We recently asked five May 2021 Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) graduates of Vanderbilt Divinity School, all of them three-year House residents and recently ordained to ministry in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), to reflect on the impact of the House on their time at VDS – from making a decision to attend VDS to life after graduation and several points in between. Their thoughtful, encouraging responses appear below.

1) **How did the opportunity to live in the House positively affect your decision to enroll at Vanderbilt Divinity School?**
   
   **Rachel Cooley Shawler:** As I considered multiple schools, the House was a huge plus for VDS. It was a great benefit financially, and it meant I would both have community connections and feel invested in by the denomination. During a visit to VDS and the House, I was able to get dinner with a House resident who talked about how much she appreciated the community and that she could have both privacy with her own space and connection with shared spaces and friendship.

2) **What was most important to you about the House during your first year at VDS?**
   
   **Josh Jackson:** The people! Divinity school really is a whole different world, for better or for worse. It was great to get to celebrate and laugh with the House community in the “better” parts of the journey, but even more wonderful and life-giving to be in community with the House when the times were “worse” or harder. I always knew I would have people to lean on at the House.

3) **How did living in the House community help you discern your call to ministry?**
   
   **Stephen Underwood:** I came to VDS without a lot of confidence in my call to ministry. I moved to Nashville by myself, with no connections to anyone there, and still recently grieving the loss of much of my community after coming out as gay. My time at the House was shaped by interactions with fellow ministers-in-training that revealed...
Recent DDH Graduates Celebrate Ordinations and New Calls
(continued)

to me that there really is no template for who or what a minister is. God made a complex world and calls all kinds of people to different ministries in that world. I am especially grateful to have been accompanied in that journey by so many women ministers, who showed time and again what it looks like to believe the call of God over and against the expectations of culture and even church.

4) At graduation, what was one of your best memories of your time at the House?
Sam Copeland: In August of 2020, in the midst of the pandemic, I turned 25. My friends at the House knew how special my birthday is to me and how much I wished I could go out and be around people to celebrate. So my friends surprised me by setting up the front porch of the House to be a “Nashville rooftop bar” with string lights, pub tables, and music playing. Our “quaran-team” group that was in town over the summer hung out and danced and laughed. It is one of the times in my life when I felt most known and loved.

5) How have you “carried the House” with you during this initial stage of your ministerial career?
Kelsey Cobbs: The House has been, in some ways, the model for the kind of community I want to create in my ministry and in my regular young-adult life. I want to be part of something that’s deeply meaningful, incredibly fun, and that cultivates a good balance between mutuality and individuality. I suspect that’s also a little taste of what the Kingdom of God is like.

Where are they now?

Kelsey Cobbs
Ordained to ministry on September 4, 2021 at New Covenant Christian Church in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma
Recently completed Clinical Pastoral Education at Oklahoma University Health, primarily in The Children’s Hospital, including some experiences in the level 1 trauma department
Will fill the pulpit at First Christian Church of Sulphur, Oklahoma through the end of 2021 and is active in the Search and Call process

Samantha “Sam” Copeland
Ordained to ministry on July 31, 2021 at University Christian Church in Fort Worth, Texas
Associate Minister for Youth and Young Adults at Geist Christian Church in Indianapolis, Indiana – runs all programs for youth in grades 7-12 and adults under the age of 35 across both of Geist’s campuses, participates weekly in worship leadership

Joshua “Josh” Jackson
Ordained to ministry on August 14, 2021 at Creekwood Christian Church in Flower Mound, Texas
Associate Minister at Allisonville Christian Church in Indianapolis, Indiana – oversees youth ministry, young adult ministry, children’s ministry, and offers support to all Sunday School classes; works with Church Growth; participates weekly in worship leadership

Rachel Cooley Shawler
Ordained to ministry on October 16, 2021 at Eastwood Christian Church in Nashville, Tennessee
Preaches and leads worship monthly at Eternal Hope United Church of Christ in Fort Walton Beach, Florida, contributing weekly to worship pieces, helps with Wednesday meal ministry for folks who are hungry or without homes. Rachel and her husband Evan, a Flight Surgeon in the United States Air Force, anticipate moving to a new home in May so that he may pursue Residency training in Anesthesiology.

Stephen Underwood
Ordained to ministry on September 18, 2021 at Eastwood Christian Church in Nashville, Tennessee
Pastor of Central Christian Church in Great Falls, Montana
From the church website: “Stephen believes that God has called the Church to participate in God’s renewal of the universe, and to truly be the Body of Christ on Earth, not relegating the Spirit’s work to the intangible realms or to some far-off future heaven. He is honored to be called into covenant with Central Christian Church, an inclusive community living out God’s radical love among the people of Great Falls, Montana.”
Fall Semester Brings Return to Campus

Students returned to classes on campus this fall as Vanderbilt University resumed in-person classes with extensive COVID protocols. The House welcomed nine new residents and eleven returning students from eight states, one US commonwealth, and five countries. Residents gathered in August for the traditional opening retreat where they began forming community and shared in a ‘how to’ orientation on life in the House.

This fall also marked the return of the History and Theology of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) class at Vanderbilt Divinity School. The class is taught by the Rev. Dr. Christal Williams, Regional Minister and President of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Tennessee and adjunct professor of the practice of ministry. The class covers Disciples theology, history, and polity as well as the practice of ministry. The course is offered every three years and is intended to meet requirements by regional commissions on ministry for those who are discerning their call and candidacy for ordination.

House Calls New Leadership in Acting and Associate Deans, House Administrator

The Board of Trustees voted in September to extend a call to Rev. Beth Pattillo MDiv 90 to return to the House, this time as Acting Dean. They also called Rev. Randy Smith MDiv 88 to serve as Associate Dean for Development and Administration. Beth and Randy are both graduates of VDS and DDH, where they met in 1986. They have been married for 32 years. Randy was most recently the Associate Vice Chancellor for University Development Initiatives at Vanderbilt where he enjoyed a 25-year career. Beth and Randy are delighted to serve the House that has meant so much to them. Each will be working in a half-time capacity for up to the next 12 months. The board continues to discern next steps in the calling of a permanent dean.

The House also welcomes David Morton as the House Administrator. David brings extensive experience in business management to his role at DDH. He is a longtime board member for Room in the Inn in Nashville, an agency which serves those experiencing homelessness.

discipleshousevandy.org
Greetings to you all on behalf of the Board of Trustees!

Dear Friends of the House,

In this newsletter, you have read exciting stories of our newest alumni and the paths they are traveling. Graduations, ordinations, new life chapters. These joys all stem from the intentional, loving community of the House. I am thankful for your partnership with us. And I am grateful for your prayers and financial support of our important work. We hope that you will be so inspired by these alumni that you will consider making a gift to support the work of the House in transforming the lives of today’s residents. For your convenience, you may send a gift in the enclosed envelope or you may make an online donation via PayPal at discipleshousevandy.org.

I am thankful for all the exciting changes at the House. We are welcoming Beth Pattillo back as our Acting Dean and her husband, Randy Smith, as our Associate Dean of Development and Administration. Beth and Randy will share the responsibility of stewarding the resources of the House and ministering to the student residents over the next year. And we welcome David Morton, our new House Administrator, who will provide vital support to the Deans and the residents of the House in the day-to-day operations.

We are also saying farewell to Mark Calvert-Rosenberger, our Transitional Dean, and to Steve Smith, our Interim House Administrator. Mark and Steve have been integral to the successful operation of the House over the past 12 months – a year with unprecedented levels of stress brought about by medical, political, and social justice issues. I am immensely grateful to Mark and Steve for their leadership during these trying times, and we wish them all the best in their future journeys.

Much of the work of the Board is not terribly glamorous. We spend time analyzing budgets and reviewing building maintenance issues and developing fundraising campaigns. But we’ve also devoted considerable time to the discernment of God’s purpose for our ongoing work to prepare excellent Disciples ministers through our supportive community of faith. In this, we are filled with hope. And that hope is fueling our planning around developing community for our students, navigating our ongoing relationship with Vanderbilt, and optimizing the use of our aging physical plant. I am thankful for the leadership and dedication of all the Board members in this process.

Blessings of this glorious season of thanksgiving!

Marcus Rafiee
DDH Chair of Trustees

Congratulations to All of Our Disciples of Christ VDS Graduates!

Erin Perry MDiv 21
Erin currently serves in an administrative role at First Christian Church in Columbia MO.

Tasha Mitchell MDiv 21
Tasha is pursuing her Ph.D. at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary in Evanston IL.

Shameka Cathey MDiv 21
Shameka serves on the history faculty at Tennessee State University and holds a Ph.D. from Howard University. She was recently ordained at New Covenant Christian Church, Nashville TN.

Shelby Lewis MDiv 21
Shelby was recently ordained at Eastwood Christian Church and resides in Nashville TN.

We look forward to featuring all of our new alumni in upcoming newsletters!

This spring, we celebrated with nine of our Disciples of Christ students as they received their Master of Divinity degree. In addition to those graduates already featured in this newsletter, we celebrate with:

Erin Perry MDiv 21
Erin currently serves in an administrative role at First Christian Church in Columbia MO.

Tasha Mitchell MDiv 21
Tasha is pursuing her Ph.D. at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary in Evanston IL.

Shameka Cathey MDiv 21
Shameka serves on the history faculty at Tennessee State University and holds a Ph.D. from Howard University. She was recently ordained at New Covenant Christian Church, Nashville TN.

Shelby Lewis MDiv 21
Shelby was recently ordained at Eastwood Christian Church and resides in Nashville TN.

We look forward to featuring all of our new alumni in upcoming newsletters!

Stay In Touch!

We encourage you to send any email or address changes as well as alumni updates to: admin@discipleshousevandy.org. Help us to keep you in the know about House happenings!

Facebook: @ddhvanderbilt | Instagram: @ddhvanderbilt