

CONVOCATION & REUNIONS 2008

Alumni Honored at Gala

by Jason Peno '10 M.Div.

UNDER THE CHANDELIERS of one of New Haven's most elegant private clubs, nearly 200 alumni and other members of the YDS community feted a quartet of Divinity School graduates who, individually, have made marks in academe, reinvigorated flagging parishes, counseled Navy sailors and reframed the political debate. At the same time, Registrar Detra Mac Dougall, who retired at the end of the 2007-08 school year, was honored for her 45 years of service to YDS.

The October 14 Alumni Award Banquet, the most festive part of the 2008 Convocation and Reunions, was held at the New Haven Lawn Club, where a menu of filet mignon, seafood risotto with scallops and raspberry tiramisu lent an air of refinement to the evening just as the accomplishments of the awardees—selected by their alumni peers—brought a sense of depth.

Captain Bradford Ableson '85 M.Div., a chaplain in the U.S. Navy, was honored with the *Lux et Veritas* award, given to someone who has shown distinction in applying Jesus' teaching. "You have brought the compassion of Christ to war zones and the combat fleet, and you continue to embody the most attractive type of Christianity," said outgoing YDS Alumni Board President George Noonan '79 M.Div. by way of introduction. Ableson, a visionary chaplain who served on ships all over the world in peace and in wartime, is battling cancer, a fact that made the award all the more poignant. Ableson received a standing ovation.

In a later interview, Ableson commented that he "was both touched and honored to be selected for the award," adding that "the receipt of my award will serve mainly as an inspiration of what can be accomplished while battling cancer."

The 2008 recipient of the William Sloane Coffin '56 Award for Peace and Justice was, for the first time ever, the current pastor of a local church. Timothy Ahrens '85 M.Div. is the pastor of the First Congregational Church in Columbus, OH. The United Church of Christ clergyman played a key

role in founding We Believe Ohio, a progressive faith-based organization that includes over 400 pastors, rabbis, imams and other religious leaders.



Dean Harold Attridge, Cheryl Cornish '83 M.Div., V. Bruce Rigdon '62 B.D., Bradford Ableson '85 M.Div., Timothy Ahrens '85 M.Div.

"Carrying the name of William Sloane Coffin with me for the remainder of my days will be an inspiration and a motivation to keep fighting for social justice," said Ahrens after the gala banquet.

Cheryl Cornish '83 M.Div., recipient of the Distinction in Congregational Ministry award, was honored for her exceptional transformation of First Congregational (UCC) in Memphis from a 20-person congregation into a thriving community of 200 that advocates for social justice in the greater Memphis area. "Undaunted by the conservatism all around

you, you led the church to watershed decisions," said Allie Perry '80 M.Div. in her introduction.

V. Bruce Rigdon '62 B.D. received the Alumni Award for Distinction in Theological Education. An ecumenical leader and social activist who once headed the Ecumenical Theological Seminary in Detroit, Rigdon has had a wide-ranging influence on people and institutions around the globe over a career spanning half a century. Thomas Duggan '59 B.D. described Rigdon as "a visionary reformer of theological education" and "a bold leader of political engagement by mainline Protestant churches."

When called to the podium to be honored, a tearful Detra Mac Dougall told the audience, "Although I did not attend YDS, I am very much a product of this school." Feting Mac Dougall, Kate Latimer '85 M.Div. said, "You have been the quiet, stubborn, warm, gifted heart at the center of YDS."

Mac Dougall has been succeeded in the registrar's position by longtime Student Book Supply Manager Lisa Huck '88 M.Div.

For complete 2008 Convocation and Reunions coverage, point your browser to: www.yale.edu/divinity/convocation/2008