



PACIFIC SCHOOL *of* RELIGION

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Leadership Letter

September 2005

Dear Friend:

It's re-entry time for Linda and me and more than 145 returning Pacific School of Religion students. For the second year in a row, we greeted the largest matriculating class in PSR's history—90 new students—bringing our student body to more than 235. At a time when many other seminaries are struggling with declining enrollments, we're fortunate to find our classrooms, dorms and apartments full of life and spirit.

As our community came together in September, our thoughts and prayers were with the many Gulf Coast communities destroyed by hurricane Katrina. During PSR's opening chapel service on September 6, at which I preached a sermon reflecting on this horrible disaster and its aftermath, we collected a special offering for the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) and the United Church of Christ's "Hope Shall Bloom" hurricane recovery initiative. You can review my sermon at www.psr.edu. Later in the month we plan to host a Red Cross blood drive on campus. We continue to check in with PSR alumni/ae in the Gulf States to see how we can help, and we've been encouraging other alumni/ae, friends and students to support relief agencies like UMCOR, UCC National Disaster Ministries and Church World Service.

Summer and the Synod

Linda and I enjoyed six weeks at our cottage on Cape Cod this summer, with lots of PSR friends dropping by. We were able to break bread and visit with alumni/ae Dale Hemphen, John Deckenback and Carolyn Roberts, Curt Preston, Nicole Lamarche and Heather Moody. PSR is attracting more and more students from New England and our graduates are in demand back in Red Sox country. Several times this summer I heard people comment that there is something "different" about PSR graduates. Someone at the United Church of Christ General Synod talked about the "PS-auRa." I'm not sure exactly what it means but I like it!

The UCC General Synod made headlines in July with a resolution affirming equal rights in marriage. I felt pretty confident the resolution would pass but I was surprised that more than 90 percent of the delegates voted in favor.

PSR had a terrific alumni/ae lunch at the synod with more than 75 in attendance. It was a fairly young crowd this year, with lots of recent graduates and several current students. At the lunch we celebrated the election of several PSR alumnae

to important leadership roles in the UCC. Cally Rogers-Witte, who has served as conference minister in the Southwest Conference (where she succeeded alumna Carole Keim) is the new executive minister for Wider Church Ministries, which shapes the denomination's work in other countries. Trustee and alumna Yvette Flunder will chair the board of directors of Justice and Witness Ministries (JWM); Linda Jaramillo, who graduated in May, is the new executive minister of JWM. This is the second time the UCC elected a graduating PSR MDiv student to national office—Doris Powell was elected treasurer in 1989.

If that weren't enough, alumna Sharon Lee MacArthur will chair the UCC's executive council and trustee Kevin Manz will serve as vice moderator of the 26th General Synod in two years.

Among other actions taken by the synod was approval of a pronouncement calling for multiple tracks toward ordained ministry in the UCC. Like most denominations, the UCC has expected its ministry candidates to complete four years of college followed by three years of seminary. This synod action adds two additional tracks, one involving mentoring with an experienced pastor, the other a course of study offered by a conference or association.

At the synod I spoke in support of the pronouncement, which surprised many people. Several asked, "Aren't you afraid PSR will lose students?" My position during the past 20 years of debate on alternative tracks has been that we have an urgent situation making the traditional four-three problematic for churches in some parts of the country: small churches on the Great Plains who cannot afford full-time clergy leadership, African American congregations in North Carolina and Virginia who depend on local leaders "called out" by the congregations, new immigrant communities on the West Coast and in Hawaii who have few leaders with college degrees.

At the same time, I believe that the Master of Divinity should remain the main route toward ordained ministry. I am haunted by a comment made at one of the synod hearings by a recent college graduate who favored the pronouncement because, "I'd like to be a minister but don't like school all that much. This way I wouldn't have to go to seminary." In creating alternatives for churches struggling to find well-prepared leaders, we must not "dumb down" the ministry.

Our Multidenominational Influence

While I had the pleasure of participating in the UCC General Synod and several regional conferences this past spring and summer, other PSR representatives attended national and regional meetings of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), the United Methodist Church (UMC), the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA) and the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches (MCC). The Swedenborgian Church of North America held its annual convention this summer at PSR.

Our alumni/ae play leading roles in all these denominations. Some of those who assumed national positions this year include Kathy Speas and Kevin Baxter, elected

by the General Convention of Swedenborgian Churches to the General Council (the governing body of the denomination) and the Information Management Support Unit, respectively. In the UUA, Richard Nugent was elected to the steering committee of the Interim Minister's Guild; Jan Christian will chair the panel for the Fund for Social Responsibility; and Jeremy Nickel was appointed national events coordinator for the UU Service Committee. Meanwhile in the MCC, Paul Fairley was made director of conferences, training and special events. In the UMC, PSR alumni/ae, students, faculty, staff and trustees—too many to list here—have held leadership roles since last year's General Conference and earlier.

PSR Faculty Transitions

Last spring we celebrated the retirements of Dean Del Brown and Professor Rosemary Radford Ruether. I'm pleased to report that the faculty and board have awarded them emeritus/a status. Mary Donovan Turner, Carl Patton Professor of Preaching, began her service as interim dean on July 1. Her term will feature, among other things, four faculty searches (for a dean and for professors of theology, New Testament and Swedenborgian studies). The trustees will also be dealing with issues of transition as Scott Hafner enters his final year as board chair.

Books

For nearly 25 years I have been part of a group of scholars who think and write about congregational life. We've published several books, including *Studying Congregations*. Our group has a new project that pairs senior scholars with younger folks entering the field. I've been paired with a young sociologist, Gerardo Marti, who is teaching at Davidson College. Gerardo's new book, *A Mosaic of Believers: Diversity and Innovation in a Multiethnic Church* is simply fascinating. It's a study of a multiracial, multicultural megachurch in Los Angeles that has been able to blend Anglo, Latino, Asian and, to a lesser extent, African Americans in a single congregation. He introduces the interesting concept of "havens" or spaces within the life of a congregation where people can find community with others (for example, mixed-race couples, artists or social innovators) who see the world as they do. Gerardo argues that the secret of the church's success is that people find havens that work for them. The church's leadership is able to weave these havens together in a way that makes sense.

A must-read for students of 20th-century American religion is Robert McAfee Brown's memoir, *Reflections over the Long Haul*, which was completed by his wife, Sydney Brown, and his children after Bob's death in 2001. Bob Brown taught theology at PSR from 1979 to 1985, years he says were "unambiguously good," and he and Sydney remained a vital part of this community in their retirement years. This is less an autobiography than a journey into the world of justice-seeking Christianity, ecumenism and North America's discovery of liberation theology. In his foreword, Bill Coffin notes that Bob "believed action leads to more new ways of thinking than does thought to new ways of acting" and that "in his company we tended to be our better selves."

The Year Ahead

PSR is in its first full year of living with the new five-year strategic plan adopted by the board of trustees in January. At its May meeting the board reviewed our 2005-2006 action plans, which lay out the year's objectives. One of these is the launch of an addition to the PSR website, entitled *The Progressive Christian Witness*, later this year. Keep an eye out for more news on this. You will also be hearing about a series of "green" initiatives that will make us better stewards of our buildings and grounds, about incorporating socially responsible investment principles into our endowment management, and about the next phase of our efforts to dismantle institutional racism in the seminary and beyond.

Del Brown and I received many enthusiastic and thoughtful responses to our articles on progressive Christianity in the spring 2005 issue of the *PSR Bulletin*. These responses—as well as such events as the successful Spiritual Activism conference that PSR co-sponsored this summer in Berkeley—underline the significance of the central goal of our strategic plan: to position PSR as a national leader in the progressive Christian movement.

We're making progressive Christianity the focus of our 2006 Earl Lectures on January 24-26, and bringing old and new friends together from around the nation to lead the discussion. Our featured lecturers will be James Forbes, senior minister at The Riverside Church in New York City; Diane Winston, Knight Chair in Media and Religion at the University of Southern California; Kwok Pui Lan, William F. Cole Professor of Christian Theology and Spirituality at Episcopal Divinity School; Hubert Locke, former trustee and acting president of PSR and dean emeritus of the Daniel J. Evans Graduate School of Public Affairs at the University of Washington; and Delwin Brown, dean emeritus of PSR. Please save time on your calendar to join the conversation.

As always, I welcome your questions and comments and look forward to being with you this fall on campus, in your hometown or at January's Earl Lectures. You can always reach me at bmckinney@psr.edu. Thanks so much for your prayers and financial support of your feisty theological school on Holy Hill.

Faithfully,



William McKinney
President

P.S. When I wrote to you a year ago, I mentioned that one of my hopes was to look back now on a successful year of fundraising. I'm pleased to announce that contributions to our 2004-2005 Annual Fund increased by 25 percent over the preceding year. Again, thank you for helping to make this possible, and for giving me, my colleagues and students at PSR much hope for another year in our tradition of boldness!