



Faculty of Theology and Religion **Annual Report 2023**



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UFS
THEOLOGY AND RELIGION





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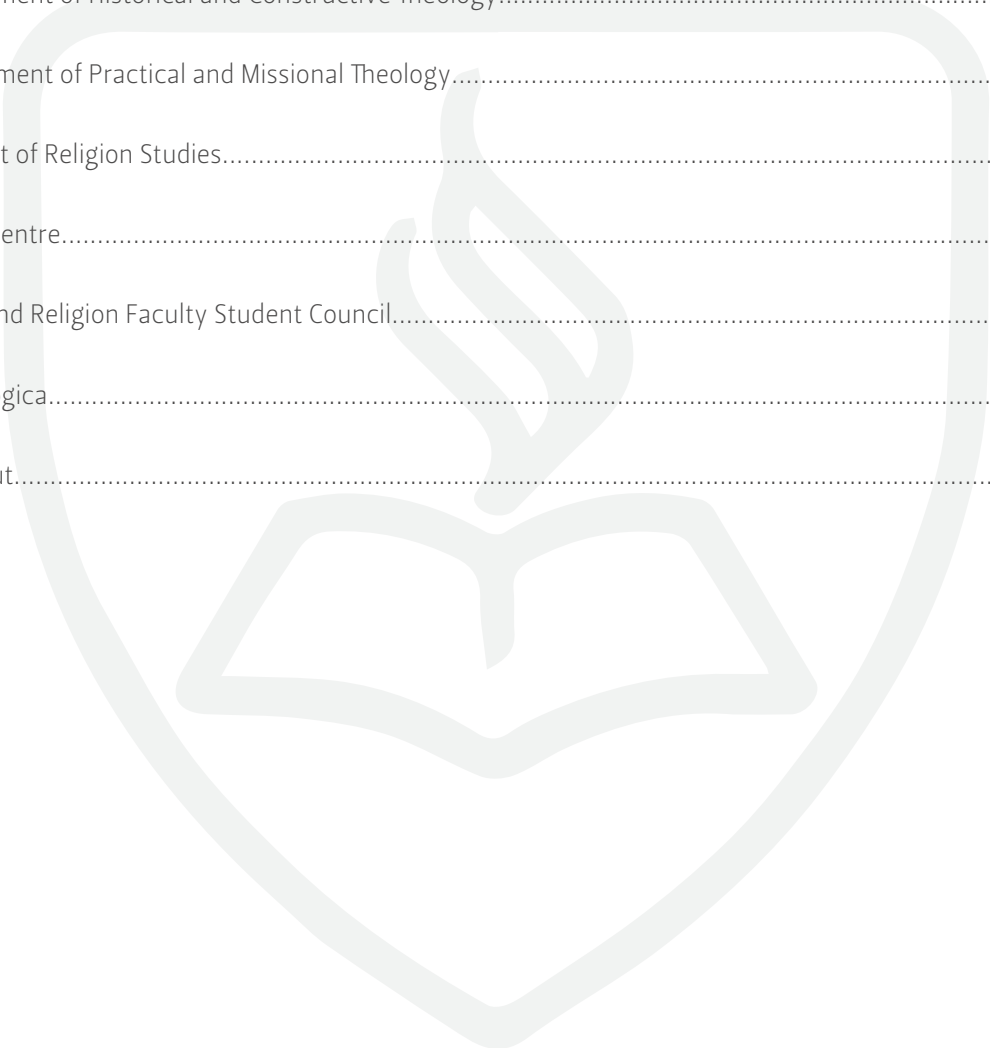
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Message from the Dean

For the Faculty, 2024 was a year of transition. Prof Rantoo Letsosa left the Faculty at the end of February to take up the Deanship of the Faculty of Theology and Religion at the University of Pretoria. Consequently, an Acting Dean had to be appointed to serve until the next Dean could assume the position. Although it was anticipated that the new Dean would commence duties at the beginning of September 2023, the appointment process took longer than expected. Prof John Klaasen, the new Dean, was only able to commence his duties in April 2024. In the interim, I and Prof Lodewyk Sutton served as Acting Deans, from March 2023 to January 2024 and February to March 2024, respectively.

For 2023, I specifically wish to highlight the following: In March 2023, the Faculty decided not to let the interim period until the arrival of the new Dean go to waste but to prepare for his/her arrival by ensuring that we hand over the Faculty in the best possible state. We understood that we were not in a position to implement any major changes, but realised that there were many areas where we could improve our processes and operations to make things easier for the new Dean. This proactive attitude helped us achieve significant improvements in various Faculty activities. In particular, the following should be noted:

- We have taken the bold step of tackling the re-accrual of the BDiv programme, as more than five years had elapsed since the previous re-accrual. This effort required significant dedication from both lecturers and support staff, and was highly successful. Despite numerous other duties, Rev Marlene Oosthuizen, our Programme Director, devoted substantial time to this process. Under her leadership we completed the crucial phases of this undertaking in record time, and we are now well on our way to implementing the new BDiv curriculum in 2025. Additionally, the Faculty will transition to a new timetable that allows most lecturers to conduct all their undergraduate lectures in one specific semester, thereby freeing up the other semester for more focused research activities.
- Under the guidance of Dr Martin Laubscher and Rev Oosthuizen, the Postgraduate Diploma in Theology has been restructured to make it more attractive to part-time students. The revised PG Dip would be implemented in 2024, and we anticipate an increase in student enrolment.
- Under the guidance of Prof Juanita Meyer and Rev Oosthuizen, the honours and structured master's programmes in Practical and Missional Theology have been re-accrued to make them more attractive to students. The honours and master's qualifications in Historical and Constructive Theology and Old and New Testament Studies will be addressed in 2024.
- The Faculty has initiated the process of reducing the number of qualifications it offers in alignment with Vision 130. The decision was made to phase out the Higher Certificate, the Advanced Diploma, and the MDiv. This will relieve our support staff and lecturers, allowing them to focus more on other qualifications that already attract many students. The Faculty began to reap the benefits of this decision in 2024.

- Rev Oosthuizen updated and standardised the module guide template across the entire Faculty. The revised template now includes updated assessment rules and incorporates recent developments, such as the enhanced focus on student attributes fostered in the particular module.
- Under the guidance of Rev Oosthuizen, the assessment rules have been standardised. This significant step forward ensures that assessments across all departments are conducted in a consistent manner and that students are treated in the same manner in all modules in all departments.
- Under the leadership of Siphokazi Dlwati, the Advising Office has been operating efficiently and has taken significant steps to support students, such as initiating the Creating Theology Together programme. The Faculty Academic Advising Office also collaborated extensively with the Centre for Teaching and Learning throughout the year to provide enhanced support to our students.
- Despite numerous other duties, Faculty Manager Ingrid Mostert drafted remits for several of our Faculty Committees, which were subsequently approved by the Faculty Board. This has clarified the reporting channels for all committees. It was also decided that the minutes of all Faculty Committee meetings will henceforth serve at the Faculty Board, ensuring transparency in all decisions.
- Under the leadership of Rev Oosthuizen, the procedures for internal and external moderation of modules have been standardised for the first time. These new procedures will be implemented starting in 2024.
- Under the leadership of Sinovuyo Mogwasi, the Shepherd Centre underwent thorough rebranding and professionalisation. Additionally, the Faculty expanded the number of Short Learning Programmes (SLPs) offered.
- Internal communication within the Faculty was enhanced through regular emails from the Dean's Office, ensuring that all staff members were informed of new developments and important decisions.
- Under the leadership of Ingrid Mostert, the Faculty initiated upgrades to several lecturing and meeting venues. These enhancements included the installation of new equipment and additional air conditioning units.
- Two new appointments were made in the Dean's Office: Mammuso Matshitse was appointed as Office Manager, and Palesa Pholo as Senior Assistant Officer for Postgraduate Support.

This brief list highlights just a few of the new initiatives and developments in 2023. Further details can be found in the remainder of this report. These accomplishments are a testament to the loyalty, dedication, and hard work of all staff members in the Faculty. Working with them and serving as Acting Dean has been a privilege!

Prof Francois Tolmie

Acting Dean: Faculty of Theology and Religion



THEOLOGY



Recurriculation

The University of the Free State's (UFS) Faculty of Theology and Religion is embarking on a significant transformation of its curriculum, marked by innovative changes and strategic discontinuations, reinforcing its commitment to quality, relevance, and sustainability in theological education. The recurriculation project is geared towards meeting quality assurance policy requirements, aligning with the global drive in higher education for producing impactful graduates, and contributing to the actualisation of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Central to this transformative journey is the streamlining of programmes offered. This streamlining involves phasing out the Higher Certificate in Theology and the Advanced Diploma in Theology. For both qualifications, 2024 will be the last cohort intake. These changes mark a conscious move towards optimising resource allocation, focusing on programmes that best serve the current needs and contexts of the faith communities.

Streamlining the programmes offered also focuses on renewing the current undergraduate curricula of the BDiv under the leadership of Prof Francois Tolmie and Rev Marlene Oosthuizen. The curriculum renewal project considers market needs (informed by the research initiatives led by Prof Kobus Schoeman), graduate attributes, and the SDGs. The curriculum is set for implementation in 2025.

One of the novel changes is incorporating compulsory modules in Hebrew and Greek for Exegesis, using technology. This innovative approach facilitates learning the Biblical languages for deeper scriptural understanding and aligns student competencies with the digital demands of the contemporary world.

Another significant BDiv curriculum enrichment is the third-year module in Spirituality, grounded in experiential learning and reflective writing practices. This initiative underscores the Faculty's recognition of the intrinsic link between academic knowledge and personal spiritual formation and its critical role in preparing future faith leaders. At the postgraduate level, changes have been made to the Postgraduate Diploma in Theology's mode of delivery to

accommodate the real-life contexts of working students. The changes offer a dynamic structure that allows for completion over two years, weekly virtual classes, and reduced face-to-face contact hours. This optimisation serves a dual purpose: it provides a practical learning pathway for students and addresses a gap in the theological education landscape. Specifically, it caters to students who have completed degrees in different fields but seek theological training to empower them for leadership roles in faith communities.

On the same trajectory of innovation, the Department of Practical and Missional Theology, under Prof Juanita Meyer's leadership, will introduce new programmes and curriculum changes in 2024. The Bachelor of Theology Honours in Practical and Missional Theology and the structured Master of Theology in Practical and Missional Theology will contract separate specialisations in Practical Theology and Missiology. The new specialisations' curricula (programmes and modules) are intentionally structured and integrated, promoting maximum interdisciplinarity and contextualisation, crucial for a well-rounded and relevant theological education.

Additionally, the Department is launching a specialised MTh in Pastoral Theology and Praxis. This programme is noteworthy for including a supervision module tailored to develop advanced competencies in pastoral care and counselling under professional guidance.

Through these strategic curriculum enhancements and course offerings, the Faculty of Theology and Religion at the UFS is repositioning itself as a beacon of flexible and contextually relevant theological education. By phasing out certain programmes and revitalising others, the faculty demonstrates a responsive and proactive approach to the evolving needs of society, the educational landscape, and faith-based communities. The faculty's dedication to these changes underscores its commitment to maintaining academic and educational standards, nurturing leadership, providing avenues for impactful contributions to society's spiritual and mental well-being, and providing care for the integrity of societal, ecological, and organisational assets.





“At the Faculty of Theology and Religion, we needed a versatile space which could function both as a lecture room and ‘chapel’ or worship space. Preaching and worship can be taught anywhere, but its practice calls for a space of grace and beauty. This transforming space becomes sacramental as we pre-sense ‘the other’s’ presence being close to center. The desire was always to have such a place and time in our reach where we could sense the embodied celebration of heaven and earth being reconnected. Besides the normal lecture load the space must bear, there is now also an opening where students can perform and assess worship services and experience ‘home’ during the weekly chapel (‘time-out’) meetings. In this re-imagined space, one senses some hopeful rays of transcendent light breaking through: hear the eventful Word, take off your shoes, sink deeper into the waters, break the bread, follow the lead, be people of the way, witness to His glorious elusive presence, speak intercessory words bathed in prayer, grow into who we are called to be, pass the peace, perform belonging community, and learn (see and taste for yourself) that we truly practice (by performing and becoming) what we preach. It is perhaps apt to recall Jacob’s words after he dreamt in Bethel: “How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven (Genesis 28:17). HMS 10 is (becoming) a well-timed and timely space for grace for a community on the move.” – Dr Martin Laubscher.





In addition to the photographs showcasing the space's transformation over the past year, we are pleased to include a special painting from Prof. Johan Cilliers, entitled Crucifixion – Implosion of Life.

“The newly renovated chapel space in the HMS building has immense potential for the Faculty of Theology and Religion community – students and staff alike. Walking into a room that does not resemble a traditional classroom or a specific church denomination invites one to experience and reflect on God’s Triune in creative and maybe even surprising ways. I hope this will indeed be the case: that it will become a place where we gather as a family, whether formally or informally, in conversation or in worship – and where we can grow into discerning co-creators of healing, sent forth into the world.”

– Dr Nina Müller Van Velden



Theological Day Guests



Event Highlights

In 2023, the Marketing Department organised and executed several impactful events that showcased the Faculty's commitment to excellence and community engagement. Through comprehensive strategic planning and effective collaboration, the Department organised several pivotal events that substantially contributed to the Faculty's development and fostered meaningful engagement with both internal and external stakeholders.

Welcoming Day

Welcoming Day set the stage for the academic year, bringing together approximately 150 new students. This event, featuring orientation sessions, team-building activities, and workshops, fostered a strong sense of belonging among the new members. The success of this initiative was evident in the positive feedback from participants, who applauded the event as creating a welcoming and supportive environment.

Theological Day

The Theological Day emerged as a cornerstone for the Faculty, drawing participants from various academic and professional backgrounds. Our guest speakers, Prof Chris AM Hermans and Rev Jacob Mokhutso engaged attendees in discussions on resilience in religion and theology. The event facilitated meaningful exchanges among scholars, reinforcing the Faculty's leadership in theological discourse.



Speakers at the Theological Day – Dr Jacob Mokhutso, Profs Eugene Baron, Rantsoa Letsosa (Dean of Faculty of Theology and Religion) and Chris Hermans.



Imagine Camp (Bothville)

Imagine Camp, held in Bothville from 18 to 20 March, was a significant event that showcased the Faculty's commitment to innovative thinking and experiential learning. Our engagement was organised by Dr Lyzette Hoffman and marketing; this large-scale event drew nearly 1 000 participants, including approximately 800 teenagers from the Free State, North West, and Northern Cape provinces. These teenagers, representing various church denominations, gathered at NAMPO Park in Bultfontein for the #Imagine 2023 experience, an initiative aimed at inspiring and equipping them to become future leaders of South Africa.

The Faculty of Theology and Religion played a crucial role in the success of #Imagine 2023. Seventeen students from the Faculty actively participated by presenting a workshop titled "Mission in Action". This workshop focused on teaching peer counselling skills, a vital component of the broader vision of the #Imagine movement. Additionally, our students were responsible for designing and decorating the workshop space, engaging creatively with the teenagers at the Encounter Station they built within the praise and worship hall.

Imagine Camp's impact extended beyond the immediate experience for the teenagers. The event was a valuable opportunity for our theology students to enhance essential graduate attributes, including oral communication, community engagement, ethical reasoning, creative ability, and group work. By participating in such events, students not only practised their skills but also gained practical experience in working within a religious environment, reinforcing the Faculty's dedication to nurturing future leaders through hands-on learning experiences.

Imagine Camp's success underscored the Faculty's role in shaping the next generation of leaders, aligning with the Faculty's broader mission of fostering innovative, ethical, and community-oriented graduates.





Nobesuthu Sonti, Dr Erika Senekal-Van Der Berg, Prof Cynthia Miller-Naudé, and Gwen Ntamo

Theology and Religion Career Masterclass

The Theology and Religion Career Masterclass was a key event to equip students with essential skills for their future careers. The masterclass featured in-depth sessions on marketing and leadership, with notable contributions from Dr Erika Senekal-Van Der Berg, Prof Cynthia Miller-Naudé, and Dr Nthabeleng Rammile. The event's success was evident in the positive feedback from attendees, who reported significant improvements in their understanding of personal branding and leadership. This event was instrumental in positioning our students as future leaders in both theological and secular domains.





Creating Theology Together

Creating Theology Together was a year-long initiative that brought students, the Faculty Advising Office, and stakeholders together to collaborate on developmental projects and theological discussions. This initiative played a crucial role in enhancing the Faculty's academic environment and fostering scholarly exchanges that have already started contributing to the Faculty's output.

Grade 9 Selection Evening

In collaboration with Student Recruitment Services, the Grade 9 Selection Evening was a strategic effort to identify and nurture future talent. Approximately 100 students were selected to join the Faculty's programme, laying the foundation for future growth. The enthusiasm and commitment of these students were a testament to the event's success.

Career Exhibition

The Career Exhibition was another significant event, attracting hundreds of students and providing them with insights into various career paths within theology, religion, and related fields. This event served as a platform for students to connect with potential employers, reinforcing the Faculty's role in facilitating career development and practical application of academic studies.

Ficksburg and Jim Fouché High School Career Exhibitions

Career exhibitions at Ficksburg and Jim Fouché High School were instrumental in expanding the Faculty's outreach. These events, attended by hundreds of students, provided clear guidance on career paths and educational opportunities, further enhancing the Faculty's reputation as a leader in career preparation.





Collaboration and Partnerships

Strategic partnerships with external organisations significantly enhanced the success of these events. Collaborations with Student Recruitment Services, other faculties, educational institutions, and industry professionals played a pivotal role in ensuring the high quality and substantial impact of the Faculty's marketing initiatives. These alliances broadened the Faculty's outreach and enriched the programming provided throughout the year.

Challenges and Solutions

Despite facing challenges such as logistical constraints and budget limitations, the Marketing Department demonstrated resilience and innovation. By leveraging digital marketing tools and forming strategic partnerships, the Department maximised impact while managing costs effectively.





The Department of Old and New Testament Studies enjoyed a productive academic year, participating in in-person classes, public lectures and conferences, and local and international travel for conferences and research. The Department welcomed a new full-time New Testament lecturer, Dr Nina Müller van Velden, from 1 July. Before this, she was a postdoctoral researcher at Stellenbosch University. She has wide experience in teaching New Testament and has already proven herself to be a solid researcher, specialising in New Testament Studies; Gospel of John; Gender Criticism; Embodiment in Antiquity; Contemporary Interpretations of Gender, Sexuality and New Testament Writings; Feminist Biblical Interpretation; Queer Biblical Interpretation; and African Women's Biblical Interpretation and Gender-Based Violence. The Department is very grateful to have her as a full-time staff member.

The Department's vision for the period 2021 to 2026 remains to "focus on studying and interpreting the Bible (the Old and New Testaments) and Early Christian Greek Literature. The literature (texts) is studied intensively, in its original languages and sources, applying its message contextually (authors then and readers now), responsibly and ethically to our current situation at the Faculty of Theology and Religion in Africa and globally, through internationally recognised research, teaching and learning that develop globally competitive graduates while also serving the communities of faith."

A hybrid approach to teaching and learning was followed throughout 2023, with classes mostly taught face-to-face and online, with continuous evaluation for the three disciplines Old and New Testament and New Testament Greek and Early Christian Greek Literature. In Old Testament, Prof Lodewyk Sutton was on research leave from March to September. A special thank you goes to Prof Francois Tolmie, who was the acting Head of the Department during this period. We also thank our part-time lecturers: Hermiene Ferreira, Rev De la Harpe Roux, Dr Andries Hoffman, Dr Elrika Senekal-van der Berg, Dr Deon Serfontein, Dr Riaan Stander, and Prof Fanie Snyman. Special mention must be made regarding the new Greek curriculum that was integrated in 2023.

Department staff are also responsible for acting as supervisors for multiple postgraduate qualifications, and they completed a number of training sessions this year. Departmental Manager Marina Van Biljon and the entire Department's academic staff completed training on Blackboard Collaborate.

Prof Sutton completed the following training courses:

- Assessment Innovation in an AI World: A UFS Perspective (6 March, UFS).
- Generative AI for Academic Writing and Assessment: Issues and Opportunities (Prof Mike Sharples, 8 March, UFS).
- How to Publish Open Access – Author Workflows and tips for Authors in South Africa (SANLiC, Wiley, CREST online training course for supervisors of doctoral candidates at African universities, 10 March, Stellenbosch University).
- SciELO South Africa 25-year Seminar: Artificial intelligence and associated tools and policies in editorial decision making (29 June, Online).
- Research Writing Retreat – Transformation of the Professoriate Programme (Prof Robert Muponde, 7–9 June, UFS).
- Biblical Wisdom: An Online Bible Study with Dr John Collins (2 Oct–7 Nov, Yale Divinity School).
- Human Research Ethics Review (7–8 Nov, UFS).
- Responding to Domestic Violence (Ridley College certificate, Australia – in process at end of 2023).

Dr Müller van Velden completed the following training courses:

- Create Your Blend Webinar (July, UFS).
- Curriculum Renewal Programme (30 Oct–3 Nov, UFS).
- Human Research Ethics Review (7–8 Nov, UFS).

Dr Machin completed the following training courses:

- Design Your Blackboard Page Webinar (6 Feb, UFS).
- Blackboard Collaborate Webinar (7 Feb, UFS).
- Create Your Blend Webinar (8 Feb, UFS).
- Learning-centred Teaching Webinar (9 Feb, UFS).
- Blended Learning Activities Webinar (10 Feb, UFS).
- Assessment Overview Webinar (13 Feb, UFS).
- Blackboard Tests Webinar (14 Feb, UFS).
- Blackboard and Turnitin Assignments Webinar (15 Feb, UFS).
- Blackboard Rubrics Webinar (16 Feb, UFS).
- Blackboard Assessments Grade Centre and Adaptive Release Webinar (17 Feb, UFS).
- Assessment Innovation in an AI World Webinar (6 March, UFS).
- Minimise Cheating in Online Assessment Webinar (10 March, UFS).
- Curriculum Renewal Programme (5–9 June, UFS).
- Graduate Attributes Mapping Workshop (19 July, UFS).



- Teaching Portfolio Workshop (27-28 July, UFS).
- “Publish from your thesis” Article Writing Workshop (Prof Robert Muponde, 24-26 Oct, UFS).
- Online Assessment System Review – Showcasing (8 Oct, UFS).

Members of the Department also fulfilled various leading roles for academic societies and on editorial boards:

Prof Sutton is Treasurer of the Southern African Society for Near Eastern Studies (SASNES). He also serves on the editorial boards of *Acta Theologica*, *Journal for Semitics* (JSEM), and *UFS Theological Explorations*, and is Series Editor of *UFS Theological Explorations*. He serves as an advisory member for the International Society of Biblical Literature (ISBL) Group: Place, Space, and Identity in the Ancient Mediterranean World. Prof Sutton was asked to organise the Psalm session at the Society of Biblical Literature (SBL) International Meeting hosted at the University of Pretoria from 3 to 7 July. The theme of the Psalm session was “Chaos in the Psalms”.

Prof Tolmie is a member of the board of *Enso*. He is on the editorial boards of *Acta Theologica* and *UFS Theological Explorations* and serves on the boards of the *Colloquium Ioanneum* and *Studiorum Novi Testamenti Societas* (SNTS).

Dr Müller van Velden is on the editorial boards of *Neotestamentica* and *Acta Theologica*. She is also on the SBL Synoptic Gospels Program Unit Steering Committee and is leader of the Gender and Sexuality subgroup of the New Testament Society of Southern Africa (NTSSA).

Dr Machin serves on the editorial board of *UFS Theological Explorations*.

Members of the Department are also regularly involved in national and international peer-reviewing of articles, and internal and external moderation and examinations.

- Sutton, L., 2023, “Supervisors without students, students without supervisors: Current and future challenges for postgraduate supervision in Old and New Testament Studies”, *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 79(1), a8487.
- Sutton, L., 2023, “An Overview of Biblical Hebrew Grammars and Current Trends in Research on Masoretic Accents”, *Journal for Semitics* 32(1), 1-13.
- Sutton, L., “Ancient post-war rituals as a pastoral aid for trauma: Honour through violence and justice from Psalm 58”. In: H. Paynter and M. Spalione (eds.), *From the Rising to the Setting Sun*. Sheffield Phoenix Press, 211-227. ISBN: 978-1-914490-19-4
- Prof Tolmie also published an overview of research on the Letter to the Galatians from 2000-2020, in two volumes, with UJ Press.



Prof Lodewyk Sutton, pictured with colleagues, was honoured with an award at the UFS Research Awards.



Several academic papers were presented by members of the Department at various conferences.

Prof Sutton presented:

- “Inner Chaos: A Spatial Reading of Psalms 42 and 43 in the Light of Chaos and Chaostkampf” (Society of Biblical Literature International Meeting, 3-7 July, UP).
- “Current Research on Ancient Warfare” (Current Trends Conference, 10 July, UFS).

Prof Tolmie presented:

- “Jesus’ brothers in John 7” (Colloquium Ioanneum, 31 Aug-4 Sep, Vienna).

Dr Machin presented:

- “Chrysostom’s use of rhetoric in *De inani gloria et de educandis liberis* when exhorting parents on the moral education of their children” (Society of Biblical Literature International Meeting, 3-7 July, UP).

Dr Müller van Velden presented:

- “Revisiting fertility ideals: A South African feminist exploration of Mark’s ‘bleeding woman’” (Society of Biblical Literature International Meeting, 3-7 July, UP; New Testament Postgraduate Seminar, August, Stellenbosch University [Online]; and Talking Theology, September, UFS).



Dr Nina Müller van Velden delivers her paper at the Society of Biblical Literature’s International Meeting at the University of Pretoria.



Researchers in the Department also attended several other academic conferences in 2023.

Prof Sutton attended:

- “Depression and the Psalm of Lament” (Dr Rico Villanueva, 19 May, Cross Culture, Melbourne, Australia, Online).
- “Preaching the Word in a Culture of Scepticism: Reflections on Jeremiah” (Dr Chris Wright, 22 May, Anglican Institute Lecture, Ridley College Public Lecture Series, Online).
- Society of Biblical Literature International Meeting (3-7 July, UP).
- Current Trends Conference (in Old Testament) (10 July, UFS).
- “How Did Jews and Christians Read and Sing the Psalms?” (Tommy Wasserman, 30 Aug, Örebro School of Theology, Sweden, Online).
- Lentekongres 2023 (17-19 Sept, Excelsus, Sentrum vir Bedieningsontwikkeling, UP).

Prof Tolmie attended:

- Colloquium Ioanneum (31 Aug-4 Sep, Vienna).

Dr Müller van Velden attended:

- Society of Biblical Literature International Meeting (3-7 July, UP).
- Current Trends Conference (in Old Testament) (10 July, UFS).

Dr Machin attended:

- Society of Biblical Literature International Meeting (3-7 July, UP).



Prof Lodewyk Sutton visited the Princeton Theological Seminary, USA, in February for research.

In terms of public and international engagements, all Departmental staff members regularly preach at churches in the Bloemfontein area. Prof Sutton is the secretary and Prof Tolmie the chair of the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) General Synod’s committee on translation and interpretation of the Bible (ATBV). Both Prof Sutton and Prof Tolmie presented Bible Schools for the DRC Universitas. Prof Tolmie serves on the board of the DRC Universitas congregation. Dr Müller van Velden is the project leader for the General Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church Reproductive Health Group.

Prof Sutton participated in archaeological excavations at Tel Hazor, Israel. Dr Igor Kreimerman from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem is the director of the excavations for the site and leads the project. The excavations fall under the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and the Israel Exploration Society.



Dr Drake Williams III, with members of the Faculty, at the public lecture hosted in the Department of Old and New Testament Studies, UFS.

On 29 June, Research Fellow Dr Drake Williams III visited the Faculty from the USA and delivered a public lecture titled “What memory is more likely? Memory and its effects on identity in the practice of the Lord’s Supper in 1 Corinthians 11:23-26”. Dr Williams has been Associate Professor of New Testament at Evangelische Theologische Faculteit in Leuven, Belgium, since 2014. Previously he was Professor of New Testament and Academic Dean at Tyndale Theological Seminary. He studied at the University of Aberdeen (Scotland), where he obtained his PhD in New Testament in 1999. His thesis, “The Wisdom of the Wise: the presence and function of Scripture in 1 Cor. 1:18-3:23”, is published with Brill (2001). His scholarly interests have now developed to areas such as the memory of Jesus at Corinth, imitation, and Jewish background in 1 Corinthians. He also has written on Ignatius of Antioch and Caspar Schwenckfeld von Ossig. Dr Williams also serves as Minister of Mission and Theology at Central Schwenckfelder Church, just north of Philadelphia in the USA.



The presenters at the Current Trends Conference, hosted in the Department of Old and New Testament Studies, UFS.



Dr Anneli MacHin and Marina Van Biljon



2023 Summer excavation team for the archaeological excavations at Tel Hazor, Israel.

The year ended with a Departmental research planning and writing visit to the Good Shepherd Retreat Centre at Hartbeespoort. The planned educational study tour to Israel, organised by Prof Sutton, was postponed due to the war between Israel and Hamas. The tour's purpose was to educate and create an opportunity, especially for our undergraduate students, to visit Israel, one of the most prominent countries in the Bible. The participants would have experienced first-hand Israel's historical, social, and geographical context.





This year was one of reimagining and rethinking the Department's location in the Faculty of Theology and Religion at a public university in the heart of South Africa.

Teaching and Learning

Prof Henco van der Westhuizen and Dr Eugene Fortein were responsible for most undergraduate and postgraduate modules in Church History. Dr Fortein taught the following undergraduate modules in 2023: Introduction to the History of Christianity (THIS1512); Continued Study of the History of Christianity 2 (THIS3732); Advanced Study of the History of Christianity 1 (THIS4812); Advanced Study of the History of Christianity 2 (THIS4832); and Study of Church Polity (TPOL4822). He also taught the following postgraduate modules: Advanced Study of the History of Christianity 2 (TELG8504); In-depth Study of Church History and Polity (TELG7910); Advanced Study in General Church History 33-2000 (TEGH6815); Advanced Study in the History of the Church and Theology in Africa (TEHT6815); Research Methodology and Theory (TERM6814); Advanced Study in Church Polity and the History of Doctrine (TEPD6825); Research Methodology (TERR6828); Advanced Study of Theoretical Aspects of Ecclesiology as a Theological Discipline (TETD6825); In-depth Study of Church History and Polity (TEID7900); Research in Church History and Polity (TELG7900); and Doctoral Supervision (TELG9100).

Prof Van der Westhuizen is responsible for most undergraduate and postgraduate modules in Systematic Theology. He taught the following undergraduate modules in 2023: Introduction to the Christian Faith (TSYS1522); Study of Systematic Theology (TSYS2622); Continued Study of Systematic Theology (TSYS3722); and Advanced Study of Systematic Theology (TSYS4822). He also taught the following postgraduate modules: Advanced Study of Systematic Theology and Ethics (TSYS5804); In-depth Study of Systematic Theology (TSYS7910/TSYS7920); Advanced Studies in Systematic Theology (TSAS6815/TSAS6825); Advanced Studies in Apologetics (TSAP6815/TSAP6825); History of Post-Enlightenment Theology (TSPE6815/TSPE6825); Research Methodology and Theory (TSRM6814/TSRM6824); Research Report in Systematic Theology (TSRR6818/TSRR6828); Advanced Studies in Spirituality (TSSP6815/TSSP6825); Advanced Studies in Ethics (TSET6815/TSET6825); In-depth Study of Systematic Theology (TSID7900); Research in Systematic Theology (TSYS7900); and Doctoral Supervision (TSYS9100).

Staffing

The Department had two staff members at the start of the year: Prof Henco van der Westhuizen and Dr Eugene Fortein, after the departure and retirement, respectively, of Ntandoyenkosi Mlambo and Prof Rian Venter. The Department welcomed two new colleagues, Dr Pascal Pienaar and Dr Calvin D Ullrich.



Dr Pascal Pienaar

Dr Pienaar was appointed as a post-doctoral fellow on 1 May and was also responsible for most of the undergraduate modules in Ethics, although her field of interest is in Church History. Dr Pienaar is a graduate of Stellenbosch University. The title of her doctoral dissertation is "The Missionary Women of the Huguenot Seminary: A Case Study in Vocational Formation through Education".



Dr Calvin D. Ullrich

Dr Ullrich joined the Department from Ruhr-Universität in Bochum, Germany. A Cape Town local and former Stellenbosch University student, Dr Ullrich's research has focused on political, public, and radical theology. He has published in all of these fields, and also in contemporary continental philosophy.



Dr Eugene Fortein

Dr Fortein attended the Samuel DeWitt Proctor Conference at the invitation of Prof Allan Boesak. The conference is the largest gathering of Black churches in the United States and was held in Atlanta, Georgia. Dr Fortein and Prof Boesak also attended a conference at Central Methodist Church, Atlanta, about reconciliation and reparations within the Methodist Church.



He was also invited by the networks forged in the United States to be part of the Transatlantic Roundtable for Religion and Race (TRRR) international conference in Zambia. The conference theme was “New Generation Nation Building: Religious and Political Perspectives from Africa and the Diaspora”. He also presented a paper titled “Youth Resistance in South Africa: Reflections on the Struggle of the ‘Born Free’ Generation”. The conference papers are set to be published in 2024.



Dr Fortein was selected to be part of the 2023 Future Professoriate Programme (FPP) cohort and attended several FPP events, including a weekend retreat in Clarens.

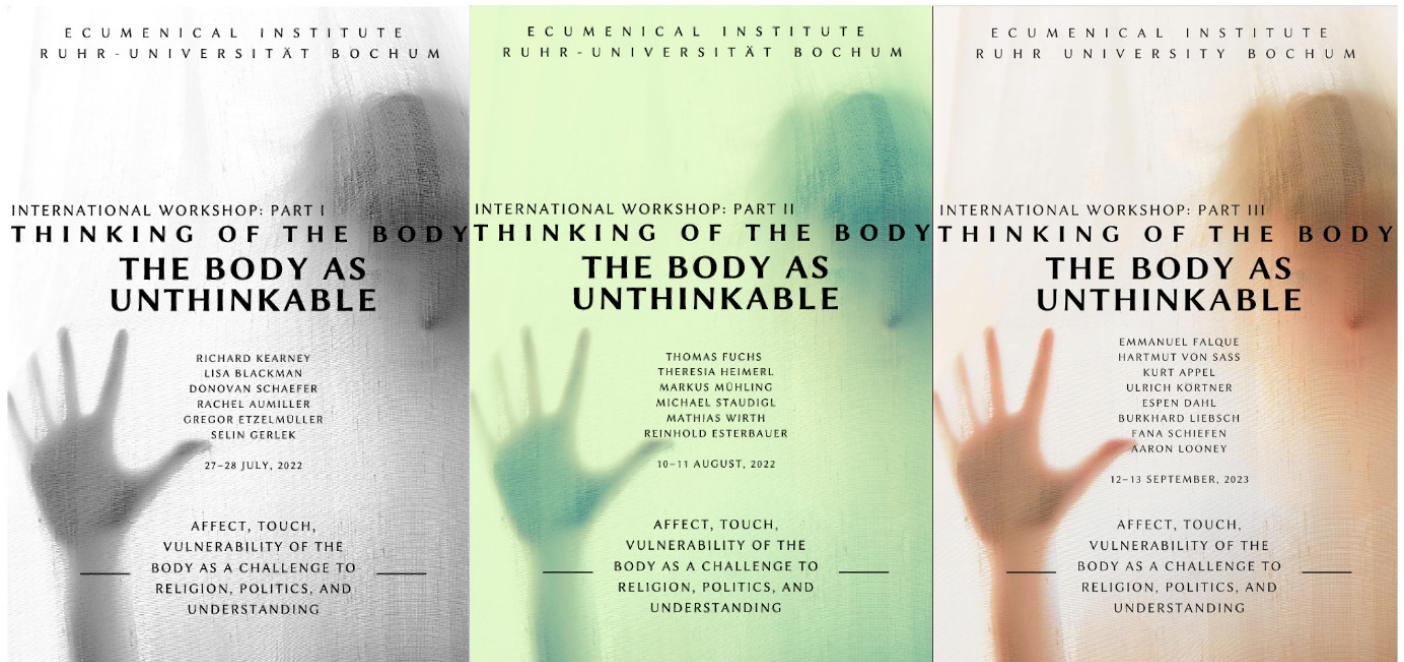
Dr Fortein worked on several book projects and articles. He delivered a paper at the 2023 Church History Society of Southern Africa Conference titled "The Church and Forced Migration/Removal: The Elandsbloof Case". Other publications included the following: "The Battle Of The Airwaves: The Role Of Radio In Mission And Apartheid"; "Belhar as Mirror and Window on Social Cohesion and Justice"; "I Will Not Restrain My Tongue: A Black Spirituality of Liberation" and "Holy Black Rage: An Inconvenience for Whiteness".



Dr Calvin Ullrich

Dr Ullrich was working on a second monograph as part of a German Hab conciliation thesis (second PhD), provisionally titled “A Phenomenology of Christian Bodily Affect”. By the end of 2023 he had already written several chapters, and hoped to complete a final draft by the end of 2024.

In 2023, he hosted and concluded the third part of an international conference series titled “Thinking of the Body – The Body as Unthinkable”. Conference contributions are being compiled into an edited volume to be published by Mohr Siebeck. Between his appointment at UFS and completing his move back to South Africa from Germany, he presented several papers, ranging from topics such as artificial intelligence to decolonising political theology, and published several book chapters in edited volumes.



Dr Pascal Pienaar

Dr Pienaar researched the local archive and produced several research outputs during 2023. She also delivered a paper at the Church History Conference, titled “South African Women Missionaries in the Diamond Fields and Their Views on Mission Work Amongst Migrant Workers”. The following research outputs were set to be published soon: “Navigating Vocation: Utilizing Social Cognitive Career Theory in historical analysis of women missionaries by means of a case study of Huguenot Seminary”; “Rev Colin McKenzie Fraser: Scottish Influence on the Church of the Free State in South Africa”; “Modern Media and the church in History: a case study on video games as participatory media and their approach to religious historical depiction of the early church”; and “Transnational Pioneers: South African Women Missionaries in the Early 20th Century”.

Charelle Sinra

Charelle Sinra, who has diligently served as Departmental Manager, took a period of leave. During her absence, we wish to express our sincere gratitude to Marina van Biljon, who effectively assumed the role of Departmental Manager and ensured the continued smooth operation of the department.





Undergraduate teaching

The Department taught 16 modules for undergraduate teaching in 2023. The Department and its lecturers pride themselves on innovative methods of teaching that combine traditional learning and teaching that takes place in a physical class setting, experiential learning that takes place external to campus, usually in a specific faith-based or social community, and online learning and teaching which conforms to the University's aims of creating a blended and innovative learning environment for students.

The Department has undergone an extensive external review and moderation of both undergraduate and postgraduate-level modules, and the assessments have been unanimously positive. Some of the highlights of these moderation reports were that, in general, the module guides are well-structured and organised, include all the information a student would need to succeed, and contain pertinent directives. Assessment practices are fair and integrated, relate to the learning outcomes, and meet the level of complexity expected at a certain NQF level. Moderators commended some modules for focusing on local and cultural contexts, specific religious traditions, various opportunities to apply gained knowledge in a practical context, and innovative teaching and learning strategies in a blended learning and teaching environment.

The Department also noted a few recommendations and compiled an Improvement Plan to be implemented from January 2024 in all modules. In the sub-discipline Congregational and Leadership Studies, Prof Kobus Schoeman's undergraduate teaching activities were centred around the modules TCON3722 and TCON4822, which emphasised the study of congregational studies and leadership. Notably, these modules incorporated practical sessions that provided students a platform to discuss their experiences in congregational leadership and ministry. Dr Joseph Pali's undergraduate teaching initiatives were focused on TPCL1415, Christian Leadership in an African Context, and TMIS 2614, Grounding of Mission and Mission in Practice.

These courses aimed to introduce students to theological leadership theories and the essence of mission from a Biblical perspective. Adopting a student-centred approach, the teaching methods integrated real-life settings, media sources, and service-learning components, aligning the assessment criteria with NQF level 5 and 6 competencies. Notably, all these courses prioritised decolonisation efforts, emphasising African and global leadership contexts through diverse media, and fostering engaged learning experiences through township research and ministry contexts.

Undergraduate teaching activities in Studies in Homiletics and Liturgy, offered by Dr Martin Laubscher, included the successful delivery of TPIP1514, Interpreting and Proclaiming the Bible in Africa, earning accolades from reviewers for its well-structured module guide and commendable student success rate. Additionally, the modules TLIT3712 and THOM4812 focused on the study of liturgy and homiletics, emphasising a comprehensive approach to worship and preaching that integrates practical application opportunities. External reviewers praised these modules for their focus on cultural and religious contexts.

Undergraduate teaching in pastoral theology and praxis focussed on providing students with comprehensive knowledge and practical skills within an African, local context, exposing students to numerous contexts of community and engagement, developing students' personhood as pastoral caregivers, and responding to their call to care for God's creation as created in the Imago Dei. Prof Jan-Albert Van den Berg was responsible for the modules TPPM1514, TPF2622, and TRES4804, emphasising pastoral ministry, faith formation, and applied research methodology in theology. Dr Lyzette Hoffman added value to students' exposure to the field of faith formation as an expert on youth work and catechism.

In the second semester, Prof Juanita Meyer directed students' attention to the being of the caregiver and the needs of the care-seeker and ways in which the development of reciprocating spiritualities can result in the development of life-giving theologies for both caregiver and -seeker (TPAS3722: Study of Pastoral Care and TPAS4822: Advanced Study of Pastoral Care).

Prof Meyer emphasises the importance of engagement with the community, and of gaining skills and knowledge from in-service learning activities by exposing students to various scholarly engagement activities. Of these, the following can be mentioned: Third-year students facilitated a pastoral narrative workshop with grade 5 learners at Marthie Du Plessis School for the Learning Disabled, and the fourth-year students undertook a pastoral practicum with a child residing at one of the ENGO childcare homes. The fourth-year students were also exposed to the world of chaplains, spiritual workers, inmates and wardens at Grootvlei Correctional Services by attending a visit to the Grootvlei Centre.



Fourth-year students visit Grootvlei Correctional Services.

Without a permanent Missional Studies lecturer during the first semester, several of the undergraduate courses in Missiology were successfully taught with the assistance of temporary lecturers Dr Erika Senekal, Dr Wessel Wessels, and Rev Marlene Oosthuizen. These lecturers remodelled the teaching and learning strategies in such a way that deliverance of module content resulted in excellent learning outcome achievements by the students while staying true to the core outcomes of Missiology. Collectively, Missiology, at the undergraduate level, aimed to equip students with comprehensive knowledge and practical skills for navigating the complex landscape of interfaith dialogue and mission activities. The modules TMIS4814 (Dr Senekal) and TMIS1724 (Dr Wessels) both focus on the parameters of dialogue with other faiths, contemporary missiological reflections on interreligious dialogue, and the understanding of dominant other faiths within the South African context. These modules aim to cultivate a respectful and responsible approach to inter-religious dialogue. Similarly, TMIS2614 (Dr Pali) emphasises explaining the Biblical foundation of mission, understanding the implications and aims of mission, applying practical mission strategies and evangelism, initiating community upliftment actions, and comprehending scholarly perspectives on evangelism, diakonia, and mission. On the other hand, TMIS3712 (Rev Oosthuizen) helps students formulate the essence of *Missio Dei*, comprehend paradigm shifts in missiology, apply the concept of contextualisation, describe the idea of a missional church, and foster an ecumenical approach to addressing the contemporary challenges of a missional church.



Third-year students at Marthie du Plessis School.

Postgraduate teaching

Restructuring of Honours and Master's Programme

The Department underwent an active restructuring process for the Honours and Master's programmes in Practical and Missional Theology, leading to the suspension of new student enrollments in the honours programme for 2023. Despite this temporary alteration, the Department successfully administered 14 postgraduate modules, all of which were subjected to external moderation by qualified reviewers. Module reviews were pending submission for most of the year's modules, highlighting ongoing efforts to ensure quality and academic rigour within the curriculum.

External Moderation of TSS07919: In-depth Study of Spiritual Practices

A standout achievement for the Department was the exceptional external moderation feedback received for the module TSS07919: In-depth Study of Spiritual Practices. Led by Prof Van den Berg, the course was lauded for its balanced blend of theoretical knowledge, practical activities, and reflective exercises, which foster critical interaction and creative expression. The course structure emphasises personal and spiritual growth through self-reflection, and encourages the exploration of spiritual practices from traditional to contemporary forms, as well as the exploration of new forms relevant to modern society. Review materials were deemed appropriate, promoting critical thought processes and encouraging meaningful engagement at both personal and interpersonal levels. The course's comprehensive and relevant approach was acknowledged, highlighting the Department's commitment to nurturing a holistic understanding of spiritual practices within a contemporary context.

In the postgraduate teaching domain, the modules TPRM7904 and TPCS7900 (Prof Kobus Schoeman) continued with their existing content, with TPCS7900 explicitly focusing on the evaluation of congregational involvement in the community, aligned with Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 1 on eradicating poverty. Dr Laubscher highlighted the significance of advanced studies in practical theology, homiletics, and liturgical renewal by facilitating modules including TPHP5800, TPHO6804, TPLR7900, and TPHN7900. In postgraduate teaching, his involvement encompassed guiding the PGDip group on an ecumenical tour with a strong emphasis on engaged scholarship.





Dr Laubscher's research activities were equally notable – he garnered the prestigious Andrew Murray Prize for the best theological book in Afrikaans, and published articles in two esteemed peer-reviewed journals, and a chapter in a book. His participation in two interviews with Profs Piet Meiring and Nadine Bowers Du Toit, published in *Acta Theologica*, the creation of several homiletical and liturgical aids, and his contribution to book reviews underscore his active engagement within the academic community and beyond. Prof Van den Berg oversaw three pastoral and spiritual studies modules, including TPTH5800, TSPP7910, and TPCF7900, focusing on advanced studies in practical theology; specialised ministries; practicum, an in-depth exploration of spiritual practices, highlighting their significance and applicability in various contexts; and an intensive examination and evaluation of curricula, promoting critical assessment and improvement of educational materials within the realm of pastoral and spiritual studies.

The module TPCF7900, In-depth Study of Pastoral Care and Counselling, led by Prof Meyer, equips students with comprehensive knowledge and skills essential for effective pastoral care. It emphasises an intercultural approach to pastoral care, elucidating the characteristics of a pastoral caregiver and the essential components of a caregiving relationship, incorporating embodied listening.

Staffing

Following a comprehensive interview process, the Department welcomed Dr Daniel Andrew as the new lecturer in Missiology. Dr Andrew, with a background in theology and ministerial training, holds two PhDs, one in Systematic Theology (2006) and another in Practical Theology (2021), supervised by our esteemed colleague Prof Schoeman. With extensive experience in various faith-based contexts, ministries, and academic settings, Dr Andrew was awarded a postdoctoral fellowship at North-West University in 2022, leading to his current appointment. Additionally, he is a licensed pastor affiliated with the Apostolic Faith Mission and possesses over 20 years of ministry experience as the presiding pastor of multiple congregations. His scholarly contributions include four articles in academic peer-reviewed journals and two conference proceedings.

Starting January 2023, the Department promoted Profs Eugene Baron and Juanita Meyer to Associate Professor. Regrettably, Prof Baron accepted a position at Unisa, commencing in 2023.

Prof Schoeman initiated a new research project alongside Dr Pali, exploring congregational ministry and leadership vitality, as part of an engaged research initiative in collaboration with Church Life Survey (Australia). Additionally, Prof Schoeman's participation in the 37th International Society for the Sociology of Religion (ISSR) Conference in Taipei, Taiwan, was highlighted through the presentation of their paper on "Congregational transformation and the pandemic's empirical reflection on the impact on South African congregations", demonstrating their commitment to international engagement and knowledge dissemination. Dr Pali's research activities included co-authoring two articles and active participation in multiple conferences,

Through a two-day training programme and pastoral guidance practicum at Aurora Rehabilitation Centre in Bloemfontein, students are guided in developing a care plan for individuals grappling with substance use or abuse, integrating elements of liberative and spiritual integration.

Three candidates completed their academic research under the guidance of Prof Van den Berg, with all degrees conferred in April 2023: Dawid Mouton (PhD), Mojalefa Moahludi and Mark Derry (MTh), and Nqobile Dlodla (Hons). Committed to quality postgraduate education, Prof Schoeman delivered the modules TPRM7904, focusing on an in-depth study of research methodology and theory in practical and missional theology, and TPCS7900, an in-depth exploration of congregation and community. TPCS7900 uniquely centred its evaluation of congregational engagement in the community around SDG 1, emphasising eradicating poverty.

Dr Pali successfully guided three students in completing their research projects, with all three degrees being conferred in December 2023: Clementinah Puseletso and Masaso Moyo (as promoter) and Sicele James (as co-promoter).

delving into diverse theological and societal topics. His involvement in various research and community-based projects, such as memorial lectures, workshops, and seminars on pertinent societal issues, significantly impacted the academic and broader communities. Prof Van den Berg made a research visit to the Princeton Theological Library (USA) in November 2023, with attendance at the American Academy of Religion Conference in San Antonio, Texas. He also engaged in various community activities, including leading worship services and delivering public lectures in multiple faith communities throughout the year, highlighting his dedication to fostering academic growth and community involvement. Prof Meyer took a six-month research sabbatical



from April to July, intending to conduct research for the project titled “Developing a Pastoral Theology and Praxis for Africa”, where the focus was on lived experiences and (life-giving and -limiting) theologies, thereby being sensitive to the embedded and deliberate theologies, symbols, and spiritual practices of care-seekers. Epistemologically, ‘theological storying’ is conceptualised through the lenses of a Trinitarian understanding of relationship, whilst notions of ‘narratological resolution’ and ‘theological reconciliation’ are conceptualised and operationalised. She was an external reviewer of various Pastoral Care and Counselling modules offered at NWU in 2023, and published a review of the book *Women in Yoruba Religions*, by Oyèronké Oládém, in the *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*. Additionally, she was appointed as a member of the Internal Review Committee for NRF rating applications of UFS scholars for the 2023 to 2024 rating applications.

Public and international engagements

Prof Schoeman participated in the 37th ISSR conference in Taipei by presenting his paper on “Congregational transformation and the pandemic’s empirical reflection on the impact on South African congregations”.

Dr Pali organised a memorial lecture for Dr AA Odendaal and Dr DT Keta, featuring the participation of Dr T Makutoane and Dr A Hoffman, which took place on 9 March at NGKA Dewetsdorp and was attended by more than 40 people. Additionally, he conducted workshops across Bloemfontein, Bultfontein, and Qwaqwa, focusing on the responsible involvement of the church and pastors in society, drawing the participation of over 60 pastors. Furthermore, a workshop titled “Towards innovative economic participation of church members” was organised in Bloemfontein on 3 October in partnership with the Small Enterprise Development Agency (SEDA), the provincial Department of Small Business Development, Tourism and Environmental Affairs (DESTEA), the UFS Community Engagement Office, and other government departments aimed at fostering creative economic engagement within church communities. A marriage seminar titled “Restore and revive your marriage in a Biblical way” was held in Thaba ‘Nchu on 9 September, with a turnout of 20 couples. It offered valuable guidance on strengthening marital relationships through Biblical teachings and principles.

Prof Meyer engaged in two national conferences, one of which was in collaboration with the International Council for Pastoral Care and Counseling (ICPCC). She also attended and presented a paper at the ReDi Conference in Oslo, Norway. Her presentations revolved around the themes of pastoral care through theological storying, focusing on aspects of resilience and reconciliation.





Staffing

The Department of Religion Studies is exceptionally proud of the hard work, dedication and commitment shown by its staff members and research fellows, who continue to meaningfully invest their time and efforts into the Department's advancement and success. The Department also acknowledges and appreciates the additional support it receives from other institutional bodies, such as the Mentoring Programme, under the leadership of Dr Henriëtte Van den Berg, which has assisted the Department financially in order to fund the employment of two part-time lecturers who effectively lessened the heavy workloads of permanent staff members. This form of support was necessary and important because the Department continues to experience a capacity challenge. As a result, the contractual employment of part-time lecturers enabled the Department to continue to excel in its work in terms of teaching and learning; research and innovation; engaged scholarship; and internationalisation.

At the moment, the Department is in the process of re-curriculation, in line with other departments in the Faculty of Theology and Religion. This is both challenging and promising. It is challenging because a new Bachelor of Divinity programme is being planned and will be introduced in 2025. This requires a lot of groundwork and benchmarking so that the offering is of a high quality and speaks to both global and (Southern) African contexts. The good news is that this is a challenge worth confronting in order to keep our offerings highly contextual, relevant, and engaging. It is also promising because it speaks to the dynamics of the Faculty and its transformative agenda. The Faculty of Theology and Religion is moving towards an inclusive theology that promotes diversity and plurality. As a result, the Faculty sees itself as ecumenical – embracing other Christian religious traditions – and offering a constructive space for the neutralistic study of religions under the premise of Religion Studies as a subject field.

The re-curriculation process is taking place in both our undergraduate and postgraduate modules. In order to benchmark our offerings against other universities, we invited Prof Jaco Beyers – Deputy Dean: Teaching and Learning, and Head of the Department of Religion Studies in the University of Pretoria's (UP's) Faculty of Theology and Religion – to assist us. We were also privileged to have our Faculty's Programme Director, Rev Marlene Oosthuizen, share some insights on how to go about the process of re-curriculation. We are truly indebted to the assistance of these two wonderful individuals. As members of the Department, we are better prepared for the process and any challenges that come with it.



Prof Joel Mokhoathi, John de Victor, Rev Marlene Oosthuizen, Thabiso Khoeli, Ronel Ellis and Dr Jacob Mokhutso



Profs Joel Mokhoathi (Head of Department Religion Studies, Jaco Beyers (Head of Department, UP) and Dr Jacob Mokhutso

At present, the Department is continuing with its regular programme, offering both undergraduate and postgraduate teaching. At undergraduate level, the Department offers some modules that speak to socio-cultural and socio-religious issues that pertain to religious expression and embodiments – also known as ‘lived religions’. The Department currently offers seven undergraduate modules. These include Contemporary Expressions of Religiosity in Africa (TRER1524); Religion and Social Milieu (TRRS1514); Social Ethics of a Religion – Focusing on Pentecostal Christianity (TRLS1714); African Traditional Religion and Christianity (TTRC2624); Phenomenology of Religion (TRPH3712); Selected World Religions (TRWR3722); and Study of Belief Systems (TRBS4822).

Post-Graduate teaching

Our postgraduate programmes cater for both structured and research-directed studies. Structured programmes start at honours to master’s level. At honours level, the Department has the following modules: Research Method and Theory (TRRM 6814/24); Advanced Study in the History and Theories of the Origins of Religion (TRHS 6815/25); Advanced Study of Christianity (TRCR 6815/25); Advanced Study of African Traditional Religion (TRAT 6815/25); Advanced Study of Buddhism (TRBU 6815/25); and a Research Report in Religion Studies (TRRR 6818/28).

For the structured master’s programme, the Department offers the following modules: Research in Religion Studies (TRLS 7900); In-depth Study of Religion Studies (TRID 7900); and In-depth Study in Religion Studies (TRLS 7916/26). There are no structured programmes for doctoral studies, as the Department only offers doctoral studies through research – pure research or by publishable articles. As they are contextually relevant and address societal issues, our programmes have attracted students from different countries and backgrounds. Our postgraduate students in the Department include students from the following countries: Ghana, Lesotho, South Africa, South Sudan, and Zimbabwe. The Department is also proud of and celebrates the successful completion of Rev Jacob Mokhutso’s PhD in Religion Studies. He was among the December 2023 graduating class.



Staffing

At present, the Department has three permanent staff members: two academic and one administrative. These are Prof Joel Mokhoathi, Dr Jacob Mokhutso, and Ronel Ellis. Through the financial support of the Mentoring Programme, the Department was able to employ two part-time lectures – John de Victor and Thabiso Khoeli – who assisted with teaching responsibilities. De Victor assisted the Department by teaching two modules: Religion and Social Milieu (TRRS 1514) and Study of Belief Systems (TRBS 4822). Khoeli also assisted with two modules: Social Ethics of a Religion – Focusing on Pentecostal Christianity (TRLS 1714) and Studies in African Traditional Religion and Christianity (TTRC 2624). In addition to both permanent and part-time staff members, the Department appreciates the significant contribution of research fellows, who continue to enrich the Department's operations and increase its research outputs. Our hearty appreciation goes to them for their involvement and continued partnership, at various capacities, in the Department.

Research activities

The members of the Department were involved, in one way or another, in some research activities during 2023. These included the following: conference participation, community engagement, and conducting empirical research projects. Below are some of the highlights:

Conferences

From 15 to 19 May, Dr Jacob Mokhutso attended and presented a paper at the African Methodist Intercultural Dialogue Network Symposium. He presented on the theme “Is the Methodist Church of Southern Africa an African Church or a Church in Africa? A decoloniality paradigm”.

From 2 to 4 August, Prof Joel Mokhoathi attended the 9th African Association for the Study of Religions (AASR) Conference in Africa, held at the University of Nairobi, Kenya, under the theme “Creativity, Innovation and Imagination in African Religions”. It was co-sponsored by the International Association for the History of Religions (IAHR) and recognised as an IAHR Regional Conference. Prof Mokhoathi presented a paper on “Diviners, Healers and Prophets: Mantsopa's hybridization of African Christianity”.

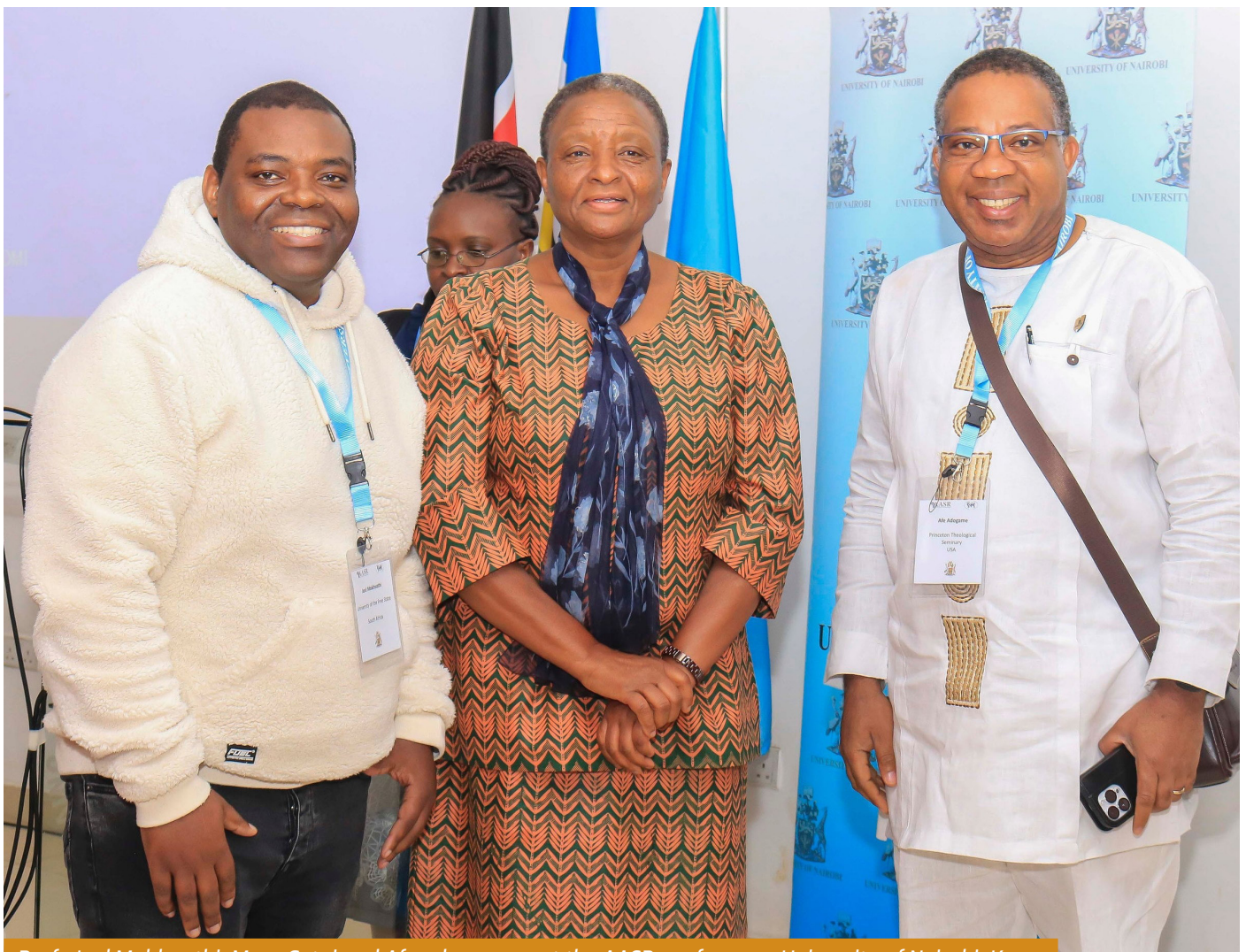


Theological Symposium: Profs D. Forster, J. Vilauculos, Dr J. Mokhutso, Prof H Pieterse, Dr M. Mujinga, Bishop, Dr A Muthoni and Prof R Hunt.



From 26 to 28 September, Prof Mokhoathi co-hosted a seminar with the Department of Religion Studies at the National University of Lesotho (NUL) around the theme of “African thought and identities: connections between religion, culture and identity”. The seminar focused on the empirical findings of a research project on Prophetess Mantsopa Makhetha, the progenitor of early African Christianity among Basotho of the Free State and Lesotho. This was the second and final part of the umbrella project “African Christianity: An Interplay between Religion, culture and Identity”, which is funded by the National Research Foundation under the Thuthuka Funding Instrument. The project was funded for three years, starting in 2021 and concluding in 2023.

From 12 to 14 October, Dr Mokhutso also attended and presented a paper at the African Association of Political Science (AAPS) Conference, which was held in Pretoria. The paper covered the theme “Decoloniality and African philosophy of Ubuntu as a nostrum to African self-determination in promoting African Indigenous health”.



Profs Joel Mokhoathi, Mary Getui and Afe adogame – at the AASR conference, University of Nairobi, Kenya.



The National University of Lesotho (NUL) seminar, which was co-hosted with the Department of Religion Studies, University of the Free State.



AAPS conference: Dr J Mokhutso, Dr K Mangombe and Dr B Magocha.

Community engagement

Dr Mokhutso continues to serve on the Faculty Engaged Scholarship Committee (FESCO), which plans activities between the Faculty of Theology and Religion and the community, and organises engaged scholarship activities within the Faculty. FESCO is bringing us a new engaged scholarship project known as “Dibuka Ditlamong”, which is an engaged scholarship project that aims to provide access to books in prisons. This project is spearheaded by Prof Juanita Meyer from the Department of Practical and Missional Theology.

Dr Mokhutso was invited to serve as a guest speaker on Theological Day, the official opening-ceremony day for the Faculty of Theology and Religion. He was also invited to speak at the 4th Annual Mokala-Montle District Wesley Guild Convention, and was invited by the CRL Rights Commission as an expert in religion to address Free State religious leaders on the topic “What is a religious community, and what are religious communities’ rights?”.

On 18 October, Dr Mokhutso was featured in the UFS Learning and Teaching Khothatsa Project, which recognises excellence in teaching.



Speaking at CRL: Dr Jacob Mokhutso

Prof Mokhoathi worked closely with the Inter-Religion Forum (IRF), an inter-religious body within the Department of Religion Studies. He was invited to speak on the practice of spirituality in residences within the UFS. The talk was themed “Religious inclusion and tolerance in residential communities”. He was also invited to participate in and speak at the UFS Teaching and Learning Pre-Conference, and served as a guest lecturer on the subject of “Spirituality and Cultural Tolerance” for an inter-professional class of students in the fields of Occupational Therapy, Physiotherapy, Dietetics, Biokinetics, and Optometry. One of the Department’s research fellows, Dr Nomfundo Mlisa, was also invited as a guest speaker. The talk was organised by Dr Anke van der Merwe from the School of Health and Rehabilitation Sciences at the UFS.



Talk on Spiritual tolerance – House Madelief residences.



Oxford-UP Interreligious Week: Charel du Toit, Prof Mokhoathi, Prof Jaco Beyers and Iwana Hartmann

Public and international engagements

In terms of public and international engagements, the Department extended its collaborations with other scholars and/or scholarly organisations. In line with this, Dr Mokhutso was involved in a collaborative teaching and learning process which saw him present a paper in a module (THEO 680: Doing Theology Inter-culturally: World Christianity as Context for Doing Theological Reflection Today) for master’s and PhD students on 19 September. This was for the Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary, Evanston, Illinois, USA.

Dr Mokhutso was invited, for the third conservative year, to serve as an external moderator for Theological Education by Extension (TEE) College from 29 October to 1 November.

Prof Mokhoathi was invited to serve as a Subject Matter Expert (SME) for one of the local higher education institutions in Eswatini by the Eswatini Higher Education Council (ESHEC). He was also invited to participate as a guest lecturer at the Inter-Religious Week event organised by the Oxford-University of Pretoria Centre for Religion, Public Life, and Security in Africa. The centre is spearheaded by Prof Maniraj Sukdaven and directed by Dr Charel Du Toit from UP’s Faculty of Theology and Religion. The year culminated with Dr Mokhutso’s graduation in December, which is an achievement the Department is extremely proud of and celebrates.



UFS December Graduation: the graduation of Dr Jacob Mokhutso.



These are, therefore, some highlights of the year 2023. It was a remarkable year, with many challenges and wonderful stories of success for the Department of Religion Studies. As members of the Department, we are truly happy and satisfied with the milestones that the Department has achieved, and we look forward to 2024.



As the Shepherd Centre, we have truly pushed ourselves in 2023 and persevered regardless of the challenges we faced. This year we focused on expanding our network by maintaining the existing stakeholder relations, looking for opportunities, and rebranding ourselves 18 years into our story. All of this was achieved because of the support received from the Faculty of Theology and Religion staff.

Staffing

The Shepherd Centre is a unit within the Faculty that reports to the Office of the Dean, and we have been blessed to have Prof Francois Tolmie, who was Acting Dean, as our Head of the Centre. The Centre is staffed with Project Coordinator Sinovuyo Mogwasi, who ensures the Centre's operations run smoothly.

Short Learning Programme Offering

Of our six active SLPs, we offered three this year, which is an improvement from last year, and we are pleased that our SLPs are starting to interest our market, and that our marketing approaches are starting to reap what we have sowed. We are very proud of all our participants for excelling in their studies with us. Below is a table to show the class average statistics for the offerings:

Name of SLP	Class Average Mark
Christian Leadership in Contemporary Context	82,25%
Effective Bible Teaching to Children	78,5%
Introduction to the Bible	82,33%

We trust that our other programmes – Burial Rites in the African Context, Practical Theology in a Fast-Changing Environment, and Christian Ritual as a Verbal and Non-verbal Phenomenon – will also be offered next year. We are proud that we had a new SLP approved, developed in collaboration with the UFS School of Financial Planning Law. The programme, Providence and Financial Planning for Pastors, will assist us in providing financial literacy skills to pastors, ministers and lay ministers in different stages of their lives. We are very excited about this new programme and can't wait to offer it to the religious communities we serve.

Additionally, our talks with the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) resulted in two new SLPs: Executive Leadership in Military Chaplaincy, and Executive Pastoral Care and Counselling in Chaplaincy. These two SLPs were developed specifically for chaplains in the SANDF and are not marketed or available to the public at the moment.

Stakeholder Relations

The Shepherd Centre's staff are not easily demotivated, and we constantly try to innovate in approaching new opportunities. The relationship we have been building with the Chaplain Service Division in the SANDF has challenges, but we are still hopeful we will preserve and seal the partnership and start working with them. The Centre also explored other relationships, such as with the South African Police Services (SAPS) and the Department of Correctional Services – organs of state that also have chaplains – and we trust we will secure a working agreement in the future with one of these bodies and train their chaplains with the material we have already developed. The Centre maintains its relationship with the Association of Christian Religious Practitioners via our existing memorandum of understanding. We are also proud to confirm that all our programmes carry continuing professional development (CPD) points with this professional body.

Events

The Centre consistently endeavours to broaden its market presence and engage with religious communities. This year, we have been honoured with multiple invitations to present our Short Learning Programmes (SLPs). Notably, on 6 May, we had the privilege of presenting to the Mangaung Ministers' Fraternal. The session proved to be highly beneficial, offering valuable insights not only for the Ministers but also for us, as evidenced by the thoughtful questions posed following our presentation.



*Sinovuyo Mogwasi Shepherd Centre
Project Coordinator*

On 4 August, the Shepherd Centre took a trip to Qwaqwa, where we had the opportunity to interact with Ministers who facilitated previous SLPs that were phased out. We were able to share the changes that have taken place in the Centre and see how they might get involved with the Centre again. Dr Joseph Pali, also conducted a workshop there. The trip was a success, and we anticipate that attendees will soon enrol for the new SLPs. Our Project Coordinator also visited the UFS Qwaqwa Campus to discuss the possibility of assisting our participants in using the resources available on the campus to study with us.



To end our year, we hosted the Shepherd Centre relaunch event on 1 November, in the Centenary Complex. We had the opportunity to invite all our internal and external stakeholders, and we presented our new logo and the direction the Centre plans to take. We also had the opportunity to introduce the new projects we will be working on in 2024. The one we are most excited about is the “Creating Ethical Leaders in Faith-Based Communities” project, which we are starting in partnership with the Center for Ethical Leadership based in Seattle, USA. The event was a great opportunity for us to get support not only from Faculty staff, but also from church leaders and other departments on campus, such as the Kovsky Phahamisa Academy and the Community Engagement Office.





Faculty of Theology and Religion



This was a year filled with many trials for the Council, with some problems proving more extensive than others. However, we survived and stayed resilient, because we had a mission to achieve. As the Council, we are proud to say we achieved our mandate for 2023, and wish the Committee of 2024 all the best.

During the year we focused on academics, the structure of Coram Deo, and community engagement.

Academics

What the Council achieved:

1. The Council made the Faculty aware that most of its students do not study theology and religion with the hopes of being pastors.
2. The Council has informed the Faculty of the academic challenges students face, specifically addressing concerns regarding the structuring of modules by lecturers. The issues highlighted include the scheduling of assignment due dates and tests in close proximity, as well as, in some cases, the manner in which the modules are delivered
3. The Council engaged in discussions with students concerning their future career plans, with the majority expressing uncertainty about their intended paths after completing their degrees or master's programmes. In response, the Council, in collaboration with the Marketing and Communication Officer, Lethabo Machabaphala, partnered with Career Services, who organised a faculty-focused Masterclass. Guest speakers were invited to address and guide the students during this event.
4. The Council thanks the Academic Advising Office for its cooperation and assistance throughout the year concerning student matters.
5. The Council addressed the faculty at the Faculty Board meetings about how the curriculum is structured and said that it could be seen as not favouring students who may not want to go into ministry.
6. The Council engaged the Faculty, noting that the third-year cohort is the largest the Faculty has had to date. It emphasised that it would not benefit the Faculty if it did not ensure that at least 50% of these students enrol in master's programmes following their final year.
7. Lastly, the Council made recommendations regarding point 5, and Rev Marlene Oosthuizen stated that she is in communication with other faculties to see if students can access other module codes besides the ones the Faculty already offers, such as modules in the Humanities and Education faculties.

What the Council would like to see in the year 2024:

1. The Council would like to see more collaboration with different churches and church organisations/ associations registered on UFS campuses. Organisations/ associations can ensure that students who wish to go into ministry relate to their respective church dogma.
2. The Council would like to see the Faculty work hand-in-hand with Career Services to ensure that students are equipped with career insights from the beginning of their studies. The Faculty should also invite professionals who have a degree or master's in theology and religion and have ventured out into other sectors to address students on how they can expand their degree's career potential.
3. The Council would like the Faculty to plan theological trips for each semester. As the Council, we wanted to ensure the Faculty adheres to what we believe is the core of Vision 130: "... promoting the learning experiences, academic support strategies, and other forms of assistance that respond to the various needs, aspirations, and social backgrounds of the diverse student community. Not only that but also ensuring that the faculty recruits and retains the best students from diverse backgrounds in all disciplines and at all levels. Particular attention will be paid to ensuring racial, socioeconomic, gender, capability, and epistemological diversity."



Academics

1. Heidedal Children and Youth Centre

We believe it is vital for the Faculty to create spaces for engagement with communities in different areas, especially where resources and support structures are needed. The Council 'adopted' the Heidedal Child and Youth Care Centre in 2022, and ran an outreach programme which saw it collaborate with House Legatum, a male day residence, and other students from different faculties. However, our expectations for the year were not met. Thus, we propose the following for next year to ensure there is consistency from the Student Council and the Faculty:

- a. For 2024, the Council hopes to have four community engagements with the Heidedal Child and Youth Care Centre per semester, with the assistance of the Faculty Engaged Scholarship Committee (FESCO) and other parties that have provided assistance.
- b. The Council will ensure that there is a commitment to ethical and responsible stewardship between the Centre and the Faculty.

Overall, the Council is proud of the work it was able to do throughout the year, and thanks the Faculty for its support.



Coram Deo

The Council also had to engage with the many students who had an experience of how Coram Deo was structured for five years, what differences they noted, and whether those differences were positive or negative. A need for more student engagement was pointed out to the Council. Senior students informed us that Coram Deo used to be a 'hub centre' for Theology and Religion students; the hour was dedicated to worship and fellowship. However, this is no longer the case. Junior students said that Coram Deo felt like another lecture rather than a space to rejuvenate themselves.

The Council's chairperson communicated with Dr Martin Laubscher regarding the structure of Coram Deo, and they discussed ways that Coram Deo can be more inclusive and fashionable in a way that aligns with current students. A consensus was reached that student engagement is required to ensure the livelihood of Coram Deo. By incorporating the idea of students being guests and speakers, students would gain experience in addressing matters, whether from a ministerial or student-experience perspective. The Council is proud to say that the restructuring of Coram Deo will invoke a new drive within our students to engage more in classes and the broader community.



THEOLOGIA



The academic journal the Faculty of Theology and Religion managed published four issues in 2023. The June edition covered various topics, from religious and sport symbols to digital ecclesiology, feminist spiritualities, and the role of supernatural beliefs in the COVID-19 pandemic. Four of the 13 articles were written by international authors. Supplementum 35 was a special edition titled “Towards life-giving Communities in a post-pandemic World: Asian feminist theological perspectives”. The guest editors were Prof AM Brazal from De La Salle University (Manila, Phillippines) and Dr R Pieris, Visiting Lecturer at the University of Kelaniya and the Christian Theological Seminary (Sri Lanka). The special edition Supplementum 36 was titled “The Transmission and Reception of Biblical Discourse in Africa”. Prof ID Mothoagae from UNISA was the guest editor.

The December edition included topics on resilient religion, interpersonal transformation, sacramental theology, astrotheology, and much more. Eight of the 13 articles were internationally authored. Acta Theologica strives to publish articles of high academic standard, in this way contributing to the theology knowledge field. Acta Theologica is listed on Web of Science, Scopus and SciELO South Africa. The Editorial Board consists of Faculty members from within all the sub-disciplines in theology. The Advisory Board comprises international academics from Africa, Europe, and the Americas.

Editorial board:

Dr Martin Laubscher (Editor-in-chief), Dr Lyzette Hoffman (Executive Editor), Dr Daniël Andrew, Dr Eugene Fortein, Prof Juanita Meyer, Prof Joel Mokhoathi, Dr Nina Müller van Velden, Dr Joseph Pali, Prof Kobus Schoeman, Prof Lodewyk Sutton, Prof Francois Tolmie, Dr Calvin Ullrich, and Prof Jan-Albert van den Berg.





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 Tolmie, D.F. *Research on the Letter to the Galatians: 2000-2020 Volume 2*, Johannesburg, UJ Press, ufs-048034
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