

Vancouver School of Theology

Thoughtful, Engaged and Generous Christian Leaders

In January of 2020, VST was acknowledged by *In Trust* Magazine (for theological schools across North America) as one of six -and the only Canadian - school, that has undergone significant transformative change. "Recognizing they could no longer maintain the status quo in this radically changed environment, six theological schools took bold, drastic action."

VST is called to educate and form thoughtful, engaged and generous Christian leaders for the church and the world. Our graduates are thoughtful people, reflective about how to interact with the large issues of our time out of the deep resources of faith. We don't rush to thin relevance, but linger with scripture, tradition, scholarship and conversation with Indigenous neighbours and people of other faith traditions. Our students are engaged, willing to get involved in the world, not just wait for the next one. Our theological ethos is designed to nurture practitioners who are making a difference for God and the gospel. We are convinced that the Risen Christ is always already involved in the world (we're missional); we discern that movement and respond to grace wherever we find it – and it is surprising where it is found. Our graduates are generous, inclusive people, able to find friends with whom to collaborate for the love of God and the good of the world. We go deep with God in Christ and so wide with the world God loves.

Faculty

In the spring of 2020, The Rev. Janet Gear informed the Principal that she felt she had completed her work at the Vancouver School of Theology (See attached release). We have expressed our profound gratitude to Janet for 15 years of outstanding leadership and dedication to the school. The Rev. Dr. Steven Chambers is Acting Director of Field Education and Denominational Formation for UCC students. In addition, The Rev. Suzanne Sykes will assist in the work of UCC student formation by coordinating and leading United Church worship and retreats. VST also engaged The Rev. Dr. Brian Thorpe, The Rev. Dr. Hyuk Cho and the Rev. Dr. Carmen Lansdowne as sessional lecturers (2019-2020) and multiple UCC clergy function as site supervisors to our UCC students, for which we are grateful. Our relationship with Huron College at the University of Western Ontario is ongoing. United Church students in South Western Ontario can complete their M.Div. education at Huron and VST (online) for *testamur*. In 2020 we have our first graduate. At the end of this academic year, two of our faculty will retire. The Rev. Dr. Pat Dutcher-Walls, our Dean and Professor of Hebrew Bible, and The Rev. Dr. Bob Paul, Dean of St Andrew's Hall and Professor of Mission. We are so grateful to Pat for her many years of successful and crucial leadership at the school. Ms. Treena Duncan and The Rev. Ingrid Brown are serving on the search committee for the next Dean of VST. A search committee at St Andrew's Hall is currently at work with the goal of appointing a new Dean effective June 1, 2020.

The Rev. Janet Gear won the McGeachy Senior Scholarship (\$50,000.00). It will support Janet's sabbatical work at Cambridge (2019-2020) - the goal of which is to 'provide the United Church of Canada with discernment and direction that will inspire toward creative and faithful mission.' Principal Richard Topping attended the *Harvard Seminar for Presidential Leadership* on the strength of the transformation and rejuvenation of VST around mission and growth in November of 2019. We have just completed the manuscript for a book entitled *Theological Ten Percent* in which all the members of the faculty have contributed an essay that prepares students for theological study in their discipline. It will be published

in 2021 as part of the 50th anniversary of VST and is edited by Prof. Ashley Moyses of Oxford University with the assistance of Prof. Harry Maier and Prof. Richard Topping.

Our faculty continues to be prolific in research and publication. *Spirit of Reconciliation*, coedited by The Rev. Dr. Ray Aldred and Rabbi Dr. Laura Duhan Kaplan, was a joint project with the Canadian Race Relations Foundation and Vancouver School of Theology. Profs Harry Maier and Laura Duhan-Kaplan are editors of a series around issues of common concern for various religious traditions. The first volume, *Encountering the Other: Christian and Multi-faith Perspectives* has just been released. Prof. Jason Byassee published, *Surprised by Jesus Again: Reading the Bible with the Communion of Saints* in 2019 and coedits the series *Pastoring for Life* with Will Willimon beginning in 2020. His book on the *Trinity* is being translated into Indonesian by BPK Gunung Mulia, Jakarta in 2020. In the fall of 2020, at least 5 new books for publication in 2020 are in the works by various members of the faculty. In the fall of 2020, Rabbi Dr. Laura Duhan-Kaplan will be on sabbatical.

VST Board

Mr. Michael Francis is the insightful and cheerful chair of the board at VST. We are so blessed by his work. This year Mr. Jim Simpson, Vice-Chair, finished his terms of service on the VST board and his leadership of the Audit and Finance Committee. We are very grateful for his dedication to fiscal oversight and good management at the school. The board meets four times a year, and has representatives from the Anglican, United and Presbyterian Churches, as well as the community at large. We follow a policy governance model. Mr. Iain Black, President and CEO of Maximizer CRM, is our Chancellor. United Church members of the VST Board include The Rev. Michelle Slater and Ms. Cheryl Jourdain. We will be searching for another United Church member of the board soon.

Partnerships

VST thrives because of its partnerships. We are a theological school preparing students for Christian leadership in the Anglican, United and Presbyterian Churches and the world. In addition to these core partnerships we work with the Sauder School of Business at University of British Columbia, Huron College at University of Western Ontario, St Mark's College at UBC, and Durham University, UK, to deliver our degree programs from the BA to Ph.D. levels.

Grants/Finances/Foundation

Vancouver School of Theology has achieved a balanced budget for the fifth year in a row with growth in programs and while building a reserve for capital purchases and maintenance. This has been possible through the prudent financial management of our Vice-Principal and CFO, Ms. Shari Coltart, the excellent leadership of our Finance and Maintenance Committee and the Foundation Board, the successful fund-raising work, and increase in enrollment. The Foundation Board is chaired by the Venerable Ronald Harrison. Profs. Ken Carty and Prof. Joy Begley are United Church members of the Foundation Board.

VST has completed the expenditure of the \$400,000.00 Luce Grant for Indigenous ministry through the Teaching House That Moves. In the last year of the program eight communities with 151 participants were engaged in indigenous communities in Canada and the US. A grant from the United Church of Canada for \$225,000.00 will enable this work to continue in the Northwest communities within the Province of British Columbia. This ministry will take theological education to indigenous communities in Northern BC using indigenous methods and instructors; and is one way that we are following up on the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

In addition, significant gifts were received at VST to support ongoing and new programs. Our Sauder School of Business program, where students learn the essentials of administrative and managerial excellence, will be completely endowed through a major donation we will receive over the next 4 years. We have received donations of almost \$40,000.00 to support the program in the meanwhile. We have also received significant gifts for student recruitment in Asia (\$30,000.00). VST recently won a grant from the Murdock Trust of \$270,000.00 for a project in congregational revitalization through community engagement. We have an active and successful Director of Advancement in Mr. Tom Berekoff.

VST will engage in fund-raising around the 50th anniversary of our school to refurbish Epiphany chapel. We are pushing the capacity of our current building and so need a larger classroom spaces. We are so very grateful to our generous donors. Not all the school's strategic initiatives are fully funded, and we welcome support.

Academic Enrollment

The fall headcount for 2019 was 165 and remained the same for the spring. The number of course registrations in the fall of 2019 was 370, an increase of 30% over 2018. The number of course registrations in the spring of 2020 was 396, an increase of 23% over spring 2019 (and an increase of 45% over spring 2018). The number of full-time students in the fall of 2019 was 88 and it stayed the same in the spring of 2020. 15 students is our average class size, 25% of our students are distance-online students, and \$234K was the amount the school awarded in bursaries and scholarships.

The United Church of Canada has the largest cohort at 45 students, Anglicans the second at 40 students, and Presbyterians third at 36. We have a significant number of United Church of Christ students (9) and a growing number of students from other Christian churches (27). For the fall of 2019, we had the largest number of applications, acceptances and incoming class members in 25 years. 49 students began their programs, including our first doctoral student in the Durham Ph.D. program and several in the BA through St Mark's College. The last year of this undergraduate program is done entirely at VST. Our Explorers Weekend, under the direction of The Rev Julie Lees, continues to build our domestic applications. VST Sunday saw members of the VST community preaching, leading and speaking at almost 50 churches across the country. We are grateful to our partner churches who welcomed this effort.

Special Lectures

Vancouver School of Theology has welcomed a series of world-class lecturers and church leaders to special lecture series at our school in the service of our mission. In the fall of 2019, we welcomed Prof. Norman Wirzba of Duke Divinity School, who lectured on Eating: More than Just A Matter of Life and Death. In February, Prof. Candida Moss, of University of Birmingham, presented on Resurrecting Perfection: Beauty, Bodies and the Afterlife. Prof. Tony Campolo visited our campus in March in conjunction with Citizens for Public Justice to give a presentation on the subject, Why Christians Should Be Involved in Social Justice. Our Visiting Distinguished Scholar for the summer of 2020 will be Prof. Katherine Sonderegger, of Virginia Theological Seminary, who will teach on The Church's Christology and Difficult Biblical Texts. Our summer school 2020 runs from July 6-17 and will be entirely online.

It includes courses like: How Doctrine Matters to Life with Cynthia Rigby; the Gospel according to Musical Theatre with The Rev. Peter Elliott and The Rev. Nathan LeRud and Process Theology and Human Existence: Following Christ into an Open Future with Donna Bowman. The full program can be found here: <https://vst.edu/vst-summer-school/>

Convocation 2020

Convocation been deferred until September 17, 2020 when we confer degrees and certificates on 30 graduates at St Mary's Anglican Church in Vancouver. Nine students will receive the certificate in Leadership excellence from the Sauder School of Business. We will also present the Principal's Thoughtful, Engaged and Generous Leader Award to Archdeacon Clara Plamondon, who exemplifies the leadership we aspire to encourage. This award is made to clergy in the first ten years of ministry. We will award three honorary doctorates – to Prof. Santa Ono, President of UBC; Rabbi Marcia Prager, Director and Dean of Aleph Ordination Programs and; The Rev Doug Goodwin, former General Secretary of BC Conference and Regional Executive Minister for the United Church. Our convocation speaker will be determined very shortly.

Vancouver School of Theology is grateful for our partnership with the United Church of Canada through the Pacific Mountain Region. We pray that you will be led by God's good, cheerful and Holy Spirit at your regional meeting.

Richard Topping,
Principal