

DOORS TO DIALOGUE: PREPARING FOR MINISTRY IN A WORLD OF RELIGIOUS DIFFERENCE

Quality Enhancement Plan (2009-2014) Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary is a seminary of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), whose mission is to “educate men and women to participate in the redemptive ministry of Jesus Christ in the world.” The Seminary has been awarding Master of Divinity degrees (or their earlier equivalent, the Bachelor of Divinity degree) for 155 years, having begun preparing students for Christian ministry in 1853. Over those years, Louisville Seminary has served as a catalyst for bringing people and churches of sometimes radically different theological perspectives together. It has sought to provide a place and an education that welcomes difference and offers opportunities for honest inquiry and the free expression of thought in the context of the mutual pursuit of truth. That commitment to being a Seminary that, guided by theological conviction, chooses to form itself as a diverse community continues into the present.

Louisville Seminary’s Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) extends this rich tradition. We recognize that, increasingly, our students will provide ministry in communities in which new immigrant churches, churches of diverse Christian traditions and theologies, and religious communities whose traditions are other than Christian live side by side. People in communities where our graduates serve will differ in understandings of reality, in traditions and convictions, and in experience, while sharing common needs and issues that belong to the human experience, including freedom from oppression and the need for resources sufficient for nurturing a meaningful life. In response to this changing context for ministry, Louisville Seminary’s QEP will focus on *enhancing students’ learning by preparing them better to provide religious leadership in contexts of religious difference*. In order to achieve this goal, we intend to develop a formative process that addresses cognitive, experiential, and vocational dimensions of student learning. To this end, we

have identified three expected learning outcomes. In our judgment, graduates of Louisville Seminary will be well prepared to provide religious leadership in contexts of religious difference if they are:

- (1) able to describe and articulate important characteristics of the history, traditions, practices, and perspectives of at least one religious tradition other than Christianity and one Christian ecclesial tradition other than their own;
- (2) able to articulate, orally and in writing, their own theological perspective, including a theology of ministry, mindful of their distinctive ecclesial tradition and the global, multicultural, multireligious context of contemporary ministry; and
- (3) able to participate in intra-Christian and interreligious dialogue constructively, with appreciation and respect, as evidenced by a demonstrated ability to articulate the views of their dialogue partners and to identify similarities and differences with their own.

The plan will unfold over five years. During year one (2009-2010) we are involved in curricular and extra-curricular planning, planning for assessment, and community education. Years two through four (2010-2013) will involve implementation with particular focus on the M.Div. cohort entering in fall 2010. Year five (2013-2014) will involve summative assessment of the project.

Doors to Dialogue provides the Seminary an opportunity to enhance the attention already given across the curriculum to religious difference and to develop a comprehensive means of assessing how well students are prepared for ministry in Christian communities of increasing diversity and in the context of a growing religious pluralism that includes religious communities other than Christian.