

PACIFIC SCHOOL OF RELIGION

2023

156th Commencement



Pacific School of Religion's 156th COMMENCEMENT

PACIFIC SCHOOL OF RELIGION

Sunday May 21, 2023 4:00 PM, PT

ABOUT PACIFIC SCHOOL OF RELIGION



Pacific School of Religion (PSR) is a progressive, interdenominational seminary and center for social justice that prepares spiritually rooted leaders to work to create a world where all can thrive.

Since 1866, PSR has attracted people who look beyond religious, cultural, and political boundaries to recognize humanity and holiness in others. While the dominant culture defines itself by who belongs and who doesn't, we're committed to welcoming people for who they are—as they are. The grace afforded to us in these efforts has been immeasurable, and we want those we serve to experience its full measure.

We believe in a radically inclusive Gospel, one that compels us to take courage and press ahead. Today, we stand at the beginning of a new era—ready to meet its challenges, as we always have, with everything we are.

PSR is a member of the Graduate Theological Union (GTU), an interreligious consortium of seminaries and institutes in the San Francisco Bay Area.

UNAFRAID SINCE 1866

JOURNEYING THE PATH OF RESILIENCE

Prelude Come Sunday

Duke Ellington © 1942

Andrew Jamieson, arr.

Processional

We've Come This Far by Faith

Words & Music: Albert A. Goodson © 1956

Ritual of Acknowledgment Piper Rowanoak

Gathering Words Barbara Garran & Patrisha Gill

One: Today we gather in the presence and power of our Creator because...

All: God is our refuge and strength.

One: Today we gather in the presence and power of this sacred community because...

All: We have journeyed together this far by faith.

One: Today we gather in full recognition of all that has challenged or at times, even broken us because...

All: The Holy One has been our ever-present help in times of trouble.

One: Today we gather in the presence and power of holy lament to remember all those people, places, and things familiar and beloved that we have lost along our pathway to resilience because...

All: Unless we offer the faithful witness of remembrance, we cannot move forward into the hopeful futures that await us in the Divine Mother who is our fortress.

One: In this moment, let us offer our hearts to the presence and power of sacred silence *(Moment of Silence)*

One: Today we gather in the presence and power of gratitude for all those who have journeyed with us to this point: ancestors, families of origin and choice, faculty, staff, co-learners and mentors because...

All: God has been with us in those who have guided and supported us in our quests to gain knowledge, embrace faith, and practice hope to build a world where all can thrive.

One: Today we gather in the presence and power of divine strength and courage that transcends the fear and turmoil that may threaten to overwhelm us because...

All: We live and move and have our being in the Creator Most High who has not and will not fail us and who will sustain us on this day and in all our days to come. Let us worship in presence and in power!

Gathering Song Great is Thy Faithfulness (page 6)

Words: Thomas O. Chisholm Music: William Runyan © 1923

Welcome Rev. Dr. David Vásquez-Levy
President, Pacific School of Religion

Dr. Jennifer W. Davidson

Dean and Vice-President for Academic Affairs, Graduate Theological Union

EMBRACING FAITH

Graduating Student Videos

Reading Blessed are You Who Bear the Light
Jan Richardson

Donald Scherschligt, AmyBeth Willis, and Michelle Winter

PRESENTATION OF POSTHUMOUS DEGREE TO ISAMAELI MATA'AFA

Presentation President David Vásquez-Levy

President, Pacific School of Religion

Selection Samoan CCCAS Oakland Choir

Graduating Student Videos

Reading

Adaption of Psalm 46: 1 – 7

For the Mariachis of the Sons of Latin America

Object to Compulsion

Cláudio Carvalhaes Adrian Joe Gonzales

Scripture Reading
Psalm 46:1-5
Sundria Sam

¹ God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in [times of] trouble. ² Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change, though the mountains shake [and crumble] in the heart of the sea, ³ though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble with its tumult. Selah ⁴ There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High. ⁵ God is in the midst of the city; it shall not be moved; God will help it when the morning dawns.

Introduction of Speaker Janice Taylor

Choir Anthem

I Believe

Mark Miller © 2016

Commencement Ensemble

Message Rev. Dr. Mahsea Evans

Adjunct Instructor, Communication and Art & Religion

Response in Song Samoan CCCAS Oakland Choir

Prayer for the Graduates

Rev. Michael Yoshii

Coordinator of United Methodist Students

PRACTICING HOPE

Presentation of Class Gift

Ryan Cassata & Safue Ulufaleilupe
Recipients: American Civil Liberties Union
Everytown for Gun Safety

Acknowledgement of Student Awards Dr. Susan Abraham

Vice-President for Academic Affairs & Dean of Faculty

Presentation of Candidates & Conferring of Degrees Dr. Susan Abraham

Vice-President for Academic Affairs & Dean of Faculty Rev. Dr. David Vásquez-Levy

President, Pacific School of Religion

Valedictory Charge Dr. Susan Abraham

Vice-President for Academic Affairs & Dean of Faculty

PSR Alumnx Council Greeting Rev. Florentino Cordova

President, PSR Alumnx Council

Closing of the Academic Year Dr. Sandra Nathan

Chair, PSR Board of Trustees

Song of Sending We'll Build a Land (page 7)

Words: Barbara Zanotti

Music: Carolyn McDade © 1979

Benediction Rev. Dr. Mahsea Evans

Adjunct Instructor, Communication and Art & Religion

Recessional Samoan CCCAS Oakland Choir

Please join us immediately following the ceremony for a President's Reception in the plaza outside the sanctuary entrance doors.

COMMENCEMENT SPEAKER



Rev. Dr. Mahsea Evans (MDiv 2013, MTS 2015)

Adjunct Instructor, Communication and Art & Religion

Rev. Dr. Mahsea Evans is an educator, artist, civic leader, and ordained minister who has dynamically engaged the topics of religious pluralism, leadership development, and social change through writings, lectures, performances, and workshops. He presently serves as the pastor at First United Methodist Church in Roseville, CA with a focus on youth empowerment, community organizing, and interfaith initiatives.

Dr. Evans earned his doctorate from Claremont School of Theology and his Master of Divinity from Pacific School of Religion where he instructs as an adjunct faculty member. Based in Northern California, this former PSR Changemaker Fellow connects his passion for the creative arts to the causes of social justice and community upliftment. Originally from Hartford, CT, Mahsea resides in Sacramento, CA with his wife of 19 years, Dr. Kawami Evans, and daughters, Niara (15), and Chloe (11).

GREAT IS THY FAITHFULNESS



WE'LL BUILD A LAND



IN MEMORY OF ISAMAELI (ELI) MATA'AFA (1993-2022)



Today we celebrate the life and legacy of Isamaeli (Eli) Mata'afa, a beloved member of the class of 2023.

Eli entered Pacific School of Religion's Master of Divinity (MDiv) program in the spring of 2020 on a presidential scholarship, awarded to the top incoming students who best exemplify PSR's mission. He came to PSR after graduating from Kanana Fou Theological Seminary in American Samoa, a school with a long-standing connection to the PSR community.

In pursuing an MDiv, Eli's goal was to serve God and his community in San Lorenzo and the greater Bay Area – especially through ministry with

youth. He also had a commitment to address climate change, which threatens the Pacific Islands through extreme weather and sea level rise, from a theological perspective.

PSR President Rev. David Vásquez-Levy said, "Eli embodied everything our PSR family holds dear. He was a person of deep personal faith and was a leader and mentor in his community with a desire to create a world where all can thrive. He had much more to give before he was taken from us."

Honoring Eli's Legacy

As a community, we commit to pattern our lives and study after the principles, values, and practices Eli demonstrated among us – caring for the young, caring for the earth, and caring for family. And furthermore, we commit ourselves to find practical ways to combat the scourge of violence.

This spring PSR students completed and opened the Isamaeli (Eli) Mata'afa Community Garden to honor his legacy and to help transform seeds of dialogue into fruitful action against violence and oppressive social issues that endanger our collective sustainability.

This fall PSR is offering the Isamaeli Mata'afa Memorial Scholarship to an incoming Master of Divinity student who we believe will carry on Eli's spirit, demonstrated through their leadership, commitment to their community, and passion for education. Priority will be given to a student from American Samoa or from the broader AAPI community.

Today we honor Eli by presenting his family with a posthumous Master of Divinity degree on his behalf.

Romans 8:38-39

"For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

RESOLUTION OF CONDOLENCE AND CELEBRATION

Whereas, Isamaeli Mata'afa was above all a beautiful Son of God who graduated from the Kanana Fou Theological Seminary in American Samoa and was enrolled as a Presidential Scholar in the Master of Divinity Program at Pacific School of Religion since the spring of 2020, and

Whereas, Isamaeli – affectionately known as Eli – was an integral part of the PSR community bringing his ministerial passions for his community and for the creation of God into all of his classes with a commitment to prepare himself for service to God in his community of San Lorenzo, the Bay Area and beyond, and

Whereas, he also had a commitment to address climate change, which threatens the Pacific Islands through extreme weather and sea level rise, from a theological perspective, believing strongly that addressing climate change upholds the fifth commandment, "Thou shalt honor thy mother and father," a concept with great resonance in Samoan culture where a connection of people and planet is greatly relational, and

Whereas, Eli drew all of his classmates and faculty members into the warmth of his soul through his infectious and inviting smile, his inquisitive nature and love for learning, and his thoughtful academic and theological insights, and

Whereas, Eli was a source of comfort, joy and support to his parents, his siblings, extended family and to countless young people whom he mentored and cared for, and

Whereas his future was bright with promise and potential for creating a world where all can thrive, and he embodied everything our PSR family holds dear as a person of deep personal faith and a leader and mentor in his community, and

Whereas, Eli was tragically taken from among us all too soon and senselessly, and our hearts are broken by his earthly absence and the irreplaceable void that is left in his family,

Be it therefore resolved that,

We will hold to the promise of eternal life that Eli believed in and even in the midst of this great loss, we affirm that NOTHING could separate him from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus – not things in this life nor things to come, not things seen or unseen, not principalities nor powers, not even death itself but we believe that even now Isamaeli is secure in the embrace of God's eternal life and never-ending love, until we meet again, and

 ${f B}$ e it also resolved that we continue to hold his family, church, and the entire Bay Area Samoan and Tuvaluan community in prayer and will stand in support and solidarity in the difficult days to come, and

Be it also resolved that as a community, we will pattern our own lives and study after the principles, values, and practices he demonstrated among us – caring for the young, caring for the earth, caring for family, and committing ourselves to combat the scourge of violence, and

 ${f B}$ e it further resolved that by vote of the Faculty and the Board of Trustees of Pacific School of Religion, Isamaeli Mata'afa be awarded posthumously the degree of Master of Divinity at the 2023 Commencement, and

Be it finally resolved that a formalized copy of this resolution shall be presented to his family at the time of his Celebration of Life and a copy shall be kept in our PSR institutional records.

A formal copy of this resolution was presented to Isamaeli's family at the Celebration of Life Service on the 18th Day of November, in the year of our Lord, Two-Thousand Twenty Two.

CANDIDATES FOR DEGREES

CERTIFICATE OF SEXUALITY AND RELIGION

RYAN CASSATA

CERTIFICATE OF SPIRITUALITY AND SOCIAL CHANGE

SARA FREAD

A. JOE GONZALES

DANIEL ALEJANDRO GUILLEN

LAHOMA J. HOWARD

ISAMAELI MATA'AFA (Posthumous)

SUNDRIA SAM

DONALD LAWRENCE SCHERSCHLIGT

PIPER ROWANOAK SWIM

JANICE TAYLOR (PRENDERGAST)

AMYBETH WILLIS

MICHELLE WINTER

MASTER OF ARTS IN SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION

RYAN CASSATA

SARA FREAD

A. JOE GONZALES

LAHOMA J. HOWARD

ISAMAELI MATA'AFA (Posthumous)

SUNDRIA SAM

DONALD LAWRENCE SCHERSCHLIGT

PIPER ROWANOAK SWIM

JANICE TAYLOR (PRENDERGAST)

AMYBETH WILLIS

MASTER OF THEOLOGICAL STUDIES

BARBARA GARRAN ELIZABETH PRESTON LEEANN SHAW YOUNGER MICHELLE WINTER

MASTER OF DIVINITY

A. JOE GONZALES

LAHOMA J. HOWARD

SUSAN (SUE) KING

ISAMAELI MATA'AFA (Posthumous)

SUNDRIA SAM

JANICE TAYLOR (PRENDERGAST)

DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

MARK CHIANG

Heart to Heart to Heart: A Conversation about Polyamory and Ethical Non-Monogamy in the Church (with distinction)

PATRISHA GILL

Wade in the Water: A Theology of Radical Resistance in the Negro Spirituals (with distinction)

ARIELLE C. HUETTNER

A New Role of Spirituality and Pastoral Counseling in Youth Suicide Prevention (with distinction)

ELENA LARSSEN

The Pandemic Pivot: Lessons We Learned that Will Lead Us Forward (with distinction)

ELIZABETH LEAVITT

Worship on the Threshold: Ministry with and for Religious Nones

SAFUE LOGO ULUFALEILUPE

The Next Generation of the Samoan Church

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

COMMENCEMENT COORDINATORS

Today's commencement coordinators are Rev. Ann Jefferson, Director of Community Life and Spiritual Care; Tara L. Weekes, Assistant Dean for Academic Programming; Janett Cabanero, Assistant Dean for Academic Affairs and Registrar; Laura Rhine, Administrative Coordinator for Academic Affairs; Office of Community Life Student workers: Kelly Weber Felch and Manuel Falcon Padua; Ja'Nay Jenkins, Operations Manager; and Dr. Susan Abraham, Vice President for Academic Affairs and Dean of Faculty. The Faculty Marshal is Rev. Dr. Dorsey Blake, Faculty Associate, Leadership and Social Transformation.

GRATITUDE

We offer our deepest gratitude and prayers to Mr. and Mrs. Voloti and Anita Mata'afa, and the extended family of Isamaeli Mata'afa AKF for their presence with us today. We are also deeply grateful for the presence of Isamaeli's pastor, Rev. Ulysses Ve'e, and the beautiful musical offerings of the Samoan CCCAS Oakland Choir.

We are thankful for the invaluable contributions of staff members: Andrew Jamieson, PSR Worship Music Director, and all who volunteered to sing in today's Commencement Ensemble; Hallie Fryd, Director of Communications and Bradley Bethel, Jr., PSR Webmaster and Graphic Designer who produced this year's program; and Alex Roman and Marco Gonzalez, PSR Mechanical and Facilities Technicians. Unless otherwise noted, all worship participants and those who submitted video statements are candidates for certificates and degrees today. The PSR banner is carried by Safue Ulufaleilupe.

We extend our most profound appreciation to Rev. Charlene Han Powell, Senior Pastor, and the membership of First Presbyterian Church of Berkeley for the use of their church for today's celebration. We are particularly grateful for the collaborative support of Ralph Anderson, Director of Facilities, Devin Crane, Media and Communications Coordinator and Kay Wolff who provided our beautiful pulpit floral arrangements. We also want to extend a huge thank you for our President's Reception provided by Ann's Catering. Finally, we thank Douglas Latimer and the team at Big Lake Productions for their collaboration in the hybrid production and live streaming of our 2023 Commencement Ceremony.

COMMENCEMENT SPEAKERS FOR THE PAST FIVE YEARS

- 2022 Rev. Marvin K. White, Minister of Celebration, Glide Memorial Church
- **2021** Kazu Haga, Founder and Coordinator of the East Point Peace Academy
- **2020** Rev. Kamal Hassan, Pastor/Teaching Elder, Sojourner Truth Presbyterian Church, Richmond, CA and Grace Gilliam, Associate Director of Community Engaged Learning, Pacific School of Religion
- **2019** Jeff Chang, Social Historian, Author of *We Gon' Be Alright and Can't Stop Won't Stop*, VP of Narrative, Arts, and Culture at Race Forward
- **2018** Rev. Dr. Dorsey O. Blake, Faculty Associate, Leadership and Social Transformation, Pacific School of Religion, Presiding Minister, The Church for the Fellowship of All Peoples

PSR MISSION STATEMENT

Pacific School of Religion prepares a diverse cadre of spiritually rooted leaders with the vision, resilience, and skill to create a world where all can thrive.

Grounded in the rigorous study and faithful practice of progressive Christian faith, PSR partners with students of all backgrounds to deepen their spirituality and enhance their capacity to lead in transformative ways. Connected to a broad network of religious, educational, not-for-profit, and private sector organizations—with a particular commitment to the wisdom of historically marginalized communities—PSR offers an education that is marked by innovation, reflection, and excellence.

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| Jen Gall | Ja'Nay Jenkins | Jai Patel | |



A TIMELINE OF PSR'S LEGACY

| 1866 | Enfranchised Chinese Immigrants Ahead of the Exclusion Act | 1997 | Protested Nuclear Proliferation at the United Nations |
|------|---|------|--|
| 1895 | Enrolled Women During the Heart of Suffrage | 2000 | Founded the Center for LGBTQ and Gender Studies in Religion (CLGS), The First Seminary-Based LGBTQ Center |
| 1942 | Opposed Japanese Internment During WWII | 2001 | Founded the Institute for Leadership Development and Study of Pacific and Asian North American Religion (PANA) |
| 1950 | Appointed Georgia Harkness, the First Female Full Professor of Theology at a U.S. Protestant Seminary | 2015 | Protested in Support of Black Lives Matter |
| 1959 | Combined Civil Rights Activism and Scholarship | 2016 | Stood with Standing Rock |
| 1966 | Marched for Farmworkers' Rights | 2017 | Protested the Militarization of the Police |
| 1969 | Protested the War in Vietnam | 2020 | Included Anti-Racism and Queer Theory into Every Aspect of our Curriculum |
| 1972 | Alumnx Bill Johnson Becomes the First Openly Gay Man Ordained in a Mainline Denomination (UCC) | 2021 | Renewed our Commitment to an Emerging Generation of Students of Color |



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