

Donors Establish the Wilson Yates Chair in Theology and the Arts

This tenure-track, endowed faculty position will be made possible by gifts from a cadre of United friends, alums, and former faculty.

SAINT PAUL, MN, UNITED STATES, March 6, 2025 /EINPresswire.com/ -- [United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities](#) is thrilled to announce the establishment of the [Wilson Yates Chair in Theology and the Arts](#). This tenure-track, endowed faculty position will be made possible by gifts from a cadre of United friends, alums, and former faculty.



Wilson Yates, President Emeritus and Distinguished Professor Emeritus of Religion, Society, and the Arts

The chair's beloved namesake, Wilson Yates, President Emeritus and Distinguished Professor Emeritus of Religion, Society, and the Arts, has had a storied career and made significant contributions to United, perhaps none more so than in the development of United's work in the field of theology and the arts. A graduate of Vanderbilt University Divinity School and Harvard University, where he did his PhD, he joined the United faculty in 1967, later becoming the Dean in 1988 and President in 1996 before retiring in 2005.

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This endowed chair rightly honors [Wilson's] legacy, and this good school continues his groundbreaking work in theology and the arts, extending it in ever-new directions.”

President Molly T. Marshall

Wilson's visionary leadership expanded and deepened the connection between imagination, creativity, and theology as expressed through the arts that has been core to

United's academic ethos for decades, evidenced by the art from students and alums lining the walls of United's campus, and anchoring its publications, programs, and digital media. As a professor, Wilson had a transformative impact on his students' understanding of their art as theology and their theology as art, empowering them to find their creative voices. As Dean, he invited the faculty to explore and expand their understanding of the arts and the critical role that

they could play in teaching. As President, he was active in the larger national and international conversations taking place regarding theology and the arts.

In addition to teaching, Wilson has been a prolific speaker, author, and contributor to publications. In 1987, he wrote "The Arts in Theological

Education: New Possibilities for Integration" in which he designed and evaluated a comprehensive study of where and to what extent the arts were integrated in theological studies in 134 seminaries of the ATS (Association of Theological Schools). His later writings included the book "Art, Theology and the Church" which he co-edited with Kimberly Vrudny, exploring the factors that made possible the rise of interest in the arts in the church as well as in the early programs of theological schools.

Wilson, along with Jane Dillenberger, John Dillenberger, Doug Adams, Robin Jensen, Terrence Dempsey, Jim Waits, John Cook, Catherine Kapikian, Kimberly Vrudny ('95)—as well as other important figures—were instrumental in creating and developing the first theology and arts programs in seminaries. In his writings, Wilson identified six key points of intersection between art and theology, including an understanding of the role of the arts in worship; art as a key to understanding Christian history; art as a means of experiencing the human condition; art as a means of encountering the prophetic; art as a form of the sacramental; and art as a source of Christian vision. In 1988, he founded and edited the journal "ARTS, the Arts in Religious and Theological Studies," and in 1997, he co-edited and published "The Grotesque in Art and Literature: Theological Reflections" with James Luther Adams, his advisor at Harvard. In 2002, Wilson was a leader in the creation of SARTS, the Society for the Arts in Religious and Theological Studies.

Published in 2009, the book "Visual Theology: Forming and Transforming the Community through the Arts"—edited by Robin Jensen and Kimberly Vrudny ('95)—was dedicated to Wilson and his legacy: a desire to see the arts as a necessary part of theological education. In his work after retirement, Wilson has continued to teach and write, focusing on artists who have been lifelong theological companions, including the historical artists Andrej Rublev, Giotto, and Rembrandt, and artists from the twentieth century such as Käthe Kollwitz, Picasso, Marc Chagall, Rouault, Barbara Hepworth, and Jacob Lawrence.

Dr. Kyle Roberts, Dean and Vice President for Academic Affairs, celebrates his predecessor's impact on United's faculty and academic offerings, saying, "One can hardly think of United without also thinking of Theology and the Arts, and vice versa. And one can hardly think of both without also thinking of Wilson Yates. Wilson's academic work and creativity in Theology and the Arts birthed that spirit and focus at United, establishing a unique identity among seminaries.



UNITED
THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
OF THE TWIN CITIES

Education for Transformation

This endowed chair in his name and honor secures that historic identity and legacy for decades to come."

Dr. James L. Waits, Dean Emeritus of Candler School of Theology at Emory University, has known and worked with Wilson for decades. Reflecting on his friend and colleague, Dr. Waits asserts, "I have known Wilson Yates for over fifty years, and have admired his substantive contributions both to the church and to theological education. His love for and advocacy for the arts has been a unique and special gift to colleagues and institutions alike."

With gratitude for Wilson's living legacy and the generosity of these committed supporters, President Molly T. Marshall reflects, "What a joyful project it has been to gather friends of United, Wilson's many friends, to provide funding for this chair. This endowed chair rightly honors his legacy, and this good school continues his groundbreaking work in theology and the arts, extending it in ever-new directions. We have learned from him that a longing for beauty is akin to a longing for God."

A natural progression of Wilson's vision and leadership, this chair supports, in perpetuity, the centrality of the arts at United as a core pillar of the seminary's educational experience.

The United community will celebrate the installation of a faculty member into this new Chair soon. United is excited to name this faculty member and share more about this event in the months to come. United offers its deepest gratitude to those many whose gifts will establish the Wilson Yates Chair in Theology and the Arts. [Please visit our blog](#) to view the list of donors that made this possible. There's still time to join these many donors by making a gift to the Yates Chair!

Please contact Rev. Dr. Cindi Beth Johnson, Vice President for Advancement, at cbjohnson@unitedseminary.edu to make your contribution and be part of this extraordinary moment.

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