



WAKE FOREST
UNIVERSITY

SCHOOL of DIVINITY

Office of the Dean

Framing Our Future

Affirming Our Values, Vision and Aspirations for Wake Forest University's School of Divinity

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Introduction

At its founding in 1834, religion played a central role in the life of Wake Forest University. One hundred and sixty-five years later, in the fall of 1999, the Wake Forest University School of Divinity welcomed its first class of graduate theological students. The establishment of the School of Divinity formally recognized the continued importance of religion in the university and in society. Indeed, President Thomas K. Hearn would underscore this point stating, “Religion is certainly among the great forces moving human life and human history . . . and an understanding of that force and that life is instrumental. . . . Having divinity schools or seminaries on a university campus gives students a richer, broader education.”

The School of Divinity opened in a time of dramatic change in graduate theological education. Complex and challenging issues from declining enrollment to financial sustainability to questions of relevance confronted students, scholars, and schools. The global financial crisis, societal conflict, and a global pandemic exacerbated these issues and forced the graduate theological community to strategically assess its priorities and core commitments. For close to a quarter century, the School of Divinity has deftly navigated these turbulent waters in charting a distinctive path for graduate theological education at Wake Forest University.

Guided by the University's motto, *Pro Humanitate*, the School of Divinity is committed to engaging the fundamental questions of what it means to be human and serving as a catalyst for good. The School of Divinity's commitment to *Pro Humanitate* is further expressed in our mission:

Wake Forest University School of Divinity is a graduate, professional school that is Christian by tradition, Baptist in heritage, and ecumenical in outlook. Consistent with Wake Forest's commitment to academic excellence and in the spirit of the University motto, Pro Humanitate, the School of Divinity prepares leaders informed by a theological understanding of vocation. Through imaginative courses and diverse programs of community engagement, students are equipped to be agents of justice, reconciliation, and compassion in Christian churches and other ministries.

This mission statement guides the School of Divinity's commitment to academic excellence in the spirit of our university motto, *Pro Humanitate*, preparation of faith leaders to assume leading roles as agents of justice, reconciliation, and compassion in congregations and communities, and advancing a vision and practice of graduate theological education that complements and deepens work and witness of our congregational and community partners. Rooted in a rich Baptist history and guided by an expansive ecumenical and interfaith outlook, the School of Divinity is dedicated to scholarly and spiritual practices that educate leaders for the church and the world of tomorrow.

The School of Divinity's strategic framework, *Framing Our Future: Affirming Our Values, Vision and Aspirations for Wake Forest University's School of Divinity*, is the result of a deliberate and inclusive process that engaged students, staff, faculty, alumni, and friends in formulating a living document that complements the University's strategic framework *Framing Our Future: Affirming Our Values, Vision and Aspirations for Wake Forest University's Third Century*. The framework is inspired by the University's motto *Pro Humanitate* and the School of Divinity's missional commitment to *justice, reconciliation, and compassion*. Like the University's strategic framework, the School of Divinity's strategic framework is flexible to enable the School of Divinity to respond to future opportunities in charting a distinctive path for graduate theological education at the university and in the academy.

Who We Are and Who We Will Become

Wake Forest University School of Divinity is an ecumenical graduate theological community committed to justice, reconciliation, and compassion. Our master's and doctoral programs feature our distinctive integrated, interdisciplinary, and individualized approach to graduate theological education. The School of Divinity offers signature opportunities to creatively combine graduate theological education with graduate programs in the Arts and Sciences, Business, Law, Medicine, and Professional Studies. Our co-curricular programs, community worship experiences, lectures, and public events create dynamic learning opportunities for understanding and practicing ministry and religious leadership in a complex and evolving world. The School of Divinity is devoted to cultivating graduate theological students who are faithful catalysts for good in the church and in the world.

The School of Divinity advances its commitment to justice, reconciliation, and compassion and the University's commitment to *Pro Humanitate* through:

- Critical scholarship across the varied disciplines of humanities, social sciences, and theological education through rigorous academic inquiry in the classroom and through research and publication
- Explorations of religious identity, vocation, social responsibility, and public engagement

- Cultivating a community of learners that celebrates diverse religious, racial, ethnic, cultural, gender, and sexual identities and that fosters accessibility for all of its members
- Providing opportunities for spiritual growth and exploration of personal and communal spiritual practices
- Partnering with Christian churches, diverse faith communities, and community partners to create opportunities for mutual learning and critical dialogue, including student internships and various forms of mentoring, consultation, community education, and shared advocacy

The Wake Forest University School of Divinity will become a premier graduate theological community by extending our commitments into our next quarter century and the University's third century by becoming a recognized model for:

- Attracting diverse and talented masters and doctoral students pursuing innovative graduate theological education grounded in values of justice, reconciliation, and compassion in an institutional context committed to ecumenism, pluralism, and religious freedom and dedicated to serving diverse congregations and communities
- Graduating a new generation of faith leaders equipped to think critically and creatively, engage different perspectives, and embrace practices of justice, reconciliation, and compassion in a complex and religiously plural world
- Innovative graduate theological programs that are integrated, interdisciplinary, and individualized and reflect the signature strengths of the School of Divinity and Wake Forest University
- A robust "graduate theological ecosystem" that incorporates curricular, co-curricular, and lifelong learning opportunities for students, alumni, and the broad public in collaboration with graduate programs in Arts and Sciences, Business, Law, Medicine, and Professional Studies
- Signature, scalable, and sustainable collaborations and partnerships with a diverse and inclusive array of congregational and community partners that builds on and expands opportunities for societal transformation for all

Shared Goals and Strategic Aims

In recent years, graduate and professional education has been structurally transformed as a result of the global pandemic and changing trends in graduate education. Graduate theological education is not immune to these dramatic shifts. The global pandemic accelerated some of the challenging trends in graduate theological education. The Wake Forest University School of Divinity has critically assessed these trends in developing our

strategic aims in response to our shared institutional goals developed in the University's strategic framework.

Community of Learning

The School of Divinity will be a community of lifelong learners that calls all to develop their full potential to meaningfully contribute in a diverse and complex world.

Strategic Aims

1.1 Recruit, retain, and graduate diverse graduate theological students with distinctive learning opportunities that generate expansive visions for theological education in a religiously plural world

Initial Action Steps

- Create a sustainable, diverse, and inclusive strategic enrollment management plan for all graduate theological programs in collaboration with the Vice-President for Enrollment Management
- Continue to develop and deepen the recently launched “WakeDiv Experience” from point of interest in the School of Divinity through graduation and continuing lifelong
- Renew the Master of Divinity curriculum program to build on signature intellectual distinctives of the School of Divinity and to offer students multiple pathways to pursue theological and vocational interests
- Develop, offer, and deliver curricular programs that leverage our strategic commitment to place through accessible and multiple modalities for experiencing integrated, interdisciplinary, and individualized graduate theological education

1.2 Create innovative experiential theological learning opportunities that respond to the changing nature of lived faith in society and the world

Initial Action Steps

- Renew signature Pathways in Ministry vocational education program to respond to the shifting dynamics of congregational, religious, and civic life in a post-pandemic world
- Develop new and dynamic ways to introduce students to vocational opportunities in new and emerging professional spaces
- Create a dynamic portfolio of curricular and co-curricular opportunities that integrate interdisciplinary experiential learning opportunities

- Broaden and deepen collaborations with Office of Personal and Career Development (OPCD) to offer graduate theological students a signature set of services for professional development

1.3 Develop novel pathways to graduate theological education for new generations of faith leaders, faith adjacent and faith informed professionals, laity, and the public

Initial Action Steps

- Create and deploy novel lifelong learning opportunities for alumni, congregations, professionals, and the general public
- Explore, design, and deploy dynamic opportunities for continuing professional education at the intersection of faith, ethics, and leadership in collaboration with the Schools of Business, Law, and Medicine
- Design and renew unique graduate theological educational opportunities with existing dual/joint master programs and revised 10-month master program
- Continue to explore and design innovative opportunities with the School of Professional Studies to offer innovative and interdisciplinary theological education for graduate students and the broad public

Community of Inquiry

The School of Divinity will foster a community of inquiry through research, scholarship and creative work that transcends disciplinary boundaries to address the challenges facing humanity and our world.

Strategic Aims

2.1 Facilitate an inclusive community of inquiry at the School of Divinity that is collaborative and creative by generating new and novel scholarship that expands the boundaries of graduate theological education

Initial Action Steps

- Create sustainable forums for faculty scholarly conversation and engagement and interdisciplinary conversation and engagement with Wake Forest University faculty across the University
- Develop and support public programs that highlight faculty scholarship that deepens intellectual life
- Assess fiscal infrastructure, technological abilities and capabilities, and professional staffing for optimal, efficient, and effective allocation, use, and deployment of resources

- Critically examine and leverage unique strengths in signature research areas – theology, ethics, and culture – and assess how to respond to emerging university initiatives in artificial intelligence, environmental justice, health equity, and leadership

2.2 Enhance existing and creating new areas of intellectual excellence that builds and expands on interdisciplinary theological scholarship with societal impact.

Initial Action Steps

- Strengthen and support identified area of emerging intellectual excellence in African American religion and thought and emergent areas of University distinction in Health, Medicine, and Humanity with the Gilead COMPASS Initiative® Faith Coordinating Center, Neuroscience and Society, Environment and Sustainability, and Leadership, Character and Integrity
- Build and enhance strategic intellectual and programmatic collaborations with the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, School of Business, School of Law, School of Medicine, and School of Professional Studies
- Strengthen and expand faculty professional development opportunities and funding to support scholarly life

2.3 Position the School of Divinity as a national thought leader by increasing scholarly production, enhancing public scholarship, and communicating research, scholarship, and creative work with the broad public

Initial Action Steps

- Develop and cultivate advancement opportunities that support signature interdisciplinary theological scholarship with societal impact including new named and endowed lectures, professorships, scholarships, and a range of scholarly activity
- Continue to develop and communicate faculty and alumni scholarship through existing and new communication platforms

Community of Partnerships

The School of Divinity will foster and expand meaningful, mutual partnerships to honor our commitment to the faithful wellbeing of local, regional, and global congregations and communities.

Strategic Aims

3.1 Develop a novel model of co-creating justice-centered congregational and community partnerships that model diverse and collaborative styles of leadership

Initial Action Steps

- Inventory and assess historic and current partnerships to better align them with the aim and goals of co-creating justice-centered and collaborative leadership styles
- Deepen local, regional, and national partnerships with Faith COMPASS Center to create signature, sustainable, and scalable partnerships that advance center, congregational, and community goals

3.2 Strategically prioritize and align institutional resources on partnerships around core areas of focus on changing contexts of congregational life, integrative partnership of faith, environment, health, and communal wellbeing, interdisciplinary faith and the arts collaborations, and new models of faith and leadership.

Initial Action Steps

- Inventory and assess current portfolio of partnerships and potential partnerships for strategic alignment and consistent prioritization
- Assess capability and capacity to optimize partnerships for maximal impact and support for partners
- Continue to develop Health, Housing, and Equitable Economic Development Collaborative with community partners in Winston-Salem and across the Triad that leverages the unique strengths of faith communities

3.3 Affirm the commitment of the School of Divinity to the communities of Winston-Salem and the Triad region, Raleigh-Durham and Triangle region, Charlotte metropolitan area, and rural North Carolina communities.

Initial Action Steps

- Map existing portfolio of partnerships in assessing geographic range, scope, and impact

Strategic Framework Process

The School of Divinity has been engaged in formulating its strategic goals and priorities consistent with the University's strategic framing process throughout the spring 2023 semester and the 2023-2024 academic year.

The faculty of the School of Divinity gathered in February of 2023 for a strategic visioning session with the theme "Discern, Imagine, Create." The critical conversations resulted in the faculty establishing its key questions, aspirations, and priorities. Over the

the 2023-2024 academic year, the School of Divinity community engaged in the following activities in developing its living document:

August 2023	Opening Year Faculty Retreat Discuss strategic framework process and preview significant themes and goals
September 2023	Faculty Meeting, Deans and Directors Meeting, All Staff Meeting Introduce, read, and review the University's <i>Framing Our Future</i>
October 2023	Faculty Meeting, Deans and Directors Meeting, All Staff Meeting, Committee Meetings Discuss responses to <i>Framing Our Future</i> Collect ideas for strategic aims and action steps
November 2023	Board of Visitors Meeting <i>Framing Our Future</i> conversation with Provost and University Advancement
December 2023	School-wide Strategic Framework Survey
January 2024	Faculty Meeting, Deans and Directors Meeting, All Staff Meeting Continue to discuss <i>Framing Our Future: The School of Divinity</i>
February 2024	Faculty Meeting, Deans and Directors Meeting, All Staff Meeting, Committee Meetings Share findings of school-wide survey Draft <i>Framing Our Future: The School of Divinity</i>
March 2024	Faculty Meeting, Deans and Directors Meeting, All Staff Meeting, Committee Meetings Draft, read, and revise <i>Framing Our Future: The School of Divinity</i>
June 2024	Faculty End of Year Retreat, Deans and Directors Meeting Discuss major question for revising <i>Framing Our Future: The School of Divinity</i> after review from the Office of the Provost and continue to revise framework

Framing Our Future: Affirming Our Values, Vision and Aspirations for Wake Forest University's School of Divinity affirms the core mission and values and provides a framework to guide and inform our future work. The conversations and deliberations from this process will aid in positioning this vibrant intellectual community to

substantively contribute new knowledge in graduate theological education and interdisciplinary scholarship, equip new generations of learners to assume leading positions in congregations and communities, and support, sustain, and enhance meaningful partnerships that extend the mission and reach of the School of Divinity. Assessment, Evaluation, and Decision-Making

Framing Our Future: Affirming Our Values, Vision and Aspirations for Wake Forest University's School of Divinity will follow the assessment, evaluation, and decision-making processes and principles outlined in the University's strategic framework. Appropriate modifications for the unique needs and context of the School of Divinity will be made so that these processes are tailored and responsive to the actions and aspirations of the School of Divinity's strategic framework.

Conclusion

Walter Harrelson, acclaimed Old Testament scholar, distinguished leader in theological education, and key architect of the Wake Forest University School of Divinity, boldly stated, "I know of no other divinity school in North America that is better positioned to offer fresh and distinctive education for Christian ministry in the early decades of the third millennium." His powerful words and generative vision from 1996 continue to reverberate as the School of Divinity charts a distinctive path in a challenging and complex graduate theological education landscape. Now more than ever, our nation and our world need faithful and theologically grounded leaders who cultivate, nurture, and sustain congregations and communities in the shared work of justice, healing, and transformation. *Framing Our Future: Affirming Our Values, Vision and Aspirations for Wake Forest University's School of Divinity* will guide our community as we enter the third century of Wake Forest University.