

## **Vancouver School of Theology 2020/2021**

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Vancouver School of Theology (VST) adapted well to the move of all our programs and operations online due to public health protocols. VST's investment in online learning facilitated this transition. Further investments in electronic resources, software systems for the library and student records support are crucial to our model of hybrid learning. The United Church is well represented on our board and faculty, and among our sessional lecturers, staff and student body. We welcomed the Rev. Rebecca Simpson to the VST faculty, and The Rev. Dr Pat Dutcher-Walls has retired. Prof. Mari Joerstad will begin as our new Dean July 1, 2021. The faculty of VST is prolific in its publications with over 10 books, and numerous articles, in the past year. Lecturers of international repute have visited the school in person and online. VST's summer school features Prof. Miroslav Volf, of Yale Divinity School, and our double virtual convocation (classes of 2020-2021) will see over 60 graduates, with Prof. Deborah van Deusen Hunsinger, of Princeton Seminary, as the speaker. VST is expanding its classroom space and renovating its facilities to accommodate the unprecedented growth in the student body. The Rev. Curtis Bablitz is the winner of the 2021 VST TEG (thoughtful, engaged and generous Christian leader) Award.

### **THOUGHTFUL, ENGAGED AND GENEROUS CHRISTIAN LEADERS**

In 2021, we not only taught adaptive leadership, we lived it out. The faculty, students, staff, Board, and administration of the school showed resilience, kindness, trust in God and a degree of mutual support that bears witness to the gospel. Our hybrid delivery enabled us to move all our classes online with the help of a wonderful IT department, and to teach students on five continents who registered for courses and programs. Auditors of our courses significantly increased and the training of our faculty for online instruction was a providential blessing. Zoom and Canvas, while not without limitations, are essential and flexible enough to provide engaging online learning. 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 - schools that have 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 waiting 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**

United Church faculty include The Rev. Dr Steven Chambers and The Rev. Suzanne Sykes. The Rev. Dr Brian Thorpe, The Rev. Cari Copeman-Haynes, The Rev. Dr Hyuk Cho, The Rev. Michael Blair, Ms. Amy Crawford and The Rev. Mary Nichol have been sessional lectures in the past academic year. Many United Church clergy have been guest speakers and leaders in our chapel services. Mr. Lonnie Delisle is our Musician-in-Residence. We continue to work closely with the Pacific Mountain Region on the certificate for children and youth ministries. The Rev. Dr Pat Dutcher-Walls retires at the end of June 2021 from her work as Dean. The Rev. Rebecca Simpson has been engaged as the new Presbyterian Director of Denominational Formation with the former Director, The Rev. Dr Ross Lockhart, becoming

the Dean of St Andrew's Hall. Principal Richard Topping's contract has been renewed for a five-year term beginning July 1, 2021. A new Dean, Dr Mari Joerstad, from the Kenan Institute at Duke University and a Professor of Hebrew Bible, will begin her employment with VST beginning July 1, 2021. We are grateful to Ms. Treena Duncan and The Rev. Ingrid Brown for serving on the search committee.

The faculty have completed a volume together entitled *Theological Studies: A Thoughtful, Engaged and Generous Approach*. It will be published in 2021 as part of the 50th anniversary of VST and is edited by Profs. Harry Maier, Richard Topping and Ashley Moyse. Our faculty continues to be prolific in research and publication. In the fall of 2020, at least five new books for publication were in the works by various members of the faculty. In 2021 more than 10 new volumes have appeared, either edited by or written by our faculty. The faculty continue to deliver important scholarship in a number of registers for the upbuilding of the church. A new series of podcasts called Bruderholz will be offered in 2021. It is a series of interviews with faculty about their work for the church and the world.

### **VST BOARD/EMPLOYEES**

Mr. Michael Francis is the insightful and cheerful chair of the Board at VST. We are so blessed by his work. 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. The Rev. Dr Doug Goodwin, Ms. Cheryl Jourdain and The Rev. Michelle Slater are our United Church members. Mr. Iain Black, President and CEO of Maximizer CRM, is our Chancellor. We launched our new brand and website in 2020 and a new Student Information System and OpenAthens software for easy use of online resources through our growing collection of electronic resources in 2021.

### **PARTNERSHIPS**

VST thrives because of its partnerships. We are a theological school preparing students for Christian leadership in the Anglican, United and Presbyterian churches. In addition to these core partnerships, we work with the Sauder School of Business at the University of British Columbia, Huron College at the University of Western Ontario (for UCC students), St Mark's College at UBC, and Durham University, United Kingdom, to deliver our degree programs from the B.A. to Ph.D. levels. A new course in the Sauder program includes leading transformational change. In late 2020, we signed agreements for faculty and student exchange and course sharing with St Andrew's, Quezon City, Philippines, and Jakarta Theological Seminary, Indonesia. These partnerships encourage us to engage in theological education that, while geared to the Canadian context, is global in its sensibilities.

### **GRANTS/FINANCES/FOUNDATION**

Vancouver School of Theology has achieved a balanced budget for the sixth year in a row with growth in programs and while also 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 Audit and Finance Committee and the Foundation Board, chaired by the Venerable Ronald Harrison. The Foundation provides an important and generous revenue stream for the operations of the school. United Church members of the Foundation board include Dr Joy Begley and Mr. Graham McIsaac.

VST has completed the expenditure of the \$400,000 Luce Grant for Indigenous Ministry through the Teaching House That Moves Around, led by The Rev. Dr Ray Aldred. In the last year of the program, eight communities with 151 participants were engaged in Indigenous communities in Canada and the United States. A three-year grant from the United Church of Canada totaling \$225,000 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 British Columbia using

indigenous methods and instructors and is one way that we are following up on the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada.

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 of 1 million dollars, half of which we have already received. We received donations of almost \$70,000 to support the program in the meanwhile. We have also received significant gifts for student recruitment in Asia (\$30,000) and a recent grant of \$250,000 toward promoting congregational flourishing. We have hired a Director to lead our new project for Congregational Flourishing through Community Engagement, Mr. Chris Pullenayegem, who began January 1, 2021. Mr. Pullenayegem comes to us from the National Offices of the United Church of Canada where he served as Faith Formation and Mission Program Coordinator.

VST is constructing larger classroom spaces and renewing Epiphany Chapel to accommodate the growth of the student body and to keep our buildings and technology ready to support theological education for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Not all the school's strategic initiatives are fully funded, and we welcome support.

## **ACADEMIC ENROLLMENT**

The headcount for spring 2021 is 243. This represents an increase of 47% over 2018. The number of course registrations in the spring of 2021 is 445, an increase of 41% over spring 2018 (and an increase of 11% over spring 2020). The number of full-time students in the fall of 2020 was 89, in the spring of 2021 it is 106 (an increase of 17%).

The Anglican Church of Canada has the largest cohort at 60 students, United Church the second at 55 students and Presbyterians third at 45. We have a significant number of United Church of Christ students (12) and a growing number of students from other Christian churches (57). For the fall of 2020, we had the largest number of applications, acceptances and incoming class members in the history of the school. Over 60 students began their programs, including two more doctoral students in the Durham Ph.D. program and two students in our joint BA program at St. Mark's have now begun their M.Div. programs at VST. Our Explorers Weekend, under the direction of the Rev. Julie Lees, continues to build our domestic applications both when done in person and online. VST Sunday saw members of the VST community engaged at almost 50 churches across the country online. 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 past two academic years, we welcomed Prof. Norman Wirzba of Duke Divinity School, Prof. Candida Moss, University of Birmingham, Prof. Tony Campolo, Prof. Katherine Sonderegger, Virginia Theological Seminary, Artist Dr James He Qi, Rabbi Professor Amy-Jill Levine of Vanderbilt University, and in the summer of 2021, Prof. Miroslav Volf, who will teach in our summer school which takes place July 5-16 and includes outstanding multiple opportunities to learn. <https://vst.edu/vst-summer-school/>. Online Summer School 2020 saw an increase of 37% in course registrations. The G. Peter Kaye Lecture with Prof. Amy-Jill Levine, held online, had 1024 people in attendance and is the most well-attended lecture we have ever had.

VST will host Religion & Thoughtful Activism Online Academic & Community Conference on May 25th to 27th, 2021. This program is offered through our Interreligious Studies program and will feature Ms. Shachi Kurl, President, Angus Reid Institute, Roots Palestinian-Israeli Network. <https://vst.edu/inter-religious-studies-program/conference/>. The Indigenous Studies Program Summer School takes place online July 12th to July 23rd, 2021. This is an opportunity for students who are often isolated from one

another to gather, learn, and worship together. Ceremony and Sacrament will be taught by Mr. Adrian Jacobs, Keeper of the Circle, Sandy-Saulteaux Spiritual Centre. <https://vst.edu/isp-summer-school/>

### **CONVOCATION 2020/2021**

On May 11, we confer degrees and certificates over 60 graduates in our online convocation for the classes of 2020 and 2021. Twelve 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 (2020) and The Rev. Curtis Bablitz (2021), who exemplify the leadership we aspire to encourage. This award is made to clergy in the first ten years of ministry. We will award four honorary doctorates – to Prof. Santa Ono, President of UBC; Rabbi Marcia Prager, Director and Dean of Aleph Ordination Programs, the Rev. Doug Goodwin, former General Secretary of British Columbia Conference and Regional Executive Minister for the United Church and to Mr. Rupert Lang, Organist and Director of Music, Christ Church Cathedral, Vancouver. Our convocation speaker is Prof. Deborah van Deusen Hunsinger, author of *Bearing the Unbearable: Trauma, Gospel and Pastoral Care*, Academy of Parish Clergy Book of the Year, 2015. She will conduct an online workshop – “Keeping an Open Heart in Troubled Times” - on May 12. This day after graduation event is part of our ongoing project for revitalization and is funded through the Hugh and Helen Mogensen Fund.

Vancouver School of Theology is grateful for our partnership with The United Church of Canada and offer our prayers and greetings to the Northern Spirit Regional Council.

Richard R. Topping  
Principal