Convocation—Fall 2015

Austin Graduate School of Theology faculty, staff, administration, Board of Trustees, students and their families gathered on August 17 to convene the 2015-2016 school year with a time of prayer, worship, reflection and fellowship. Dr. Allan McNicol gave the keynote address, challenging all of us as the culture considers Christianity outdated.

"So, we are here this evening once again on the eve of a new semester. In my journey I have been at this point many times. But somehow I sense this year is a bit different. Those familiar with this school can no doubt recall strong words from the faculty about the need for the church to consider itself as an 'alternative moral community' for the world. Today there is no doubt traditional Christians who accept the historical faith of the people of God are marginalized from contemporary mainstream society. Our version of Christianity is openly branded in significant places as 'totally outdated' and completely unacceptable to mainstream contemporary values. The culture says the goal of absolute freedom must be fulfilled; otherwise you are sectarian. To be an 'alternative moral community' will take fortitude and courage. We may pay a price to be faithful. So we come to the new semester with a sense of being a bit shell shocked. Yes, some of us are demoralized. What does it mean to study theology in the midst of this 'background noise'? I have been thinking about the Gospel of Mark lately. It resonates as a good word for us in our present situation whether we are a beginning student or seasoned scholar. But it seems to address a church facing cultural hostility. What does 'the gospel' it speaks about in 1:1 say to that? How does it deal with persecution and the loss of zeal and numbers in the church? Mark clearly reminds us that we signed on to follow one who was abandoned by even his own followers, and he was put to death by the 'power elites' of his time. Is it really odd that we who have signed on to finish the journey with him might also get a taste of the same thing? So what I am saying is that the church could do with a good dose of disciplined study of the Word and the seminary can be the place to see what that is all about. In order to accomplish that, bring along your faith; but add to that study and perseverance. And, for those who are a bit demoralized over what is going on in the culture, perhaps we need to get back to the Word and hear the good news: Humanly it is impossible. But not with God; for all things are possible with God! Mark 10:27"

Words of Consecration

Fred Strietelmeier, Chairman of the Board, stressed that the call of Christ is to willing, dedicated discipleship, and challenged faculty, staff, students, trustees and partners to perform important kingdom work with the school. He asked everyone to be praying for the students as they seek deeper knowledge, for the faculty as they prepare and teach, for the staff that supports them, and for the donors who make Austin Grad possible through their gifts.
STUDENT BODY OFFICERS

In addition to studies and other responsibilities, the student officers will assist their fellow classmates to make the time at Austin Grad a valuable experience spiritually and relationally as they pursue their degrees.

President—Casey Tamez
Casey was elected student body president for the 2015-2016 school year. She values growth in knowledge of scripture and relationship with God and was to provide others those opportunities at Austin Grad. She received a B.A. in English at Abilene Christian University and is now enrolled in the master's program at Austin Grad. Casey also works part-time as recruitment communications coordinator for Austin Grad.

Treasurer—Tamika Eason,
President—Casey Tamez and Secretary—Frank Bolanos

BOARD OF VISITORS MEETING

The Board, a volunteer group of advocates that help the school through referral of new students, philanthropic support and as representatives of the school in their local areas, met on Saturday, October 17, following the activities of Friends' Day. Chairman Fred Weaver called the meeting to order, and Gary Stork led the opening prayer.

Austin Grad President, Stan Reid, welcomed the group and thanked them for their support of the school. Dr. Reid gave a report on the previous day’s Board of Trustees meeting, which included announcing that Dr. Jerry Christian from Lampasas, Texas, was the newly elected chairman of the board, succeeding Fred Strietelmeier as chair.

Neil Haney, Director of Development, gave a report on development activities and an update of the Continuing the Dream Campaign. Following some Board of Visitors business discussion, Haney then led an intercessory prayer, and the meeting was adjourned. The next Board of Visitors’ meeting will be April, 2016.
Living Stones Award
Dan Watson & Bunny Stark

Because God chooses to use Christians as living stones in the building up of his kingdom, Austin Grad's Living Stones Award is honored to uphold stories of some of those living stones to encourage the church in its mission. The recipients of the Living Stones Award are those who have some affiliation with Austin Graduate School of Theology. The purpose to honor those deserving honor, and let their stories encourage us as we seek to live faithful Christian lives in a world that seems more and more bent on discouraging this.

Dan Watson — A Hero to the Hurting

He had a record-breaking baseball career at the University of Texas, started a successful florist on the "drag", raised a God-fearing family, officiated conference baseball and basketball, owned and operated an apartment homes building, and for decades volunteered his time to help others in need. At the age of 90, Dan and his daughter, Jan, deliver meals to homebound clients along his 35 year old route in East Austin each Monday morning. He told Meals on Wheels, "I've tried to find a reason to quit, but I can't find a good excuse." For years he served breakfast to the homeless at First United Methodist Church, University Avenue Church of Christ, and the Micah 6 Food Pantry. When asked why, he replies, "I volunteer to serve others."

Dan was the catcher for UT when they won the first College World Series championship in 1948 and was inducted into the Longhorn Hall of Honor in 2009. After college he began Watson Florist on "the drag". Flowers are part of almost all celebrations, and Dan brought joy to those hurting and to those rejoicing through his marketplace ministry.

He was baptized in 1937 at age 12 at the University Avenue Church of Christ in downtown Austin, a long time partner of the seminary. Since 1994, Dan has been a faithful giver to Austin Grad thanks to Jake Isaac, a former Board member who got him involved as a donor. His generous giving has allowed many students to afford their education through reduced tuition and scholarships. Congratulations to Dan upon receiving the Living Stones Award for his active service in building up the Kingdom of God with grace and humility.

Bunnie Stark — A Light That Can't Be Hidden

As Christians, one of our primary goals is to be a light in the world and live in such a way that those around us desire to find the source of our light: Christ. One light that can't be hidden goes by the name of Bonnie Stark, Austin Grad's recent recipient of the Living Stones Award. Bunnie's attraction to light began when she was a child. She grew up in East Austin with her four brothers, and apart from school and home, she spent much of her time among the members of Grant AME Church Worship Center. "It was there I felt safe and loved," Bunnie says of her church. "I was nurtured by great pastors and teachers and given the opportunity to use my gifts in ways I was not able to outside of the church. I learned the value of being dependable and what it meant to have a relationship with God. I can't remember a time in my life when I wasn't aware of God and his love. And when you have to walk past dogs that threaten to 'eat you alive', you learn quickly who to call on — and it's not mom or dad." Walking through unpleasant areas to church meetings were avenues of faith for Bunnie, finding comfort in the words of Psalm 23 and John 3:16.

At 18, she began teaching Sunday school and served at Grant AME Church Worship Center. Wanting to deepen her understanding of scripture and further serve God, she enrolled in Austin Grad and completed both bachelor's and master's degrees in Christian and Theological Studies. In 2006 she received her current ministry appointment at Greater Mt. Vernon Zion AME Church in Elgin, Texas. She encourages current students to "stay the course" and to be faithful to God as He is always faithful.
From the President

A Place with Many Windows

Austin Grad has many windows. A notable feature of our building is that 90 percent of the exterior walls are windows. One of the first visitors to our school, when the newly refurbished facility was opened in 2008, noted how natural light was so prevalent compared to other school buildings he had been in.

Imagine buildings, houses, or rooms without windows. Fortresses, dungeons, and prison cells come to mind as places used to keep something out or someone incarcerated. Protection from something or someone that might bring harm is the intent of such windowless structures. Confinement for an extended period of time in a windowless structure is an inhumane form of torture used to break the spirit of prisoners.

The function of windows is to allow outside light in and those inside to see out. While fulfilling that function, windows still protect those inside from weather, insects, and other intruders. Windows, to me, is an apt metaphor for what is done inside the walls of Austin Grad.

The students at Austin Grad serve as a window for me to see the outcome of our work. Through them and their stories, I get a better glimpse of what the professors are accomplishing as they fulfill our school’s mission to promote the knowledge, understanding, and practice of the Christian faith by equipping Christians and churches for service in the kingdom of God.

I encourage you to visit the Austin Grad YouTube channel at https://www.youtube.com/user/austingradseminary. There you will hear student testimonials. It is an excellent way to witness the impact our professors are having as they work diligently as Christian scholars in service to the church. Another window allowing us to see the broader impact of our professors was a comment made by Dr. Robert Wilken, a world-renowned church historian and chairman of the board for First Things Journal. Austin Grad partnered with First Things to host the first ever First Things Lecture in Austin. After conversations with our faculty in the classroom and over meals, Dr. Wilken prefaced his final lecture with this comment, “This is a place where serious people read and think, which is always a joy.” That is a high compliment coming from a representative of such a highly regarded theological journal. It is very encouraging to see that our professors are having an impact not only in the classroom, but in the larger theological conversation going on among scholars.

Although I could use many more, one final example of a window on the good kingdom work entrusted to Austin Grad is Matt and Lauren Porter. Matt holds our BA (Class of 2009) and MATS (Class of 2012) degrees. Both Matt and Lauren served as Austin Grad staff members for a few years before Matt became youth minister for the Canton Church of Christ. The Porters came back to Austin a few weeks ago for several reasons. First, they wanted to show off their new daughter, Joanna Francis, who is a doll. They also attended Friends’ Day and then Matt spoke in chapel the following Monday.

I made sure we got a picture of Matt, Lauren, and Joanna. It represents the past and the future of Austin Grad. Matt’s father, Keith Porter (Austin Grad Class of 1986), encouraged Matt to attend our school and to cut his theological teeth with our professors. I hope that Matt and Lauren will entrust us with Joanna so that a third-generation will join us in our quest to know, understand, and practice the faith.

Austin Grad has such a storied past and hope for a productive future in kingdom work because of the friends and partners who faithfully pray, encourage, and support this work. Of all our windows, one of the best ones gives us a picture of that group of people. We thank God and ask him to bless us as we work together in the name of Jesus, through the power of the Spirit, and for the glory of the Father.
Friends' Day
It's what the name implies!

A day for friends of Austin Grad to gather to worship, to hear from staff, faculty and students, and to enjoy a wonderful brunch and great conversations. We were thankful and blessed to have Karen Weber back, too! And, as always, many stayed after it was over to have just one more conversation.

Fred Strietelmeier and Stan Reid

Jeff Peterson
Mark Shipp
Matt, Lauren and Joanna Porter

Friends' Day Brunch and Conversation

Laynne Reid and Karen Weber
Fred Strietelmeier, Casey Tamez, Dagne Balcha and Stan Reid
Casey and Dagne were student speakers at Friends' Day
Terry and Carole Koonsce

Fred and Joan Weaver
John and Cheryl Halton
Friends' Day Brunch Line
WITH GRATUFL

APPRECIATION

AN ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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This list represents gifts received from June 1, to October 31, 2015
The first "Austin Graduate School of Theology—First Things Lecture" is in the books. By all accounts, the event was a great success. The school was excited to cooperate in this lecture with First Things, which is one of the most widely read and influential religious journals in the United States. As an ecumenical endeavor—featuring regular contributions from Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and evangelical Protestant writers—the publication shares many of the same concerns dear to the original Restoration Movement. The journal also shares much in common with Austin Grad in particular, whose mission is to promote knowledge, understanding, and practice of the Christian faith by equipping Christians and churches for service in the Kingdom of God.

Our speaker, Robert Wilken, is perhaps most recognized for his books The Christians as the Romans Saw Them (Yale, 1984; 2nd ed., 2003), The Spirit of Early Christian Thought: Seeking the Face of God (Yale, 2003), and his recent The First Thousand Years: A Global History of Christianity (Yale, 2012).

On Monday evening, September 14, Wilken spoke to a crowd of 228 in downtown Austin. The lecture topic was "Christianity and Religious Freedom." The notion of religious freedom, according to Wilken, is not a result of Enlightenment rationalism or secular principles, but is a product of Christian thought. In fact, the early church father, Tertullian, was the first one to use the phrase, "religious freedom." The early church was attempting to carve out a place for itself in the midst of an empire that pressed for conformity to its rituals and gods. One’s faith and the exercise of religious conscience should not be coerced. Unfortunately, Christendom, especially after Emperor Thodosius, often obscured the idea of religious freedom. I was championed once again by various Protestant groups during the Reformation.

The English colonies that became the United States of America were by and large populated by religious non-conformists who sought religious freedom. This principle was enshrined in the so-called Establishment Clause, the opening words of the U.S. Constitution’s Bill of Rights: “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.” As it turns out, Protestant reformers and America’s founding fathers were aware of the Christian case for religious freedom as articulated first by Tertullian.

On Tuesday, Wilken then spoke to a small group of Austin Grad faculty, local alumni and friends. The topic on this day was "Global Christianity: Then and Now." Wilken noted that church history courses tend to be courses in western church history, and that there is a rich history of the spread of Christianity beyond the borders of the Roman Empire. After each lecture there was a Question and Answer period. The video recordings of the two lectures are available on Austin Grad’s YouTube page.

We at Austin Grad are grateful to Robert Wilken for sharing his insights with our community, and we are grateful to First Things magazine for co-sponsoring the event. Before these lectures, many friends of Austin Grad were perhaps unfamiliar with First Things, and many readers of First Things may not have heard of Austin Grad. These lectures were a first step in remedying that. We look forward to future collaboration with First Things.

The First Things Lecture was coordinated by Dr. Keith Stanglin, an Austin Grad Professor.
The faculty at Austin Graduate School of Theology is having a very busy and productive year! After four years the faculty has completed *Lord, Teach Us to Pray: The Lord's Prayer for Today's Church*, published by Christian Studies Press and edited by Michael Weed, Keith Stanglin and Todd Hall and available at the Austin Grad bookstore, along with vol. 27 of *Christian Studies* journal.

The following are some of the projects the faculty are currently working on:

**Todd Hall** is completing his dissertation at Texas State University, San Marcos and plans to defend in December. He is also co-presenting a paper at the European Society for Research on the Education of Adults conference, called “Intersections of Hope: Buddhism and Christianity in Dialogue,” in Canterbury, England in February 2016.

**Keith Stanglin** presented a paper at the Sixteenth Century Society conference in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada in October. In May of 2016 he will be teaching church history at the Kesis Institute in Melbourne, Australia, and will also conduct seminars throughout Australia.

**Jeff Peterson** accompanied a group from University Avenue Church of Christ to Israel in October. He offered reflections on the Gospels at many of the sites they visited. He will present a paper on “Luke’s Transformation of Matthaean Motifs” and will offer a panel review of two recent books on “orthodoxy and heresy in earliest Christianity” at the Society of Biblical Literature in November. He will be staying at the Tyndale House at Cambridge University, England, April - June 2016 to complete the book *Folly to the Gentiles*, to be published by Baker Academic, and will begin the book *The Gospel According to Paul*, to be published by Eerdmans.

**Daniel Napier** returned from summer missionary travels in Eastern Europe. Besides serving on Hall’s dissertation committee, he is working on a manuscript entitled *Eyes to See: How Jesus Apprentices Us to Recognize God’s Activity*. He also attended the Dallas Willard conference to be held at Boston University, November 6-7.

**Mark Shipp** has just completed work on volume two of *Timeless: Ancient Psalms for the Church Today*, published by ACU Press, and is beginning work on volume three. The second professional CD of music from *Timeless (Where Are You Lord? From Lament to Praise in the Psalms)* came out a couple of months ago, and he is already planning a third CD. He is working on a book entitled *Handbook of the Gemstones of the Bible*, for which he is seeking a publisher. In January 2016, he will be presenting a series of four lectures at the Northwest Expositor’s Workshop in Oregon on preaching from Chronicles.
Woody Woodrow

Robert "Woody" Woodrow joined the Austin Grad staff in August of this year as the Assistant Online BA Program coordinator. Woody is a graduate of Oklahoma Christian University and Abilene Christian University and holds a Dr. of Ministry from ACU. Dr. Reid invited Woody to help with the online program, and the invitation intrigued him because he saw it as a marvelous opportunity and outreach through the offering of the completion of a degree in Christian Studies. His association with Austin Grad began in 1987 through the Sermon Seminar, and he was enrolled in Dr. Reid's Hebrew class in the '70s. His experience in ministry includes serving as a Military Chaplain in the army, a campus minister for 8 years, and the preaching minister for the Hillcrest Church of Christ in Arlington for twenty years.

Casey Tamez

Casey has joined the staff at Austin Grad as a part-time recruitment communications coordinator. After finishing her B.A. in English from Abilene Christian University, she enrolled in the Adventures in Missions program in Florida, later joining the staff of Redland Christian Academy where she taught middle school English and Math. Moving to San Antonio, she worked in campus ministry at the Church of Christ Student Center at San Antonio College, and later became an academic advisor for the school's Honors Academy. God has definitely impacted her life through the people she has met and the knowledge she has gained at Austin Grad. Casey wants to influence others in the same way.

Board of Trustees

Fred Strietelmeier has served as president of the Austin Graduate School of Theology Board of Trustees for the past five years. Since this is the term limit for board presidents, he has stepped down, and Jerry Christian has been named the new president. Several took advantage of the opportunity to thank Strietelmeier for his leadership which was described as Christ-like, his sense of humor that is "as dry as toast with honey and jelly", and the fact that he loves Austin Grad. Fred came from Houston to Austin to UA - Bible Chair / Student Ministry just as the Institute for Christian Studies (Austin Graduate School of Theology) was forming, and he has truly supported and blessed the school.

Austin Grad Scholarship Fund

The Austin Grad Scholarship Fund has grown in excess of $15,000 thanks to an out-of-state charitable foundation that wishes to remain anonymous. The school was notified in May, 2015 that the foundation had approved a grant in the amount of $7,500 specifically for the scholarship fund, providing that a like amount could be raised from other sources.

President Stan Reid said, "Our friends, alumni, past donors and one church responded generously to our appeal to meeting the challenge. It was exciting to know that each contribution would, in effect, be doubled."

Many of the students who attend Austin Grad require financial assistance. Director of Development, Neil Haney said, "We are blessed to have an institutional scholarship fund that can be drawn on to help these students. We are very grateful to those who contribute regularly to this fund. Their gifts demonstrate their true interest in helping others achieve their educational goals."

In the notification letter the president of the foundation wrote, "Thank you for this opportunity to help provide students the opportunity to attend Austin Graduate School of Theology." It was also indicated that the foundation would consider similar grants in future years. "We are extremely grateful to the foundation for their interest in helping Austin Grad students," Reid continued. "We are also grateful to all those who contributed to help meet this important matching grant."
I recently came across a quote that has stuck with me and continues to be meaningful. I can’t give credit to its author, but I appreciate whoever it is. The quote says, “Blessed are those who can give without remembering and take without forgetting.”

The quote is meaningful to me for several reasons. First, it describes a lot of people I know. I have been fortunate to know some of the most generous people in the world. Most of them are described by this quote. Most people who share their resources do so from a genuine motive to help others. Seldom are they concerned with self-gratification. The benefit of others is their concern. They do not keep lists of those they have helped and often do not recall specific acts of kindness when reminded of them. On those rare occasions when others reciprocate their good deeds, they never forget and are forever grateful.

Second, I like the quote because it seems so consistent with our Lord’s teachings about giving. Matthew 6 comes to mind. Jesus taught that the purpose of our acts of kindness should be to help the needy and not to call attention to ourselves. There have been many surveys designed to determine the main reasons people give to charitable organizations. The results are always the same. People give to organizations like Austin Grad because they believe in the institutional mission. Tax benefits and recognition are secondary. Not that they are unimportant, but first and foremost, the true philanthropist lives and gives to serve others.

At Austin Grad, we believe in recognizing and honoring our donors. We list their names in our publications. We name facilities for them. We put them on our donor wall. Why? Because we want them and others to be ever mindful of our gratitude for their generous support. Moreover, their example serves as inspiration for others to do likewise.

Yet, we know their hearts. There is no doubt their support is given for the right reasons. Their concern is to support the mission of Austin Grad and the students who attend here. They are true philanthropists. They give, often without remembering and take without forgetting. We are all blessed by them.

Thanks for Giving Roundup

The fifth annual Thanks for Giving Roundup was held on Thursday, November 5, 2015 in the Hocott Commons at Austin Grad. The purpose of the event is to honor Austin Grad donors from Austin and the surrounding area. Neil Haney, Director of Development presided at the dinner.

Dr. Jerry Christian, newly elected Chairman of the Austin Grad Board of Trustees, was the keynote speaker. A retired public school educator, his last two positions were as superintendent of the Alamo Heights Independent School District in San Antonio and CEO of the Sunshine Cottage School for Deaf Children, also in San Antonio. Dr. Christian has been a member of the Austin Grad Board of Trustees since 2012. He thanked the donors for their loyal support and described how important philanthropy is to the school.

The presentation of the annual Austin Grad Philanthropy award to Fran and Ottie Olson was the highlight of the evening. Haney remarked that the Olsons have been involved with and supported Austin Grad since the days of the Bible Chair on the campus of the University of Texas. He continued, saying, “Their humble and modest style reminds me of one of my favorite quotes about philanthropy, blessed are those who give without remembering and take without forgetting. That describes Fran and Ottie.” Their son, Karl Olsen, came from Mesquite, Texas for the presentation.

The evening concluded with gospel music by “Shades of Gray,” a quartet from Brentwood Oaks Church of Christ in Austin. After Haney thanked the Austin Grad staff for their efforts in making the event a success, Dr. Jeff Peterson, an Austin Grad faculty member, adjourned the evening with a prayer.
Update

CALENDAR

Finals Week
December 7-11

Christmas Break
December 14-January 15

Spring Semester Begins
January 19, 2016