

Unification Theological Seminary Welcomes Hugh Spurgin as Acting President

Michael Balcomb

January 7, 2015



The Board of Trustees of the Unification Theological Seminary (UTS) voted on January 7, 2015 to appoint Dr. Hugh Spurgin as its Acting President. At the same meeting, the Board thanked the outgoing president, Dr. Richard Panzer, for his valuable contributions to UTS since 2010 and wished him well.

Dr. Michael Balcomb, chair of the UTS Board and president of the Holy Spirit Association for the Unification of World Christianity (HSA-UWC), thanked Dr. Panzer for his pioneering work to create Barrytown College (BC) and to bring new vitality to UTS. He said that Dr. Spurgin will report to the UTS Board and will serve as acting president until June 30, 2015 during which time there will be a formal search for a permanent president.

Dr. Spurgin has served since 1997 as the principal of Bridgeport International Academy, a college preparatory high school that is located adjacent to the campus of the University of Bridgeport. At UTS, he will guide the effort to find solutions to the financial and management crises which have developed at the seminary and college during the last few years.

The close association of UTS with its sponsoring church, HSA-UWC, is explicitly set forth in the UTS bylaws, and the spiritual guidance of UTS by the Founder of both the church and seminary is recognized by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education, its accrediting body. On June 26, 2014, the Middle States Commission (MSCHE) placed UTS on probation, a warning that the institution, among other things, must reflect on its mission and strengthen its institutional resources in order to keep its accredited status. In April, MSCHE will send a site team to UTS to determine whether it has made appropriate adjustments to bring itself into compliance with the accreditation standards.

“We are deeply concerned about all students, and place a very high priority on their educational success,” said Dr. Balcomb. He went on to say, “Our Founder is investing extensively in formal education for Unificationist youth with wide-ranging grant opportunities, including scholarships to colleges in the USA and worldwide, and special grants for study at Sun Moon University in Korea and at the Universal Peace Academy.”

The prevailing view of the trustees was that in the current circumstances, the budgetary, administrative and accreditation crises UTS faces could be best addressed by a president with more experience in church and educational administration.

“My first order of business will be to communicate with the various stakeholders of UTS/BC, including students, faculty, staff, alumni, and donors, to address their concerns and to answer their questions,” Dr. Spurgin said after the vote. “Having spent 18 years as the principal of a college preparatory school, I have cared greatly about the education and welfare of second-and third generation Unificationist and non-Unificationist students. I hope to apply lessons that I have learned in that educational environment to the

UTS situation.”

Dr. Spurgin is a longtime Unificationist who joined the Unification Church in 1968 in Washington, D.C. He holds a Ph.D. in American and European history from Columbia University, a Master of Divinity degree from Union Theological Seminary, and a Master of Public Administration degree from Syracuse University. He was the president of the first class of students who graduated in May 1977 from UTS and served as the first president of the UTS Alumni Association. For more than three decades, Dr. Spurgin has served as an associate or a full member of the UTS Board and for many years has been an officer of the Board.

Dr. Spurgin stated, “For 40 years I have been associated with UTS, and I look forward to the opportunity to help this institution that I love to survive its current budgetary, administrative and accreditation crisis.” “A joint committee of representatives from both UTS and HSA-UWC will work together to seek for ways to go forward,” he went on to say. “We expect to undertake a review of all current programs and make recommendations.”

Dr. Spurgin received the Marriage Blessing with Nora Martin Spurgin during the 777 Holy Marriage Blessing Ceremony that was held in Seoul in 1970. Hugh and Nora are the parents of four adult children, who are married and who have professional careers. Dr. Spurgin has served in the Unification Church as the national vice president and in various providential organizations, including the Professors World Peace Academy, the International Cultural Foundation, and the Washington Times. He has taught courses at UTS, the University of Bridgeport and the Union Institute.