

San Francisco Theological Seminary
105 Seminary Road
San Anselmo, CA 94960
www.sfts.edu

SFTS names Jernigan 2010 Distinguished Alumna

San Anselmo, Calif., March 17 – Interim President Dr. Laird J. Stuart announced on Saturday, March 13, that the Rev. Aleida Jernigan, Co-Executive Presbyter of Cascades Presbytery, is San Francisco Theological Seminary's 2010 Distinguished Alumna. Jernigan will deliver a charge to the 2010 graduates of SFTS during the Seminary's Commencement Exercises May 22 on the SFTS San Anselmo campus.

Stuart's announcement was made in front of Jernigan's colleagues at a regular meeting of the Presbytery of the Cascades. Jernigan graduated from SFTS in 1997 with a Master of Divinity and has served the church through a variety of ministries.

"She was very surprised, delighted and honored to receive this award and she deserves this award for her faithful service to the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)," Stuart said.

Jernigan describes her current work as being "a pastor to the pastors." But with the soul of an activist and special interests in women's rights, Hispanic ministries and the ecumenical movement, Jernigan has also become a valuable resource on many PC(USA) committees. She has recently been elected to the executive committee of the General Assembly Mission Council.

"My call to the ministry was not a straight road, but a series of opportunities to serve others in my community, my local congregation, the denomination and the Church in general," Jernigan said. "At SFTS, I had the opportunity to discern with professors and advisors how to put together learned skills and make them into gifts for the community and for God's praise."

Born in Cuba, Jernigan moved to New York City in the 1960s, living in a mixed neighborhood where the Presbyterian Church reached out to Hispanics, supported rent control and assisted the needy with their taxes.

"I visited several churches, but the Welsh pastor at the Presbyterian Church was a very warm person and invited me to come back," Jernigan said. "The rest is history. In my own family there is a sense of justice – working to improve the community. That was what intrigued me about the people of the church."

Jernigan moved with her family to San Francisco in 1965, and her top priority was finding a home church even if that meant riding a bus across town. Three years later she moved to Petaluma, where she found a home congregation at First

Presbyterian Church. There she engaged with Christian educators, who sensed her call.

"They would say 'Why don't you try seminary?'" Jernigan recalled. "Perhaps they saw things I didn't see. It is interesting to see how other people perceive you."

Before seminary, Jernigan was a stay-at-home mom, ran her own professional cleaning business, worked in banking, and was a supervisor for the upscale department store I. Magnin. She believes those experiences allow her to view theological issues throughout different lenses.

"San Francisco Theological Seminary helped me put my business experiences and theological understanding together," Jernigan said. "I learned to see how my gifts can be used for the church."

Early in Jernigan's journey toward ministry, she was told by a pastor that she had gifts of peacemaking. Considering the many committees, caucuses and cabinets she has served, Jernigan's business savvy, ability to moderate and promote dialogues, and her faith have been used by God in many ways.