Congratulations
Class of 2010

On May 23rd, almost 200 guests gathered at University Avenue Church of Christ to witness Austin Grad's 2010 graduation ceremony. The school recognized five students for their dedication and perseverance in earning the Bachelor of Arts in Ministry and Christian Studies. Six graduate students completed the requirements for the Master of Arts in Theological Studies and Austin Grad is proud to honor them for their achievements.

Before the presentation of diplomas, Paul Watson, former associate professor at Austin Grad, delivered the commencement address. Dr. Watson encouraged the graduates to use their education in kingdom service.

The following graduates completed a Bachelor of Arts in Ministry and Christian Studies:
- Bethany Blesing
- Eliza Bushn
- Humberto Bustamante
- Royal Johnson
- Matt Porter

The following graduates earned a Master of Arts in Theological Studies:
- Reggie Arline
- Steve Dye
- Oscar Graves
- Sergio Longoria
- Mary Meoli Johnson
- Ahn Nguyen
About This Issue of Update...

Austin Graduate School of Theology is a seminary associated with Churches of Christ and in conversation with all who confess Jesus as Lord. Our mission is to promote knowledge, understanding, and practice of the Christian faith by equipping Christians and churches for service in the kingdom of God.

In keeping with our mission, this issue of Update focuses on the ways Austin Grad fulfills its mission and the ways our graduates serve in the kingdom. Future issues will focus on our supporters, needs, and plans for the school.

When you are through with your copy of Update, we encourage you to pass it on someone who might be interested in learning more about Austin Grad. If you know someone who would appreciate receiving this newsletter on a regular basis, please e-mail Cynthia Agnell at cagnell@austingrad.edu.

MATS Graduate Continues Education in the Northeast

Recently, Ashley Gay (MATS 2009) stopped by and we had a few minutes to visit about her time at Austin Grad and her plans for the future. Currently Ashley is a student at Andover Newton Theological School near Boston, where she is working on a Master of Arts in Theological Research.

Ashley majored in Drama and Literature at Harding University. This background in the arts and humanities led her to ask theological questions, but it did not prepare her to answer them. As she finished her Bachelor’s degree she began to look for a place where she could find answers to her questions. Sarah Shipp, daughter of Austin Grad professor Mark Shipp, introduced Ashley to the school and Dylan Pfeifer arranged for her to meet with Jeff Peterson.

Ashley recalls, “The way Dr. Peterson answered my questions about Romans 9 made me want to study at Austin Grad.” She planned to attend Austin Grad for one semester before moving on Andover Newton but she stayed to complete the Master of Arts in Theological Studies. She found Austin Grad to be a unique academic environment that valued both spiritual life and scholarship. For Ashley, Austin Grad was the best place to acquire a faith-based foundation for her academic pursuits.

True to her artistic background, Ashley loves to tell stories that have a significant meaning for people. The theological training she received at Austin Grad enables her to relate stories that answer the core questions about life and living. Her stories engage others in conversation about what it means to be human and be a believer.

When she finishes her Master’s at Andover Newton she plans to study for a PhD in either Practical Theology or Theological Aesthetics. Eventually Ashley wants to teach and pass on what she learned from the professors at Austin Grad—how to live as a faithful believer engaged in theological scholarship.
Supporting the Vision of Austin Grad

Experts in corporate management tell us that an organization’s mission statement tells where it is presently. It describes its purpose for existence. A vision statement, on the other hand, states where the institution wants to be in the future.

A new organization may be established by visionary people. Once established it will be governed by its mission. However, its vision will direct its future.

Austin Grad is guided by a visionary Board of Trustees. They continue the vision of those leaders who established it from a dream and a desire to serve God by equipping men and women with a high level of Christian education. That vision led the school from being an ordinary Bible Chair on the University of Texas campus to its status today as an accredited seminary that offers a BA in Christian Studies and a MA in Theological Studies.

What will Austin Grad be next year? In two years? Ten years from now? What will be required to fulfill the vision?

Our vision is to serve more people through increased enrollment. Our vision is to offer a Master of Divinity degree. Our vision is to impact the world through theologically educated people who pass on their faith to future generations.

The question is asked, “What do we need to fulfill our vision?” The simple answer is, “We need you.” We need the involvement and support of people like you who share our vision. You can actively share our vision in the following ways:

- Pray for us to grow in numbers and purpose
- Be our advocate—tell others about Austin Grad
- Take a course for credit or audit one
- Join the Associates for Austin Grad
- Become a friend of Austin Grad and attend our Friends’ Day activities
- Include Austin Grad in your charitable giving

The vision of Austin Grad is only limited by its financial resources. The progress of Austin Grad is directly related to the amount of philanthropic support it receives from generous friends who share our vision. Philanthropy has never been more important than it is now. Your gifts can and do make a significant difference in fulfilling our vision. If you are one who regularly contributes funds to the school, we are extremely grateful. If you have yet to join those who share our vision, we invite you to do so. Please consider placing Austin Grad near the top of your charitable giving list. You will derive a great sense of satisfaction in doing so.

In another article in this issue of UPDATE, I write about how your own philanthropic activities can be visionary. Visionary Philanthropy suggests how you might support Austin Grad in ways that are unique to your personal situation.

—Neal Haney, Director of Development

Intentions

Lin Penland grew up in a South Texas home where his father taught him to hunt and fish and his mother taught him to love the church. As a young man, Lin enjoyed the company of preachers, listening to them talk and singing with them, but he never intended to become one.

Lin attended Abilene Christian where he earned a Bachelor’s degree in Music and a Master’s degree in Education. His first career focused on education—teaching and counseling and finally educational sales.

In the mid-1990s, Lin enrolled in the Master’s program at Austin Grad. He wanted the guidance and tools that would make him a better Bible class teacher and help him grow spiritually. He never intended to become a preacher, but God had other plans. For fourteen years, Lin has served the Holland Street Church of Christ in San Marcos, Texas as pulpit minister.

Like most ministers, Lin finds it challenging to serve a diverse congregation with varied needs, problems, and perceptions. He meets that

Continued on page 4
Turning Church History into Art

Tatiana Nikolova-Houston grew up in Bulgaria during the socialist regime—a time when religious practice resulted in persecution, ridicule and economic sacrifice. Bibles and religious books were prohibited, but Tatiana learned about faith and Christian love from her grandmother, Sofia.

Raised in a family that loved music, art, and nature, Tatiana studied landscape architecture and designed colorful municipal gardens in Bulgaria. In 1990, after the fall of socialism, she came to Texas and married Ron Houston. Ron and Tatiana live near UT and she discovered Austin Grad (ICS) on one of her walks around campus. She enrolled in her first class and the rest, as they say, is history.

Tatiana completed a Bachelor's degree (1995) and Master's degree (2000) at Austin Grad. She went on to earn a Master's degree and a Doctorate in Library Science from UT. Today she is the artist behind Sacred Illuminations, works of art based on old Slavic biblical manuscripts.

In explaining how she merged her love for art with her theological studies and library science, Tatiana says, "We, Christians especially, need spiritual guidance all the time. Perhaps, for that reason, and because I always search for signs to answer my prayers and guide me through the hassles of everyday life, I began to incorporate Biblical passages, prayers, and other inspirational quotes in the illumination and decorative patterns of Slavic sacred manuscripts. Doing this, I see the direct influence of my life at Austin Grad (ICS) where I learned the importance of the Bible and God's guiding us through its wisdom."

Tatiana describes her work as "a form of spiritual ministry that intends to provide a spark of illumination in our grim daily lives, a spark of beauty and wisdom. I see this art form as a bridge between medieval and pre-modern ecclesiastical art and our contemporary world, a bridge between church traditions. It is intended to unite the diverse Christian communities in one center—Christ."

Visit www.sacredilluminations.webs.com to learn more about Tatiana's art.

Intentions continued from page 3

challenge by preaching good, solid, biblical sermons—a practice that took root during his time at Austin Grad.

Early on, the quality of education available at Austin Grad impressed Lin and he credits the faculty for preparing him to minister in a local congregation. He found the faculty to be well-educated and dedicated to their work. "They believe they are personally accountable to God for what they do and teach," says Lin. "They are faithful Christians preparing other Christians."

While Lin never intended to become a preacher, he excels at his calling. One of the Holland Street members puts it this way, "I have been under Lin's caring ministry for many years now, and have seen the fruit born of his preaching and teaching and ministering. I've cried and laughed with him, and I've learned so much from him. His knowledge of the Bible, of the character and love of God, and his willingness to know and to meet the needs of God's people makes Lin the perfect minister for Holland Street. I have sat at the feet of many preachers, but Lin's sermons, biblically based and responsible to the text, have fed me like no others."

Lin's father taught him to hunt and fish, his mother taught him to love the church, and his time at Austin Grad taught him how to minister in the kingdom.
Sermon Seminar 2010

For most Austin-area sports fans, the Longhorns are the ultimate team. Area residents with different loyalties quickly learn to keep a low profile inside “burnt orange territory.” UT alumni, and Austinites in general, are passionate about the Longhorns.

Austin Grad doesn’t have a nationally acclaimed sports team but we do have alumni who are passionate about our programs and activities. Allan Stanglin (MATS 2007) is one. Currently Allan serves as pulpit minister for Legacy Church of Christ in North Richland Hills, Texas. In addition to his preaching duties, Allan writes a blog that demonstrates his love of God, family, and sports (in that order).

The following excerpt from The Kingdom, The Kids, & The Cowboys reflects Allan’s passion and appreciation for Austin Grad’s annual Sermon Seminar.

My preaching just got a whole lot better. Members of the Legacy church will be especially pleased to know that I’m a much better preacher today than when I last posted on this blog. The annual Sermon Seminar at Austin Graduate School of Theology will do that to a guy.

Sitting at the feet of Rubel Shelly as he graced us with his knowledge and insights into our Savior’s Sermon on the Mount and encouraged us to empty ourselves and truly live into what God intends for us as his children. Listening to Paul Watson as he walked us through the words of judgment and grace in Ezekiel and challenged us to preach both. Soaking up my great friend Jim Martin’s wisdom and experience as he taught from 2 Corinthians and helped us to rely solely on our God as we minister in our churches. Feverishly taking notes as Jim Reynolds carried us from Genesis to Malachi, painting a portrait of our God and his people, a breathtaking picture of love and mercy and grace, and begging us to preach the story. It was, as somebody observed halfway through the first day, like getting a drink from a fire hose. It was much too much.

I heard a few jokes. I picked up several preaching pointers. I gathered lots of sermon ideas and outlines and illustrations. All those things are going to make me a better preacher. But here’s the thing that matters; this is what’s important:

For three days in Austin I was reminded by some of the best preachers and teachers of preachers in our fellowship that our sermons do not belong to us. Our sermons are the holy words of our mighty God. My ideas, my stories, my words, my thoughts are inadequate and empty. The world is too messed up, it’s in too much trouble. I bring nothing to the table. I’ve got nothing to offer. It’s God. God’s holy words and God’s holy will. His grace and his mercy and his love. His presence and guidance and encouragement. It’s God. I’m speaking for God.

This preaching thing is not a career. It’s not a profession. It’s a calling. It’s a sacred calling. Preachers are not hired and fired; they are not applicants or candidates. We don’t update resumes or climb any corporate ladders. We work for our Father. Everything we do, we do for him.

If the whole church applauds in approval after my sermon this Sunday but God is not pleased, I have not fulfilled my calling. If the whole church scowls in disapproval but God is delighted, I have done what he is calling me to do.

The Austin Grad Sermon Seminar always re-centers me. It re-focuses me. It pulls me back to the proper understandings and views that get so easily distorted or sometimes even lost in the swirling mess that is church life and church meetings and church politics and church business. It reminds me of who I am as a powerful proclaimer of the great news of salvation from God in Christ. And it reminds me that I work for the God who created me and equips me and empowers me to speak his words—whether anybody’s listening or not—and he guarantees those words will not return to him empty. — Allan Stanglin, May 28, 2010

More than 100 preachers, teachers, students, and church leaders, representing more than 90 congregations, attended the Sermon Seminar May 24 to 26th. The Seminar is one of the primary ways Austin Grad fulfills its mission to equip churches for kingdom service.

Encourage the preachers and teachers you know to attend the 30th annual Sermon Seminar scheduled for May 23-25, 2011. Plenary speakers include Rodney Ashlock on the Five Megillot or Five Scrolls, Mark Hamilton on Jonah, and Bruce McLarty on the Gospel of John.
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This list represents gifts received December 2008 to June 2010.
From the president

As God with us, Jesus came to embrace our humanity completely. His ministry and teaching was driven by his pastoral concern. It was open to all and closed to none. He extended mercy to sinners and welcomed them into his company. As a teacher, he challenged the deadly work of sin, restored broken lives, and became the source of hope.

My vision is for AGST to be a community of scholars and students coming together in a quest to know the faith better in order to live the faith better. I am convinced that knowing the content of Christian doctrine is essential to shaping the conduct of Christian lives. Our faculty teaches the Bible as the authoritative word of God. In the classroom our students and faculty engage the issues, questions, and debates of our time.

Although AGST is committed to serving the church and preparing her leaders, it is not the church. We do not assemble on Sundays to worship. We don't share the Lord’s Supper. We don't add converts. And we do not come to the text with the same understanding of the faith as some of our students.

Like Jesus, however, our school is open to all and closed to none who meet the academic requirements. A distinguishing characteristic of AGST is the diversity of our students in age, race, gender, and faith tradition. This aspect of AGST continues our legacy from the days of the Bible Chair at the University of Texas (UT). Before UT disbanded the Bible Chairs in 1987, we often would have 500-600 students per semester enrolled in our courses. These students reflected the same diversity seen at AGST today.

I am reminded of the apostle Paul writing the lecture hall of Tyrannus in Ephesus in order to teach the gospel. He welcomed believers and unbelievers alike. Paul trusted the word of God and the truth of the gospel to reveal the complexities of God’s righteousness and human depravity. By welcoming pagans, Jews, and Christians, Paul was able to address the questions and issues of his day with the truth of the gospel. In such a setting, transformation of believers and conversion of unbelievers is always possible. I pray that AGST will continue to be such a place.

In such an academic community, discussion and debate of various understandings of the faith and its practices will occur. Central to this is our conviction that God’s self-revelation in the Bible is the final authority. We should boldly follow the examples of Jesus and Paul. Trusting the truth of the gospel, we welcome all who would respectfully listen, discuss, or debate our Christian worldview in the contemporary culture.

—Stan Reid, President

The Librarian Recommends

A child kicks his legs rhythmically through excess, not absence, of life. Because children have abounding vitality, because they are in spirit force and free, therefore they want things repeated and unchanged. They always say “Do it again” and the grown-up person does it again until he is nearly dead. For grown-up people are not strong enough to exult in monotonous. But perhaps God is strong enough to exult in monotonous. It is possible that God says every morning, “Do it again” to the sun; and every evening, “Do it again” to the moon. It may not be automatic necessity that makes all daisies alike; it may be that God makes every daisy separately, but has never got tired of making them. It may be that He has the eternal appetite of infancy, for we have sinned and grown old, and our Father is younger than we.

—G.K. Chesterton, Orthodoxy
Held in prison, the Apostle Paul, anticipated a difficult season when he wrote to Timothy asking him to bring the cloak and the parchments Paul left at Troas. In the final verses of 2 Timothy 4, Paul implored, "Do your best to get here before winter."

Karen Alexander (MS 1995), knows “winter can mean more than cold winds and dead leaves. The symbol can represent any period regarded as a time of decline, dreariness, or adversity.” Recognizing that women in ministry, especially missionaries, experience seasons of winter, Karen founded and directs Come before Winter—a ministry that seeks to renew, equip, unite, and honor these women around the world.

Since 2001, Come before Winter has taken a program of Bible study, prayer, praise, and reflection to more than 600 women on every continent except Antarctica. Every renewal is a gift to the participants from the ministry and the team members. The renewals offer a break from daily ministry and an opportunity for each woman to focus fully on her relationship with the Creator who refreshes and renews.

“The basis of Come before Winter’s equipping program sits squarely on foundations laid at Austin Grad,” says Karen Alexander. “I like to say that I had the best exegesis teacher ever, and I believe it. Dr. Doug Gragg first helped me to explore the text, but after Dr. Gragg left, both Dr. McNicol and Dr. Shipp continued to challenge me and to encourage me.

“When we started Come before Winter, former missionary to Brazil Karen Goudeau Fenter insisted that we use material that was developed by me and another Austin Grad graduate, Carol Gafford—material that focused on exegetical exploration of various genres of the text. Though I was reluctant, that idea of forming each curriculum around a genre of biblical writing has proven to be one key to Come before Winter’s success.”

One measure of its success is the number of women who attend multiple renewals. A woman had this to say prior to the recent renewal in Chiang Rai, Thailand:

I am eagerly anticipating it—needing it, really! I just feel that in my own Christian walk, I am in need of renewal and encouragement—to go to the next level. I recall the first CBW I attended and how it really was a turning point in my Christian walk—I learned how to exegete and grow to love quiet time and study. That helped me continue to grow in the faith, without being so dependent on others to “teach” me... I’m hoping that my time at CBW will help launch me with the mindset I need to live out God’s calling.

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For Reflection...

I have tried the pharisaic plan, and the monastic. I was once so straight, that, like the Indian’s tree, I learned a little the other way. And however much I may be slandered now as seeking “popularity” or a popular course, I have to rejoice that to my own satisfaction, as well as to others, I proved that truth, and not popularity, was my object; for I was once so strict a Separatist that I would neither pray nor sing praises with any one who was not as perfect as I supposed myself. In this most unpopular course I persisted until I discovered the mistake, and saw that on the principle embraced in my conduct, there never could be a congregation or church upon the earth.

—Alexander Campbell in The Christian Baptist Volume III, 1827
Faculty Insight

During my first year in seminary, I rode to my job before and after school with a fellow student. I was studying theology, he was studying church administration. The drive was a half-hour each way, which gave us lots of time to share our thoughts on how the world and the church should be run, as seminary students are wont to do. Usually we agreed, but sometimes we didn't, and that's how it was when we discussed the church and what we each hoped to accomplish in our ministries. "You see the church as a brain, throbbing away with no body," he told me. "You see the church as a pair of legs running around with no head," I replied.

Discussions like that are hardy perennials around seminary campuses, and (as often when people disagree) neither side captures the truth. "You are the body of Christ," Paul tells the church, "If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell?" If the whole body were legs, how could we comprehend the path through death and resurrection that Christ has marked out before us? If the whole body were a brain, how would we walk in his steps?

A seminary is not a church, and the work that a seminary does is certainly not the whole of the church's labor. But the people who constitute a seminary are members of the body of Christ, and their work can make a vital contribution to the life and ministry of the church. Seminary study offers Christians a time and a place to be drawn more deeply into the mind of Christ, in large part by communing with those who have tried to walk the way of the cross before we arrived on the scene.

Austin Grad exists "to promote knowledge, understanding, and practice of the Christian faith," as our mission statement reminds us. Our hope is that our ministry of study and prayer may so increase our apprehension of the mind of Christ that we may walk more surely in his steps. May God bless our efforts and those of all who minister in the name of Christ.

—Jeffrey Peterson, Jack C. and Ruth Wright Professor of New Testament

Class of 2010

Steve Dye is now serving as Senior Minister at Quail Springs Church of Christ in Oklahoma City.

Eliza Bushn is presently enrolled in the MATS program at Austin Grad. Someday she hopes to teach in a seminary.

Matt Porter manages the Austin Grad Bookstore and is studying for the Master of Arts in Theological Studies.

Austin Graduate School of Theology
cordially invites you to join us for
Convocation
Sunday,
August 22, 2010
2 PM
7640 Guadalupe Street, Austin, Texas

Reception follows the Consecration Service
Please RSVP to 512/476-2772 by August 19th.
Visionary Philanthropy

It has been said that philanthropists are visionary people. Visionary people look to the future to see what is in store down the road for those institutions they support. They are also visionary in crafting their own philanthropic techniques.

Often, people overlook methods of making charitable gifts that may increase their own tax benefits and personal satisfaction. These gifts may be just as effective to the charitable organization as a gift of cash. Of course, there is nothing wrong with gifts of cash. A gift of cash is the most common gift that organizations receive. They are easy and they are 100% deductible.

There are other ways, however, that charitable gifts can be made. Here are a few.

- Gifts of Stock: Gifts of appreciated stock are also quite common. You receive a charitable deduction for the full fair market value of the stock while avoiding capital gains tax that would be paid if the stock were sold. Austin Grad will receive the stock at its full value.

- Gifts of Real Estate: You can donate land, homes, farms, etc. with favorable tax benefits. It is possible to donate homes, farms or second homes while reserving life estate. This means the property is deeded to an organization like Austin Grad with you retaining the right to continue use of it for life. There is a sizable charitable deduction when it is deeded and upon the death of the donor or the life estate tenant, Austin Grad assumes the property.

- Gifts of Life Insurance and Retirement Funds: Substantial gifts may be made simply by changing the beneficiary designation to Austin Grad for all or part of the death benefit. There are a variety of ways to make life insurance gifts, all with favorable benefits to both you and the school. Retirement funds are often overlooked as charitable gift sources. Retirement funds are vulnerable to high taxation or even loss if left, without proper planning, to an individual.

- Life Income Gifts: It is possible for you to make a charitable gift to Austin Grad while retaining an income from the asset. Charitable gift vehicles such as a Charitable Remainder Annuity Trust or a Charitable Remainder Unitrust provide you with a sizable charitable deduction and an income for life or a designated period of time. At the end of the trust period, the school receives all assets remaining in the trust. Thus, the name, Charitable Remainder Trust.

- Bequest in a Will: One of the most thoughtful ways to make a lasting charitable gift is to include the school in your will. Such planning indicates an abiding commitment to the mission of the school and leaves a lasting legacy of caring.

These are but a few ways to make meaningful charitable gifts to Austin Grad. We strongly recommend that you discuss these options with your estate planning advisors prior to making any such gift. The content of this article is not meant to be legal advice. Charitable giving is intensely personal and should be done in the context of serious estate planning.

For questions about charitable giving to Austin Grad, please contact Neil Haney in the Austin Grad Development Office. There is no obligation and any discussion will be held in confidence.
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