

# DDHI

## NEWSLETTER



### From the Desk of the Dean

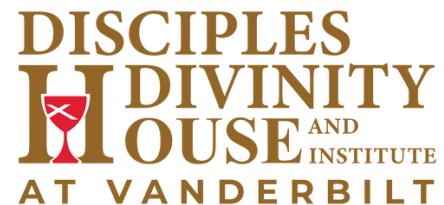
#### ***Greetings for the New Year & Welcome to Our Quarterly Newsletter***

#### **Grace and peace to you, and Happy New Year!**

It is with deep gratitude and great joy that I welcome you to the inaugural quarterly newsletter of Disciples Divinity House and Institute (DDHI). This newsletter is our shared community space. This is a place for current students, alumni, and friends to stay connected, to learn more about what is happening at the House, and to remain rooted in a community that is both distinctive and deeply committed to faith, justice, and formation.

This year marks an exciting new chapter in our life together as we officially launch the Institute. The DDHI Institute is a learning hub designed for students, alumni, lay leaders, and local congregations who are eager to engage theological education through a social justice lens. It is a space for curiosity, courageous questions, faithful wrestling, and communal discernment.

As I traveled in my role as Dean of the House, I encountered pastors and faith leaders across many contexts who voiced a shared longing.



Again and again, I heard the same question: How do we build and lead a prophetic church at this moment?

That question is the very spirit in which we launch the Institute. We seek to provide intentional spaces for learning and engagement and offering resources, workshops, and support for current students, alumni, and faith leaders both locally and beyond. The Institute is not only for those serving in traditional church roles. It is also for lay leaders and everyday people who desire to deepen their understanding of what it means to live as Christians in the world today.

DDHI's renewed vision centers on deepening relationships through service and shared leadership. As an Institute, we serve as a dynamic resource hub for pastoral care and leadership formation, committed to nurturing call, sustaining faith, and supporting leaders across every stage of their vocational journey.

Grounded in an ecumenical spirit and shaped by the values of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), DDHI serves students, clergy, lay leaders, and congregations through collaborative partnerships with Vanderbilt University, the Christian Church in Tennessee, and congregations in Nashville and beyond. Together, we are cultivating denominational and ecumenical spaces for discernment, growth, care, and courageous leadership for the church and for the world.

As we build this next chapter, we invite you to join us in prayer and to support this work by registering for an upcoming workshop. In order to expand our reach and deepen our impact, the Institute will offer hybrid learning opportunities, gathering both virtually and in person.

We invite you to join us to be inspired, be challenged, and grow with us as we learn together.

*With hope and gratitude,*  
Rev. Cherisna Jean-Marie, M.Div.  
Dean, Disciples Divinity House and Institute

## Faculty Spotlight

### Dr. Yara González-Justiniano

Dr. González-Justiniano is an Assistant Professor of Religion, Psychology, and Culture with an emphasis on Latinx Studies at Vanderbilt University. Her scholarly work focuses on practical theology, with a particular interest in the intersections of land, ecology, and social justice. In her book *Centering Hope as a Sustainable Decolonial Practice*, Dr. González-Justiniano explores how hope can serve as a transformative force within decolonial and theological frameworks.

Her current research challenges readers to reflect on the relationship between people and place, especially through the theological questions posed by Marlene Ferreras and Randy Woodley: "What grows in your land?" and "How do you take care of the land?" These inquiries invite a deeper engagement with ecological justice and our role in sustaining the earth.



Dr. González-Justiniano is also working on her second monograph, *Exhausting All Possibilities: Healing in Place*, which addresses the trauma of displacement caused by environmental, socioeconomic, and military forces. Drawing from trauma studies and ritual theory, she explores how healing can emerge from the fractured relationships created by forced migration, offering a vision for integrative healing that touches on the personal, communal, and ecological aspects of human experience.



### Alumni Spotlight

“

***I cannot imagine my ministry without the community and education I received at Vanderbilt.***

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### Rev. Allison Lanza (M. Div. '08)

Rev. Lanza, Fort Worth, TX, a 2008 graduate, is the Co-Founder and Executive Director of Be The Neighbor ([www.betheneighbor.org](http://www.betheneighbor.org)). The highlight of my Vanderbilt DDHI experience was the community I found; the friends I made while living in the house are still the people who sustain me in living out this calling.

Additionally, my Vanderbilt education at the School of the Prophets provided me with the skills and knowledge to face the challenges of our world with courage, to speak out for God's justice in both words and actions, and to recognize that I am not alone in this work, but stand in the tradition of faithful justice seekers striving to build the beloved community. I cannot imagine my ministry without the community and education I received at Vanderbilt and in the House, and I am committed to ensuring that this opportunity remains available for those answering their call today.

I have had the honor of working with numerous young adults who have lived in the House in recent years, and it brings me joy to see them receive a powerful education and supportive community that will sustain them as they follow their own calling.

## Student Spotlight

My name is Noah Tennant. I am from Rockwall, Texas and now live in Nashville, Tennessee, where I am a first-year Master of Divinity student in my second semester at Vanderbilt Divinity School.

A class that especially stood out to me in my first semester was Evangelicalism and Politics, which offered a rich blend of history, current events, and theology. I am deeply passionate about pastoral care and social justice/advocacy, and I am excited to see where those commitments lead, whether in chaplaincy, congregational ministry, or something else entirely.

I currently serve as the Head Resident at the Disciples Divinity House and Institute, a role that holds many dimensions. I represent the house as a student, help plan our programming, assist with the social media management, and help the Dean with larger projects like our upcoming Discernment Retreat in March.



## New name, new look, and a new mission.

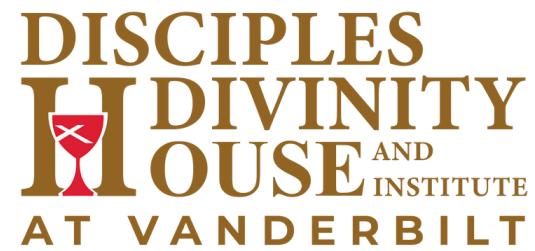
We are excited to share that Disciples Divinity House (DDH) is now Disciples Divinity House and Institute (DDHI). This new name reflects a renewed and expanded mission and vision for our community. At the November 2025 Board meeting, our Board of Directors approved a new mission and vision to guide the next season of ministry at the House. With new leadership and new goals, we are embracing a broader and more dynamic future for DDHI. Along with our new name comes a new logo and a fresh expression of who we are becoming. We invite you to celebrate this new season with us by sharing this exciting news with your friends, family, and networks.

## Mission Statement

We seek to create accessibility for housing, educational opportunities, and intentional community for leaders answering their call to serve.

## Vision Statement

Well-equipped faith leaders changing the world.



## Interested in Applying?

Are you considering applying to Vanderbilt Divinity School? Would you like to be part of the Disciples Divinity House and Institute (DDHI) community? We'd love to connect with you!

For more information, visit: [Divinity School | Vanderbilt University](#)

If you'd like to request information right away, you can fill out our Divinity Admissions Info Request Form: <https://divinity.vanderbilt.edu/admissions/request-information/>. You'll receive a response from the VDS team within 24-48 hours!

# RETREAT

## Disciples Discernment Retreat – Applications Now Open

*What does it look like to take your questions of faith, justice, and vocation seriously - and not alone?*

The Disciples Discernment Retreat is a weekend experience for Disciples who are curious about theological education and vocational discernment. Designed for young adults ages 19-26, this retreat creates space to ask honest questions about calling, ministry, justice, and faith without pressure or pretense. This event is made possible through partnerships with Disciples Divinity House and Institute, Disciples Home Missions, Disciples Peace Fellowship, Be The Neighbor, and Vanderbilt Divinity School Admissions, with a sponsorship from the Oreon E. Scott Foundation.

Participants will engage in spiritual discernment practices, conversation with Vanderbilt Divinity School faculty and students, practical discussions about theological education, admissions, and financial aid, as well as get the opportunity to see the work in action on site visits. Rooted in radical hospitality, community, and joy, this retreat offers tangible resources and life-giving connections for those exploring what might be next.

Whether you are feeling drawn toward ministry, theological study, or simply wondering how faith and vocation intersect, this weekend is an invitation to pull up a chair and discern together.

We invite you to apply or to nominate someone who may benefit from this experience. We encourage you to share this opportunity and help spread the word. Applications and nominations are now open, space is limited, and all costs are covered.

**Applications close February 15, 2026.**

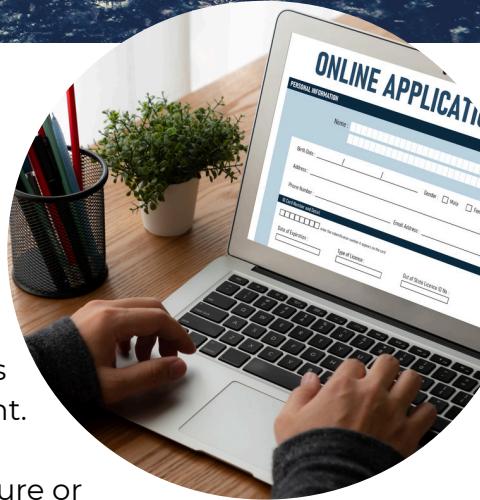
**Pull up a chair. There's room at the table.**

### Application Link

<https://bit.ly/DisciplesDiscernApply>

### Nomination Link

<https://bit.ly/DisciplesDiscernNominate>



## Meet the Staff



### **Rev. Cherisna Jean-Marie**

*Dean*

Rev. Cherisna Jean-Marie is a Haitian-American leader, preacher, and justice advocate, born and raised in Newark, New Jersey. She is the newly elected Dean of the Disciples Divinity House at Vanderbilt, becoming the first woman and person of color to serve in this role, beginning April 1, 2024.

A trailblazer in ministry and social justice, she has held several historic leadership positions across faith-based and nonprofit institutions. She is the founder of The Co-Conspirator Institute, a nonprofit dedicated to confronting systemic racism and fostering healing from racial trauma, including grief retreats for Black mothers impacted by gun violence.

An award-winning preacher and co-contributor to multiple book projects, Rev. Jean-Marie is also a mentor, community organizer, and international teacher who proudly embraces her most cherished role as “auntie” to her nieces and nephews.



### **Angela Jones**

*House Administrator*

Angela Y. Jones is a seasoned community service professional with more than 30 years of experience in healthcare access, education, youth development, and organizational leadership. She currently serves as House Administrator at Disciples Divinity House and Institute at Vanderbilt, overseeing daily operations and supporting a residential community of theological graduate students.

Previously, she held leadership roles with the YMCA of Middle Tennessee and served as a Healthcare Access Specialist, helping families navigate complex systems of care. Angela holds a B.S. in Early Childhood Education from Tennessee State University and is widely respected for her strengths in leadership, mentoring, and community engagement.

She is a proud mother, grandmother, and creative entrepreneur through her business, Angela's Creations.



### **Noah Tenant**

*Head Resident*

Noah is a first-year MDiv Student at Vanderbilt Divinity School from Rockwall, Texas. He serves as the Head Resident of the Disciples Divinity House and Institute.

Noah has been a part of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) since the 4th grade and has served with Be The Neighbor, Disciples on Campus at TCU, and Central Christian Church at Weatherford. Grounded in a passion for pastoral care, Noah is currently pursuing concentrations in Chaplaincy and Prophetic and Pastoral Leadership while also serving as an Admissions Fellow and the Disciples of Christ Liaison for VDS Admissions.

# 5 WAYS TO SUPPORT DDHI

**Be on the board** – Serving on the Board of Disciples Divinity House & Institute. Your leadership and commitment to the church and theological education would be a wonderful gift to our community. This is an exciting time for DDHI, and we are seeking thoughtful, engaged leaders to help guide our mission and future. I would love to share more about the role and answer any questions you might have.

**Be on a committee** – We have several active committees made up of current students, alumni, and friends of Disciples Divinity House & Institute. There are many ways to support DDHI by volunteering to serve on one of these committees.

**Financial Support the house** – We are deeply grateful for the generosity of our community who faithfully give to our Annual Fund and Endowment. Your support makes it possible for us to provide vital student assistance, including tuition support, student fees, health care, books, assemblies, and much more. We invite you to continue partnering with us through your giving, and if you have not yet done so, to join us in supporting Disciples Divinity House & Institute. Every gift no matter the size makes a meaningful difference in the lives of our students and in the future of our ministry. (add donation link here:)

**Host a Dinner** – One of the most meaningful events at Disciples Divinity House & Institute is our monthly community dinner. Each month, our House Scholars gather to break bread and to nurture our community through conversation, presence, laughter, and mutual support. If you would be interested in hosting one of these dinners, we would be deeply grateful for your generosity and partnership in helping us continue this cherished tradition.

## Prayer and encouragement

Disciples Divinity House & Institute has a prayer team that meets monthly to pray specifically for the life and ministry of DDHI. We recognize prayer as both a sacred spiritual practice and an essential foundation for our work. We invite you to join us in this ministry of prayer by adding DDHI to your personal and congregational prayer lists. Your prayers are a vital gift to our community.

For more information about how to join a Board, a committee, or to host a dinner please contact us at [admin@discipleshousevandy.org](mailto:admin@discipleshousevandy.org).

## 2025 Donation

*Thank you for your 2025 contribution to  
Disciples Divinity House and Institute.  
All donation acknowledgement letters  
have been sent.*

**If you have any questions, concerns, or if you did  
not receive your letter please contact us at  
[admin@discipleshousevandy.org](mailto:admin@discipleshousevandy.org).**

**Thank you again for your generous support.**

SAVE  
THE  
DATE

# Disciples Divinity House and Institute Turns 100!

The year 2027 marks a historic milestone for DDHI as we celebrate 100 years of transformative ministry. Stay tuned for more information about upcoming celebrations and gatherings as we honor this remarkable moment in the life and legacy of Disciples Divinity House and Institute.

## Calendar Events

### Programmings

- **Jan 26** – Vocational Discernment Prayer Service
- **Feb 2** – Salary Negotiation Worship with Dr. Rory Dicker
- **March 30** – Dialogue: History of Segregated Church with Dr Juan Flyod-Thomas and Dr. Jimmy Byrd
- **April 1-7** – Last Words Worship Service
- **3rd Mondays** – DDHI Community Dinners
- **1st Thursdays** – Middle TN Clergy Gathering

### DDHI Board Meetings

- **Feb 19** – 4:00 PM | Virtual
- **May 21** – 4:00 PM | Virtual
- **Aug 20** – 11:00 AM | Virtual

### DDHI Executive Board Meetings

- **Feb 12** – 10:00 AM Virtual
- **May 14** – 10:00 AM Virtual
- **Aug 13** – 10:00 AM Virtual

## Other Resources:

- **Vanderbilt Divinity School** – <https://divinity.vanderbilt.edu/>
- **Higher Education Leadership Ministry** – <https://www.helmdisciples.org/>
- **Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) of TN** – <https://tndisciples.org/>
- **Disciples Peace Fellowship** – <https://www.disciplespeace.org/>
- **Disciples Home Mission** – <https://www.discipleshomemissions.org/>



**STAY CONNECTED  
WITH US!**

**Follow Disciples Divinity House and Institute**

 [@ddhvanderbilt](https://www.instagram.com/ddhvanderbilt)

 [Disciples Divinity House at Vanderbilt](https://www.facebook.com/DivinityHouseAtVanderbilt)

for the latest updates, events, and glimpses into life at DDHI.