

## **Covenant for the Future: Louisville Seminary Strategic Plan 2011–2021**

The Strategic Planning Committee has developed a phased ten-year plan that will build on Louisville Seminary's institutional strengths and align with our core mission of educating men and women to participate in the redemptive ministry of Jesus Christ in an increasingly pluralistic world. The Presbyterian Church (USA) and the wider church today stand in need of ministers, counselors, teachers, and other leaders educated to read closely, think deeply, listen generously, preach prophetically, teach imaginatively, counsel wisely, and serve resourcefully and collaboratively in changing and challenging contexts. The world is in need of servant-leaders who strive to understand those with whom they disagree and to work across the lines that so often divide us. Louisville Seminary's Strategic Plan will help us to recruit students with proven gifts for grace-filled leadership and equip them with knowledge and skills they need to minister effectively in a time such as this—a time fraught with peril for the church, but also filled with great possibilities (see Matt 9:36-38).

### **Overview**

Five strategic initiatives will work in concert to attract classes of gifted students with varied backgrounds and perspectives, kindle their passion for lives of theological reflection and devoted service, and provide them with essential knowledge and competencies. The first, centerpiece initiative—called “The Covenant Scholarship Plan”—will limit enrollment to 130 students (inclusive of all master's degree programs). It will stipulate provision of a full-tuition scholarship for every student by September 2015 and, in addition, a stipend to cover living expenses for every student by September 2021. In exchange, the Covenant Scholarship Plan will require various forms of community service from all students. The other strategic initiatives include: underwriting and institutionalizing the Doors to Dialogue program; underwriting and expanding the Black Church Studies program; creating an endowed fund to support expansion and maintenance of the Seminary's Information Technology (IT) services; and renovating student housing. The timeline for the plan is three to five years, with the corresponding comprehensive campaign to be carried out over ten years.

### **The Covenant Scholarship Plan**

Capping the size of entering classes will make full funding of each student an achievable goal within a relatively short time frame. The generous financial support (along with expanded curricular offerings, outstanding faculty and student body, quality housing, and up-to-date IT capacity) will increase the Seminary's attractiveness to prospective students, thereby enriching our applicant pool and permitting us to exercise greater selectivity in a redesigned admissions process. The Covenant Scholarship Plan will thus enable us to maintain high academic standards, while also favoring candidates with demonstrated gifts and graces for ministerial service and crafting entering classes to reflect the racial, ethnic, national, and theological diversity in which our graduates will serve. In short, emphasis will be on achieving the highest quality (rather than quantity) of entering students and of classes as a whole.

In covenantal exchange for their financial aid, students will be required to engage in service throughout their time at the Seminary. The philosophy behind this requirement for reciprocal service is the biblical directive that “from everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required” (Luke 12:48). Service will take various forms, such as field education or practicum placement in a church, community service agency, or non-profit organization in Louisville, or on campus as Chapel Coordinator, President of the student body, or in some other role. Some of students' contextual education will be accompanied by a classroom component, in which they will engage in critical theological reflection on their experience. Because their service will be given in exchange for full financial support, the institutions where students serve will not need to budget additional funds to pay them; relief from this financial obligation will make possible a wider array of contextual education settings. Our students will

benefit from the greater variety of settings, and more churches, agencies, and other institutions will benefit from their service.

At its very best, education of men and women for ministry is a *transformational process*. Students' worldviews—and, indeed, their very characters—are unmade and remade as they grow in knowledge, wisdom, and discernment of God's will for their lives and for the body of Christ (see Prov 2:9-11 and Rom 12:1-8). The most effective theological education is, therefore, personal, intensive, and existentially provocative. The Covenant Scholarship Plan will enable the Seminary to provide these and other elements crucial to the wondrous alchemy of theological education: elements such as small class sizes, first-rate faculty mentoring, rich opportunities for experiential learning and reflection, and talented peer groups. Louisville Seminary will become—even more than it is already—a place where God recreates men and women as reflective and agile leaders for the Presbyterian Church (USA) and the wider church.

Moreover, these leaders will be better able to follow wherever God calls them into service. Because they will not be saddled with large debt for Seminary education that would force them to take a position (or even revert to a former career) based primarily on monetary considerations, they will be at liberty to serve smaller churches or agencies, to develop new churches, or to try other creative (but sometimes low-paying) forms of ministry. Additionally, some students who might otherwise have had to attend part-time or compromise their studies by working an excessive number of hours in addition to full-time study may be able to focus on their theological education full time.

### **Other Strategic Initiatives**

The second and third strategic initiatives emerge organically from Louisville Seminary's missional commitment to teaching critical yet faithful engagement with the Reformed tradition in an ecumenical context where other Christian traditions and world religions are studied and valued. The Doors to Dialogue (D2D) program and Black Church Studies (BCS) program already offer exceptional opportunities for students to expand their awareness and sophistication in ministering to people in a variety of cultural and religious settings, and to heighten their appreciation for the unity of the people of God across boundaries of religion, race, nation, gender, and culture. Hostility and even demonization are society's usual ways of dealing with difference, but the Seminary and its graduates will be empowered through these two programs to explore models of ministry that encourage generous listening and critical appreciation of difference, and to become heralds of the news that God's vision and embrace are larger than we can ever conceive (see Isa 55:6-9). The D2D and BCS strategic initiatives will give firm financial footing to these two programs and facilitate specific curricular and programmatic goals.

The fourth and fifth strategic initiatives address problems of infrastructure with housing and information technology. By addressing these problems aggressively, the Seminary will turn potential liabilities into significant assets: once renovated, on-campus apartments will be a selling point for prospective students, and up-to-date IT capability will augment our instructional capacity and support our resourcing of the church.

### **Benefits and Synergies**

The Strategic Plan promises to change the entire landscape around Louisville Seminary and provide an example to other theological schools. The generous financial support, rich curricular offerings, diverse faculty and student body, quality housing, and up-to-date IT capacity that the Plan envisions will work synergistically to enhance the Seminary's attractiveness to candidates with outstanding promise for ministry and strengthen its ability to educate them for a life of service to the church and to God's beloved, pluralistic world.