

Christian Theological Seminary Announces 2026 Commencement and Baccalaureate Speakers

Commencement Services and Baccalaureate Speakers Announced, Honoring Community Leader Ellen Annala

INDIANAPOLIS, IN, UNITED STATES, April 29, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- With the conclusion of the spring semester approaching, [Christian Theological Seminary](#) (CTS) has announced distinguished speakers and honorees for its 2026 Commencement and Baccalaureate celebrations—events that recognize both the achievements of graduates and the Seminary's ongoing commitment to justice, compassion, and community impact.

"Every year, our desire is to invite speakers who will inspire the assembled community to do great things and to participate in God's transforming work in the world," said David Mellott, President of CTS. "My hope is that those who attend will leave braver than ever to lift up the inherent dignity of every human being."

Commencement Speaker: Emma Vosicky

The 2026 Commencement address will be delivered by Emma Vosicky, JD, MAT, CEO of Gender Nexus, an Indianapolis-based nonprofit serving gender-diverse individuals and their families. Vosicky, a nationally recognized advocate and public speaker, has dedicated her career to supporting LGBTQ+ communities through education, care coordination, and community-building initiatives.

Gender Nexus works to empower individuals to live healthy, authentic, and joyful lives by addressing systemic barriers in healthcare, education, and legal systems. Vosicky will receive an Honorary Doctor of Humane Letters in recognition of her leadership and advocacy. "Emma embodies the values of CTS through her daily work," Mellott said. "She is saving lives and strengthening communities through compassion, courage, and action."



Ellen Annala: President's Award of Excellence

Baccalaureate Speaker: Rev. Dr. Daisy L. Machado

The Baccalaureate Homily will be delivered by Daisy L. Machado, PhD, Executive Director of the Hispanic Summer Program and Professor Emerita of American Religious History at Union Theological Seminary. A pioneering theologian, Machado was the first U.S. Latina ordained in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).

Her scholarship has reshaped theological education by centering lived experience—what Latina theologians describe as *lo cotidiano*—as a vital source of theological reflection. She will receive an Honorary Doctor of Divinity. “Dr. Machado’s work reminds us that theology is lived, embodied, and shaped by community,” said Francisco Lozada Jr., Vice President of Academic Affairs and Dean of the Faculty. “Her influence continues to shape students, institutions, and the broader theological landscape.”

Presidential Award of Excellence: Ellen Annala

CTS will honor Ellen Annala with the 2026 Presidential Award of Excellence, recognizing her extraordinary leadership and longstanding commitment to both the Seminary and the Indianapolis community.

Annala’s career spans more than four decades in the nonprofit and public sectors, including 15 years as President and CEO of the United Way of Central Indiana. Prior to her tenure at United Way, she served as executive director of Big Sisters and held leadership roles in neighborhood development and civil rights initiatives. She first came to Indianapolis in 1971 to work in youth ministry for the Division of Homeland Ministries of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), grounding her lifelong commitment to faith-informed community engagement.

Known for her collaborative leadership and strategic insight, Annala has extensive experience working across urban and rural contexts to address complex community challenges. She currently consults with nonprofit and philanthropic organizations across central Indiana, advising on evaluation, board governance, and strategic planning. Annala’s civic leadership includes service on numerous nonprofit and community boards, including the TechPoint Foundation, Greater Indianapolis Progress Committee (GIPC), Pleasant Run Children’s Home, United Northeast Community Development Corporation, and the Economic Club of Indiana. She co-chaired the City of Indianapolis Bicentennial Plan (2020) for GIPC and continues to serve on the Meadows Community Foundation board, as a trustee of her church, and on the CTS Advancement Committee.

Her relationship with CTS has been both deep and enduring. A former Chair of the Board of Trustees and now Trustee Emeritus, Annala has provided visionary leadership and steadfast support to the Seminary’s mission. Her contributions have helped shape CTS’s direction and strengthen its role in preparing leaders for ministry, justice, and community transformation. Annala holds a bachelor’s degree from Phillips University in Oklahoma and a Master of Public Affairs from Indiana University. In 2013, she was awarded an honorary Doctor of Humane Letters from the University of Indianapolis in recognition of her significant contributions to the

community. "Ellen's life and work reflect the very best of CTS's mission and values," Mellott said. "Her leadership has made a lasting impact on both this institution and the wider community."

Event Details

The CTS Commencement Ceremony will take place on Saturday, May 16 in Shelton Auditorium and is a ticketed event for graduates and invited guests.

The Baccalaureate Service will be held on Friday, May 15 at 3:00 p.m. in Sweeney Chapel. This service is open to the public and will also be live-streamed.

Stephanie Seeger
Christian Theological Seminary
sseeger@cts.edu

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