

Throughout 2020, Duke Divinity School sought to reckon in deeper and broader ways with systemic racism and injustice, particularly in light of the overlapping pandemics of COVID-19, economic crisis, and mental health challenges. Over the summer, three task forces working on Witness, Study, and Self-Examination began to identify the issues, challenges, and opportunities facing the school, some of which are represented in the action steps summarized below.

The early work of these task forces led us to organize our work in Fall 2020 around four interrelated sets of issues: **Classroom Culture and Mentoring, Worship and Christian Vocational Formation, Story Gathering and Listening, and Admissions, Financial Aid, and Field Education.** The groups included, at minimum, two faculty, three staff, one alumnus/a, and three students appointed by the Divinity Student Council, reflecting a range of diversity in degree program, age, race/ethnicity, and ecclesial affiliation. In addition, the Dean charged a continued working group on *Witness* to undertake pilot projects alongside congregations and other Christian NGOs in Durham and across North Carolina to help strengthen the capacities of communities to work on anti-racism issues at the intersections of other challenges.

**The Church is an institution that is vital to sustaining the work of eliminating racial injustice. While the work of justice is not exclusive to the church, the body of Christ is essential for “justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.”**

– David Emmanuel Goatley, Associate Dean for Vocational Formation & Christian Witness

Working groups engaged in candid and constructive conversations with opportunities for all members to share. A summary of the findings and recommendations from those task forces is provided below.

## INITIATIVES ALREADY UNDERWAY

In recent years, the Divinity School has made encouraging progress on which we can build, including significantly increasing the recruitment, representation and leadership of people of color in the Divinity School (students, faculty, and staff), and working on new field education opportunities and funding for African-American students. A revamping of core course curricula and the launch of a new Black Church Studies certificate is helping to diversify the options, voices, and perspectives for students exploring the work and witness of Black Church contexts. New endowments will help to support student formation through the Office of Black Church Studies as well as domestic and international field education opportunities.

We continue to look for opportunities to strengthen our partnership and racial justice work across Duke University. The new Race and the Professions Fellowship, in partnership with the Kenan Institute

for Ethics, and the Churches Promoting Recovery Project, in partnership with the Theology, Medicine, and Culture Initiative, provide new opportunities for Duke students to deepen their vocational formation and reimagine community transformation beyond campus. Building on the Racial Equity Institute Training (REI) completed by many in the Divinity School in 2018, we have worked to revamp onboarding and training for doctoral students in the Divinity School and the Graduate Program of Religion, as well as visiting scholars serving as preceptors and graders for Divinity courses.

2020 has also witnessed a significant expansion of the Divinity School's partnerships across Durham and beyond, including the Americas Initiative, a fellowship of organizations, scholars and practitioners working on peacebuilding among Latin American and Latinx communities, particularly those of Indigenous and African descent. *Singing our Songs in a Strange Land*, a partnership between the Hispanic House of Studies, Office of Black Church Studies, and Center for Reconciliation, gathered pastors and students of color for monthly conversation around biblical passages of exodus, exile and other themes to listen and learn from each other. The five-year Black Pastoral Leadership Collaboration, begun in the fall of 2019 and jointly funded by the Divinity School and the Provost's Office, is working to harness and catalogue leadership lessons and practical theology from the Black Church for the whole church.

## **NEW EFFORTS FOR 2021**

The newly relaunched Ormond Center for Thriving Congregations and Communities will serve as the home for two new initiatives working with congregations and communities of color across North Carolina, South Carolina, and Virginia. Pathways of Repair is a partnership between Ormond, the Office of Black Church Studies, and the Hispanic House of Studies to providing a range of technical assistance, including research and analysis, to inform local learning and decision-making to help overcome historical racial disparities. The Community Craft Collaborative brings together clusters of congregations of distinctive racial, ethnic, socio-economic, and denominational makeup to facilitate a two-way transfer of knowledge and capacity by leveraging the extensive theological assets, logistical capabilities, and organizational stability of a high-capacity institution while privileging the lived theology and practical insight of congregational leaders, especially those historically at the margins.

The Office of Black Church Studies, Hispanic House of Studies, and Center for Reconciliation continue to be a critical thoroughfare for the theological work of the Divinity School around racial justice. In Spring 2021, they will together host a multi-week program on Combating the Challenges of Immigration and Racialized Policing in partnership with SOJOURNERS, Matthew 25 SoCal, and the Christian Community Development Association. *Redes*, a new Spanish-language electronic resource under development by the Hispanic House of Studies, will seek to address the complex realities of Latinx and Latin American ministry practitioners. A project led by faculty member Patrick Smith will partner with the Center for Practical Bioethics to reduce racial disparities in advance care planning and end of life care.

In addition to these efforts, working groups also made recommendations in the particular areas identified in their charge. Notably, the action steps summarized below directly address opportunities, needs, and challenges emerging from the findings of the Story Listening and Gathering group, which received 62 submissions (10 current students, 6 faculty, 7 staff, 38 alumni, and 1 other).

### **Classroom Culture & Mentoring**

The Divinity School will convene a Conduct Covenant working group to clarify expectations for our life together in and out of the classroom. We will review and redesign the course evaluation process and grading practices to facilitate greater feedback and accountability. In course planning and degree program design, we will focus attention on cultivating a non-Eurocentric vision of Christianity.

In recognition of the ways positive experiences in mentoring serve as a blessing in our lives and can have an extraordinary impact on one's formation and vocational pathways, the Divinity School will foster diverse leadership for mentoring and a strong mentoring environment in Academic Advising, Field Education, Spiritual Formation, and vocation-specific plans of study. We will develop new resources and opportunities for faculty, staff, and students to celebrate and promote diversity, including participation in training programs offered by the broader university.

### **Admissions, Financial Aid, and Field Education**

Over the year ahead, we anticipate continuing work well underway in assessing and addressing gaps in financial aid awarding across various student groups and to reimagine a more equitable structure for financial aid, including Field Education. New investments will provide additional funding for students pursuing Field Education in predominantly Black and Latinx contexts, as well as scholarship resources to support students who complete the Certificate in Black Church Studies (to begin in Academic Year 2021-22). We will also seek to expand opportunities for cross-cultural placements and training for students and supervisors.

### **Worship and Christian Vocational Formation**

Worship at Duke Divinity School seeks to reflect a breadth of denominational, cultural, and racial expressions in keeping with the School's mission to train students for service in multiple Christian churches in a diverse world. We will work to increase the diversity of worship expressions in chapel and to improve the experience and formation of cultural diversity through its spiritual formation activities.

## **CONCLUSION**

As a school, we believe these efforts will help us to reckon with systemic racism and injustice while also attending to the diverse and daunting challenges of our present moment. We do all of this with continued attention to reimagining a new business model for theological education; navigating technology and changing modes of educational delivery; the uncertainties surrounding the future of the United Methodist Church (the primary affiliation of the School); and the Divinity School's firm commitment to the broader mission of Duke University. We look forward to partnering across and beyond Duke University in the work ahead.