UTS's Kathy Winings Elected Vice-President of Religious Education Association

Cabot W. Peterson
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BARRYTOWN – The Unification Theological Seminary (UTS) is proud to announce that Dr. Kathy Winings, Vice-President for Academic Affairs at UTS has been elected to the position of Vice-President of the Religious Education Association (REA), at their Annual Meeting which was held recently in Pittsburgh, PA from November 4-6.

The REA is an international, interfaith organization made up of more than 400 professors, practitioners and researchers dedicated to advancing ideas of religious teaching, research and scholarship in today's world. This year's REA conference was centered around the theme Generating Hope: The Future of the Teaching Profession in a Globalized World.

Dr. Winings will work with incoming program chair and president-elect, Mualla Selcuk, Professor of Religious Education at Ankara University,Turkey, helping her prepare for next November's Annual Meeting being held in St. Louis, MO.

"I'll come in as the vice-president elect and I will support the 2017 program chair, who is the president-elect," explained Dr. Winings, who has been a member of REA since 1989, when she was a doctoral student at Columbia University.

"Then, after the annual meeting conference next November the program chair becomes the president in January of '18 and I become the program chair and get to design the 2018 program conference."

The importance of the design of the yearly conference is not only measured in prestige, but responsibility, since the papers, plenary sessions and guest speakers will all focus on the topic chosen by the program chair.
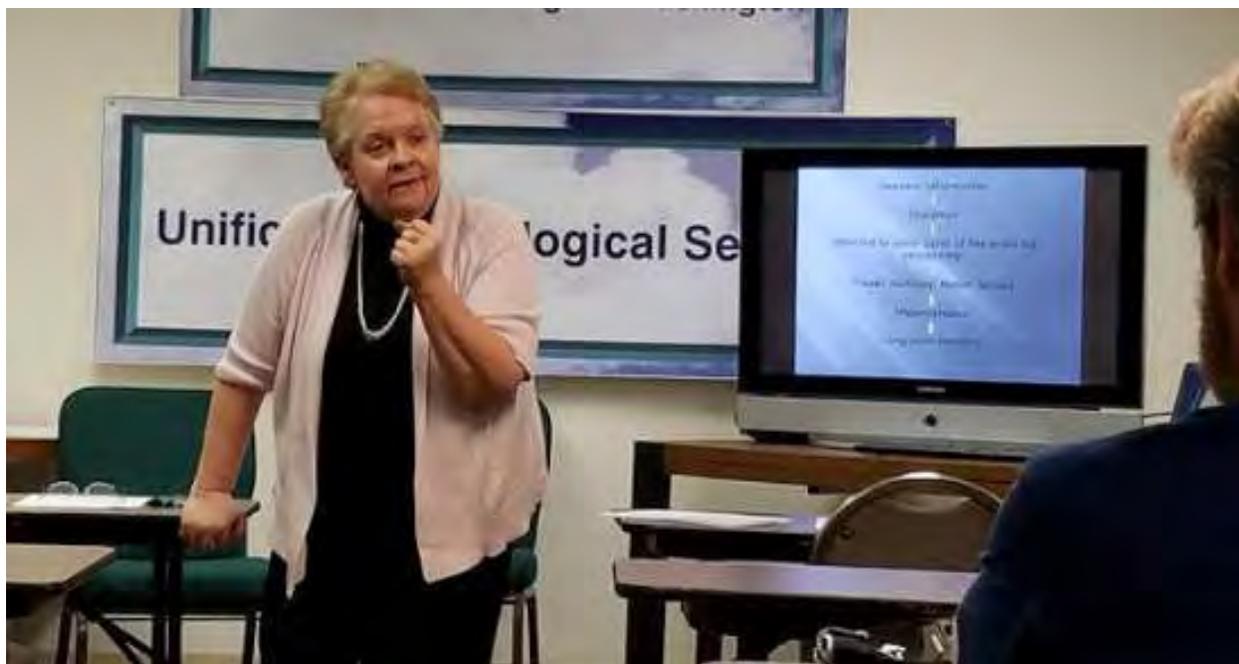
Not one to shy away from responsibility, or controversy, Dr. Winings has already drafted a working title for her conference theme: Dismantling Whiteness: Creating Brave Spaces Through Religious Education. She will then present it, together with the Call for Papers, to the Board at its meeting in November for their formal approval.

"Brave spaces is a new term used in social justice work," said Dr. Winings. "It used to be 'safe spaces,' but this is a step beyond. It is empowering people to be brave enough and courageous enough not to just be in a safe space and protected, but now to make a contribution, to change something that is abusive or wrong. A place for people to do something, to act, to contribute positively."

In today's highly charged world where so much is centered around ethnicity, culture and religious difference, and where words and phrases can easily be misconstrued, misunderstood or received in an

offensive manner, Dr. Winings is acutely aware of her topic's delicate nature and the controversy it could engender.

"I didn't want to use the title of 'racism'," said Dr. Winings, 'whiteness' is the bigger issue right now. If I talk about 'racism' then I get caught in the binary of black/white relations, and many groups and ethnicities are discriminated against.

"You have the Asian arena, you have the First Peoples or Native Americans, you have Latinos, Latinas. So, that's why now in the field of social justice everyone is talking about 'whiteness' and how to dismantle that.

"It can be confrontational, that topic, but I'm getting a lot of encouragement that we're going to be bold enough to take on that issue."

Aware that the topic is something which is often in the news here in the U.S., and mostly from a "black-white" perspective, Dr. Winings wanted to make sure the focus wasn't too narrow for the international members, who have become more prevalent at REA conferences in recent years.

"The theme of the conference will draw or attract people or not," said Dr. Winings. "We've had a strong international participation the last couple of years; Europe, Africa, from all over, and the Europeans are dealing with the immigration issue as well. That's an issue of whiteness, also.

"Certainly it is a global issue, and I wanted to make sure of that before I addressed it. I wanted to make sure there was enough interest and to make sure it was relevant for them."