

For Immediate Release: November 30, 2022

VST ANNOUNCES 2023 HONORARY DOCTORATE RECIPIENT **GENERAL SECRETARY OF THE UNITED CHURCH OF CANADA RECOGNIZED**

VANCOUVER, BC, November 30, 2022. The Board of Governors of the **Vancouver School of Theology** is very pleased to announce that the **Rev. Michael Blair** has been selected as 2023 Honorary Doctor of Divinity Degree recipient.

This Honorary Doctor of Divinity (HDD) is awarded to individuals who exemplify the values of VST, a leading internationally recognized theological school known for its innovation and global leadership. VST's HDD recipients have made significant contributions through the integration of theology and practice of ministry in one or more of: theological scholarship, ecumenical dialogue, the life and ministry of the Christian community, and interdisciplinary scholarship involving theology with other fields.

The Rev. Michael Blair joins a prestigious group of HDD recipients, including Dr. Rupert Lang, Dr. Santa Ono, Dr. Trevor Ferguson, Dr. Marie Wilson, Rev. Dr. Chris Ferguson, The Rev. Dr. Lois Wilson C.C., OOnt., Archbishop Desmond Tutu, and a total of fifty-nine (59) esteemed leaders since the award was established in 1981.

About the Rev. Michael Blair

Rev. Michael Blair serves the General Council of The United Church of Canada as the General Secretary, a role he began in November, 2020. He is the first person of African descent to serve this role in the United Church. In his time at the General Council Office, he has served in a number of capacities, including as Executive Minister for Ethnic Ministry and Executive Minister, Church in Mission.



Before joining the General Council staff, Michael served as the Executive Director of the Toronto Christian Resource Center (CRC) in Regent Park, Toronto. Michael previously served as a congregational minister of a number of Baptist churches in Toronto and St. Catharine's, Ontario; a staff member with InterVarsity Christian Fellowship at the University of Toronto, and as a community chaplain with the Ontario Multifaith Council's Reintegration Program.

Michael serves as Chair for the Mission from the Margins working group of the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism. In 2021, Michael delivered the Gandier Lecture at Emmanuel College, on the theme of Becoming the Beloved Community. He also recently contributed the Afterword to For the Sake of the Common Good, a collection of essays in honour of Lois Wilson, one of his mentors.

Born in Jamaica, Michael is a graduate of Ontario Bible College (Tyndale), University of Waterloo and Wycliffe College, Toronto School of Theology, University of Toronto. He is the father of two adult sons. Michael enjoys photography in his spare time.

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At a time when the predominantly settler church which is The United Church of Canada decided to seriously address issues of its colonial history and lack of racial diversity, God raised up Michael Blair to provide leadership in a “thoughtful, engaged, and generous” manner. Michael’s accomplishments are hard to separate from his own personal qualities. His engagement with church, society and the world are obvious through his resume. He has done so, though, in a “thoughtful” and “generous” manner. He is known as a thinker, one who listens well and reflects deeply in a prayerful manner. His generous theology allows him to work with many others of various views, honouring other people and traditions. He combines the strengths of Baptist personal faith in Jesus, liberal openness to the modern world, commitment to the church as the Body of Christ, and theological rigor.

The Rev. Dr. G. D. “Doug” Goodwin

Michael has a deep sense of God’s call to justice for the marginalized, honed by many years of work and personal experience. Michael [was] one of the most effective executive directors of the United Church supported Christian Resource Centre in Toronto. Its ministry is to those on the margins, offering support and housing as well as being a major player in Regent Park’s groundbreaking redevelopment.

At the General Council office, where he was the Executive Minister of the Church in Mission Unit, he moved seamlessly into the international work of the church, representing it at the World Council of Churches and through friendships and professional relationships set the foundation for the United Church’s Full Communion Agreement with the United Church of Christ in the United States . . . He also has an open and inquiring mind, which, combined with his deep prayer life, makes his decisions well-crafted and thorough. This speaks to a disciplined approach and a desire for excellence in everything he does.

Catherine Rodd

*VST is delighted to award the Doctorate of Divinity, *honoris causa*, to the Rev. Michael Blair. His commitments to the mission of the church, inclusivity, diversity, theological education and the global church are clear and inspiring. He is a thoughtful, engaged and generous Christian leader. We are so glad that Michael has agreed to be the 2023 convocation speaker.*

Richard Topping
President and Vice-Chancellor

About VST

VST’s core mandate is to educate and form thoughtful, engaged and generous Christian leaders for the church in the 21st century. Among theological schools, VST is viewed as a change agent and an innovator for the church. As an affiliated college of the University of British Columbia, VST is now ranked in the top 50 schools globally and in the top 10 of most improved theological schools. In 2020 VST was identified by *In Trust* Magazine as instituting bold transformative change for the renewal of theological education. In 2022, VST was the recipient of a prestigious

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Pathways for Tomorrow grant from the Lilly Endowment to help redefine theological field education. VST is accredited by the Government of British Columbia, and in North America by ATS (Association of Theological Schools).

The Vancouver School of Theology welcomes students from many Christian communions, other faith traditions and Indigenous communities, while celebrating its core relationships with the Anglican Church of Canada, Presbyterian Church in Canada, and United Church of Canada. The Indigenous Studies Program at VST is central to the school's identity and commitments. The Vancouver School of Theology celebrated its 50th Anniversary (2021) as a leader in theological education.

The Vancouver School of Theology acknowledges that the land on which they are located is the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territory of the xwməθkwəyəm (Musqueam) People.

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