New MDiv Curriculum Looks To The Future Of Theological Education

Over 200 years ago, theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher framed the basics of a theological curriculum: divided by disciplines, learned in theory and then applied to practice post-degree. Most accredited theological schools, including Phillips Theological Seminary, have operated with some version of Schleiermacher’s curricular frame for most of our history. Until now.

The PTS faculty in Fall 2012, while considering a curriculum revision for the Master of Divinity program decided to make radical, “to the roots,” changes.

What distinguishes the new curriculum, which will be offered beginning in the Fall 2013, from either the former program—and, in several ways, from other Protestant seminaries?

PORTAL COURSES: Students enter the program through four doorways, or “portal” courses. Interpretation. Context. Conversation. Vocation. These courses are gateways into the rest of the curriculum—indeed (and to shift the metaphor), the courses are foundations for a lifetime of theological education.

These portal courses are team taught with at least two disciplines represented in the class at all times. The faculty will model how to talk back and forth across disciplines. The complexity of religious life and change today requires well-developed collaborative skills. The team approach in the portal courses will also model a collaborative approach to ministry.

“At PTS, we want to participate in the renewal of how Christianity is practiced, and what form the church takes.”

- Gary Peluso-Verdend, PTS President

IMMERSION EXPERIENCE: The students will be required to include an immersion experience in their courses. Sometimes we speak of the difference between head knowledge and embodied learning. An immersion course provides a wonderful context for embodied learning.

LAUNCH COURSE: At the end of the students’ course of study at PTS, they will take a final integrative course, the “launch course.” Taught by a member of the PTS faculty and a ministry practitioner. The students are concluding their time at PTS and are re-entering the world as a rare species, the formally theologically educated! The students will have a hand in personalizing the syllabus for this course, depending on their anticipated post-graduation ministry.

Why does all this matter? Because the way Christianity is being practiced in North America is changing radically. While there are many withering congregations and practices, there are also signs of rebirth and renewal. At PTS, we want to participate in the renewal of how Christianity is practiced, and what form the church takes. We intend the new MDiv curriculum to be a means to that very audacious end.
New IU Program Contributes To Public Good In Tulsa

Below is an interview about the Interreligious Understanding Program with Dr. Don Pittman who retires as Dean and the William Tabbernee Professor of the History of Religions on July 31. Dr. Pittman helped to create and envision the IU program. Dr. Pittman has served the PTS community for 13 years as Dean and we are grateful for his service to PTS, Tulsa, and the greater church.

How did the first year of the program go?

If the seminary’s primary goal in initiating this new educational program for adult learners was to follow in the compassionate way of Jesus by seeking (1) to broaden interreligious understandings and (2) to enrich relationships between people in our community committed to diverse religious visions of the world, then, from my perspective, we had a good first year. Not only were we pleased with the number of participants who enrolled in the first semester, the fall of 2012, the enrollment significantly increased in the spring of 2013.

Faculty members and students represented contemporary Native American, Christian, Islamic, and Buddhist, and Jewish traditions, although a number of those enrolled were not identified with any particular religious heritage. While most enrolled as non-degree, non-credit “Certificate” students, a number of them took the four courses in the first year for credit. The seminary’s expanded mission and identity statements, and its aim to contribute to the goal of greater interreligious dialogue and cooperation to advance the public good, were widely recognized and appreciated.

What are people getting from the program?

For many of our adult learners, the program is providing for the first time opportunities to explore the religious traditions of global neighbors, near and far—as these are interpreted by knowledgeable practitioners who represent those traditions in Tulsa and the surrounding region. Moreover, the course is helping to prepare them to deal with the difficult issues of religious-cultural similarity and difference, as they attempt to share with their neighbors important aspects of the ethos and worldview of their own religious community. Progress toward these interrelated challenges of coming to know the “other” and to share openly and with integrity “oneself” will depend on how well we are able to practice imaginative listening and empathetic participation in the circumstances of all. It will depend on whether or not, on the basis of the knowledge so-gained, we can together become agents of a healing, reconciling justice.

Why is religious understanding so important to you?

Having grown up near a major university campus with a significant group of international students always in residence, I have been interested in religious and cultural diversity since a very young age. Now, as an historian of religions who has lived and taught in East Asia and traveled widely, I have seen both how difficult establishing cross-cultural communication and promoting interreligious understanding can be and yet how critically important these pursuits are in our dangerous and divided world.

Today, every newscast reinforces the fact of our global interdependence. And every newspaper and magazine affirms that in order to live interdependently, we have to engage in interreligious dialogue. And in order for our dialogues to be meaningful, we first have to get to know one another. It is toward that end that the seminary’s “Interreligious Understanding Program” is directed. We want to listen respectfully to our neighbors when they speak to us about the religious experiences which inform and shape their most comprehensive beliefs about the universe and their place within it, as with sensitivity, and when invited, we share aspects of our own.

FALL 2013 OFFERINGS

“Contemporary Hindu Traditions,”
Dr. N. C. Mathur
(India Association of Greater Tulsa)
8/29, 9/5, 9/12, 9/19, 9/26, 10/3

“Contemporary Jewish Traditions,”
Rabbi Charles P. Sherman
(Rabbi Emeritus of Temple Israel)
10/24, 11/7, 11/14, 11/21, 12/5, 12/12
New Director Of Recruitment

Hello, I’m Josh Linton, the new Director of Recruitment at PTS. I’m coming into this job with many years of pulpit and youth ministry experience in local congregations of the Church of Christ and also as a graduate of PTS (and also current student, again). I enrolled during the last two years of my ministry career and found this place to be an incredible space for exploration and conversation concerning the direction and future of religious expression. I believe that this important conversation has been fully engaged by PTS and I’m happy to be a part of it. I aim to bring my experience into discussions with prospective students who may feel uncertain concerning the future of faith and religion. PTS, I’m convinced, exceeds expectations for a seminary in preparing students to step into that future. I’m excited to help take those first few steps.
Contact me at 918-270-6463 or josh.linton@ptstulsa.edu if you or someone you know is interested in learning more about PTS.

PTS At General Assembly — July 13-17

PTS is gearing up for the 2013 General Assembly of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Orlando, FL. On Monday, July 15, 11:30 a.m.-1:00 p.m., PTS will host a luncheon for PTS Alums and friends. Tickets must be purchased online. Throughout the assembly, students, faculty and staff will be busy in many ways:

• **Gary Peluso-Verdend, President** will present the report for the Council on Theological Education to the Assembly, as chair.
• **John Imbler** is teaching a DOC History & Polity class.
• **Belva Brown Jordan** will MC for the NBA Luncheon as the NBA board president.

• **Anna Hubbard & Dan Adolphson**, current students, will represent PTS in the “Considering Seminary” workshop.
• **Don Pittman** will be receiving the Alumnus of the Year award from the Disciples Divinity House at Vanderbilt University.

PTS Awards Degrees At Commencement

Commencement exercises were held on Saturday, May 15, at the First Christian Church of Tulsa. Retiring dean, Don Pittman, William Tabbernee Professor of the History of Religions, gave the faculty reflection. Mark Cloninger and Mary Ann Morris, PTS graduating seniors, gave the student reflection.

PTS awarded 39 degrees and certificates in six programs: Graduate Diploma in General Theological Studies (1), Certificate in Graduate Theological Studies (4), Master of Arts in Ministry and Culture (3), Master of Theological Studies (1), Master of Divinity (24), and Doctor of Ministry (6). An Honorary Doctorate of Divinity was awarded to Rabbi Charles Sherman in absentia and presented to him at Temple Israel during a Sabbath service in June.
The Rev. Dr. Kathleen McCallie has been named as Assistant Professor of Ministerial Leadership and Director of the Doctor of Ministry Program, effective July 1, 2013.

McCallie holds a Bachelor of Arts and Master of Arts in Philosophy from Oklahoma State University; a Master of Divinity from Perkins School of Theology at Southern Methodist University and a Doctor of Philosophy in Political Science from the University of Oklahoma. Her special interests include international relations and economic justice.

McCallie, originally ordained in The United Methodist Church, is currently an ordained United Church of Christ pastor, and has served many congregations. She is the founding pastor of the Church of the Open Arms, a UCC congregation in Oklahoma City, where she has served in full-time ministry since 1997.

McCallie has served as the chair of the Oklahoma Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty and the Clergy Coalition for Human Rights. Her favorite volunteer work has been with the Peace House and RAIN, both of Oklahoma City. She was a member of the first RAIN team in Oklahoma and has led both medical and construction mission teams to Central America (particularly Nicaragua) each of the past seven (7) years.

McCallie is a proud mother of three (3) children and an avid gardener. She enjoys reading feminist novels and listening to Mozart. McCallie replaces Dr. Nancy Pittman, who was named the new Dean of PTS earlier this year.

Student Scholarships

The PTS Phonathon occurs every year in the fall and helps raise money to support students scholarships. Almost 95% of the students at PTS receive some sort of student assistance through your generous donations. Each year we turn the board room into a call center and get together to make connections with alums and donors and share the vital conversations that are occurring at PTS. We decorate the board room, fill it with phones and students, and give you a call. We are calling to raise money for student scholarships, but want to hear from you! We want to know why you care about PTS, your experience at PTS, and any prayer requests you may have. We want to get to know you, our supporters, and thank you for giving to PTS. The PTS Phonathon will be taking place from September 17 - 26 this year. Thank you for supporting theological education at PTS.

New Planned Giving E-Tool Available

Have you tried our new PTS Planned Giving interactive tool? Go to www.ptstulsa.edu and visit the Stewardship section; Planned and Deferred Giving. Follow the links to Planning Tools. **Gift Illustrator** lets you enter an age, an amount you might donate and then calculates your potential tax benefit, annual benefit, and benefit to a charity you might specify. You can adjust any of the figures to see how the various planned gifts work. The **Compare Gifts** section describes what different gift options are available and what the benefit would be to you.
Dr. Nancy Pittman Named Next Dean

The Rev. Dr. Nancy Claire Pittman is the new dean at PTS. She succeeds Dr. Don A. Pittman, who will retire on July 31, 2013.

“We conducted a national search. The consulting committee met some very promising candidates,” said Peluso-Verdend. “But, when we considered Nancy’s significant contributions to the seminary in revising two degree programs, her scholarship, her service to the church and the community, her institutional citizenship, and her reputation as a preacher and workshop leader among the Disciples of Christ, we concluded that Nancy was the right candidate for this time.” Peluso-Verdend went on to say, “Years ago, deans were sort of honorary positions for senior scholars, whose basic work was to retain and attract faculty. Today, deans are accreditation professionals, academic leaders, innovators, and bridge-builders between faculty, students, administration, boards, and external partners. Being a dean is a huge job. I am delighted that Nancy has said yes.”

PTS is in the midst of implementing a strategic plan that includes new degree and non-degree programs and an enhanced effort to connect with new communities, both locally throughout Tulsa and nationally.

Dr. Nancy Pittman was Director of the Doctor of Ministry Program. Her experience in ministry has included both seminary teaching and congregational leadership. She has served as Assistant Professor of New Testament Studies at Tainan Theological College and Seminary, Tainan, Taiwan—as a missionary appointed by the Common Global Ministries of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and the United Church of Christ—and, among other pastoral positions, most recently as Minister of First Christian Church, Tahlequah, Oklahoma. Although she joined the regular full-time faculty July 2005 in the Practice of Ministry, she has served since 2001 as an adjunct member of the faculty in New Testament and Preaching, offering courses such as The Gospel of John, Interpreting the Book of Revelation, Introduction to Preaching, and Preaching the Lectionary.

When she is not teaching, working with students in the Doctor of Ministry program, or developing new doctoral specializations with faculty colleagues, Dr. Pittman continues to research the Johannine literature of the New Testament, particularly as it relates to intersections of ordained ministry, women in pastoral leadership and images of Christian community. She is currently working on a book project at these intersections and contemporary ecclesiology.

Dr. Pittman is an ordained minister in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and an accredited spiritual director. She is a member of the Society of Biblical Literature, Spiritual Directors International, the Association for Doctor of Ministry Education, and a founding member of the Forrest-Moss Institute.

Dr. Pittman is a graduate of Texas Christian University, Brite Divinity School, and Southern Methodist University.

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*Tributes reflect gifts given from 01/01/2012 to 12/31/2012.
PTS Faculty & Staff Updates

- **Ellen Blue** was promoted from associate professor to the rank of professor. Ellen is the Mouzon Biggs, Jr. Professor of the History of Christianity and United Methodist Studies.
- **Belva Brown Jordan** will be leaving the PTS community on July 31st to become the assistant dean at Claremont School of Theology and assistant provost at Claremont Lincoln University in Claremont, CA.
- **Don Pittman** will be retiring as Dean on July 31st and received the honor of faculty emeritus status as the William Tabbernee Professor of the History of Religions Emeritus.
- **Bill Sebeni** joined the PTS staff in April as the Maintenance Manager.
- **Richard Ward** was promoted from associate professor to the rank of professor. Richard is the Fred B. Craddock Professor of Homiletics and Worship.

Phillips Theological Seminary offers theological education dedicated to learning the way of Jesus in order to cultivate vital communities, vital conversations, and the public good.