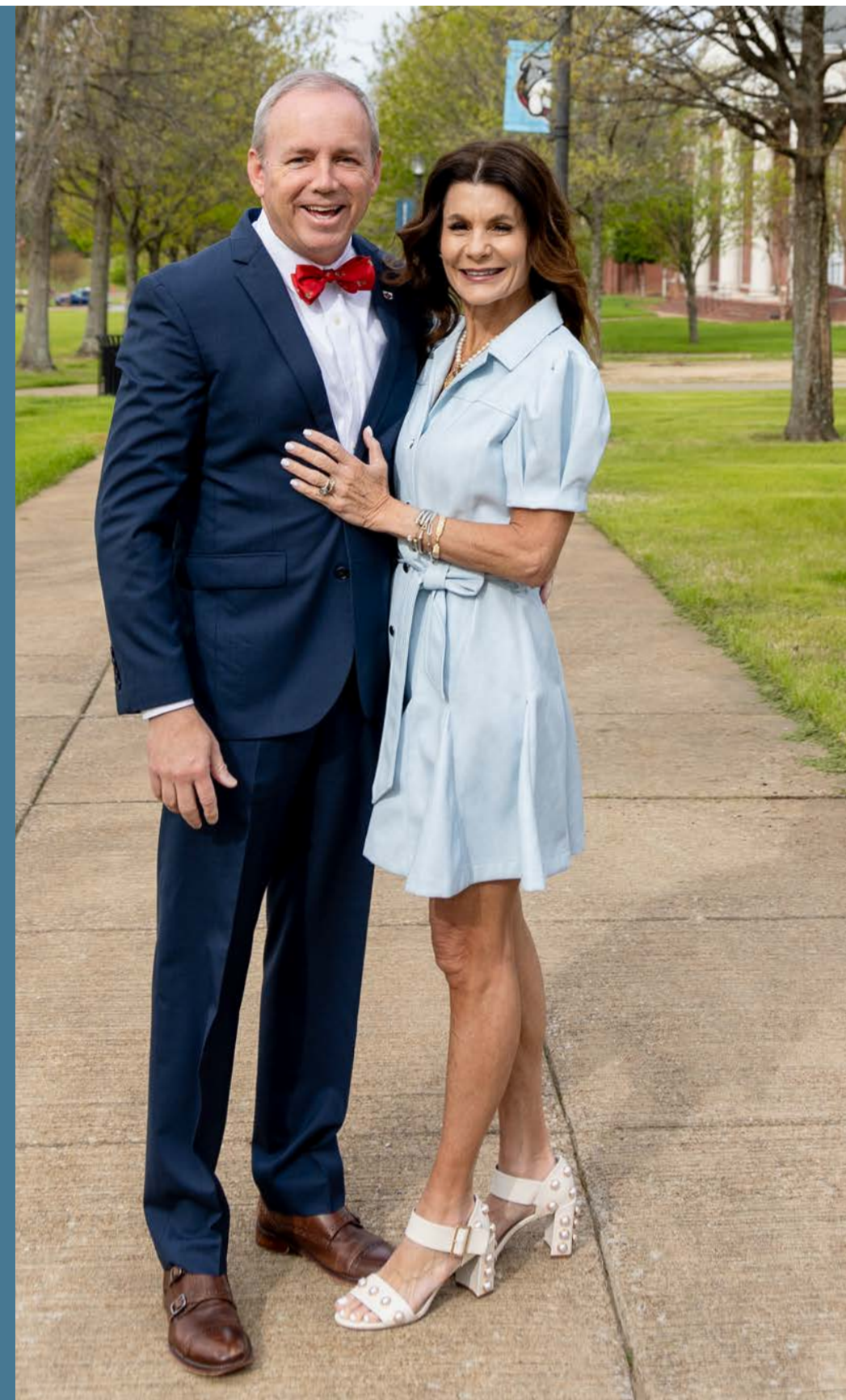
"I don't think you have to know Dr. Dub super well in order to see the fruit of his wisdom and the fruit of how he leads and his heart behind that," Phillips says. "Even despite the friendship, seeing him as a mentor is still something a lot of people at Union can recognize and benefit from."

There is something to be said for Oliver's commitment to Union and its mission. After 10 years as president, Dr. Dub has touched the lives of thousands of students and faculty. Not only has he furthered the quality of life of the physical campus, but he has also furthered the development of students through his intentionality and care.

He has gone above and beyond what a university president's job requires because he doesn't see people as a number on a chart. Developing relationships isn't a checkmark on the schedule. He values "hanging out" with students as much as his faculty meetings — because to him, pouring into students is a part of the job, even if it isn't in the formal job description as president. Dr. Dub uses Union as the platform God has entrusted him so he can be a steward who points students toward the Lord.

"In addition to helping the university regain its financial footing, his legacy will also be helping students and faculty continue to flourish and grow in ways that are meaningful," Blair says, adding that service to "the church and society," as Union's mission says, will be part of that legacy.

By the end of his time at Union, Dr. Dub only wishes for one thing: "At the end of my career, that people would be able to say, 'He loved us well, and he led us well,'" Oliver says.





A VOICE FOR THE VULNERABLE: HOW A UNION ALUMNA IS SHARING A NEW PERSPECTIVE ON ORPHAN CARE

BY SUZANNE RHODES

There are approximately 150 million orphans around the world.

Churches throughout the United States seek to address this issue by sending an estimated \$2.5 billion to orphanages every year, but what if these good intentions did not always translate to the best care for orphans and vulnerable children?

Kristen (Sayres) Lowry, a Union University alumna and international orphan care consultant for Send Relief, seeks to educate Southern Baptists how their churches and missionaries can provide the best long-term care for orphans around the world. A collaboration between the International Mission Board and the North American Mission Board, Send Relief provides compassion ministry both domestically and internationally.

As co-executive director of Shelter Yetu in Kenya, Lowry ('06) learned early in her orphan-care experience that most children placed in orphanages have living family members who were forced to give up their children to institutional orphanages because of life circumstances, poverty or food insecurity.

© IMB Photo



Daniel and Kristen Lowry with their children Bahati, Serafina, Ebenezer and Theodosia.



© IMB Photo

Once Lowry studied the shocking statistics that children living in orphanages are more likely to commit suicide, to become victims of trafficking and exploitation and to have developmental problems, she sought to shift the orphan-care model at Shelter Yetu. Rather than focusing solely on institutional orphan housing for children, Shelter Yetu became committed to reuniting families.

“When we talk about 150 million orphans, we’re not talking about that many who need to be adopted or who need to be in orphanages,” Lowry

said. “Most of these children could be reunited with their families if we reconsider the way we give our money and volunteering to address why they were placed in orphanages to begin with.”

Today, Shelter Yetu equips hundreds of families each year to best care for their children by providing counseling, educational opportunities, food support, economic empowerment and more.

“There’s a reason people want to visit and give to orphanages, because it feels like a tangible way to help,” Lowry said. “But I think as mature believers, we need to think critically about what

can help these children thrive. ... And most of the time, it is by reuniting them with their family of origin.”

In her work with Send Relief, Lowry hopes to encourage more Southern Baptist missionaries and church leaders to consider the value of transitioning traditional institutional care (orphanages) to family-based care.

Though Lowry never received formal theological education, she sees how her time at Union University helped prepare her for this role. The Union staff and professors who modeled Christ-centeredness, excellent work and people-focused compassion gave Lowry a solid foundation to work with vulnerable children and families.

“[Union] showed me what a vibrant relationship with Jesus Christ looks like in the world and that my faith can stand up to even the most rigorous intellectual questions,” Lowry said. “I’m grateful for staff and faculty who showed me the reality of a God who cares for the vulnerable and the compassionate faith that can follow from that.”

As she educates churches and missionaries about the value of reuniting families, she believes the Southern Baptist Convention can help change the tide for what orphan care looks like around the world.

“My prayer is that orphans can go home to safe and loving families, and if I can be a small part of that, then to God be the glory,” Lowry said.

Send Relief offers free coaching for church leaders and Southern Baptists interested in international orphan care. Learn more at www.sendrelief.org/international-orphan-care/.



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“

MY PRAYER IS THAT ORPHANS CAN GO HOME TO SAFE AND LOVING FAMILIES, AND IF I CAN BE A SMALL PART OF THAT, THEN TO GOD BE THE GLORY.”

—KRISTEN LOWRY



© IMB Photo

KRISTEN LOWRY ON HOW CHURCHES CAN HELP ORPHANS:



© IMB Photo

RUNNING TOWARD REDEMPTION

HOW GOD USED A BEAT-UP BIBLE
AND CHRISTIAN TEAMMATES TO BRING
TRISTAN KELLY TO CHRIST

BY TIM ELLSWORTH
PHOTOS BY KARLEY HATHCOCK

The back cover of Tristan Kelly's Bible has fallen off. The pages of the Bible are dog-eared and crumpled—but so far none of them have suffered the same fate as the unfortunate back cover. They are intact, at least for now.

Some of them are coffee stained. Most of them contain notes he has jotted or highlighting of some kind. It's easy to see that this is a well-loved book.

"I have not upgraded because I don't think I have the heart to," Kelly says. "My heart just can't give it up. It means the world to me....There's nothing better when you see a bunch of color in the pages, because you know that you've read that before, you've looked at it, you've thought about it, you've taken something away."

For Kelly, who just completed his junior year at Union, that red Bible, despite its deterioration and decay, symbolizes what God has done for him. He's used it for classes and for personal reading. And God has used it, and the people at Union, to transform Kelly's life.



Kelly came to Union from Northern Ireland as a cross-country runner. He describes his upbringing as “secular Catholic,” where religion is more of a cultural identity than a personal one. He knew of God but didn’t have any kind of relationship with him.

Instead, Kelly’s life focused on running. Soccer was his first love, and he started running as a means of conditioning for soccer. But running quickly became the greater priority. As he began considering colleges

where he could run cross-country, he interacted with many coaches whose main concern was his running time.

He found something different in Bailey Bell, Union’s cross-country coach.

“At the end of your four years, I don’t care how you performed athletically,” Bell told him. “I care about how you’ve grown as a person.”

That perspective appealed to Kelly. He committed to Union, even though he had no idea what Jackson was like or what Union was like. He had

never even been to the United States before he moved onto campus for the fall semester of his freshman year.

One of his roommates and cross-country teammates was Micah Winn, a home schooled pastor’s kid from Durham, North Carolina.

“First impressions were that I could not understand half of what he was saying,” Winn says of Kelly and his Irish accent.

They butted heads over simple things — like Kelly’s frequent profanity — and the vast cultural differences sometimes caused friction in the relationship.

“But Micah always pursued me,” Kelly says. “He didn’t let moments to pour into me pass by him.”

“I loved church, and I loved talking about the Bible, and he did not know anything about it,” Winn says. “I was asking him a lot of questions. He jokes now and calls me ‘Pastor Mike’ some. I would ask these questions about his faith or about the way he grew up.”

In Winn and others at Union, Kelly encountered genuine Christianity that intrigued him, at least at first. But he soon found himself dealing with personal issues and trauma — the death of his grandfather, the breakup with a girlfriend, a stress fracture in his foot, poor racing performances — that left him embittered.

“I think he started to question a lot of things about what running really meant and how to put your worth in something bigger than running,” Bell says.

When Kelly returned to campus in the spring of his freshman year, he wanted nothing to do with God. He’d sit through chapel services in anger and frustration, waiting impatiently for them to end.

The main issue was his self-described hard-headedness and rebellion against God.

His teammates continued to invest in him, however, and pushed him to consider the gospel — the good news that Jesus saves sinners. He was required to read the Bible in his Old Testament and New Testament survey classes.

Winn had given Kelly a Bible early in his time at Union, but Kelly picked up another copy — the red English Standard Version — when he visited Cornerstone Community Church one Sunday. He liked the ESV better because that was what his professors were using in his classes.

He began reading it earnestly and asking questions about passages in books such as Romans. The troubles and conflicts in his mind started to fade. He began attending Calvary Baptist Church in Jackson regularly where he was receiving spiritual nourishment.

At the end of the spring semester, as he was boarding his flight home to Ireland, he felt a sense of peace in his heart because he understood and believed the gospel. That summer, as he was visiting with friends in a night club, he remembers telling himself that he didn’t need alcohol anymore.



Tristan Kelly and Micah Winn

“I don’t need something external to give me satisfaction, because I have this newfound appreciation in my heart because of God’s redeeming love,” Kelly says.

As the summer progressed, he couldn’t wait to return to Jackson and tell Ryan O’Neal, the college minister at Calvary, about the change in his life and that he wanted to be baptized.

“He’s never been the same since he’s given his life to Christ,” O’Neal says. “His demeanor, his words and his actions are so others oriented.”

Kelly continued to grow in his faith during his sophomore year. The following summer, he went to Salt Lake City, Utah, to work with Christ Fellowship, a church planted by Union alumni Timothy and Haley O’Day and Zach and Courtney Thompson.

“I think for me, it was the fulfillment of the Great Commission in the sense that God had broken me down, and he had built me back up again,” Kelly says. “I had learned the Scripture, and then it was me going out and sharing the gospel. It was beautiful.”

An exercise science major with a minor in Christian studies, Kelly isn’t entirely sure what he wants to do after he graduates from Union in May of

2025. He’s thinking about pursuing a master’s degree in athletic training. He does know that he wants to go where the Lord’s work needs to be done.

For now, Kelly continues running. He clocks about 65–70 miles per week.

“I want to make sure that I can cross the finish line in my last race here and say I’ve given it my all,” he says. “Running is something that is finite. I cannot run forever, but I will have this relationship (with God) forever. If I’m not bringing glory to him in running, I’m not running well.”

Wherever his path leads after graduation, Kelly will depart from Union with gratitude.

“I’ve never found a place that invests in the people, the students, as much as the professors and the staff here,” he says. “And that’s what I’ve loved about this place.”

He’ll also depart with a red, coverless Bible — a Bible that has renewed his mind, changed his heart and stoked his affections for the Lord. It may not be pretty on the outside, but it’s a priceless treasure to Kelly.

“It’s just a reminder of the amount of hours that I’ve spent in this Bible,” he says. “This is two and a half years of how God pursued me.”





UNION UNIVERSITY IS MOVING FORWARD ON FUNDRAISING FOR A NEW CHAPEL

Its presence will be a physical manifestation of Union University's Christ-centered mission.

Its steeple will rise above every other building on campus, symbolizing Union's commitment to keep Christ at the forefront of all it does.

Its four columns will line the building's entrance, representing Union's four core values of being excellence-driven, Christ-centered, people-focused, and future-directed.

Its design will embrace both tradition and innovation, reflecting Union's rich 200-year heritage while looking forward to the future.

As a key component to the campus master plan, Union University is moving forward on fundraising for a new chapel. Clearly visible from the heavily trafficked Highway 45 Bypass, the freestanding chapel will be the heart of the Union campus — a beacon of faith and learning for generations to come.

A TIME-HONORED TRADITION. A VISION FOR THE FUTURE.

For nearly 50 years, Union's current chapel has stood as a testament to its commitment to worshipping God and fostering spiritual growth in the lives of students. As the university looks to the future, however, it recognizes the need for a space that meets the evolving needs of the Union community and that stands as a symbol of its enduring convictions.

The new chapel will be a place where students, faculty, and staff can gather to worship, to reflect, and to engage with the truths of Scripture that serve as the foundation for all Union is and does. It will also serve as a vibrant center for the arts, hosting concerts, lectures, and other events that enrich our community and engage the wider world.

FUNCTION AND DESIGN

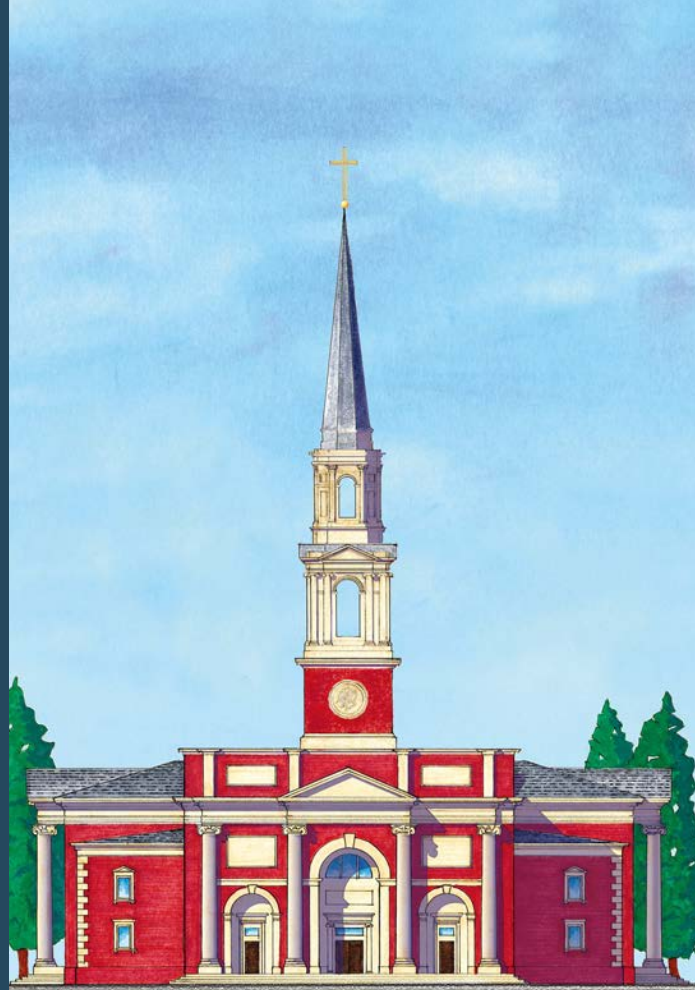
The chapel will embody Union's steadfast dedication to Christ-centered education beyond mere physical space. It will stand as the most inspiring and beautiful building on campus, symbolizing the supremacy of Union's mission to promote excellence and character development in service to Church and society.

With a seating capacity of 1,500 people and covering about 32,000 square feet, the chapel will be equipped to host a wide range of university and community events. It will incorporate red brick and stone, aligning with the campus aesthetic while establishing this grand facility as a landmark in its own right.

In this building, students will be challenged to know the Word of God and to love the Lord with their hearts, souls, minds, and strength.

WAYS TO SUPPORT

The journey to renew the heart of Union University through construction of a new chapel is a communal endeavor, inviting participation from all who share in Union's vision for a space that encapsulates our Christ-centered mission.



You can make a significant impact in several ways:

FINANCIAL CONTRIBUTIONS

- Every gift, whether large or small, matters. Donations can be made as one-time gifts or spread over time.
- You can honor a loved one or commemorate a significant individual with a memorial or honorary gift that contributes to a lasting legacy of faith and learning.
- For those able to make a larger investment, naming opportunities within the chapel offer a way to leave a permanent mark on the project.

OTHER WAYS TO HELP

- Pray for the completion of this project, for the workers constructing it and for the lives it will touch.
- Advocate for the project by spreading the word within your circles, inspiring others to support the endeavor.



To learn more about the campaign and how you can contribute, please visit uu.edu/giving/chapel or contact Union's Office of Institutional Advancement at (731) 661-5050.



UNION
UNIVERSITY

PLAN TODAY TO CHANGE TOMORROW

Include Union in your legacy and invest in students for generations to come. Planned giving is a way to integrate your personal, financial, and estate planning goals. The right planned gift may provide you with tax and income benefits while helping Union further its mission.

Contact **Jason Vaughan** at jvaughan@uu.edu so we may assist in discovering the right plan for you.

MERITORIOUS SERVICE **AWARDS**



ALUMNUS OF **THE YEAR**

Presented to a Union University graduate for distinction in his/her profession, service to mankind and/or contribution to Union University.

CLAY HALLMARK ('89)

Clay Hallmark graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree in religion and church ministry. While at Union he met and married his wife, Leslie Reeves Hallmark. Hallmark completed his Master of Divinity degree from Beeson Divinity School and his Doctor of Ministry degree from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. He has served churches in Alabama, Arkansas and Tennessee. He is senior pastor of First Baptist Church in Lexington, Tennessee, and served terms as president of the Tennessee Baptist Convention. His book, *From Death to Life: The Heart of Church Revitalization*, was published in 2023.

OUTSTANDING YOUNG **ALUMNI**



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.

RYAN GRIFFIN ('11)

Ryan Griffin graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree in digital media studies with an emphasis in communications. He earned a Master of Business Administration degree from Bethel University. He served as staff assistant to the provost and systems coordinator in the registrar's office at Union from 2011-2015. Griffin was elected as the mayor of McKenzie, Tennessee, in 2022. He also serves as a data specialist for the executive vice president at Bethel University.



ERICKA KING ('11)

A native of McNairy County, Tennessee, Ericka King graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree in political science. She served as an enrollment counselor at Union before completing her law degree from the Mississippi College School of Law. She worked on the staff of U.S. Sen. Rand Paul and in 2023 followed her passion for advocacy, leaving Washington to become director of national affairs and government relations for Kentucky Farm Bureau, one of the nation's premier state farm bureaus.



MARK TRAMMELL ('08)

Mark Trammell serves as executive director and general counsel to the Center for American Liberty. An ardent defender of First Amendment freedoms, Trammell regularly appears on Fox News, Newsmax and nationally syndicated radio programs. Under Trammell's leadership, the Center for American Liberty won three cases at the U.S. Supreme Court restoring religious liberty rights for millions of Americans. Today, much of Trammell's practice is spent representing young women in landmark lawsuits against doctors and hospital groups who perform "gender affirming care" resulting in irreversible damage to minors.

DISTINGUISHED SERVICE



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

PEGGY GRAVES

Peggy Graves is a seasoned real estate broker at Coldwell Banker Barnes in Jackson, Tennessee. Holding prestigious real estate designations, including Certified Residential Specialist, Military Relocation Professional and Certified Relocation Specialist, Graves excels in the dynamic realm of the real estate market. She is a former board member of Regions Bank and a director on the Central West Tennessee Association Board of Realtors. Graves has also served on the board of the Union University Foundation and on Union's Board of Trustees.

LEST WE FORGET



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

SHERRY TIGNOR ('72)

Sherry Tignor joined Union in 1996, initially as the director of adult and evening studies. During her tenure, she took on the role of co-director of the Center for New Students. She further developed and implemented the Keystone program, providing accountability for students during the transition from high school to college. She also served as executive director of Union's Center for Academic Success, which began in 2017, before retiring from Union in 2023.

UNION FAMILY LEGACY



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.

THE MARTY CLEMENTS FAMILY

Marty Clements' connection to Union University stretches back to 1926 when his grandparents, C.L. and Dorothy Dodds, graduated from the institution. C.L. Dodds was a member of Union's football team, competing against teams such as Ole Miss, Alabama and Georgetown.

The tradition continued with Clements' parents, Grady and Carolyn ('48) Clements, both of whom attended Union. Marty earned his bachelor's degree in psychology from Union in 1975 and a master's degree in administration and supervision from the University of Tennessee at Martin. The Union family legacy extends to Clements' son Derek ('16), who earned his Master of Business Administration here.

Clements retired in 2020 from his role as director of the Jackson-Madison County Emergency Management Agency, a position he held since 2005 after starting there as deputy director in 2003. He is a Certified Emergency Management Professional and was one of 25 recipients of the Governor's First Responder Award for 2011, in honor of the 10th anniversary of the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks.

G.M. SAVAGE LEGACY



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

HAL POE

Hal Poe serves as the Charles Colson Professor of Faith and Culture in the School of Theology and Missions at Union, a position he held since 2002, before his retirement at the end of the spring semester in 2024. Poe teaches, lectures and writes about how the gospel answers the deep questions of every culture. He has published over 300 articles and reviews, 20 books and 25 chapters in edited volumes.

ROBERT E. CRAIG SERVICE



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

JIM & JANET AYERS

Jim Ayers' upbringing in rural West Tennessee, in the town of Parsons, laid the foundation for his unwavering commitment to hard work and education. He graduated from the University of Memphis with a major in accounting. In the mid-1990s, Ayers acquired First Farmer's State Bank, which later became FirstBank. Under his leadership, FirstBank transformed into Tennessee's largest independently owned and operated bank. In 1999, Jim and his wife, Janet, established The Ayers Foundation, a philanthropic initiative that has awarded over \$20 million in scholarships to graduating high school seniors in rural counties, benefiting nearly 30,000 students.

DISTINGUISHED ACHIEVEMENT



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

**CLAY SMITH ('95)
HEALTH CARE**

Dr. Clay Smith earned his Bachelor of Science degree in biology at Union. He then pursued his medical education at the University of Tennessee Health Science Center, where he completed his first residency in pediatric internal medicine at Vanderbilt University, followed by his second residency in emergency medicine at the same institution. Currently, Smith serves as the co-medical director for the Vanderbilt Health Walk-In Clinics and Vanderbilt Health Clinic at Walgreens.

DISTINGUISHED ACHIEVEMENT

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

TONY KIRK ('84)
BUSINESS

Tony Kirk graduated from Union with a bachelor's degree in economics and finance. He was a member of the 1983 and 1984 baseball teams, and he is a member of Union's Sports Hall of Fame with the 1983 team that finished third in the NAIA College World Series. After graduation, Kirk was employed by the Bolivar Energy Authority and has held various positions over his 39-year career with BEA, serving as president and CEO since 2020.

KEVIN TROWBRIDGE ('96)
EDUCATION

After graduating with a bachelor's degree in communication arts, Kevin Trowbridge began his career as a strategic communication professional. He completed his master's degree from the University of Memphis and his Doctor of Philosophy degree from Regent University. In 2011, Trowbridge joined the faculty of Belmont University, where he now serves as chair of the Department of Public Relations and director of the Strategic Communication and Leadership Graduate Program.

COREY CAIN ('99)
CHURCH MINISTRY

Corey Cain was called to ministry during his high school years attending First Baptist Church in Smyrna, Tennessee (now LifePoint at FBC Smyrna). The Lord directed his path to Union where he graduated with a major in business. He completed his Master of Divinity from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and has served at several churches in Tennessee. Cain is currently pastor of First Baptist Church in Seymour, Tennessee, and serves on the Executive Committee of the Southern Baptist Convention.

**DISTINGUISHED ACHIEVEMENT**

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

ROXANNE MCMURRAY ('13)
RESEARCH/SCIENCE

Roxanne McMurray graduated from Union in 2013 with a Doctor of Nursing Practice degree focusing on anesthesia. Since receiving her DNP, McMurray has been the co-founder of McMurray Medical Group, inventor of the McMurray Enhanced Airway, practicing certified registered nurse anesthetist, and retired clinical assistant professor and assistant program director at the University of Minnesota. Her MEA invention has been recognized with multiple accolades, including the 2023 American Nurses Association Innovation of the Year Award.

**MEREDITH BOGGS ('12)**
HUMANITIES

Meredith Boggs graduated from Union with a bachelor's degree in nursing and works for Vanderbilt LifeFlight and as a sexual assault nurse examiner. While living abroad and serving with Show Hope in China, Boggs began writing on the blog she started as a student at Union, intending to pursue her dream of becoming a published author. Her writing has been featured in several publications, and her debut book, *The Journey Home*, was published in 2023 by Thomas Nelson.

**LAUREN SUMSKI ('16)**
ATHLETICS

Lauren Sumski played basketball for the University of Tennessee at Knoxville and Rhodes College in Memphis. After graduating from Rhodes, she joined Mark Campbell's staff at Union in 2014 with the Lady Bulldogs. During her three seasons on staff, Union compiled a 73-20 record, and Sumski also completed her master's degree at Union. In 2019, Sumski became the head women's basketball coach at Lipscomb University, where she became one of the youngest head coaches in the nation.

DISTINGUISHED ACHIEVEMENT



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

STACY WOLFE ('98)
NOT-FOR-PROFIT

Stacy Wolfe earned her bachelor's degree in music and psychology from Union. After serving as a Union enrollment counselor, she moved to northern Alabama with her husband Micky, where she volunteered at Lindsay Lane Baptist Church in Athens before joining the church staff as children's choir coordinator and communications director. In 2022 she established the Stacy Wolfe Breast Cancer Foundation to assist individuals navigating their own cancer journeys. Stacy passed away on Feb. 3, 2024.



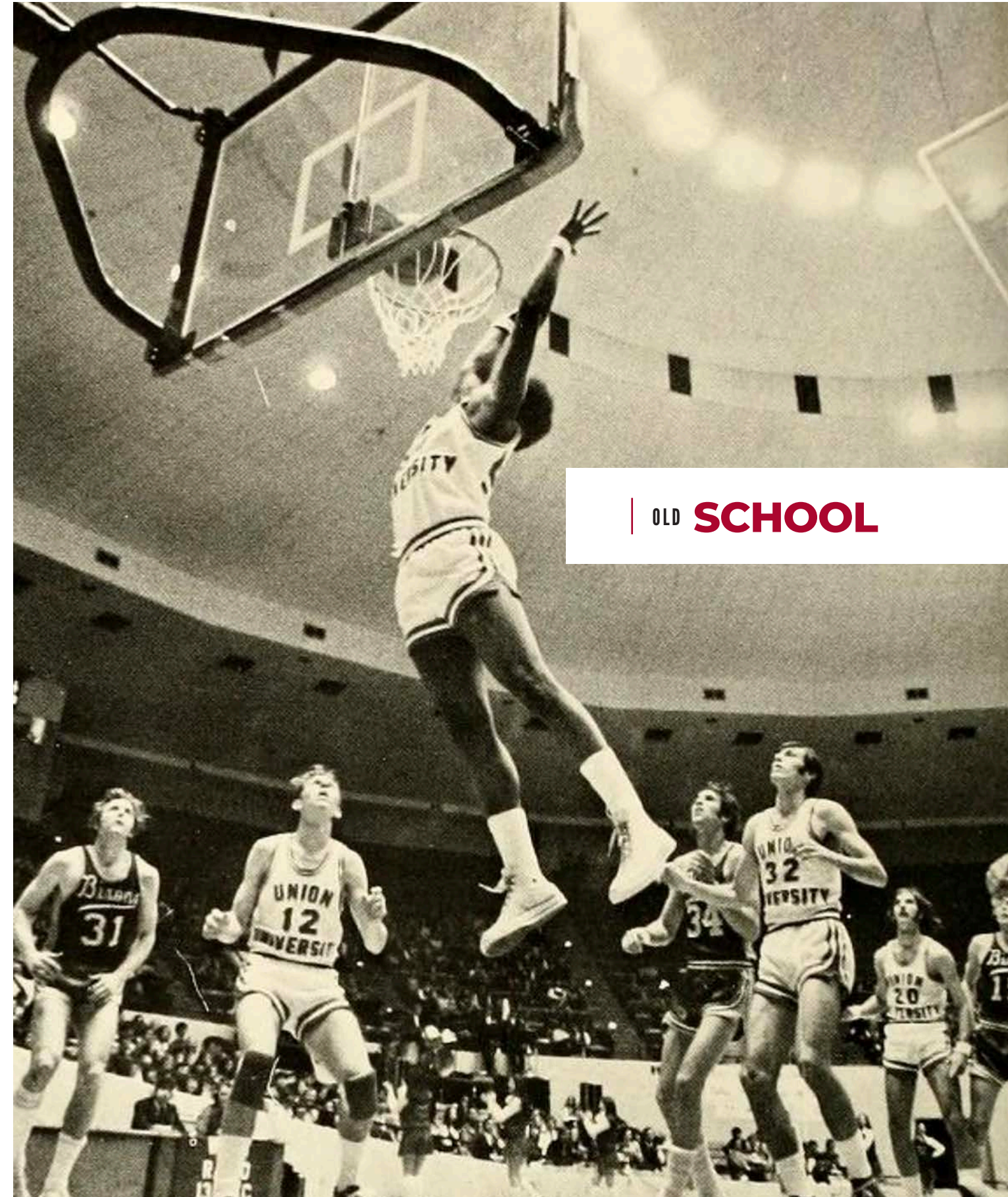
SAM MIZELL ('96)
ARTS/MEDIA

Sam Mizell completed his bachelor's degree at Union in sacred music. He went on to achieve acclaim as an award-winning film composer, writer and producer. Mizell's career has been marked by numerous collaborations with prominent artists, filmmakers, songwriters and instrumentalists. Some of his most recent notable songs include *King of the World*, recorded by Natalie Grant, *The Motions* and *You are Everything*, both recorded by Matthew West and *The Words I Would Say*, recorded by Sidewalk Prophets.



JOHN DAVID CRESSMAN ('11)
GOVERNMENT/PUBLIC SERVICES

John David Cressman, known as J.D., graduated with a bachelor's degree in philosophy. He pursued further education at Washington and Lee University School of Law. Cressman currently serves as the general counsel for the Tennessee Department of Military. His career in public service also includes roles as the legislative liaison and department counsel for the Tennessee Department of Veterans Services, assistant general counsel and small business advocate for the Tennessee Comptroller of the Treasury and deputy general counsel for the Tennessee Department of Military.



OLD **SCHOOL**

Union University has a long history of producing graduates who excel in their careers, in ministry, in service and in life. Each year at Homecoming, the university presents Meritorious Service Awards to select graduates and friends who have distinguished themselves in a number of ways. Complete biographies and videos from recipients are available at uu.edu/alumni/awards/2023.



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

THE 1980s

LAWRENCE HAWKINS ('82) recently retired and is enjoying this new phase of life.

WILLIAM STEPHEN HALE ('82, '00) and his wife Patty recently moved back to Jackson, Tenn., from Smyrna, Tenn., to be closer to two of their children. Steve is semi-retired and loves to work on welding and home repair projects.

STEVE W. MARTIN ('84) recently moved to Dalton, Ga., to serve as the associate pastor of Welcome Hill Baptist Church. For the past 15 years, was the worship pastor for Liberty Baptist in Fayetteville, Ga.

CLAY HALLMARK ('89) published his first book, *From Death to Life: The Heart of Church Revitalization*, which is available through his website at www.clayhallmark.com. He is senior pastor of First Baptist Church in Lexington, Tenn.

THE 1990s

JAI TEMPLETON ('94) was recently appointed by Gov. Bill Lee to serve on the Tennessee Rehabilitative Initiative in Correction Board of Directors. TRICOR provides occupational and life skills to Tennessee's incarcerated population to assist with a successful reintegration to society.

BOBBY HURT ('96) works for the The Joint Commission, a global driver of quality and patient safety in health care, after a 30-year career in the U.S. Navy as a nurse corps officer.



CHRISTI HOLBROOK LYNN ('96) was promoted to vice president of communications and engagement for the Association of Christian Schools International. She also completed her master's degree in communication from Grand Canyon University in 2023.



ADAM DAVIS ('98) started in January 2024 serving as an associate pastor at K-LOVE Radio in Franklin, Tenn., after serving 16 years as an associate pastor at Belle Aire Baptist Church in Murfreesboro, Tenn.



LORRIE JOHNSON ('99) was named the 2023-2024 Assistant Principal of the Year for the State of Tennessee at the Tennessee Association of Secondary School Principals Winter Conference in Murfreesboro, Tenn., on February 28, 2024. Lorrie has worked at McEwen High School for 23 years, and she has served as assistant principal for 13 years.

JAY WATSON ('99) AND KYLE WILTSHIRE ('00) have signed a publishing deal and released their first book, *The Dead Rock Stars: A Novel*.

THE 2000s

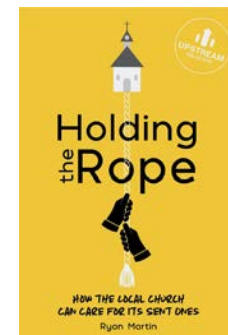


ROBERT (ROB) RAMSEY ('03) is a musician, composer and songwriter. His debut album *Wilderness* recently released and draws inspiration from his love of the outdoors and exploration.

CHRISTINE SCARBROUGH POLK ('04) is currently a licensed clinical social worker. She is trained in eye movement processing and desensitization as well as providing clinical supervision.

BRITTANY RHOADES ('05) was named a 2023 fellow for the Clinical Nurse Specialist Institute. She serves as a clinical nurse specialist/instructor for cardiothoracic surgery at Baylor College of Medicine in Houston, Texas.

RYAN MARTIN ('05) graduated from Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in May 2022 with his Doctor of Ministry degree and has recently published *Holding the Rope: How the Local Church Can Care for Its Sent Ones*. He is director of missions and operations for Lightbearers Ministries in Fayetteville, Ark.



TINA TRANZOR ('06) was named co-director of the Western Educational Equity Assistance Center, one of four federally funded Equity Assistance Centers across the nation that provides technical assistance and training to promote equity in student access to educational opportunities and resources.



NATHAN BREWER ('07) and his colleagues published groundbreaking research in the field of nuclear physics. The paper, *Rare 40K Decay with Implications for Fundamental Physics and Geochronology*, was published in several reviews as well as the APS Physics Magazine. He has also been recognized for his contributions on the additions of Tennessee (117) and Oganesson (118) to the periodic table.



JENNIFER JURADO ('08) is a family nurse practitioner with Methodist LeBonheur Healthcare in Memphis, Tenn.

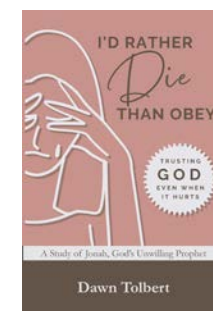
ZACHARY PENDERGRASS ('08) was promoted to branch manager/assistant vice president for the main branch of Regions Bank in Humboldt, Tenn. He has been an assistant branch manager for Regions at various branches since 2019.

RENEE (ROBERTSON) EMERSON ('08) recently published her third collection of poetry, *Church Ladies* (Fernwood Press, 2023).



RUTHANN PIKE ('08) finalized the adoption of her daughter Mallory Constance in November 2022.

THE 2010s



DAWN TOLBERT ('13) recently published the women's Bible study, *I'd Rather Die Than Obey: Trusting God Even When It Hurts*. The study offers a fresh perspective on the story of Jonah and asks difficult questions to delve into the deep waters of faith, obedience and the unwavering love of the Creator. Dawn currently serves as the director of advancement communications at Berry College in Mount Berry, Ga.

KENDRA RANDLE ('13) has received a national Milken Educator Award for 2023-24 that comes with a \$25,000 cash prize. She is executive principal at Adelante Schools' Emma Donnan Campus in Indianapolis, Ind.



COREY BUSK ('14) is pursuing a master's degree in psychology at Purdue University. After graduation, he plans to pursue a Ph.D. in clinical psychology.

WARD S. HOWARD ('15) was selected as a 2023 NASA Hubble Fellowship Program Sagan fellow. This program enables outstanding postdoctoral scientists to pursue independent research in any area of NASA astrophysics, using theory, observations, simulations, experimentation or instrument development.

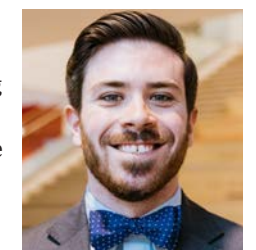


MICHAEL CHAD MITCHELL ('16) was named market center manager for Funeral Directors Life in Mississippi.

ELIZABETH PIGG ('17) has traveled across the United States working at various outdoor education facilities after completing her degree in conservation biology. She works in the Barrier Island Environmental Education Program at St. Christopher Camp and Conference Center in South Carolina, teaching students from across the Southeast about God's creation.



BRILEY RAY ('19) has accepted a full-time teaching position for Highlands College as the instructor for church history. Church of the Highlands is one of the largest churches in the United States, and Highlands College serves as an accredited four-year ministry training college affiliated with the church.



THE 2020s



EDWARD MAYBERRY ('20) has accepted a new role as the director of governance, risk and compliance at Altana AI. The AI platform connects and learns from billions of data points to help governments and the private sector build safe, resilient and sustainable supply chains.

THE MARRIAGES



HOPE HINTON ALEXANDER ('93) married Barry Alexander on May 27, 2023. Hope serves as communications and outreach manager with Volunteer Tennessee, the governor's commission that encourages volunteerism and community involvement across the state.



ALBERT (SHEP) SHEPHERD ('10) married Samantha Gamble on Dec. 2, 2023, in Montgomery, Ala.



ANNA STRAND SONNAMAKER ('20) married Steven Sonnamaker on Nov. 5, 2022, in St. Paul, Minn. Anna is an emergency room nurse in Bismarck, N.D., and he is an emergency room physician.

THE BIRTHS



TIMOTHY HOOKER ('93, '20) and his wife Gantuya welcomed their son Jacob Aldar Hooker on May 15, 2023.

HILARY HAZELWOOD DOWDY ('11) and her husband Dustin welcomed Isla Delaney Dowdy on June 6, 2023.

IN MEMORIAM

LYNDA "SHARRON" LYON ('63) passed away Sept. 29, 2023, in Nashville, Tenn., at age 82. She was music editor at the Baptist Sunday School Board/Lifeway for 30 years and received Union's Distinguished Music Alumnus award in 2003.

GARY RAY ASLIN ('66) of Ripley, Miss., died June 18, 2023. He worked for the Tennessee Baptist Children's Home, taught 15 years in public schools and was a bivocational minister for 48 years in West Tennessee and Georgia.

KENNETH B. COX ('72) of Bartlett, Tenn., died Feb. 10, 2023. He played baseball at Union and served in many campus organizations. His career was spent ministering to the staff of several West Tennessee churches in the areas of youth, recreation and activities. He also designed and managed Buckhead Creek Recreation Complex in Bartlett until his retirement in 2018. He is survived by his wife of 50 years, Diane McCraw Cox ('74).

WAYNE ALLEN WILD ('73) died Dec. 20, 2023, at the Tennessee State Veterans Home in Humboldt, Tenn., at age 78. He was an artist and a member of Woodland Baptist Church in Jackson.

EUGENE L. GLADNEY ('75) of Seymour, Ind., died Dec. 26, 2023, at age 70. He was a Presbyterian minister who served at churches in Mississippi, Kentucky, Georgia, Indiana and Tennessee during his ministry. Memorials may be directed to the Class of 1975 Endowment Scholarship.

BONNIE JEAN HADLEY ('77) age 90, of Humboldt, Tenn., died Nov. 21, 2023. She was a devoted wife and mother, an avid gardener and an artist.

BROOKS P. DOUGLASS JR. ('83) died May 5, 2023, at Jackson-Madison County General Hospital at age 65. He served in the Tennessee National Guard and retired from the state of Tennessee as an auditor with the Department of Commerce and Insurance.

KIMBROUGH JOHNSTON COOPER ('93) of Jackson, Tenn., died Feb. 24, 2023, at the age of 60.

DANA S. DAVIS ('93) age 52, a resident of Haywood County, Tenn., passed away Nov. 1, 2023. She was employed by the Jackson-Madison County School District.

MITCHELL KEITH MCGOWAN ('93) died Sept. 25, 2023, at his home in Alamo, Tenn., at age 60. He devoted many years of his life as a traveling nurse and most recently had joined the medical team at Maplewood Healthcare and Rehab in Jackson.

BETTY JO STEWART ('00) 70, passed away Dec. 3, 2023, at her home in Dyersburg, Tenn. She was a retired parole officer with the State of Tennessee Board of Probation and Parole.

JOSH EDWARD BRYANT ('03) age 45, died Oct. 3, 2023, at Jackson-Madison County General Hospital. He was an account manager for ASM-Mars Co., a sales development representative of Yodle, Inc., and a fitness consultant at Gold's Gym in Jackson.

THOMAS EARL POLK ('06) of Bolivar, Tenn., died Nov. 22, 2023, at age 74. He worked in the Hardeman County School System as director of transportation, among other roles, and previously worked in Memphis City Schools.

DOROTHY MAE PRICE HOLT age 93, died Oct. 11, 2023, in Jackson, Tenn. She retired from Union University after working in the university bookstore and was a member at Calvary Baptist Church for more than 60 years.



Union held the 1823 Society Weekend April 12-13, with members of the classes of 1960 through 1974 in attendance. More than 30 alumni gathered to celebrate the induction of the class of 1974 into the 1823 Society, which consists of alumni who have celebrated 50 years or more since their graduation. (Photo by Karley Hathcock)

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

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DONOR **PROFILE**



SCHOLARSHIP SUPPORT BRINGS ENRICHMENT TO UNION DONOR WALLACE

A friendship with Union alumni and longtime donors Stephen and Stephanie Moore led Rhonda Wallace, of Franklin, Tennessee, to begin supporting student scholarships.

The Moores not only give monetarily, but they also regularly meet with scholarship recipients in a mentoring relationship. As they talked to Wallace, their next-door neighbor, about the program, she became intrigued.

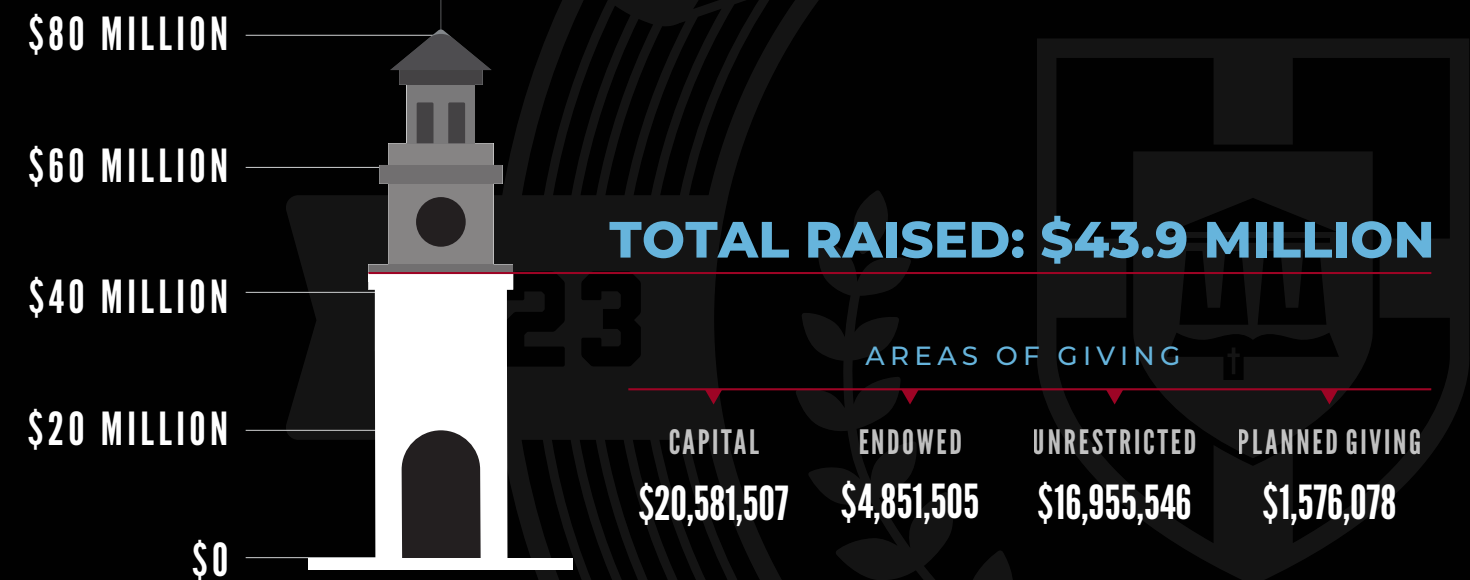
“I asked if I could participate,” she says. “I wanted to help them by contributing money to the program.”

Those contributions led to Wallace joining the Moores on trips to Jackson, beginning last fall, to meet with a group of students to discuss various topics and fellowship together. A retired elementary school teacher, Wallace said her involvement with Union students has been enriching.

“I see our future right before me,” she says. “I see how they are going to impact the world. We need more people in our world who are willing to share their love of Christ.”



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FINAL **FRAME**

A new Buster the Bulldog mascot joined the Union family this spring. Our previous mascot is enjoying his retirement, living on the farm of a Union staff member.

PHOTO BY KARLEY HATHCOCK ('22, '23)

