

More than Non-discriminating: Nurturing Inclusive Teaching and Learning Environments

by Emily K. Rodgers

The mission statement of Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary says that as a seminary of the Reformed tradition, LPTS strives to “respect the global and cross-cultural character of Christian ministry in the world...” Throughout its history, LPTS has been committed to crossing cultural lines. It was the only Presbyterian seminary to be supported by both the northern and southern branches of the Presbyterian Church simultaneously. In addition, until recent world events have tightened the reins on travel and resources, there has always been a strong international presence on campus, as students from South Korea, Ghana, Haiti, and other places have come to study as well.

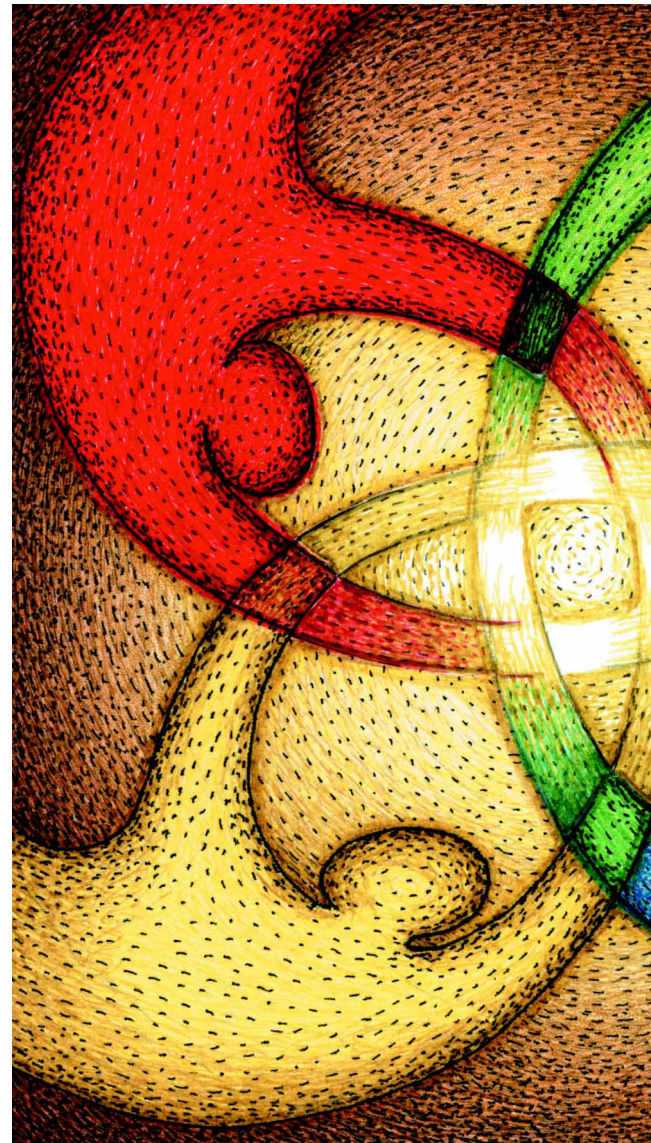
The first African American degree-seeking student, Snowden Isaiah McKinnon, was denied admission at another Seminary in 1950 when he appealed to LPTS. Because McKinnon was admitted as a resident, LPTS breached the Kentucky Day Law, although no legal response was made.” (Rick Nutt, 2002, p. 156) However, it wasn’t until 1986 that Virgil Cruz came to serve as the first African American full-time professor.

Over the last decade, LPTS has paid increasing attention to cultivating racial and ethnic diversity on campus. During the late 1990s a specific committee comprised of faculty and students was established to explore questions and plan community events around racial and ethnic diversity. Also during that

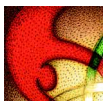
time, LPTS has hired three African-American faculty and established covenants with three traditionally African American denominations. The African Methodist Episcopal, African Methodist Episcopal Zion, and Christian Methodist Episcopal Churches now consider LPTS an approved seminary for their ministers.

The visible complexion of the campus is in the process of changing to reflect a healthier diversity of students and faculty. However, changing the complexion of the campus is not sufficient. Questions of respecting racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity go much deeper than the colors of our skin. Stephen Ray, associate professor of theology and philosophy, speaks of the depth to which we are shaped by the realities of race, ethnicity, and culture by using the phrase, “the total racialization of the American imagination.” He says, “There is no aspect of contemporary thinking or historical reflection that escapes this tinting.” (in forthcoming article, “Teaching for Inclusion”)

The only way to confront this reality, which is not only present in our living, but also underneath our living, is to look deep into our assumptions about who we are and



how we do theological education. To this end, LPTS has made a commitment to move from “a ‘non-discriminating’ to a ‘multicultural’ seminary.” (Ramsay, Wabash Grant proposal, p. 3) LPTS wants to be known *not* as a seminary that tolerates and includes voices, experiences, and faces that represent diverse cultures and races; but rather, as a *center* of theological education that values and embraces that diversity of perspectives and recognizes such diversity as essential if we are to faithfully reflect the image of God at work in the world.



GOD'S TIMING

God's hand, at work in people's lives, is often seen through timing. There is an old phrase, "It will happen in God's timing." We can best see God's timing when we look back over a sequence of events. Nancy Ramsay, Harrison Ray Anderson Professor of Pastoral Theology, has always been committed to making LPTS a place that values and embraces diversity. When the Marriage and Family Therapy Program (MFT) was established at LPTS in 1993, Ramsay was given the opportunity to develop a course now entitled, "Gender, Race, and Class in

Pastoral Practice." Teaching, which some say is the best way of learning, afforded her the time and occasion to read widely in the literature and gain new perspectives around the issues of racial identity. As she prepared for the classroom, she began to understand the need to redefine racism away from the operative definition of many white European Americans as a system of disadvantage. Instead, racism needs to be understood "as a system of advantage as well as disadvantage based on race. She says that it is important to include "advantage" [because] "it discloses the way privilege (unacknowledged) reproduces and sustains racism on, at least, four interlocking levels: individual, group, institutional, cultural/symbolic." As a white European teaching mostly other white Europeans at that time, she came to understand that racial identity is not only an issue for people of color, rather it is an issue for all people. That was the beginning of a quest for justice that Ramsay and the faculty of LPTS continue to forge more than a decade later.

In 1997, LPTS began an intentional process of hiring three African American professors. When Scott Williamson, Dale P. Andrews, and Stephen G. Ray Jr. were hired, the Seminary shared with them a vision for increased diversity. That vision was essential to their decision to continue their academic careers at LPTS rather than some other institution. Williamson, Robert H. Walkup Associate Professor of Theological Ethics, says that if he had thought that LPTS was not going to continue the quest for diversity beyond the appointment of one or two African-American professors, he and his colleagues would not have come. Furthermore, it was understood that the areas in

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which Williamson, Andrews, and Ray wanted to teach, such as Black Preaching and Black Theology, needed to become mainstream rather than simply sideline courses. The curriculum would have to be shaped so that students were introduced to conversation partners from a variety of races and cultures in all areas of theological education and by all professors. This vision is still in the process of being realized.



Left to right: Professors Stephen G. Ray, Jr., Scott Williamson, and Dale P. Andrews.

In 2001, Ramsay, while on leave focusing on teaching and learning in racially diverse classrooms approached Seminary Dean Dianne Reistroffer about exploring these issues of racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity at LPTS as a whole. Reistroffer was quite supportive of the idea, and together they began to look for signs that the time was right for such a proposal.

About a year later, it became clear that there was a growing

interest among several faculty members to address in a more focused, unified, and intentional way how LPTS could cultivate positive learning and teaching environments that would go beyond merely serving a diverse community. As discussions among faculty in practical theology took place, faculty from other disciplines also began to desire some specific focus on the issues of diversity. In separate conversations,

Williamson, Andrews, and Ray were exploring a proposal for a Black Studies program at LPTS. However, the faculty also realized that in order for such a program to be successful, the faculty as a whole would have to be better prepared to deal with a diversified community. While the physical doors of the Seminary were already open to historically African American denominations, the faculty realized that they simply were not

equipped to be as hospitable and open as they fully desired to be in order to nurture the diverse community they envisioned. Concerns about racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity were now percolating in all academic areas of the Seminary. With Reistroffer's support and encouragement, Ramsay agreed, on behalf of the faculty, to draft a grant proposal to the Wabash Center for Teaching and Learning in Theology and Religion.

Truly Studying "Methodist Studies"



Dean Dianne Reistroffer, who has dual affiliation with the Presbyterian Church (USA) and the United Methodist

Church, has developed a project that reconstructs the Methodist Heritage course with a Pan-Methodist emphasis. Pan Methodism represents the efforts of four Methodist denominations—one historically white (The United Methodist Church) and three historically black (The African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME); The African Methodist Episcopal Church Zion (AMEZ), and the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church (CME)—to address the racial dilemma in American Methodism and to unite for reconciliation and peace with justice.

"As a Seminary with official partnerships with all four denominations, I think we are in a unique environment to sponsor inclusive and nurturing classrooms as we deal with these difficult chapters in our Methodist Heritage," says Reistroffer.

"Typically the Methodist History and Doctrine course has reflected the commitments and the story of the United Methodist Church and its predominantly white antecedents. While official Methodist histories have devoted some attention to the sad legacy of racism and racial/institutional division in our movement, there has been little or no

treatment of the full denominational histories of the black Methodist churches in the United States," continues Reistroffer, who intends to employ a parallel reader with four accounts given of select events and persons in American Methodism. Students will have an opportunity to read ("hear") and interpret four different denominational accounts of such events as:



Dianne Reistroffer

- The Christmas Conference of 1784
- John Wesley's "Thoughts on Slavery"
- The racial incidents at St. George Methodist Church in Philadelphia—1787-1794—that eventually led to the formation of the AME Church
- The formation of the AMEZ Church in NYC—1796—and the reasons behind failed negotiations between the AME and AMEZ—1820s
- The War Between the States (The Civil War) and relationships between and among these various denominations
- Jim Crow and the response of the Churches

▶ For more information about the Pan Methodist movement visit the Methodists United for Peace with Justice website at <www.mupwj.org>.



THE GRANT

The grant, entitled "Nurturing a Racially and Culturally Inclusive Teaching and Learning Environment," was recognized by the Wabash Center, which awarded LPTS \$58,585 to implement the endeavor.

The grant is providing the faculty at LPTS the opportunity to think together about four overarching areas of racial and cultural diversity: "what we teach, whom we teach, how we teach, and the effect of our own racial identities." (Marchesani and Adams, 1992)

The grant provides time and resources for the faculty, as a whole and as individuals, to address racial and cultural diversity in their pedagogical practices and skills, the learning environment of their classrooms, and within their own personal experiences and life-informing assumptions. It is important to address cultural as well as racial diversity because even groups of people that look similar in terms of physical features represent a whole spectrum of cultural identities. This includes not only persons of African and European descent, but also Latino and Asian Americans.



Kathryn Johnson

Specifically, the grant provides stipends to faculty to undertake projects that are designed to help them become more effective teachers in racially and culturally diverse classrooms. Thirteen

faculty members are working with Dr. Matthew Oullette from the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, who is an expert in pedagogy and diversity. Faculty members have designed projects covering every area of theological study.

One project designed by faculty members Kathryn Johnson, Paul Tudor Jones Professor of Historical Theology, Ray, Associate Professor Theology and Philosophy, and Williamson, concerns the required introduction course, the nine-hour, year-long "Christian Historical and Theological Studies," known by and for its acronym, CHATS. CHATS is a team-taught, area-integrated course that introduces students to Christian theological reflection, both historical and contemporary, and to some of the major movements and institutions in the life of the church. The two primary goals that the team has for revising CHATS are: first, "to expand the sense of "ownership" of Christian tradition among all our students" and, second, "to seek to include voices from African American (and others often marginalized) experience not only as critics of dominant traditions but as theologians of constructive genius." Their hope is to introduce students to a more multicultural set of theological conversation partners, all of whom are essential, not peripheral, to our theological heritage. CHATS will emphasize that people of all races

and cultures have an equal claim on that heritage. As the professorial team has stated, "We take as an expression of our goal the response of one of us to the question of an African American woman on first reading Augustine: 'So we were there from the beginning of the Church?'—He replied, 'What is there from the beginning is yours.'"

From the Biblical Studies area, Johanna Bos, Dora Pierce Professor of Bible and Professor of Old Testament, has developed a new course called "To Know the Heart of the Stranger—Understanding Racism and Sexism in a Biblical and Contemporary Context." Bos says the goal of the course is "to identify and analyze the connections between racism and sexism as they promote and reinforce dominant structures and practices in the religious and secular realm." The course material will include fictional works of contemporary women writers, which will help students access diverse cultures and experiences.

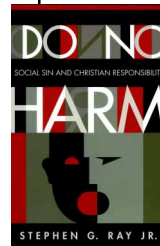
Andrews, Frank H. Caldwell Associate Professor of Homiletics and Associate Professor of Homiletics and Pastoral Theology, and Williams have also developed a project in the practical theology field of "Preaching and Ethics." They wanted to create some new whole that is greater than just the two topics that are being combined. Objectives for this course include engaging students in moral discourse around social issues and in fact encouraging leadership on those issues, to enable students to preach a Word that speaks to those issues, and to be able to work collaboratively with a congregation to do moral analysis. These two professors are particularly concerned with cultivating a diverse learning environment by being aware of differences in learning styles. Cultural, ethnic, and racial factors influence what skills

Resources for Change

If you have never challenged yourself on the issue of discrimination, the following books are recommended by LPTS faculty to change your heart...

Why Are all the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria? by Beverly Daniel Tatum

Black and White in Youth Ministry by William Myers



Do No Harm: Social Sin and Christian Responsibility by Stephen G. Ray Jr.

Soul Stories: African American Christian Education by Ann Streaty Wimberly

Stranger at the Gate: To Be Gay and Christian in America by Mel White

"Talking about Race, Learning about Racism: The Application of Racial Identity Development Theory in the Classroom," by Beverly Daniel Tatum in *Harvard Educational Review* Vol. 62

A Feminist Ethic of Risk by Sharon Welch

Sex, Race and God by Susan Thistlewaite

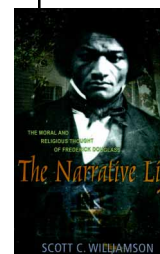


Practical Theology for Black Churches: Bridging Black Theology and African-American Folk Religion by Dale P. Andrews

Ain't I A Woman by bell hooks

Poor Banished Children of Eve—Woman as Evil in the Hebrew Bible by Gale A. Yee

The Wolf Shall Dwell with the Lamb: A Spirituality for Leadership in a Multicultural Community by Eric Law



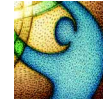
The Narrative Life: The Moral and Religious Thought of Frederick Douglass by Scott C. Williamson

students bring to the classroom. Those factors and perspectives shape where students might look for resources, what they consider important, and how different individuals might process a given social issue. Andrews and Williamson want to create a learning environment where all students feel their different skills and perspectives are equally valid and are being honored within the course evaluation.

The list of faculty projects expands beyond the academic areas of the Seminary curriculum. Interim Director of Field Education Garnett Foster is working to broaden the opportunities for placing students in a variety of field education locations where issues of race and culture are intentionally addressed and the diversity of experience is highlighted. She is then planning to provide them with resources, seminars, and forums for discussion where students can process their own and others' cultural and racial identities and how their experiences impact the practice of ministry.

Faculty who undertake projects are being guided by expert educators, like Oullette, who have been invited to the Seminary community to facilitate and nurture the faculty's quest for more faithful teaching. The faculty have committed to gather together for an intensive retreat, as well as attending four seminars so that they can "give focused attention to major issues such as the social construction of race ... tools for helping students access their own multicultural competence ... and multicultural course and curriculum models." (Morey and Kitano, 1997 and Banks, 1989)

Another major proposal of the grant is facilitated dialogue among the faculty. These group conversations, which are designed for dialogue and study, will assist faculty in thinking together about their own racial and cultural identities and experiences as well as institutional change. Faculty committed to these monthly meetings will explore how race and culture have been influential in their understanding and assumptions about teaching.



HIGH HOPES

"The Wabash Center was astonished at the level of participation that the faculty (of LPTS) has committed to," Ramsay said. Thirteen of 19 full-time faculty members have taken on a specific project and twelve elected to join in a dialogue group. The range of benefits resulting from such commitment has the potential to be exponential—individually, for the faculty as a whole, and for the Seminary. "I feel fortunate to serve on a faculty where so many people are concerned about this," she said.

Williamson also said that this fervor among the faculty was heartening, especially to a professor of African American heritage. He said that LPTS has now embarked on the kind of project that could potentially change the whole culture of an institution—its purposes, its vision, its commitments. It is not like a great meal that you enjoy once and is then gone. He is encouraged that LPTS is now asking the right questions and that there are models and procedures in place to begin answering those questions faithfully and effectively.

This process of cultivating racially and culturally diverse teaching and learning environments is not a process that will benefit LPTS alone. Instead, there is a much wider vision. The LPTS faculty is hoping to create a model that might significantly contribute to an awakening across the whole spectrum of theological education. They are planning to contribute a co-authored article to the journal, *Teaching and Learning in Theology and Religion*, and a workshop at the Association of Theological Schools (ATS) meeting. They are convinced that faculties have influence, through self-reflection, intentional dialogue, and conscientious effort, to effect great change in theological education in America.

Field Education with a Multicultural Emphasis



Garnett Foster

Interim Director of Field Education Garnett Foster proposes a multi-year project that will provide experiences in and opportunities for reflection on ministry in multicultural settings. Through such experiences, students will be prepared to lead multicultural congregations and agencies, sensitive to the uniqueness of these situations.

"It is also hoped that the students will become advocates for multicultural ministries in governing bodies and other places where the church is called to create communities of faith that reflect the diversity of the Body of Christ," says Foster.

Foster is enlisting new field education sites to encourage such experiences. She has sought the support of Kentucky Refugee Ministry, The Cathedral Heritage Foundation (interfaith as well as multicultural), the Presbyterian Community Center, CLOUT (a community organizing group that works with churches), and several churches which are multicultural or are seeking to reach out to Louisville's growing Hispanic population.

"During the 2004-05 academic year, supervisors and students will not only participate in the usual supervisory studies program but also meet together to explore issues raised by their site, to reflect theologically upon it, and to celebrate their ministries," she says.

How might we know that we have succeeded? When theological seminaries are open places where persons of diverse heritage desire to study and learn together and we finally learn that people of every race, ethnicity, and culture have an equal claim to the Christian heritage and an equal share in God's redeeming, transforming grace. ■



Rev. Emily K. Rodgers is a graduate of LPTS (MDiv '99) and is completing the ThD degree in homiletics at the Toronto School of Theology, which is part of the University of Toronto in Canada. She is also an adjunct faculty member at Knox College, where she teaches Introduction to Preaching.

GOD MADE US FOR LIFE IN COMMUNITY

God created human beings with a need for community and with freedom to enter into it by responding to their Maker with grateful obedience and to one another with love and helpfulness.

We believe that we have been created to relate to God and each other in freedom and responsibility.

We may misuse our freedom and deny our responsibility by trying to live without God and other people or against God and other people.

Yet we are still bound to them for our life and well-being, and intended for free and responsible fellowship with them.

Since every human being is made for communion with God and others, we must treat no one with contempt.

We are to respect and love all other people and ourselves as well.

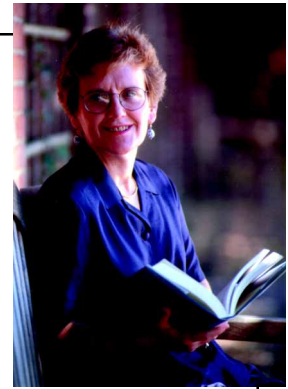
From *A Declaration of Faith*, 2:4,
Presbyterian Church (USA)

Changing What Has Always Been Required

Professors Nancy Ramsay, David Sawyer, and David Hester are revising the required course, Introduction to Practical Theology (IPT). Their aim is to examine the course—its objectives, content, and methods—for ways in which the course implicitly and explicitly reflects a monocultural perspective.

"We know that we make assumptions about congregational structures, culture, and leadership and related practices of ministry that are likely influenced by our own experiences and informed by our own cultural and structural assumptions and, therefore, largely reflect the perspectives of the dominant culture," says Hester.

"My personal hope," he continues, "is to become more aware of my own racial identity and the implicit effects it has on my style of teaching, my course planning, and my interaction with students. I want to develop that commitment in pedagogical perspectives and structures to guide my own teaching. The beginning point for that is self-examination: what it means to be a white European American male and how that identity has unconsciously shaped what I see, how I see it, and what assumptions I have and bring to my teaching about who my students are and what they see and need. The grant experience is providing that kind of opportunity for me so that I may be prepared to engage students in ways that honor who they are and what they know as they are introduced to issues of teaching and learning and theological reflection for the sake of their ministry to others."



Nancy J. Ramsay



David Sawyer

David C. Hester

