



Rise & Amplify

Claiming our Season of
Visibility and Voice

PACIFIC
SCHOOL OF
RELIGION

2025

158th Commencement



2025

158th Commencement Ceremony

May 25, 2025 | 4:00pm PT
First Presbyterian Church of Berkeley
2407 Dana St. Berkeley, CA 94704

Founded in 1866, Pacific School of Religion (PSR) is a leading progressive Christian seminary, graduate school, and center for leadership development and social impact. PSR transforms individuals and communities through a flexible, stackable curriculum and a collaborative, lifelong learning ecosystem powered by diversity. In addition to PSR's doctoral, masters, and certificate programs, PSR offers practical leadership courses and cohort experiences through its offerings on PSR Collective, an online community learning platform on Kwaray.org, from PSR's Ignite Institute and our Theological Education for Leadership (TEL) program. PSR is also home to the Center for

LGBTQ+ & Gender Studies in Religion (CLGS), the first seminary-based LGBTQ+ Center and the Badè Museum of Biblical Archaeology. Additionally, In 2024, PSR launched Kwaray, a digital learning and engagement platform designed to connect theological education with broader communities through accessible, technology-driven tools. To learn more about all the ways PSR is reimagining a world where all can thrive, visit [PSR.edu](https://psr.edu) and [Kwaray.org](https://kwaray.org).

Unafraid Since 1866

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By REV. LESTER KINSOLVING
Special to the Houston Post

SAN CARLOS, Calif. — William Johnson, a former president of Houston's Christian Youth Council — and the first self-professed homosexual ever admitted to the ministry of a major denomination — was ordained by the United Church of Christ Sunday night in this suburb of San Francisco.

By REV. LESTER KINSOLVING
Special to the Houston Post

SAN CARLOS, Calif. — William Johnson, a former president of Houston's Christian Youth Council — and the first self-professed homosexual ever admitted to the ministry of a major denomination — was ordained by the United Church of Christ Sunday night in this suburb of San Francisco.

In the afternoon prior to the service, Johnson sat in an open convertible which led a parade of an estimated 1,800 homosexuals through downtown San Francisco, in the city's first gay parade — featuring 25 floats and a horn-bling sheriff's posse.

The sermon at the ordination service was preached by the Rev. James Clark Brown, pastor of the First Congregational Church of San Francisco and a leading supporter of Johnson in his application for ordination.

The Rev. Mr. Brown, whose own congregation was rent in heated debate over the ordination, preached on the text

The Ministry, which God has Called Us." He told the congregation of 17 clergy and visitors from 13 San Francisco Bay Area churches:

"God is not primarily concerned with whether you and I are good — but whether we are good in the difference between moralistic and redemptive religion. God is a father, not a quality control engineer — and we can't imagine him saying, 'This is good, that is bad, and you must be good.' There is a third and a movement for social enlightenment."

The demonstration's traditional dedication service also featured "A Danced Word," performed by Cecily Zillmer and Linda Evans of the San Carlos Church's Youth Group.

The ordinar's mother, Mrs. Minnie Johnson of Houston, was present at the ceremony, as was his brother, Wayne, a Houston advertising man who was formerly a commercial artist for the

Mrs. Johnson, a seamstress who is a member of Houston's First Evangelical



Rev. Johnson during parade
—AP Wirephoto

2024

Launch of Kwaray



Acknowledgements

Commencement Coordinators

Today's commencement coordinators are Rev. Ann Jefferson, Director of Community Life and Spiritual Care; Rev. Michael Harrell, Associate Campus Minister (UMC) and Congregational Cohort Enrollment Counselor; Janett Cabanero, Associate Dean for Academic Affairs and Registrar; Janneth Orozco, Assistant Registrar and Membership Manager; Laura Rhine, Administrative Coordinator for Academic Affairs; Rev. Tana Roseboro-Marsh, MDiv. '18, Program Coordinator for the Theological Education for Leadership (TEL) Program; Jacob Perez MTS '21, Senior Director of Marketing, Growth, and Communications and Breana Trejo-Quibelan,

Webmaster and Graphic Designer. The Faculty Marshal is Dr. Lisa Asedillo, Assistant Professor of Worship and Ethics and Director of the Master of Divinity Program.

We are especially grateful for the presence of Charlotte Toothman and Shawn Merriman-Roberts who are providing our American Sign Language Interpretation for today's ceremony.

Gratitude

We extend our deepest gratitude to our Commencement speaker, Dr. Patrick Reyes, for his presence and inspiring words and for his ongoing service as a member of our PSR Board of Trustees. We are thankful for the invaluable contributions of our special guests and staff members: The Glide Memorial Church Ensemble under the direction of Zoe Ellis and accompanied by Janice Maxie Reid; Rev. Tevita Koro'i, Pastor of First United Methodist Church San Rafael, Mrs. Ruci Vakaliwaliwa, and the First UMC San Rafael Choir; Patrick Sturgis, PSR Chapel Music Director and all who volunteered to sing in today's Commencement Ensemble; Breana Trejo-Quibelan, PSR Web-master and Graphic Designer who produced this year's program; Joseph Junsay, Facilities and Operations Manager along with Alex Roman and Marco Gonzalez, PSR Mechanical and Facilities Technicians, and Office of Community Life Student Worker, Manuel Falcon Padua and members of the Community Life Council for their coordination of student volunteers. Unless otherwise noted, all worship participants are candidates for certificates and

degrees today. The PSR banner is carried by Tuituiotoga Farani.

We also extend our most profound appreciation to PSR Board Member 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 Michele Lebrun, Hospitality Coordinator, Devin Crane, Media and Communications Coordinator and Kay Wolff who provided our beautiful pulpit floral arrangements. We are equally grateful for Douglas Latimer and the team at Big Lake Productions for their collaboration in the hybrid production and live streaming of our 2025 Commencement ceremony. Finally, we extend our gratitude to the Office of the President for the President's Reception provided by Ann's Catering.

Dr. Patrick B. Reyes

Dean of Auburn Seminary | PSR Trustee (Santa Fe, New Mexico)



A Chicano writer, theologian, and executive leader, Patrick B. Reyes, Ph.D., is the award-winning author of *The Purpose Gap* and *Nobody Cries When We Die*. He is the Dean of Auburn Theological Seminary. He has been recognized for his service and scholarship by higher education institutions, receiving awards from institutions such as Boston University, Duke Leadership, Children's Defense Fund, and Hispanic Theological Initiative, and was inducted into the Morehouse College MLK Jr. Collegium of Scholars in 2023. The Council of Independent Colleges NetVUE selected *The Purpose Gap* as the Big Read for 2022-2023. He previously served the Forum for Theological Exploration, hosted the Sound of the Genuine podcast, and served as the board president of the Religious Education Association. He volunteers as the co-dean of the Freedom Seminary for the Children's Defense Fund. Patrick provides leadership on several boards in theological and higher education, publications, and the non-profit sector, supporting the next generation of Black, Indigenous, and Chicano spiritual and cultural leaders. He is the incoming vice-chair of the PSR Board of Trustees.

Past Commencement Speakers

- 2024** Rev. John H. Vaughn, MDiv '85, DMin
Executive Pastor of Ebenezer Baptist Church (Atlanta, GA)
- 2023** Rev. Dr. Mahsea Evans, MDiv '13, MTS '15
Lead Pastor of First United Methodist (Sacramento)
- 2022** Rev. Marvin K. White
Minister of Celebration at Glide Memorial Church (San Francisco)
- 2021** Kazu Haga
Founder and Coordinator of East Point Peace Academy (Oakland)

Luke Vakaliwaliwa

PSR Student



Luke Vakaliwaliwa died unexpectedly following the completion of his first year of the MDiv program at PSR. Luke Vakaliwaliwa hailed from the village of Nabuna, on the island of Koro, in the province of Lomaiviti, in the Fiji Islands. After completing his elementary education, Luke attended one of Fiji's prestigious government boarding schools - Queen Victoria School, on Fiji's main island of Viti Levu.

Luke's spiritual formation in the Methodist faith began early in life like most young indigenous Fijians. He was baptized as a child and attended Sunday School classes throughout his student life, while being taught about Sunday observance, family prayer meetings, cell group meetings as norms of growing up.

Luke was a product of an education system which placed emphasis on academic excellence, together with cultural and religious education, which no doubt shaped his later years of service.

From a family of eight siblings, four of Luke's brothers are pastors of various Christian denominations. He played a very active role in the Methodist Church in Fiji's young adult ministries, and became a Lay Preacher, before migrating to the US.

Luke first became the Fijian Ministry's Lay Leader at the Trinity United Methodist Church, Mountain View, California, before moving to San Rafael United Methodist Church, CA, to assume the position of the Fijian Lay Leader at the church from 2017 until 2024.

With his active participation in church ministries and his spiritual gifts, Luke was recommended by his church for candidacy for Local Licensed Pastor, in the UMC, while he enrolled in the Master's of Divinity program at Pacific School of Religion, 2024.

He was called to be with our Lord on the 11th of January 2025.

"Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful to these few things, I will appoint you to be in charge of many things, enter into the joy of your master." Matthew 25:21

Rev. Dr. Dorsey Odell Blake

Faculty Associate of Leadership and Social Transformation



Rev. Dr. Dorsey Odell Blake, a beloved faculty member, prophetic leader, and tireless advocate for justice passed away this spring shortly before his planned retirement. Dr. Blake, who served as Professor of Leadership and Social Transformation, leaves behind an extraordinary legacy of faith, activism, and transformative teaching.

Dr. Blake first arrived at Pacific School of Religion in 1968, inspired by encounters with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and other Civil Rights leaders. With more than five decades that included service in various schools, Dr. Blake returned to his Alma Mater as faculty in 2015 where he profoundly shaped generations of students through courses like Transformative Leadership and Visions of Tomorrow. In 2023, he was recognized by the Graduate Theological Union with the 48th Distinguished Faculty Award. His ministry extended far beyond the classroom as he faithfully led The Church for the Fellowship of All Peoples, following in the footsteps of his mentor, Dr. Howard Thurman.

A lifelong champion of justice, Dr. Blake was at the forefront of interfaith movements for peace, prison reform, and the abolition of the death penalty. Whether speaking in small gatherings or addressing rallies with crowds of over 200,000, his prophetic voice called for a world rooted in love, dignity, and liberation.

As we grieve this profound loss, we also celebrate the remarkable life he lived and the movements he inspired. Dr. Blake, your legacy endures in the lives you touched and the justice you pursued.

Candidates for Degrees

Certificate in Theological Education for Leadership

Marilyn Fowler

Desiree Frierson

LaJuan Aakaary Washington

Certificate of Theological Studies

Catherine Miller

Certificate of Sexuality and Religion

Becks Salentes

Certificate of Spirituality and Social Change

Jenny Jahn

Luke Vakaliwaliwa (posthumous)

Master of Arts in Social Transformation

Jenny Jahn

Becks Salentes

Master of Theological Studies

Tuituiotoga Mapuolesega Fualau Farani

Veronica Anne Schindler

Rosanne Marie Siino

Allison Van Tilborgh

Master of Divinity

Jenny Jahn

Doctor of Ministry

Dean Aponte-Safe

"I'm Thinking of God More as Love: Spiritual Journeys of Rural LGBTQIA+ Christians"

Dinah S. Chapman

"Justice and Joy: African American Leaders Engaging Racial Equity and Inclusivity in the Unity Movement"

CJ Sokugan Dunford

"Making the Pure Land: An Anti-Imperialist Project for Jōdo Shinshū Buddhists"

Joelle Henneman

"TRANSitions: Gender-Diverse Faith Leadership from the Transfigured Self"

Rev. B. Dundee Holt

"Come, Let Us Reason Together: Jesus-Centered Questions, Utterances, Engagements, Excavations and Resources to Build the Mutual Embracing of Black LGBTQIA2S+ People and Historically Black Churches"

Fredrick Robert Kereopa

"Remembering the Maori Saints: Indigenous Wisdom for a Context of Church Struggle"

Chynaah Maryoung-Cooke

"A Visionary Ubuntu Pedagogy: Developing Equitable & Equal Access to Learning"

LaTayna M. Purnell

"Public Theological Ministry through Art Activism/Craftivism"

Sally D. Swan

"Wild Worship: Re-Earthing our Spiritual Roots"

Rise & Amplify: Claiming our Season of Visibility and Voice

Rise & Amplify

Prelude "Lift Every Voice and Sing"
Patrick Sturgis, arr
James Weldon Johnson & J. Rosamond Johnson

Processional "Don't Wait Till the Battle is Over, Shout Now" by Walter Hawkins

Land Acknowledgement *Sally D. Swan and Frederick Robert Kereopa*

Gathering Words *Dean Aponte-Safe, Dinah S. Chapman and Joelle Henneman*

One: Today we gather in the presence of our Creator and this community to lift our voices in song and praise for God has been faithful to us, and...

ALL: *We will rise and amplify all that we have been created to be.*

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...

ALL: *We will rise and amplify them for we do not celebrate the accomplishments of this day as individuals but as members of beloved community.*

One: Today as we gather, we also remember those who began this journey with us but have passed from this life and are now among the Great Cloud of Witnesses on high.

ALL: *We will rise and amplify their memory and all that they gifted to us while they lived among us.*

One: In this season where we are challenged by principalities and powers that too often seek to diminish our prophetic visibility and the power of our voices...

One: *We will rise and amplify the words of Audre Lorde who reminded us that "When we speak we are afraid our words will not be heard or welcomed. But when we are silent, we are still afraid. So it is better to speak."*

ALL: *So we will rise and amplify all that we have been called to be, say, and do.*

One: *In this season, when it might appear easier to withdraw or to return in kind those words or actions which do not "speak life" into our beloved communities,...*

ALL: *We will rise and amplify that we are called to manifest a never-ending season of "doing justice, loving mercy, and walking humbly" with our Creator and one another.*

One: *May we find courage and inspiration in this celebration and strength for the "facing of these days."*

ALL: *Let us rise together and amplify the Holy One in worship, spirit and in truth! AMEN.*

Gathering Hymn "O, For a World"
Miriam Therese Winter, words
Carl Gotthelf Gläser, music 1828

Refer to back of program for lyrics

Welcome Greetings Rev. Dr. David Vásquez-Levy
President

Dr. Diandra C. Erickson
Associate Dean for Teaching, Learning, and Assessment
Graduate Theological Union

Claiming Our Season of Visibility

Reading "Sage Warrior, Wake to Oneness" by Valarie Kaur
Jenny Jahn & LaTayna M. Purnell

Presentation of Posthumous Certificate to Luke Vakaliwaliwa

Presentation Rev. Dr. David Vásquez-Levy
President

Selection First United Methodist Church Choir, San Rafael

Remembering the Rev. Dr. Dorsey Odell Blake

Presentation Dr. Susan Abraham
Vice President of Academic Affairs
and Dean of Faculty

Moment of Silence

Scripture Reading Tuituiotoga Mapuolesega Fualau Farani & Desiree Frierson

Ecclesiastes 3: 1 - 8

Everything Has Its Time

For everything there is a season and a time for every matter under heaven:

- ² *a time to be born and a time to die;*
a time to plant and a time to pluck up what is planted;
- ³ *a time to kill and a time to heal;*
a time to break down and a time to build up;
- ⁴ *a time to weep and a time to laugh;*
a time to mourn and a time to dance;
- ⁵ *a time to throw away stones and a time to gather stones together;*
a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing;
- ⁶ *a time to seek and a time to lose;*
a time to keep and a time to throw away;
- ⁷ *a time to tear and a time to sew;*
a time to keep silent and a time to speak;
- ⁸ *a time to love and a time to hate;*

Introduction of Speaker Allison Van Tilborgh

Selection "I Feel Your Spirit" by Hezekiah Walker
Glide Memorial Church Ensemble

Message *Dr. Patrick B. Reyes*
Dean of Auburn Seminary and PSR Trustee

Response in Song "Rise Up"
Rev. Chynaah Maryoung-Cooke, soloist
PSR Commencement Ensemble

Prayer for the Graduates *Rev. Michael Harrell*
Associate Campus Minister (UMC) and
Congregational Cohort Enrollment Counselor

Claiming Our Season of Voice

Presentation of Class Gift *Veronica Anne Schindler & Rev. B. Dundee Holt*

Acknowledgment of Student Awards *Dr. Susan Abraham*
Vice President of Academic Affairs
and Dean of Faculty

**Presentation of Candidates
 and Conferring of Degrees** *Rev. Dr. David Vásquez-Levy*
President
Dr. Susan Abraham
Vice President of Academic Affairs
and Dean of Faculty

Valedictory Charge *Rev. Kamal Hassan*
Campus Pastor, Pacific School of Religion and
Pastor, Sojourner Truth Presbyterian Church

PSR Alumnx Council Greeting *Rev. Florentino Cordova*
President, PSR Alumnx Council

Closing of the Academic Year *Arlene Mendoza*
Chair, PSR Board of Trustees

Benediction *Dr. Patrick B. Reyes*
Dean of Auburn Seminary and PSR Trustee

Recessional "I Feel Your Spirit"
 reprise

"O, For a World" Gathering Hymn

1. O for a world where ev - ery - one re -
 2. O for a world where goods are shared and
 3. We wel - come one world fam - i - ly and
 4. The poor are rich, the weak are strong, the
 5. O for a world pre - par - ing for God's

1. spect each oth - er's ways, where love is lived and
 2. mis - er - y re - lieved, where truth is spo - ken,
 3. strug - gle with each choice that o - pens us to
 4. fool - ish ones are wise. Tell all who mourn; out -
 5. glo - rious reign of peace, where time and tears will

1. all is done with jus - tice and with praise.
 2. chil - dren spared, e - qual - i - ty a - chieved.
 3. u - ni - ty and gives our vi - sion voice.
 4. casts be - long, who per - ish - es will rise.
 5. be no more, and all but love will cease.

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**Please join us outside for a
President's Reception after
the ceremony**



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