

Dr. Munjed M. Murad Installed as Johnson-Fry Endowed Chair in World Religions and Intercultural Studies

Dr. Murad also directs United's new Eco-Justice Program

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formally installed Dr. Munjed M. Murad on February 9th as the inaugural holder of the Johnson-Fry Endowed

Chair in World Religions and Intercultural Studies. The endowed professorship was established to support United's progressive values in training future leaders to minister in a multi-faith and multi-cultural world. Dr. Murad also makes institutional history as United's first full-time Muslim scholar and faculty member and program director for the school's new Eco-Justice concentration.



Dr. Murad is already strengthening United's profile in a world that beckons respect for the lived religion of others and envisions intercultural competence."

President Molly T. Marshall

For more than a decade, Dr. Murad has been a stalwart and humble laborer in the fight to preserve and respect the natural world. The Harvard Divinity School doctoral graduate has written and presented widely on the question of environmentalism within an Islamic context and has called for "a return to God through sacred tradition" and "the sincere commitment of religious authorities to environmental solutions."

Dr. Murad also has spent many years teaching courses on world religions. His doctoral dissertation, "A Tale of Two Trees: Unveiling the Sacred Life of Nature in Islamic and Christian Traditions," explores traditions surrounding two trees: the Sahabi tree in Islam and the tree that became the cross in Christianity, both of which, he says, "were significant gateways to the life of nature." Dr. Murad's foundational work offers new insight into a thread of ecological interconnectedness between the two religious traditions.



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Education for Transformation

The Johnson-Fry Endowed Chair will support Dr. Murad as he works to enlighten United students about the multitude of the world's faith traditions. "United," notes Dr. Murad, "is a seminary that's interested in addressing the whole of the human being." Seminaries like United, he explains, are uniquely equipped to help students transform not only in spiritual knowledge, but also with an awakened cognizance about themselves and the world in which we all live.



Dr. Munjed M. Murad

As Rev. Andrea Johnson ('17), whose family made possible Dr. Murad's endowed professorship, states, "We need all our religious leaders to be deeply responsive to the realities of religious and spiritual diversity. This chair will be instrumental in supporting United's values and relevance for future leaders. I was transformed by the education I received at United and am passionate about supporting its future."

"What is also inviting about teaching at United," Dr. Murad continues, "is that its model allows for teaching and learning about other traditions while being rooted in one's own. The transparency in religious affiliation among United's faculty, staff, and students facilitates an ambience in which one can easily be one's self."

Born in the Commonwealth of Virginia, but raised in Amman, Jordan, Dr. Murad returned to the United States for his post-high school education. After earning a degree in international business at George Washington University, he undertook graduate studies—in religion and ecology, as well as business and the environment—at Yale School of the Environment where he earned a masters in environmental management.

Speaking of United's Eco-Justice Program, Dr. Murad shares, "I hope that this program can bring the resources of religious worlds to light, for the sake of the natural world that we all share." Murad successfully defended his Doctor of Theology dissertation at Harvard Divinity School in 2022.

"I am delighted and excited to have Dr. Murad as one of our core faculty," notes United Dean Kyle Roberts. "His expertise in world religions, combined with his knowledge of and passion for environmental ethics and eco-theology, makes him the perfect fit for this newly endowed

chair.”

“We are already seeing an increased interest in potential partnerships, student interest in our programs, and a general excitement for the impact that Dr. Murad will have in this new position. By installing our first full-time Muslim faculty member, United further demonstrates our commitment to interreligious engagement and partnering across religious lines at this strategic time in our society.”

United President Molly T. Marshall states, “Focusing on World Religions and Intercultural Studies, Dr. Murad is already strengthening United’s profile in a world that beckons respect for the lived religion of others and envisions intercultural competence.”

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About United

Founded as a welcoming, ecumenical school that embraces all denominations and faith traditions, United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities has been on the cutting edge of progressive theological thought leadership since it was established in 1962. Today, United continues to train leaders who dismantle systems of oppression, explore multi-faith spirituality, and push the boundaries of knowledge.

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