



UNIVERSITY OF THE FREE STATE
UNIVERSITEIT VAN DIE VRYSTAAT
YUNIVESITHI YA FREISTATA

FACULTY OF THEOLOGY AND RELIGION

Annual Report 2025



*Inspiring excellence, transforming lives
through quality, impact, and care.*



UNIVERSITY OF THE
FREE STATE
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VRYSTAAT
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THEOLOGY AND RELIGION



Annual Report 2025

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AAPSC	African Association for Pastoral and Spiritual Care
ASSAf	Academy of Science of South Africa
ATBV	Algemene Taakspan Bybelvertaling en -Verklaring
BDiv	Bachelor of Divinity
CBR	Community-Based Research
CIRRCE	Centre for Interdisciplinary Research in Religion, Community, and Ecologies
CLS-SA	Church Life Survey in Southern Africa
CPSC	Council for Pastoral and Spiritual Counsellors
DRC	Dutch Reformed Church
FAAO	Faculty Academic Administration Office
FBO	Faith-Based Organisation
FESCO	Faculty Engaged Scholarship Committee
FPG	Future Professoriate Group
FSC	Faculty Student Council
GHREC	General Human Research Ethics Committee
HoD	Head of Department
HPCSA	Health Professions Council of South Africa
ISERT	International Society for Empirical Research in Theology
MTh	Master of Theology
NCLS	National Church Life Survey
NCLS/CLS-SA	National Church Life Survey/Church Life Survey in Southern Africa
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OTSSA	Old Testament Society of Southern Africa
PALAR	Participatory Action Learning Action Research
PThU	Protestant Theological University
ReDi	Research in Diaconia and Christian Social Practice
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SANCA	South African National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence
SANDF	South African National Defence Force
SAPS	South African Police Service
SASNES	Southern African Society for Near Eastern Studies
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SLP	Short Learning Programme
SNTS	Society of New Testament Studies
TOIBO	Transoranje instituut van Buitengewone Onderwys
TRRR	Trans-Atlantic Roundtable on Religion and Race
TSSA	Theological Society of Southern Africa
UCDG	University Capacity Development Grant
UFS	University of the Free State
WIL	Work-Integrated Learning

Dean's Overview

The Faculty of Theology and Religion continues to strengthen its position as a dynamic centre of theology and religion scholarship, teaching, research, and community engagement (CE) within the University of the Free State (UFS) and beyond. Guided by its Strategic Vision and aligned with Vision 130, the faculty remained committed to academic excellence, transformative education, impactful research, and meaningful partnerships that address societal needs at local and global levels.

During the year under review, the faculty built on a strong foundation of academic quality while embracing opportunities for innovation, collaboration, and growth. Across its teaching, research, and engagement activities, it sought to create an environment in which students, staff, and partners could contribute meaningfully to addressing complex societal challenges through theological and religious scholarship.

Students remain a vital part of the academic community. During the year, the faculty achieved its first-time entry targets for both undergraduate and postgraduate registrations. Student success remained central to its mission, and the faculty sought to enhance the student experience and expand opportunities for academic development and leadership formation. Through collaboration with schools, faith institutions, alumni, Student Recruitment Services, and other strategic partners, the faculty increased its visibility and strengthened awareness of the diverse academic opportunities available within Theology and Religion. These efforts supported the faculty's commitment to attracting talented students while broadening access to quality higher education.

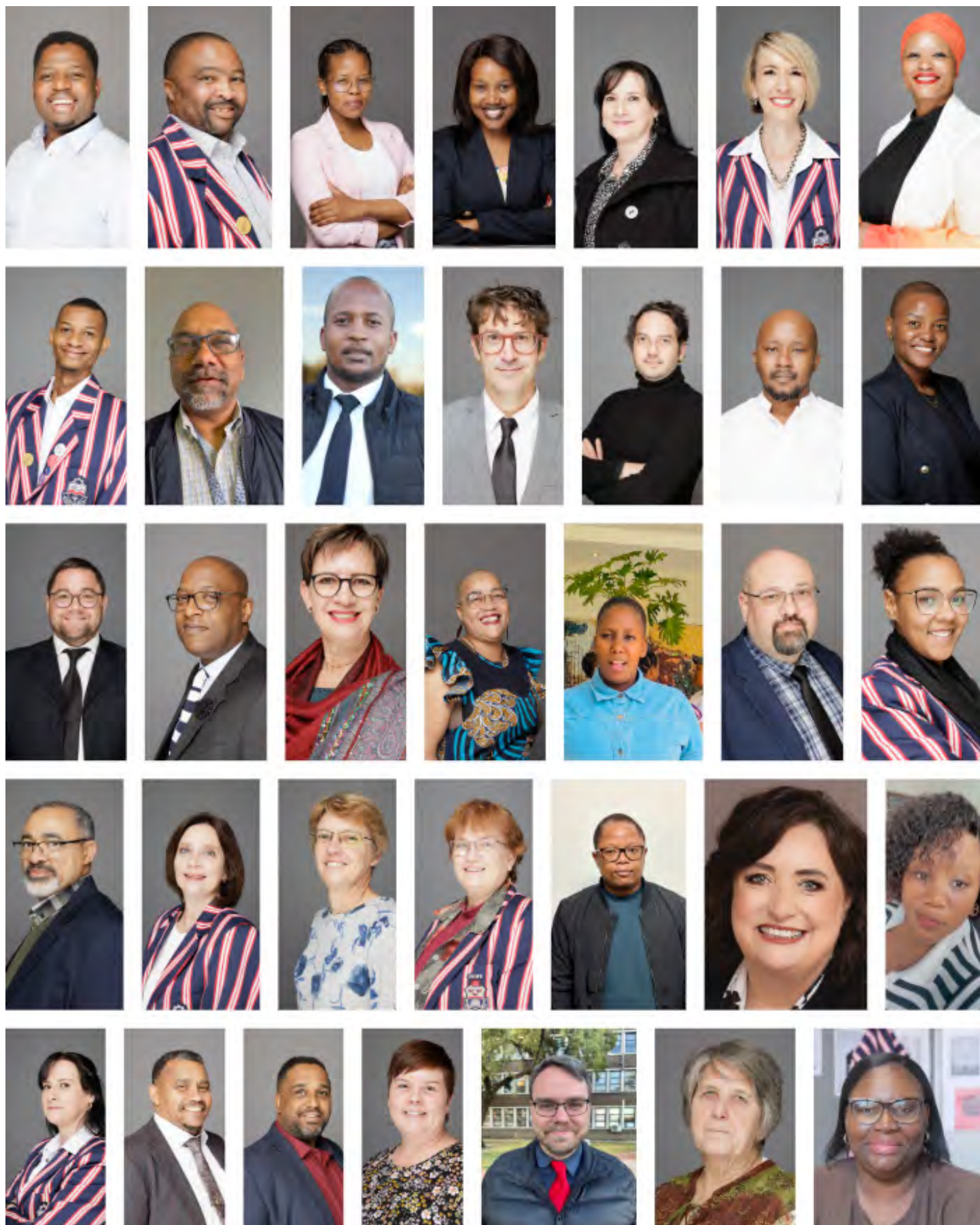
Research excellence remained a defining feature of the faculty's contribution to the University and the broader academic community. The faculty ranked third among all faculties for research output, reflecting the scholarship of its academic staff, their active participation in national and international research networks, and their supervision of postgraduate students.

The faculty also deepened its engagement with local communities, faith-based organisations (FBOs), public institutions, and international partners. These collaborations expanded opportunities for research, student mobility, CE, and knowledge exchange, while reinforcing the faculty's role as both locally responsive and globally connected. Particular attention was given to developing partnerships across the African continent as part of its broader internationalisation strategy.

Throughout the year, considerable effort was invested in strengthening the faculty's institutional profile through strategic communication, digital engagement, and stakeholder relations. The development of its digital platforms, publications, and public engagement initiatives enabled the faculty to communicate its achievements more effectively and showcase the impact of its academic programmes, research, and community work.

The faculty's achievements during the year reflected the collective commitment of its academic staff, professional support staff, students, alumni, and partners. Their dedication helped shape a faculty that is intellectually rigorous, socially engaged, and committed to serving the University and wider society.

Looking ahead, the faculty remains focused on advancing academic excellence, increasing postgraduate enrolment, expanding international partnerships, growing research impact, and fostering meaningful engagement with communities. It is confident that, through collaboration, innovation, and purposeful leadership, the Faculty of Theology and Religion will continue to make a significant contribution to the UFS, the African continent, and the global theological community.



Overview

Throughout 2025, the Faculty of Theology and Religion continued to enhance its visibility, stakeholder engagement, and academic profile through a range of recruitment, communication, and engagement initiatives aligned with the faculty's strategic objectives.

Working in collaboration with the Dean's Office, academic departments, and institutional partners, Marketing and Communications ensured that the faculty remained visible to prospective students, churches, community partners, alumni, and the wider public. These communication activities were intentionally guided by the faculty's commitment to academic excellence, transformative engagement, social justice, and leadership development.

The year was characterised by a strong focus on student recruitment, stakeholder engagement, academic visibility, and community impact. Through both in-person and digital platforms, the faculty successfully showcased its academic programmes, scholarly contributions, and societal relevance, while further strengthening its presence within the University of the Free State (UFS) and beyond.

Strategic Contribution to Faculty Objectives

Marketing and Communications continued to serve as a strategic enabler of the faculty's teaching, learning, research, and engagement agenda. The portfolio provided communication support across key faculty priorities, raising awareness of academic programmes, enhancing stakeholder relationships, and increasing participation in faculty initiatives.

Such communication efforts advanced the faculty's broader objective of positioning itself as a leading centre for theological education, research, and public engagement. Through consistent messaging and targeted visibility initiatives, the faculty strengthened its reputation as a space where faith, scholarship, and societal transformation intersect.

Student Recruitment and Enrolment Support

Student recruitment remained a key priority throughout the reporting period. The academic year began with the Faculty Welcoming Programme, First-Year Welcoming activities, and Theological Day. These initiatives introduced students to the faculty's academic environment, fostered a sense of belonging, and encouraged community and intellectual engagement. They also reinforced the faculty's commitment to supporting student success from the outset of the academic year.

In partnership with Student Recruitment Services, the faculty actively participated in a wide range of recruitment and learner engagement initiatives. These included Open Day activities at the Bloemfontein and QwaQwa Campuses, regional recruitment campaigns in KwaZulu-Natal, school visits, Grade 9 Subject Selection programmes, and Mini Open Day engagements for Grade 10 and 11 learners. Visits to schools such as Jim Fouché High School, as well as engagements involving high-performing learner groups through institutional recruitment programmes, created valuable opportunities to promote the faculty's academic programmes, explain potential career pathways, and engage directly with prospective students.

Postgraduate recruitment received focused attention through dedicated information sessions and engagement evenings. These platforms enabled prospective honours, master's, and doctoral students to engage directly with academics, explore the faculty's offerings, and gain a clearer understanding of its research environment. The faculty also broadened its recruitment reach by participating in virtual and international recruitment initiatives, thereby supporting wider institutional priorities related to access, diversity, and internationalisation.

Marketing, Brand Visibility and Reputation Management

Throughout the year, the faculty's communication efforts focused on presenting its work in a manner that reflected both its academic excellence and its contribution to society.

Faculty achievements, student accomplishments, research activities, public lectures, stakeholder engagements, and community initiatives were regularly featured across digital communication platforms and institutional channels. This sustained visibility strengthened the faculty's public profile and reinforced its reputation as a respected contributor to theological scholarship and public discourse.

Rather than relying solely on promotional messaging, the faculty prioritised authentic storytelling and meaningful engagement. This approach enabled the faculty to demonstrate the impact and value of its work, while fostering stronger connections with key stakeholders.

Stakeholder Engagement and Relationship Building

Throughout 2025, the faculty continued to strengthen its relationships with churches, pastors, FBOs, schools, and community partners.

Engagements with church leaders and faith communities remained particularly important. Initiatives such as the Botshabelo Pastors Engagement, together with other ministerial and church-related activities, created opportunities for dialogue, collaboration, and leadership development, while reinforcing the faculty's connection with the communities it serves.

Collaboration with internal stakeholders, including Student Recruitment Services and other University support divisions, further enhanced the faculty's ability to implement recruitment, communication, and engagement activities effectively.

These relationships remain central to the faculty's mission and continue to provide valuable opportunities for collaboration, knowledge exchange, and community impact.

Research Visibility and Academic Positioning

Research Visibility and Academic Positioning

The faculty continued to strengthen its academic profile through a range of scholarly and intellectual engagement activities.

Theological Day provided an important platform for academic reflection and discussion at the beginning of the year, while public lectures, seminars, and scholarly engagements sustained intellectual discourse within the faculty throughout the reporting period.

A key highlight was the inaugural Ancestor Day Conference, which attracted significant interest and created a platform for engagement on matters of faith, identity, spirituality, heritage, and social transformation. Alongside other conferences, lectures, and academic engagements, the event enhanced the faculty's visibility as a space for critical scholarship and meaningful dialogue.

Marketing and Communications supported these initiatives by ensuring that faculty research, academic expertise, and scholarly contributions reached audiences within and beyond the University.



Community Engagement and Public Impact

Community engagement remained an important part of the Faculty's work during 2025. Through relationships with churches, schools, community organisations and faith leaders, the Faculty continued to create opportunities for its academic work to contribute to communities beyond the university.

One example was the Heidedal Child and Youth Care Centre Library Initiative, which grew from an idea to transform an unused room at the Centre into a space for reading, learning and creativity. Lethabo Machabaphala initiated and coordinated the project, working with colleagues across the University and the Centre to develop the idea into a practical and lasting resource. The initiative brought together Kegomodicwe Phuthi from Sasol Library, Likonelo Mahlaba from Makerspace, Moleboheng Moshe-Bereng from Financial Planning Law and

Carolina Nombula from the Heidedal Child and Youth Care Centre.

The collaboration culminated in the launch of the library on 18 July 2025, as part of Mandela Day. The project was deliberately conceived as more than a once-off Mandela Day activity. It created a dedicated space where children and young people can access books, read, learn and participate in creative activities, with the potential to support literacy, confidence and educational development over time.

The initiative is a practical example of what can be achieved when the University works collaboratively with communities. It brought together different areas of expertise, responded to a clearly identified community need and translated the Faculty's commitment to engaged scholarship and societal impact into something tangible for children and young people in Heidedal.

The Faculty's community engagement during the year therefore continued to strengthen its connection with communities and demonstrate the relevance of Theology and Religion in addressing real social needs.

<https://ufsacza.sharepoint.com/SitePages/UFS-brings-hope-and-learning-to-Heidedal-on-Mandela-Day.aspx>



Events, Conferences and Faculty Initiatives

The faculty maintained a vibrant programme of academic, recruitment, and stakeholder engagement activities throughout the year.

Key highlights included the Faculty Welcoming Programme, First-Year Welcoming activities, Theological Day, Imagine Camp, Open Day engagements, postgraduate recruitment evenings, learner engagement programmes, church partnership initiatives, pastor development activities, and community outreach programmes.

The faculty also hosted and participated in conferences, public lectures, and academic discussions that advanced dialogue on contemporary theological and societal issues. The inaugural Ancestor Day Conference was a significant milestone in the faculty's academic and public engagement calendar, reflecting its commitment to facilitating meaningful conversations within both academia and society.

These activities supported student recruitment, enhanced stakeholder engagement, increased the faculty's academic visibility, and extended its impact across the University and the broader community.

Key Achievements

The faculty's key achievements during 2025 included:

- Successful support of undergraduate and postgraduate recruitment initiatives across multiple provinces and recruitment platforms.
- Expanded engagement with prospective students through school visits, Open Days, learner development programmes, and postgraduate recruitment events.
- Strengthened relationships with churches, pastors, FBOs, and community stakeholders.
- Increased visibility of faculty research, academic expertise, and scholarly engagement activities.
- Successful hosting and promotion of Theological Day and the inaugural Ancestor Day Conference.
- Sustained digital engagement and communication presence, despite financial constraints.
- Continued promotion of the faculty's contribution to leadership development, social justice, and societal transformation.



Challenges and Future Priorities

Although budget constraints and delays in accessing marketing resources presented challenges during the reporting period, the faculty maintained strong visibility and engagement through strategic collaboration, careful prioritisation, and innovative communication approaches.

Looking ahead, the faculty will continue to strengthen postgraduate recruitment, increase research visibility, deepen stakeholder relationships, and expand its digital communication presence. Greater emphasis will also be placed on strengthening impact measurement, evidence-based reporting, and strategic communication planning to support the faculty's continued growth and contribution to the University and society at large.



Introduction

As the Shepherd Centre, we remain committed to serving the religious community through relevant training and engagement initiatives. The year 2025 marked a significant step forward for the centre as we began to see the fruits of our consistent efforts in marketing, stakeholder engagement, and visibility. Despite ongoing capacity constraints, the centre demonstrated resilience and growth, particularly in the successful implementation of our SLPs.

Staffing

The Shepherd Centre continues to operate as a unit within the Faculty of Theology and Religion, reporting to the Office of the Dean. The centre is under the leadership of Prof John Klaasen as Head of the Centre.

Operationally, the centre is managed by Miss Sinovuyo Mogwasi, who serves as the Project Coordinator and is responsible for ensuring the smooth running of all activities and administrative functions. The centre continues to operate with a lean staffing structure, which presents both challenges and opportunities for growth.

Short Learning Programme Offering

The year 2025 was a productive year for the Shepherd Centre in terms of programme delivery. A total of four SLPs were successfully offered:

- Christian Leadership in Contemporary Context (16 participants)
- Introduction to the Bible (9 participants)
- Effective Bible Teaching to Children (11 participants)
- Practical Theology in a Fast-Changing Environment (2 participants)

This marks a significant improvement compared to the previous year, where no programmes were offered. The increase in participation reflects growing interest in the centre's offerings and the effectiveness of targeted marketing and stakeholder engagement strategies.

While application numbers improved considerably, it is important to note that financial constraints remained a barrier for some prospective participants, affecting final registration numbers.



Stakeholder Relations

The Shepherd Centre continued to strengthen its engagement with religious institutions and stakeholders during 2025. A key highlight was the engagement with the Anglican Church, which contributed significantly to the student cohort for the year.

In May 2025, the centre conducted a recruitment visit to Qwaqwa, engaging directly with church communities to promote the SLP offerings. This initiative forms part of the centre's broader strategy to expand its reach and reconnect with previously established networks.

Progress was also made with the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) Chaplain Services. The centre engaged in discussions with SANDF representatives, and a meeting was held with the Dean. The SANDF indicated its intention to enrol participants in two specialised programmes in 2026, with a planned start date of February 2026. This development represents a promising opportunity for future collaboration.

Events

The Shepherd Centre hosted several key events during 2025 to support student success and celebrate achievements:

- Two orientation sessions were held prior to the commencement of each cohort. These sessions were well received and played a crucial role in preparing participants for their learning journey.

A certificate ceremony was hosted on 5 December 2025 to celebrate the achievements of participants who successfully completed their programmes. The event served as an important milestone in recognising student success and strengthening the centre's community.

All events were hosted internally on campus and contributed positively to the centre's visibility and engagement.



Visibility and Impact

The year under review saw a noticeable improvement in the visibility of the Shepherd Centre within the faculty and the broader institution. Increased engagement efforts and programme offerings contributed to a stronger presence and renewed awareness of the centre's role.

There was also a marked increase in interest and applications compared to previous years, indicating that the centre's efforts to position itself within the religious community are beginning to yield positive results.

Challenges

Despite the progress made, the Centre continues to face several challenges:

- Capacity constraints: The Centre remains staffed by a single coordinator, which limits the scale and speed of operations.
- Financial barriers for participants: While interest in programmes has increased, financial constraints continue to impact registration numbers.

These challenges highlight the need for continued strategic planning and potential resource expansion to sustain growth.

Conclusion and Way Forward

The 2025 academic year represents a turning point for the Shepherd Centre. The successful offering of programmes, improved stakeholder engagement, and increased visibility signal a positive trajectory for the centre.

Looking ahead, the centre aims to build on this momentum by:

- Expanding programme offerings and increasing enrolment numbers
- Strengthening stakeholder partnerships, particularly with the SANDF
- Enhancing visibility and engagement within the religious community
- Exploring strategies to address financial accessibility for prospective participants

The Shepherd Centre remains committed to its mission of equipping and supporting religious leaders and practitioners through relevant and impactful programmes.



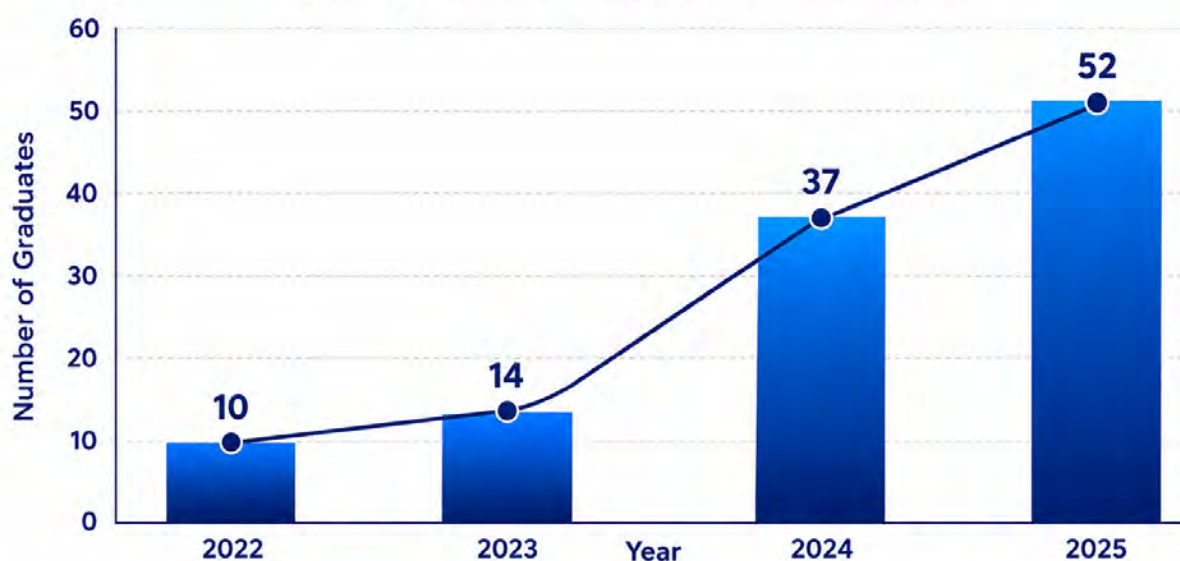
The 2025 academic year marked a significant period of growth, excellence, and collaboration within the Faculty's Learning and Teaching portfolio. Through the dedication of staff, the resilience of our students, and the continued support of the broader faculty community, we were able to strengthen our academic support initiatives and celebrate several noteworthy achievements.

The Faculty Academic Administration Office (FAAO) was further enhanced by the appointments of Ms Elizabeth Pelatona and Ms Gomolemo Motse. Their contributions to the office have already made a meaningful impact by supporting the smooth functioning of administrative processes and enhancing student support services. We extend our sincere appreciation to them, as well as to all colleagues within the faculty, whose commitment and teamwork have enabled the office to operate effectively and to continue delivering high-quality support to our students throughout the year.

One of the most encouraging highlights of 2025 was the growth in our Bachelor of Divinity (BDiv) graduating cohort. The number of graduates increased from 37 in the previous cycle to 52 in 2025, reflecting an increase of approximately 40.5%. This growth represents not only improved student retention and progression, but also the collective efforts of academic and support staff in creating an enabling learning environment for our students to succeed.

BDiv Graduation Statistics (2022–2025)

A Strong and Steady Growth in Graduate Numbers



The number of BDiv graduates has grown steadily from **10** in 2022 to **52** in 2025, reflecting **significant growth** over the last four years.



An equally significant milestone was the progression of 18 students from this graduating cohort into our master's programmes. This development reflects increasing confidence in postgraduate theological education within the faculty and highlights the academic maturity and research potential cultivated among our undergraduate students.

To celebrate academic excellence and student achievement, the faculty hosted a Recognition Ceremony, during which more than 90 students were honoured for their dedication, perseverance, and outstanding academic performance. The event provided a valuable opportunity to acknowledge and promote a culture of excellence among our students.

Prof Anthea Rhoda Deputy Vice-Chancellor and faculty colleagues are especially proud to acknowledge with the students for their exceptional academic achievements:



From the postgraduate cohort, a hearty congratulations to:

Mr Taba Letso – Best Performing Postgraduate Diploma Student with an average of 78%

- **Ms Thando Mkhathswa** and **Dr Nina Muller Van Velden** for receiving the award for Best Research Report with a mark of 80%
- **Mr Michael Seheri** for receiving the award for Best Master's Dissertation with a mark of 79%
- In 2025, the faculty also successfully piloted the Student-Led Teaching Awards, an initiative aimed at recognising excellence in teaching and supervision from the students' perspective. In their recognition, we congratulate:

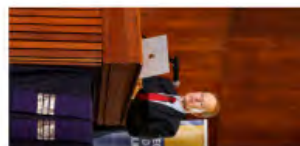
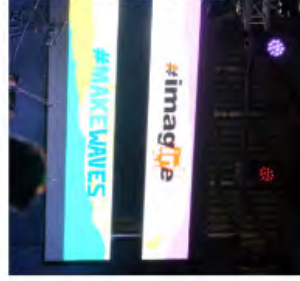
Dr Daniel Andrew, recipient of the award for Best Postgraduate Supervisor and Commitment to Student Wellbeing Award.

Prof Lodewyk Sutton, recipient of the Innovation in Teaching Award and Teacher of the Year Award



These recognitions highlight the faculty's dedication to innovative, student-centred teaching and meaningful postgraduate supervision. We extend our heartfelt appreciation to all faculty staff for their steadfast commitment to our students and the faculty's academic mission. Your dedication, professionalism, and readiness to exceed expectations continue to foster an environment in which students are encouraged to grow intellectually, professionally, and personally. The achievements of 2025 serve as evidence of your collective efforts and ongoing pursuit of excellence in learning and teaching.





Purpose of the report

This handover report has been prepared to facilitate a smooth transfer of responsibilities from the Theology and Religion Faculty Student Council (FSC) 2024/25 to the Theology and Religion FSC 2025/26. It is intended to support continuity and efficiency throughout the transition.

The report outlines key responsibilities, important contacts, challenges encountered, recommendations for future leadership, and the duties associated with each council member's portfolio. By documenting this information, it provides the new council with a practical reference for continuing ongoing work, building on previous achievements, avoiding the repetition of past challenges or mistakes, and maintaining effective representation and service for the student body.

Reflection on our Term in Office

Serving as the FSC for Theology and Religion has been a period of both growth and service. Throughout our term, we worked to represent students' needs, strengthen communication between the faculty and the student body, and foster a stronger sense of community. We are proud of the initiatives undertaken, such as the Food Drive project, thrift sale partnerships, and other student-centred programmes. These initiatives not only addressed immediate student needs, but also showcased the spirit of compassion, cooperation, and shared responsibility within the faculty.

At the same time, we encountered challenges, including limited resources and funding constraints. These difficulties taught us resilience, creativity, and the importance of working closely with stakeholders. This term reminded us that leadership is about service, listening, and creating platforms where every student feels valued.

As we hand over to the next council, we do so with gratitude for the lessons learned and with the hope that the foundation established during our term will continue to be strengthened.



Acknowledgements

With the dedication, teamwork, and commitment of council members, the FSC was able to carry out its projects and initiatives successfully. None of these achievements would have been possible without the following individuals: Phumlani Masango – Chairperson, Asandile Mbuku – Deputy Chairperson, Nkcubeko Msesele – Secretary, Ayesha Ndlovu – Treasurer, and Tumisang Phejane – Marketing and Liaison.

We also wish to express our sincere gratitude to the faculty staff, whose guidance and cooperation enabled us to address student needs effectively. Particular appreciation is extended to the Office of the Dean of the Faculty of Theology and Religion for their ongoing encouragement, partnership, and leadership. Their support proved vital to the success of key initiatives, including the Food Drive, the Theology Gala Dinner, and other student-centred programmes. Finally, to the Theology and Religion student body, we extend our thanks, as student leadership is only possible through the active engagement of students.

These endeavours demonstrate that leadership is not an individual pursuit but a shared commitment to service, growth, and community.

Vision of the Theology and Religion Faculty Student Council (FSC)

The Theology and Religion Faculty Student Council (FSC) envisions a vibrant, inclusive, and empowered student community rooted in values of service, academic excellence, and faith-driven leadership.

Our vision is to:

- **Promote Student Representation** – ensure that every student's voice is heard and their needs are addressed within the faculty.
- **Foster Academic and Spiritual Growth** – create platforms that support both the intellectual and spiritual development of students.
- **Build Community and Belonging** – strengthen relationships among students, staff, and external stakeholders through meaningful initiatives and events.
- **Advance Social Responsibility** – engage in projects that reflect compassion, justice, and service to society, embodying the values of theology and religion.
- **Leave a Legacy of Leadership** – equip and inspire future leaders to continue building on the foundation of collaboration, resilience, and excellence.

Mission of the Theology and Religion Faculty Student Council (FSC)

The mission of the Faculty Student Council for Theology and Religion is to serve as the voice of the student body by representing their interests, promoting academic and spiritual growth, and fostering a sense of unity within the faculty.

Commitments of the Theology and Religion Faculty Student Council (FSC)

The FSC commits itself to:

- **Serving Students Faithfully:** to prioritize the needs, concerns, and aspirations of students in all decisions and initiatives.
- **Promoting Academic Excellence** – to support students in their studies through academic programs, workshops, and platforms that enhance learning.
- **Fostering Community and Belonging** – to build a faculty culture rooted in unity, inclusivity, and mutual respect.
- **Encouraging Spiritual Growth** – to create spaces where students can grow in faith and embody the values of theology and religion.
- **Strengthening Collaboration** – to work closely with faculty staff, the Office of the Dean, and other stakeholders for the benefit of students.
- **Advancing Social Responsibility** – to initiate and sustain projects, such as the Food Drive and thrift collaborations, that address the real needs of students and contribute to society.
- **Developing Future Leaders** – to mentor and inspire students to embrace servant leadership and carry forward the values of the council.

Council Members and Portfolios

Chairperson- Phumlani Masango.

- Provides overall leadership and strategic direction for the FSC.
- Chairs council meetings and ensures the effective implementation of decisions.
- Serves as the main representative of the student body to the faculty and external stakeholders.
- Oversees all projects and initiatives, ensuring alignment with council objectives.
- Represents the council at faculty board meetings and in discussions with stakeholders.

Deputy Chairperson- Asandile Mbuku.

- Supports the Chairperson in leadership responsibilities and assumes duties in their absence.
- Facilitates the coordination and monitoring of council activities and projects.
- Acts as a key intermediary between council members and the Chairperson.
- Ensures that student concerns are effectively communicated and addressed.

Secretary- Nkcubeko Msesele.

- Records minutes during council meetings and maintains official council documents.
- Manages all correspondence on behalf of the council.
- Monitors council activities, deadlines, and follow-ups.
- Maintains accurate documentation for all projects and events.

Treasurer-Ayesha Ndlovu.

- Manages the council's finances, including budgeting, income, and expenditures.
- Keeps accurate financial records and reports to the council regularly.
- Oversees fundraising initiatives and ensures proper allocation of funds.
- Promotes transparency and accountability in all financial matters.

Marketing and Liaison- Tumisang Phejane.

- Manages communication and promotion of council initiatives to students and faculty.
- Builds and maintains relationships with external stakeholders, sponsors, and partners.
- Coordinates publicity for events such as the Theology Gala Dinner and other projects.
- Ensures students are informed about council activities and opportunities for participation

Key Initiatives and Events

During our term in office, the Theology and Religion FSC undertook several initiatives and hosted events aimed at fostering community, supporting student growth, and strengthening the faculty spirit. While several of these events were carried out successfully, others could not be realised due to time constraints and limited resources.



Notable highlights include:

1. Movie Night

Date: 28 March 2025

Venue: Albert Wessels Auditorium

Attendance: 82 + students

- The event served as a community-building initiative designed to create a relaxed and engaging environment for students.
- It encouraged fellowship and strengthened relationships among students outside the classroom setting.
- Students were provided with an opportunity to unwind, connect socially, and recharge emotionally, thereby supporting a healthy balance between academic responsibilities and rest.
- By combining an enjoyable activity with opportunities for social connection and mental rejuvenation, the event helped to alleviate the pressures of student life.
- The FSC considered the event particularly appropriate during the period leading up to examinations.

2. Career Development Seminar

Date: 1st August 2025

Venue: H van der Merwe Scholtz Hall, Room 10

Attendance: 40+ students

- The seminar informed students about potential career paths in theology, ministry, and associated sectors.
- Guest speakers and professionals provided guidance on vocational development and career advancement.
- The event equipped students with knowledge and resources to support their transition beyond graduation.

3. Food Drive Project

- Launched in April, the Food Drive remained one of the FSC's ongoing projects.
- Approximately 28 unfunded students received assistance.
- The project was launched in response to challenges related to student funding and food insecurity within the faculty.
- Food parcels were distributed to students through contributions from churches, faculty staff, and other stakeholders.
- The initiative demonstrated the FSC's commitment to compassion, social responsibility, and student support.

4. Thrift Sale Collaboration with the Active Civic Teaching (ACT) Office

- Partnered with the ACT Office to raise funds in support of the Food Drive initiative.
- Collected clothing and items from students in good condition to sell at affordable prices.
- Promoted sustainability, solidarity, and community involvement while addressing student needs.
- This is also one of the ongoing projects, however not enough funds were raised as it was the Council's first time in such an event, the sales were bad as a result only R100 was made.

5. Gala Dinner

Date: 05 September 2025

Venue: Awela Restaurant

Attendance: 60 attendees (including faculty staff members)

- The Gala dinner was one of the FSC's largest events, bringing together students and staff.
- It recognised both academic and community achievements, thereby fostering unity and pride within the faculty.
- The event provided a platform for recognition, networking, and the strengthening of connections between the student body and faculty leadership.
- It also served as the official handover dinner to the incoming FSC, during which the new council was introduced.

These initiatives and events addressed students' immediate needs, reinforced community connections, encouraged academic and personal development, and celebrated the collective identity of the Faculty of Theology and Religion. They demonstrate the FSC's commitment to service, leadership, while laying a strong foundation for future councils.

Together, these achievements reflect the FSC's commitment to service, community, and student development. By addressing student needs through the Food Drive and thrift sale partnerships, fostering fellowship through Movie Night, equipping students for future opportunities through the Career Development Seminar, and celebrating unity at the Theology Gala Dinner, the FSC made a meaningful contribution to the Faculty of Theology and Religion. These accomplishments demonstrate what can be achieved through teamwork, resilience, and a shared commitment to serving the student body.

Challenges encountered

While the Faculty Student Council for Theology and Religion successfully carried out several initiatives, our term was not without its challenges. Among the main difficulties encountered were:

Time Constraints

- Balancing council responsibilities with academic responsibilities placed pressure on the planning and implementation of activities.
- As a result, some events could not be carried out as effectively as initially envisioned.

Event Planning Challenges

- Certain planned activities, such as the Intervarsity Tour, could not be executed successfully due to insufficient time for proper preparation and limited resources.
- This highlighted the need for earlier scheduling, stronger logistics, and dedicated event-planning structures.

Despite these challenges, the council demonstrated resilience by focusing on achievable goals, maximizing available resources, and ensuring that the most impactful projects were delivered.

Recommendations for the Incoming FSC

As the outgoing Theology and Religion FSC, the Council encourages its successors to build on the foundation established during the reporting period and to continue serving the student body with dedication and integrity. Based on its experience, the Council recommends expanding the Food Drive Project and similar initiatives that address students' practical needs. It also suggests exploring sustainable partnerships with churches, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and campus offices to secure ongoing resources.

The Career Development Seminar should be retained as an annual event and broadened to include workshops, mentorship opportunities, and professional networking. Alumni involvement could further strengthen this initiative by providing students with career guidance, practical insight, and inspiration.

Informal gatherings, such as Movie Nights or other social activities, should continue to promote fellowship and student morale. Community-building initiatives should remain inclusive and accessible to all students. Signature events such as the Gala Dinner should be maintained as a flagship event that celebrate achievements, foster pride, and strengthen relationships within the faculty. Innovative approaches should be considered to enhance the event's impact, while managing costs effectively.

The incoming Council should maintain close communication with the Office of the Dean and faculty staff to ensure ongoing guidance and support. Partnerships with other student structures and institutional offices, such as the ACT Office, should be strengthened through joint initiatives.

Effective internal governance should remain a priority. Cooperation, clear communication, and mutual respect among council members are essential to the Council's success. Regular meetings should be held, responsibilities monitored, and accurate records maintained to ensure accountability and continuity.

To support long-term sustainability, all activities, budgets, contacts, and key decisions should be carefully documented. Priority should be given to initiatives that can be sustained, strengthened, and further developed by future councils.

Closing Statement

As we conclude our term, we do so with gratitude for the opportunity to serve the Faculty of Theology and Religion and with pride in the initiatives we have carried out. While challenges tested our resilience, they also revealed the strength of collaboration, creativity, and faith-driven leadership. We hand over with confidence that the incoming council will build on these foundations, continue to serve with integrity, and lead the student body toward even greater achievements. May the values of unity, service, and excellence guide every decision and action in the term ahead.



Introduction

During 2025, the Department of Historical and Constructive Theology maintained an active profile in teaching, research, publication, international collaboration, ecclesial service, and engaged scholarship. Members of the department contributed to academic and ecumenical initiatives at national and international levels through conference participation, visiting fellowships, publications, leadership roles, and involvement in church and community structures. The activities outlined in this report reflect the department's commitment to scholarly excellence, interdisciplinary engagement, theological reflection, and service to the church, the academy, and wider society.

Prof Henco van der Westhuizen: Academic Activities for 2025

During 2025, Prof Henco van der Westhuizen participated in several international conferences and consultations as part of his ongoing academic and ecumenical endeavours.

In February 2025, Prof van der Westhuizen spent two weeks in Geneva, Switzerland, taking part in the Staff Planning Days of the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches. The gathering assembled staff and collaborators engaged in the theological work of Faith and Order, enabling the planning of forthcoming projects and initiatives, including preparations for the Sixth World Conference on Faith and Order.

In July 2025, Prof van der Westhuizen presented a paper at a seminar on Inductive Theology hosted by the Institute of Social Ethics at the University of Zürich. The seminar formed part of the preparatory activities for the forthcoming Brill Handbook on Inductive Theology, scheduled for publication by Brill in 2026. His contribution addressed themes in public theology and explored methodological questions concerning inductive approaches within contemporary theological scholarship.

In October 2025, Prof van der Westhuizen participated in the 27th General Council of the World Communion of Reformed Churches, held in Chiang Mai, Thailand. This global assembly brought together representatives of Reformed churches from various regions to deliberate on matters of theology, mission, justice, and ecclesial cooperation.

After this meeting, Prof van der Westhuizen travelled to Egypt to participate in the Sixth World Conference on Faith and Order, held in Wadi El Natrun. At this conference, he served as a staff member for the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches, contributing to both the organisation and theological discussions. The conference gathered theologians and church leaders from across the global Christian community to reflect on questions of Christian unity.

These engagements enriched both Prof van der Westhuizen's research and the international ecumenical initiatives in which he remains actively involved.

Dr Calvin Ullrich: Academic Activities for 2025

In 2025, Dr Ullrich presented at the Theological Society of Southern Africa's (TSSA) annual conference with a paper titled, 'A Tale of Two Postmoderns: Apophatics and Dialectics in Mark C. Taylor and John D. Caputo'. He also undertook a month-long Visiting Fellowship on the invitation of the Protestant Theological University (PThU), Utrecht. During this fellowship, he delivered a guest lecture on 'The Necessity of Interdisciplinarity: Four Sketches in Systematic Theology and Beyond', alongside a public lecture titled: 'In Solidarity with Nature? The Anthropocene, Eco-Phenomenology, and the Theological Turn'.

Dr Ullrich further contributed to scholarly discourse through the publication of an article in the Religion & Theology Journal (Brill), titled 'Marian Materialisms? Reflections on Tina Beattie, Marika Rose, and Catherine Malabou'. In addition, he authored a book chapter for the new Routledge Handbook for Eco-Phenomenology. He concluded his 2025 research activities by participating in the second part of an international colloquium on sovereignty, where he presented a paper titled 'Sovereignty and Apatheism: Notes Toward a Political Theology of A-patheia'.

During the year, Dr Ullrich also joined the Future Professoriate Group (FPG) Programme and, in August, assumed the role of Director of the Centre for Interdisciplinary Research in Religion, Community, and Ecologies (CIRRCE). His monograph, *Sovereignty and Event*, was also short-listed for the Academy of Science of South Africa (ASSAf) Humanities Book Award in 2025.

Dr Eugene Fortein: Academic Activities for 2025

In February 2025, Dr Fortein attended the annual Samuel DeWitt Proctor Conference in Little Rock, Arkansas. The conference theme was *There Is No End to Our Rising: Restoring Our Glory in the Age of Erasure*. This event represents the largest gathering of black churches in the United States.

Dr Fortein published an edited volume, *Fragility of Social Order & Stability of Faith: URCSA at 30 Years*, reflecting on the Uniting Reformed Church's 30th anniversary conference with ecumenical partners from Germany and Belgium.

At the biannual international conference of the Trans-Atlantic Roundtable on Religion and Race (TRRR) at the University of Pretoria, he presented a paper titled 'Allan Boesak's critiques of apartheid and global apartheid'. He also delivered a paper, 'Trump and the Theology of Borders: Re-reading the Kairos Document and Allan Boesak', at the international conference marking the 40th anniversary of the Kairos Document, hosted by the Desmond Tutu Centre for Religion and Justice. Dr Fortein published an article, 'The Story of Allan Aubrey Boesak: The Making of a Prophet', as part of the Church History Society of Southern Africa's project on oral tradition.

Dr Fortein led two workshops: one focusing on Church Order and Polity at URCSA Kommagag, and another addressing the challenges of Reformed identity in ministry at the URCSA Presbytery of Kuruman.





Introduction

The Department of Practical and Missional Theology continues to contribute significantly to the Faculty of Theology and Religion through excellence in teaching and learning, impactful research, engaged scholarship, postgraduate supervision, and active citizenship. The department remains committed to integrating theological reflection with lived realities, ensuring that teaching, research, and CE are mutually enriching practices that contribute to human flourishing, social transformation, and the development of ethical leaders.

During 2025, the department continued to strengthen its local, national, and international profile through innovative pedagogies, community-engaged learning opportunities, interdisciplinary research collaborations, international scholarly participation, and partnerships with churches, schools, rehabilitation centres, child and youth care facilities, and ecumenical bodies. Collectively, these activities reflect the faculty's commitment to societal impact, graduate development, and the advancement of theological scholarship within South Africa and beyond.

The department's activities are underpinned by an integrated research vision centred on the relationship between faith, practice, and transformation. This vision seeks to advance theological research and praxis that promote human dignity, social justice, and flourishing life within complex and changing contexts. The department's scholarship engages human life across multiple dimensions, including lived experience, ecclesial life, public life, and theological reflection. Although staff members contribute distinct areas of expertise, these collectively form an integrated scholarly ecosystem that addresses contemporary challenges facing individuals, communities, churches, and society.

The department's research identity is organised around four complementary research pillars: (1) Pastoral care, trauma, and human lived experience; (2) Leadership, mission, and congregational life; (3) Worship, preaching, and public theology; and (4) Biblical, ethical, and interreligious reflection.

Engaged teaching and learning



Postgraduate Teaching

The department remained committed to integrating academic excellence with practical application through community-engaged pedagogies and experiential learning opportunities.

Prof Juanita Meyer facilitated three undergraduate modules, including the department's Research Methodology module, co-presented with Prof Jan-Albert van den Berg. Through these offerings, the department continues to spearhead the faculty's commitment to undergraduate research development and scholarly literacy.

A distinctive feature of the department's undergraduate programme is its strong service-learning component. Students enrolled in TPAS3722 and TPAS4822 participated in structured in-service learning projects at Marthie

du Plessis School and ENGO Child and Youth Care Centres in Bloemfontein. Working with more than 70 children, students facilitated narrative-therapeutic workshops designed to help children develop life-giving narratives, resilience, and theological meaning-making. Successful students received certificates jointly issued by the UFS and the partner institutions.

In Homiletics and Liturgy, Dr Martin Laubscher continued to provide leadership through the use of the renovated HMS10 chapel and teaching venue. Weekly Coram Deo sessions created opportunities for practical ministerial formation and preaching development. During the academic year, more than 160 sermons were delivered and assessed. The department acknowledges the valuable contribution of Ms Judidy Ngwenya as student assistant and fourth-year class leader, as well as the generous donation by Prof Johan Cilliers of his painting *Vulnerability* (2011), which enhances the reflective atmosphere of the venue.

In Missiology, Dr Daniel Andrew led the undergraduate curriculum across all levels. First-year students engaged with the biblical and historical foundations of mission, decolonisation, and reverse mission. Second-year students explored ecumenical diaconia and evangelism, while third-year students examined the relationship between the *missio Dei*, ecology, and liturgy. Fourth-year students critically engaged with South Africa's multi-religious context. Student evaluations indicated strong engagement with the discipline and growing interest in postgraduate study.

Prof Joseph Pali contributed significantly through the modules Christian Leadership, Mission Studies, Practical Theology, and Ministry. His student-centred pedagogical approach integrated service-learning, contextual learning, collaborative assessment, and engagement with local church leaders. Particular emphasis was placed on African leadership models, decolonial perspectives, and contextual theological reflection.

Postgraduate Teaching

During the reporting period, the department continued to make a substantial contribution to postgraduate education and supervision.

Prof Meyer facilitated the Honours Research Methodology and Pastoral Care and Counselling modules within the revised structured master's programme. A particular highlight was the two-day training workshop at the South African National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence (SANCA) Aurora Rehabilitation Centre, where students facilitated Bible study groups with inpatients and completed assessments relating to substance use and abuse. Students who successfully completed the programme received certificates jointly awarded by SANCA Aurora and the UFS.

Dr Martin Laubscher continued to serve as Programme Coordinator of the Postgraduate Diploma in Theology and facilitated the annual Ecumenical Tour to the Eastern Free State. This initiative remains a flagship example of engaged scholarship, exposing students to contextual ministry and ecumenical engagement.

Prof Joseph Pali facilitated postgraduate modules focusing on congregational leadership, contextual ecclesiology, sustainability, and community engagement, while Dr Daniel Andrew supervised postgraduate students in missiology, missional ethics, congregational leadership, and mission studies.



DPMT PGDip Workshop at Mezpah

The department celebrated several graduations from its research master's and doctoral programmes. Under the supervision of Prof Jan-Albert van den Berg, George Marchinkowski and Elna van Schalkwyk successfully completed their studies. Prof Juanita Meyer supervised Chaplain Mahlatsi, who was awarded the research master's degree with distinction. The department also marked the graduation of its Zambian doctoral students: Dr Daniel Banda and Dr Michael Kalito, who were supervised by Dr Nico Mostert and Dr Gideon van der Watt and graduated in April 2025; and Dr Alick Banda, supervised by Prof Juanita Meyer, who graduated in December 2025.



Institutional Academic Activities

Involvement in and Membership of Academic Committees, Councils, and Associations at Faculty or Institutional Level.

The department continued to provide leadership within the faculty and the University. During the reporting period, Prof Juanita Meyer served as Chair of the Faculty Research Committee and as a member of both the Senate Research Committee and the General Human Research Ethics Committee (GHREC). She also served as an ethics specialist within the Christian Psychological Society of South Africa (CPSC) and continued to lead departmental strategic planning, postgraduate development initiatives, curriculum renewal, and the annual Faculty Publication Fair.

Dr Daniel Andrew served on the Faculty Engaged Scholarship Committee (FESCO) and participated in the UFS Academic Leadership Programme.

Dr Martin Laubscher continued his role as Editor-in-Chief of *Acta Theologica* and served as Secretary of the International Board of *Societas Homiletica*.

The department successfully hosted its annual Lekgotla, which focused on teaching, postgraduate

development, research strategy, curriculum renewal, workload planning, and departmental alignment. Prof Juanita Meyer attended the African Association for Pastoral and Spiritual Care (AAPSC) conference in Kenya, where she was elected Secretary of the Executive Board. She also served as a member of the editorial board of the International Journal of Pastoral Care.

Training/ Courses Completed

Prof Juanita Meyer further demonstrated her commitment to professional and leadership development by completing the Short Learning Programme (SLP) in Human-Centric Digital Transformation through North-West University with distinction. The programme focused on digital transformation, organisational change management, human-centred innovation, digital readiness, leadership in complex environments, and the responsible integration of digital technologies within organisational systems. This learning experience further strengthened the department's capacity to engage critically with emerging digital realities in higher education, ministry, pastoral care, and theological formation.

Engaged research



Conferences, public lectures, and international activities

The department maintained a strong national and international research presence during the reporting period. Prof Meyer served as a co-organiser of the Tenth International Research in Diaconia and Christian Social Practice (ReDi) Conference, held in Wellington from 1–4 April 2025, and was selected as the African representative for this segment of the ReDi network. Working alongside colleagues from South African universities, she helped to host the first ReDi conference in the Global South, thereby strengthening the department's visibility within international scholarship on diaconia and Christian social practice.

The conference was particularly significant for the Department of Practical and Missional Theology, as several staff members and postgraduate students attended and presented papers. The UFS had the strongest representation at the conference, with the department contributing substantially to the scholarly programme through presentations, research networking, and engagement with international collaborators.

Prof Meyer had the privilege of co-organising and participating in the AAPSC biannual conference in Kenya. With the generous support of one of the department's international research fellows, she also sponsored the participation of a doctoral student, Dr Dlodla, thereby linking international networking with postgraduate development. The conference provided valuable opportunities for scholarly exchange, mentoring, and the strengthening of African research networks in pastoral theology, spiritual care, and contextual caregiving. During the conference, Prof Meyer was elected Secretary of the AAPSC, further enhancing the department's visibility and leadership profile across the continent.

Prof Jan-Albert van den Berg used his research leave and opportunities for international scholarly engagement to strengthen his research profile. In 2025, he concluded 22 years of full-time academic service at the UFS and delivered his valedictory lecture, titled 'Data with Soul: Collaging an Autoethnographical Practical Theology'. His academic career has been distinguished by a sustained commitment to narrative theology, spirituality, pastoral care, futures studies, and practical theology. Following his retirement, he continues to contribute to the department as a Research Fellow.

Dr Martin Laubscher represented the department at several national and international conferences. His presentations addressed themes including prophetic preaching, public theology, Allan Boesak's legacy, decolonisation, digital worship, Eucharistic theology, Belhar, and democratic citizenship. He presented at Fuller Theological Seminary's Global Network for Public Theology Consultation, the Kairos 40th Anniversary Gathering, the University of Pretoria, the ReDi International Conference, and the Society for Practical Theology in South Africa.

Dr Daniel Andrew continued to strengthen the department's international profile through his participation in the World Council of Churches Faith and Order Commission, international conferences in Geneva and elsewhere, and joint research projects on reverse mission, ecumenism, public theology, environmental justice, and social transformation.



INVITATION TO THE VALEDICTORY LECTURE

Prof Jan-Albert van den Berg

Data with soul: Collaging an autoethnographical practical theology

A significant contribution of the department during the reporting period was its involvement in the Congregational Vitality Research Project, conducted through the National Church Life Survey/Church Life Survey in Southern Africa (NCLS/CLS-SA). The project is led by Prof Kobus Schoeman, formerly a full professor at the UFS and currently a Research Fellow in the Department of Practical and Missional Theology, and includes the involvement of Prof Joseph Pali.

The project forms part of the department's broader research focus on congregational leadership, African ecclesiology, missional identity, and community transformation. Its aim is to critically describe and evaluate, from missional, contextual, and practical theological perspectives, the role of congregations as faith communities and the role of congregational leadership within communities and broader society. The research is grounded in the premise that healthy congregations, understood in terms of internal, inspirational, and outward core qualities, may contribute to spiritual and social capital and function as generators of social cohesion within their communities.

The research uses a mixed-methods design comprising attender surveys, congregational surveys, and in-depth interviews with congregational leaders, including ordained and lay leaders. The attender survey gives voice to congregation members, the congregational survey examines the functioning and ministry of the congregation, and the leadership interviews provide deeper insight into how congregational leadership is exercised within specific ecclesial and community contexts.

The project progressed through three major research waves. The first wave, conducted from 2014 to 2015, involved 141 congregations and 18 838 participants, mainly from traditional mainline churches in South Africa. The second wave, conducted from 2018 to 2020, included 101 congregations and 9 545 participants, with particular inclusion of township congregations. The third wave, CLS-SA 2023–2025, extended the project across Southern Africa and included 224 congregations from Botswana, Lesotho, Namibia, South Africa, Zambia, and Zimbabwe, representing a wide range of denominations and church traditions.

The 2023–2025 CLS-SA wave significantly strengthened the department's regional research footprint by extending congregational studies beyond a single national context and enabling comparative analysis across Southern African denominations, ecclesial traditions, and community settings. In doing so, it contributed to the development of a contextual and missional ecclesiology from below, informed by empirical data and lived congregational realities.

The project also generated important postgraduate and research capacity. During the reporting period, four doctoral students were conducting research within the project, focusing on youth leadership in congregations affected by poverty, congregational leadership in the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian Synod of Harare, transformational diaconia in the Reformed Church in Zambia, and the missional formation of families in congregations. In addition, earlier doctoral research arising from the project was translated into workshops and programmes supporting small rural congregations, children's ministry, and congregational development in South Africa and Namibia.

The project's engaged character was evident in the way research findings were shared with participating communities. Workshops were conducted in township congregations in the Mangaung Metro to explain NCLS findings to pastors and congregational leaders, with Prof Joseph Pali playing an important role in this process. Further workshops were held in Namibia and Botswana in 2025. The workshop in Gaborone was attended by more than 50 congregational leaders from 15 congregations, following strong participation by the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) in Botswana.

The project also enhanced the department's international research visibility. Members of the research team, including Prof C van Wyngaard, Prof WJ Schoeman, Prof KJ Pali, Dr L Bosman, and P van der Walt, participated in the International Society for Empirical Research in Theology (ISERT) Conference in Siegen, Germany, where

they presented a symposium on empirical research, decoloniality, congregational vitality, and leadership practices from a South African perspective. A volume in the UFS Theological Explorations series, edited by Profs KJ Pali and WJ Schoeman and provisionally titled Practical Theology and Empirical Research: Perspectives from an African Context, was under peer review during the reporting period.

The completion of the three waves of the NCLS/CLS-SA research confirms the value of empirical survey research for congregational studies and practical theology in Southern Africa. The project strengthens the department's contribution to contextual, participatory, and action-oriented research by generating reliable congregational data, supporting leadership formation, informing ministry development, and contributing to social cohesion and community transformation.

Publications/ Research Outputs

The department maintained a strong publication profile during the reporting period.

Prof Juanita Meyer's research focused on pastoral theology, trauma, narrative identity, reconciliation, masculinities, gender justice, and relational ecologies of care.

Prof Jan-Albert van den Berg contributed to scholarship in pastoral theology, spirituality, narrative identity, and practical theology.

Dr Martin Laubscher published:

- 'Revisiting democracy "after" Allan Boesak?' Acta Theologica (Supplement 39).
- 'On (c)entering Allan Boesak's contribution on African Christian preaching and decolonisation?' Stellenbosch Theological Journal.

Prof Joseph Pali continued to publish on congregational leadership, decolonisation, citizenship, and African ecclesiology.

Dr Daniel Andrew expanded his publication profile in the fields of missional theology, Pentecostal theology, environmental justice, gender inclusion, social cohesion, and public engagement.

Prof Kobus Schoeman continued contributing to scholarship on congregational vitality, congregational transformation, and empirical practical theology.

Supervised postgraduate completions

A flagship departmental project remains the Congregational Ministry and Leadership: Exploring Vitality Project under the leadership of Prof Kobus Schoeman and Prof Joseph Pali.

The project investigates congregational vitality, leadership, social capital, and social cohesion across multiple denominations in South Africa and the broader Southern African Development Community (SADC) region. Using revised NCLS methodologies, the project incorporates congregational surveys, attendee surveys, and leadership interviews. The project currently supports postdoctoral research, doctoral candidates, and prospective doctoral students while advancing contextual and missional ecclesiology.

The department also continues to strengthen international research collaborations through projects involving reverse mission, diaconia, ecumenism, pastoral theology, and practical theology.

Departmental Research Identity and Strategic Focus

During 2025, the department further consolidated its research identity through the development of an integrated research strategy structured around four complementary pillars:

- Pastoral care, trauma, and human lived experience.
- Leadership, mission, and congregational life.
- Worship, preaching, and public theology.
- Biblical, ethical, and interreligious theology.

The department also strengthened its postgraduate pipeline, expanded international collaborations, and continued integrating research fellows and extraordinary professors into its research culture.

The Department of Practical and Missional Theology is characterised by an interdisciplinary yet integrated research identity, in which diverse theological sub-disciplines contribute to a shared concern: understanding how faith, belief, practice, and community engage with human life, social complexity, and transformation within contemporary contexts. Rather than functioning as isolated research programmes, the department's research strengths converge around four complementary pillars.

The first pillar focuses on pastoral care, trauma, vulnerability, healing, identity formation, spirituality, and human lived experience. Within this pillar, Prof Meyer's research explores pastoral theology and praxis within vulnerable and fractured relational ecologies, with particular attention to trauma, masculinity, fatherhood, reconciliation, gender justice, and digital ecologies of care.

The second pillar centres on leadership, mission, and congregational life. Prof Pali's work on congregational leadership, African ecclesiology, community development, faith formation, and the decolonisation of theological education makes a significant contribution to this area. Dr Daniel Andrew complements this focus through research on missional theology, Pentecostal theology, public leadership, active citizenship, gender inclusion, resilience, and community transformation. The ongoing Congregational Vitality Project, led by Prof Schoeman and Prof Pali, remains a flagship initiative within this pillar.

The third pillar addresses worship, preaching, and public theology. Dr Laubscher's scholarship explores the relationship between liturgy, preaching, prophetic witness, public theology, and media engagement within the Reformed tradition. His work continues to strengthen the department's profile in homiletics, liturgical theology, public theology, and theological engagement with contemporary societal challenges.

The fourth pillar focuses on biblical, ethical, and interreligious reflection. This area contributes critical theological grounding through engagement with biblical interpretation, ethics, apologetics, comparative religion, worldview formation, and interreligious dialogue. Together, these four pillars create an integrated research ecosystem that strengthens the department's capacity for postgraduate supervision, interdisciplinary collaboration, international engagement, and societal impact.

ENGAGED CITIZENSHIP

Academically engaged citizenship

The department remains actively involved in serving the church, the academy, and society.

Prof Meyer facilitated worship services, leadership programmes, women's ministry events, external doctoral examinations, ethics reviews, and professional accreditation processes. She also coordinated the Faculty Publication Fair, a flagship event that brings together researchers, students, publishers, journals, and research support structures to strengthen the faculty's publication culture.

Dr Laubscher contributed through preaching, public theology initiatives, book reviews, editorial leadership, liturgical resources, and regular theological columns.

Dr Andrew continued serving on ecclesial and international theological bodies, including the World Council of Churches Faith and Order Commission and various theological and church structures.

Prof Joseph Pali conducted workshops and leadership training for congregations, SAPS chaplains, student leaders, Anglican church leaders, and community organisations. He also contributed to the development of Sesotho theological terminology through the Academy for Multilingualism.

Professional Boards and Community Organisations

Prof Juanita Meyer's academically engaged citizenship is further reflected in her sustained service on professional, ecclesial, and community governance structures. As an ordained tentmaker minister in the DRC, a psychological counsellor and pastoral therapist registered with the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA), and an academic in pastoral theology, she fulfils an important bridging role between the University, the church, professional bodies, and community organisations.

As a member on the Ethics Committee of the Council for Pastoral and Spiritual Counsellors (CPSC), Prof Meyer investigates complaints involving clients and registered counsellors, thereby demonstrating her professional expertise in pastoral care, counselling ethics, professional accountability, and safe practice.

Prof Meyer also serves on the School Governing Body of Marthie du Plessis School for learners with disabilities, where she represents the DRC in the Free State. This role strengthens the department's long-standing relationship with the school and advances its broader commitment to education, care, disability awareness, service-learning, and community-engaged theological formation.

Her ecclesial service further includes membership of the Bursary Committee of the DRC in the Free State, through which she contributes to the support and development of theological students. She also serves as a church representative on TOIBO, thereby strengthening the relationship between theological education, church formation, student support, and institutional accountability.

These roles illustrate Prof Meyer's sustained contribution to academically engaged citizenship, professional ethics, church-faculty collaboration, community governance, and the formation of future theological leaders. They also reinforce the department's strategic stakeholder relationships and enhance the faculty's public and ecclesial visibility.

Editorial Boards, Publication Houses, or Academic Journals

Members of the Department of Practical and Missional Theology continued to contribute to theological scholarship through editorial leadership, peer review, publication development, book reviewing, and service on scholarly publication platforms.

Dr Martin Laubscher provided academic leadership as Editor-in-Chief of *Acta Theologica*, one of the faculty's flagship accredited theological journals. In this role, he contributed to peer-review management, editorial decision-making, scholarly quality assurance, and the dissemination of theological research both nationally and internationally. His editorial leadership enhanced the faculty's publication profile and supported both emerging and established scholars within the wider theological academy.

Prof Juanita Meyer served on the editorial board of *Acta Theologica* from 2019 to 2024 and, during the reporting period, served on the editorial boards of *Sacramentum Testamentum* (Psychology) and the *International Journal of Pastoral Theology*. She also served as a regular reviewer for the *Journal of Pastoral Theology* and reviewed academic articles for journals such as *HTS Theological Studies*, *Acta Theologica*, *Verbum et Ecclesia*, and *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae*. Her publication-related service further included the review of academic monographs for HTS/AOSIS and SUN Media. In addition, she served as chair, organiser, and editor of the faculty Publication Fair newsletter, thereby contributing to the development of a strong publication culture within the Faculty of Theology and Religion.

Dr Daniel Andrew contributed to editorial and publication-related work as a member of the *Acta Theologica* Editorial Board and as a peer reviewer for accredited journals. His promotion portfolio reflected a developing profile in publication development, academic reviewing, and scholarly service across missiology, Pentecostal theology, public theology, and engaged scholarship.

Prof Jan-Albert van den Berg, who continued his association with the department as a Research Fellow, made a sustained contribution to scholarly publication through academic writing, postgraduate supervision, peer review, and involvement in pastoral and practical theological scholarship. His long-standing academic career continued to enrich the department's research culture and publication profile.

Prof Kobus Schoeman, also serving as a Research Fellow, contributed to publication development through empirical theological research, collaborative publications, peer-review activities, and the mentorship of emerging researchers in congregational studies and the Congregational Vitality Research Project.

Prof Joseph Pali advanced publication development through his scholarly work in congregational leadership, African ecclesiology, decolonisation, and engaged citizenship. His research enhanced the department's publication profile in practical theology, mission studies, and leadership, while his joint research efforts generated publications focused on congregational vitality and community transformation.

The department's editorial, reviewing, and publication-related activities reflect a sustained commitment to advancing theological scholarship, supporting research quality, mentoring emerging scholars, and enhancing the visibility of the Faculty of Theology and Religion within national and international academic networks.

3.2 Student engaged citizenship

Students participated extensively in community-engaged learning opportunities through partnerships with the Marthie du Plessis School, the ENGO Child and Youth Care Centres, the Aurora Rehabilitation Centre, churches, and FBOs. Through these initiatives, students developed leadership, ethical awareness, social responsibility, and professional competence while contributing meaningfully to vulnerable communities. These initiatives are embedded in the modules' curricula and assessment strategies, providing students with opportunities to engage directly with vulnerable individuals and communities through supervised pastoral encounters.

During the reporting period, students participated in the department's flagship *My Life in a Suitcase* narrative workshop at Marthie du Plessis School and the ENGO Child and Youth Care Centres. Working with more than 70 children, students facilitated a structured narrative-therapeutic process that enabled them to explore personal identity, resilience, belonging, memory, hope, and meaning-making through storytelling and symbolic activities. The workshop is designed to support the development of life-giving narratives and theological metanarratives that promote dignity, agency, and flourishing. The programme culminated in a celebration and certificate-awarding event involving both students and community participants.

The department further expanded its in-service learning opportunities through partnerships with institutions such as Aurora Rehabilitation Centre, correctional services, schools, child and youth care facilities, and elderly care settings. In 2025, the TPAS4822 module introduced a specialised learning stream focusing on compassionate witnessing, ageing, memory work, and end-of-life pastoral care, in collaboration with Siesta Home and Bloemfontein Hospice. Students participated in narrative-based pastoral engagement activities, including the Memory Quilt project, which encourages respectful storytelling, spiritual reflection, meaning-making, and accompaniment among elderly residents. Through guided conversations centred on memory, hope, dignity, lament, and spiritual journeying, students developed practical pastoral competencies while deepening their understanding of human vulnerability and flourishing across the life course.

University-engaged citizenship

Members of the Department of Practical and Missional Theology continued to contribute actively to institutional governance, academic leadership, research development, ethics oversight, student support, and strategic initiatives at the UFS.

Through sustained participation in faculty and University governance structures, research committees, ethics bodies, teaching and learning structures, postgraduate processes, and strategic institutional initiatives, the department demonstrated its commitment to strengthening the academic, ethical, research, and teaching functions of the UFS.

During the reporting period, Prof Juanita Meyer provided institutional leadership through her service on several faculty and University committees. As Head of Department (HoD), she served on the Faculty Board, the Faculty Management Committee, the Faculty Financial Committee, the Academic Committee, the Teaching and Learning Committee, the Postgraduate Examinations Committee, and the Faculty Bursary Committee. She also chaired the Faculty Research Committee, where she contributed to research planning, postgraduate research development, proposal processes, research quality enhancement, and the strengthening of the faculty's research culture.

At the university level, Prof Meyer served on the Senate, Senate Research Committee, Senate Research Ethics Committee, Doctoral Degrees Committee, Senate Conference Organising Committee, Educational Technology and Learning Spaces Committee, and the UFS Engaged Scholarship Committee. She also served on the GHREC as a counselling and ethics specialist, contributing expertise in counselling, pastoral care, qualitative research, vulnerability, and human participant research ethics.

Prof Meyer further contributed to institutional discussions on teaching and learning through her presentation at the 2025 UFS Senate Conference. Her presentation highlighted innovative approaches to Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) within Practical and Missional Theology and demonstrated how community-engaged pedagogies, service-learning partnerships, and pastoral formation initiatives contribute to student development, graduate attributes, and societal impact. It also showcased the department's long-standing engagement with schools, rehabilitation centres, child and youth care facilities, congregations, and community organisations as sites of authentic experiential learning.

Dr Daniel Andrew contributed to university-engaged citizenship through his service on FESCO, participation in the UFS Academic Leadership Programme, and involvement in faculty governance and publication development through the Acta Theologica Editorial Board. His participation strengthened the department's contribution to engaged scholarship, teaching innovation, and faculty-level academic leadership.

Dr Martin Laubscher contributed to the University's academic citizenship and research profile through his role as Editor-in-Chief of *Acta Theologica*, one of the faculty's flagship accredited journals. In this role, he contributed to scholarly quality assurance, peer-review processes, editorial governance, and the visibility of theological research within and beyond the university.

Departmental staff also contributed to university-engaged citizenship through participation in postgraduate supervision structures, proposal defence processes, examination and moderation processes, ethics review, curriculum renewal, research strategy development, faculty reporting, and annual departmental strategic planning.

Collectively, these contributions strengthened the faculty's academic governance, ethical accountability, research development, teaching quality, and institutional impact.

Strategic developments aligned with Faculty priorities

During the reporting period, staff members continued to pursue professional development opportunities that enhance the department's responsiveness to emerging societal and technological challenges.

Prof Meyer's successful completion of the Human-Centric Digital Transformation programme contributed to the department's growing engagement with questions of digital transformation, digital readiness, innovation, and technology-enhanced learning within theological education. This achievement complemented ongoing departmental research and teaching initiatives that examine digital religion, digital pastoral care, artificial intelligence, and the future of ministry in technologically mediated contexts.

Graduate Attributes in Teaching

The Department of Practical and Missional Theology plays a central role in the faculty's implementation of graduate attributes, particularly through its in-service learning, service-learning, and WIL opportunities. While other disciplines and departments provide essential theological, biblical, historical, doctrinal and ethical foundations, Practical and Missional Theology creates concrete spaces for students to integrate this theoretical knowledge into lived ministerial, pastoral, congregational, and community contexts.

The department's teaching philosophy is intentionally designed to cultivate critical thinking, ethical leadership, intercultural competence, social responsibility, research literacy, pastoral sensitivity, and professional formation. Through service-learning, practical placements, community engagement, narrative workshops, rehabilitation-centre training, congregational exposure, preaching practice, ecumenical engagement, and research training, students are prepared to become reflective practitioners and transformative leaders.

In this regard, the department functions as a key bridge between theological theory and ministerial praxis. Students are assessed not only on their understanding of theological concepts, but also on their ability to apply and embody them responsibly in contexts of care, vulnerability, diversity, trauma, ageing, addiction, disability, youth care, congregational life, urban mission, and public witness. These learning opportunities support the broader faculty curriculum by enabling students to apply, test, and deepen the theoretical insights gained across the theological disciplines.

The department also recognises the increasing importance of digital literacy and technological competence in theological education. Through ongoing curriculum development and staff development initiatives, including Prof Meyer's completion of the Human-Centric Digital Transformation programme with distinction, the department continues to explore the implications of digital transformation, artificial intelligence, online learning, digital pastoral care, and technology-mediated ministry for theological education and professional practice.

By combining theological reflection, practical engagement, ethical accountability, and digital readiness, the department contributes directly to the formation of graduates who are socially responsible, contextually

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Research

The department's research agenda is closely aligned with Vision 130 and its commitment to flourishing life, social justice, knowledge integration, and societal impact. By employing an integrated research model, the department actively contributes to multiple United Nations SDGs and national development priorities.

Research within the pastoral care, trauma, and human experience pillar contributes directly to SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being), SDG 5 (Gender Equality), and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities). Research on trauma, gender-based violence, fatherhood, masculinity, reconciliation, pastoral care, and spiritual meaning-making seeks to promote healing, resilience, dignity, and human flourishing in vulnerable communities.

Research within the leadership, mission, and congregational life pillar contributes to SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities) and SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions). Projects focusing on congregational vitality, leadership development, missional identity, active citizenship, community transformation, decolonisation, and social cohesion seek to strengthen both faith communities and broader society.

Research within worship, preaching, and public theology contributes to SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions). Through scholarship on public theology, prophetic witness, preaching, liturgy, and theological engagement in public spaces, the department seeks to cultivate ethical leadership, critical citizenship, and social responsibility.

Research within biblical, ethical, and interreligious theology similarly contributes to SDG 4 and SDG 16 by promoting ethical reflection, interreligious understanding, moral formation, and theological engagement with pluralistic societies.

The department's integrated approach enables meaningful engagement with churches, communities, public institutions, professional bodies, and international scholarly networks. Through interdisciplinary collaboration, postgraduate development, engaged scholarship, and international partnerships, the department continues to make a significant contribution to academic excellence, ministerial formation, social transformation, and the flourishing of individuals and communities in South Africa and beyond.



Prof Joseph Pali workshop with pastors in Bloemfontein



Bishop Ramahlele



Introduction

The year 2025 was marked by both significant challenges and notable achievements. The year began on a sombre note with the resignation of one of our colleagues, leaving the department with only the HoD and the administrator, Ms Ronel. Throughout the year, Prof Dube managed the dual responsibilities of meeting academic requirements alongside teaching and supervision duties.

We are grateful to our postdoctoral fellows, Dr Humbe and Dr Masengwe, who helped address these challenges through their involvement in teaching and the coordination of seminars and conferences. In particular, Dr Bernard Humbe contributed considerably by teaching the fourth-year modules and overseeing the department's postgraduate seminars.

Despite these difficulties, the department recorded excellent outcomes, including an outstanding class pass rate, high-quality teaching, and successful seminars and conferences.

By the end of the year, circumstances improved with the addition of Dr Yuvan Shunmugam to the department. Although he did not teach in 2025, his active participation in seminars and conferences made a noticeable impact.

Staffing

By the end of 2025, the department had three full-time staff members: Prof Dube (HoD), Dr Matthias Shunmugam (Lecturer), and Mrs Ronel Ellis (departmental administrator). The department remains deeply appreciative of Mrs Ellis's experience and efficiency.

Postdoctoral researchers Dr Masengwe and Dr Humbe also contributed to the department during this period. Additionally, Afikile Candlovu provided valuable teaching assistance on an ad hoc basis.

Academic and Research Achievements

Undergraduate classes were well attended, and students expressed satisfaction with the variety of teaching methods employed. In TRPH3712, Study of the Phenomenology of Religion, for example, students particularly appreciated the module's introduction to the scientific study of religion and the concept of epoché, understood as a value-free approach to religious studies.

In TRPH3722, Study of Selected World Religions, students welcomed the opportunity to learn about different religions and their diverse practices. Classes incorporated a range of teaching strategies, including group discussions and short presentations. These methods enhanced knowledge retention and stimulated greater interest in the subject matter.

We extend our gratitude to Ms Afikile Candlovu for her teaching of TTRC2624, which achieved an impressive overall pass rate. Thank you, Afikile.

We also recognise the exceptional achievements of students such as Lerato Chipu and Karla Jooste, whose strong performance across the various modules in religious studies is noteworthy.

Publications and Postgraduate Completions

Through the contributions of our research associates and postdoctoral fellows, the department achieved an impressive publication output. It produced two books, eight book chapters, and 28 peer-reviewed journal articles – a notable achievement for a department of its size.

Conferences, Public Lectures, and International Activities

The successful inauguration and hosting of the inaugural Ancestor Day Conference was the department's most significant highlight of 2025. Organised under the theme 'Ancestors, Memory and Democracy', the conference explored leadership lessons from past traditions and considered their relevance to effective institutional governance. The attendance of members of Parliament and traditional leaders, including Hon. Zungula (Africa Transformation Movement) and Hon. Kwankwa (UDM), further enhanced the faculty's visibility.

Given its unique focus, the conference naturally generated discussion among church partners and some colleagues. We take pride in having drawn attention to debates on the decolonisation and Africanisation of theological studies through this event. The conference also highlighted critical questions about curriculum content, pedagogy, contextualisation, Africanisation, and decolonisation within theology.

During one of the panel discussions, students posed pertinent questions regarding the current theological studies curriculum, particularly its lack of engagement with existential issues relevant to the South African context.

In addition, the guest lecture by Prof Agnieszka Podolecka from Poland, focusing on Spiritual Calling, N'angas, and Sangomas in Southern Africa, drew attention to African healing practices. The seminar, which attracted a large audience, prompted discussions about the complexity surrounding the emergence of white Sangomas (traditional healers) in spaces typically regarded as "African".

Following the seminar, we received a range of responses. Some participants commended the event for expanding the scope of engaged scholarship, while others evaluated it primarily from their Christian denominational perspectives. The department recognises these varied responses as indicative of the urgent need to reflect on the faculty's identity within the context of pluriversality and cultural complexity. There is an ongoing question as to whether the faculty exists to serve a specific church denomination or whether it functions as a reflective space for all religious practices. As a department, we maintain that addressing such questions will necessarily inform both our pedagogy and praxis.

On 31 October 2025, we hosted a conference titled 'Religion and Climate Consciousness from the Perspective of African Spirituality'. Thirteen speakers from various disciplines presented their research, which was followed by lively discussions. The conference aimed to foreground Afro-centric epistemologies as frameworks for engaging with ecological debates, thereby critiquing and challenging the hermeneutical dominance of Western narratives.

We are pleased to announce that papers from both conferences are being prepared for publication.





Student Achievements and Awards

Anathi Kene, Lerato Chipu, Karla Jooste, Mbele Surprise, Sinelizwi Ndabilihle, and Lukhanyo Yengo achieved semester marks above 80% in TRPH3712. Well done to all.

Regarding our structured master's programme, Teleni Marule and Anele Mathaba successfully completed their studies, with Anele earning a distinction.

Additionally, Juliet Sigauke completed her PhD studies with the thesis titled: 'The Law and Media on Witchcraft: A Socio-Religious Investigation'. The research was supervised by Prof Dube (Religious Studies) and Dr Matthee (Faculty of Law). Congratulations, Juliet!

Strategic Developments Aligned with Faculty Priorities

The Department of Religion Studies regards itself as strategically positioned to advance Afrocentric, multidisciplinary, and decolonial perspectives in the study of theology and religion. From the department's perspective, the Faculty of Theology and Religion currently stands at a crossroads: it may either retain a curriculum influenced by Western traditions or embrace multidisciplinary approaches, pluriversality, and religious diversity.



The Department of Old and New Testament Studies enjoyed a productive academic year, participating in in-person classes, public lectures, and conferences, as well as local and international travel for conferences and research.

The department continued to be guided by its 2021–2026 vision:

In the Department of Old and New Testament Studies, we 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 adopted throughout the 2025 academic year, with classes offered both face-to-face and online and continuous assessment implemented across the department's three disciplines:

- Old Testament,
- New Testament, and
- New Testament Greek and Early Christian Greek Literature.

The department acknowledges the contributions of its part-time lecturers:

- Ms Hermiene Ferreira,
- Ms Marian Labuschagne,
- Rev. De la Harpe le Roux, and
- Dr Erika Senekal-Van der Berg.

Since 2023, departmental staff members have been actively involved in the BDiv recirculation process. The revised BDiv curriculum is scheduled for implementation in 2026. This process has involved the comprehensive redesign of the undergraduate curricula in Old Testament, New Testament, and New Testament Greek and Early Christian Greek Literature curricula within the Faculty of Theology and Religion at the UFS, as well as the development of interdisciplinary modules in collaboration with colleagues from other departments.

The department's academic staff members supervise a range of postgraduate qualifications, including honours, master's, and doctoral degrees. We congratulate Mr Juan Venter, who was awarded the Master of Theology (MTh) in New Testament with distinction in December 2025. His dissertation, titled 'The Gospel of John's characterisation of Pontius Pilate: A socio-historical exegetical investigation', was supervised by Dr Müller van Velden.

Congratulations are also extended to Dr Yoshi Onishi, who completed a PhD in Old Testament Studies with the thesis titled, 'Healing of traumatic memories: Appropriating Psalms 74, 79 and 137 in East Asia', under the supervision of Prof Sutton. During the reporting period, Dr Müller van Velden also supervised the department's postdoctoral candidate, Dr Slindile Thabede.

Furthermore, the department hosted the faculty's first Postgraduate Colloquium during the reporting period.



Postgraduate Colloquium for the Faculty of Theology and Religion

Staff Training and Professional Development

Departmental staff members participated in several training sessions.

Ms Van Biljon, the departmental manager, and all academic staff members completed training on Blackboard Collaborate.

Prof. Sutton completed the following training courses:

- Blackboard Training: Design your Blackboard page, University of the Free State,
- Blackboard Training: Teaching in a large classroom, University of the Free State,
- Blackboard Training: Learning- centred teaching, University of the Free State.
- Dr Müller van Velden completed the following training courses:
- Blackboard Training: Teaching in a large classroom, University of the Free State.

Further Academic Qualifications

Prof Sutton continued to pursue a Master's in Biblical Archaeology at the University of South Africa (Unisa).

Dr Müller van Velden completed a BTh Honours (New Testament Greek and Early Christian Literature) with distinction at the UFS.

Academic Societies and Editorial Boards

Members of the department hold several leadership positions in academic societies and serve on editorial boards.

Prof Sutton serves as treasurer of the Southern African Society for Near Eastern Studies (SASNES). He is a member of the editorial boards of *Acta Theologica*, *Journal for Semitics* (JSEM), and *UFS Theological Explorations* (book series), and acts as series editor for *UFS Theological Explorations*. In addition, he is an advisory member for the International Society of Biblical Literature (ISBL) Group: Place, Space, and Identity in the Ancient Mediterranean World. Prof Sutton also chairs the Old Testament Society of Southern Africa.

Dr Müller van Velden is a member of the editorial boards of *Neotestamentica* and *Acta Theologica*. She chairs the executive committee of the New Testament Society of Southern Africa (NTSSA), and serves on the steering committees of both the Synoptic Gospels Program Unit and the Bible and Empire Program Unit for the Society of Biblical Literature (SBL). Additionally, she is a member of the Sesquicentennial Task Force for SBL.

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

Department members are consistently engaged in national and international peer review of articles, as well as internal and external moderation and examination processes.

Publications

The department produced several publications during the year.

- Müller van Velden, N.E., 2025, 'John 15,1-8: a re-reading through earth, SDGs, Covid 19, and Cape Town farms contexts', *Perspectiva Teológica* 57(1), 1–22, <https://doi.org/10.20911/21768757v57n1e05804/2025>.
- Müller van Velden, N.E., 2025, 'A healing encounter: a South African feminist exploration of Mark's "bleeding woman"', in M.J. Nel, N. Cezula & M. Havenga (eds.), *Encounters with God: Theological reflections on divine presence in the Old and New Testaments*, Stellenbosch Theological Reflections, pp. 225–242, Barnabas Academic Publishers, Wellington.

The department extends its gratitude to its Research Fellows for their significant contributions to its publication outputs.

Conference Presentations

Members of the department presented a substantial number of academic papers at various conferences.

Prof Sutton presented at the following conferences:

- Southern African Mountain Conference (SAMC) – African Mountainscapes and the Anthropocene: (Re) Mediating Mountain Imaginaries, hosted by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), South Africa, 17–20 March 2025.
- International Organization for the Study of the Old Testament (IOSOT) Conference, hosted by the Humboldt University of Berlin, Germany, 11–15 August 2025.
- ProPsalms & ProProf Conference, hosted by the Department of Old Testament and Hebrew Scriptures, University of Pretoria, Pretoria, 4–5 September 2025.

Dr Müller van Velden presented at the following conferences:

- “John Chrysostom on Mary, mother of Jesus: Liberating interpretations, or unholy heresies?”, Annual conference of the New Testament Society of Southern Africa, Pretoria, South Africa, March/April.
- “A healing encounter: A South African feminist exploration of Mark’s “bleeding woman”, Encounters with God Conference, Stellenbosch University, Wellington, South Africa, February 2025.
- “Herod & Mary: Simply evil personified, living hope embodied”, International Conference of the Gender Unit, Stellenbosch University, South Africa, March.
- “Philo of Alexandria, sexuality and women: An African-feminist hermeneutical exploration”, Society for New Testament Studies African International Initiatives Pre-Conference, Regensburg, Germany, August 2025.
- “The annunciations to Mary and Joseph: Dialoguing Matthew 1:18–25, Luke 1:26–38, and feminist-critical interpretations of consent”, International Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature and the European Association of Biblical Studies, Uppsala, Sweden, June 2025.

Dr Anneli Machin presented at the following conference:

- “John Chrysostom’s use of rhetoric to enhance the moral education of children by their parents.” International Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature (ISBL), University of Uppsala, Sweden, 23–27 June 2025.

Other conferences attended:

- Prof Sutton attended:
- Southern African Mountain Conference (SAMC) – African Mountainscapes and the Anthropocene: (Re) Mediating Mountain Imaginaries, hosted by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), South Africa, 17–20 March 2025. (Read Paper).
- SANES Annual Conference 2025, Hosted by the Department of Old and New Testament Studies, Faculty of Theology and Religion, UFS, South Africa, 8–9 September 2025.
- OTSSA Annual Conference 2025, Hosted by the Department of Old and New Testament Studies, Faculty of Theology and Religion, UFS, South Africa, 10–11 September 2025.
- International Organization for the Study of the Old Testament (IOSOT), Hosted by the Humboldt University of Berlin, Germany, 11–15 August 2025. (Read Paper).
- ProPsalms & ProProf Conference, Hosted by the Department of Old Testament and Hebrew Scriptures, University of Pretoria, Pretoria, South Africa, 4–5 September 2025. (Read Paper).
- ProPent Conference, Hosted by the Department of Old Testament and Hebrew Scriptures, University of Pretoria, Pretoria, South Africa, 5–6 September 2025.



Prof Sutton delivering a paper at ProPsalms

Dr Müller van Velden attended the following conferences:

- Annual Conference of the New Testament Society of Southern Africa, Pretoria, South Africa, March/April 2025.
- Encounters with God Conference, hosted by Stellenbosch University, Wellington, South Africa, February 2025.
- International Conference of the Gender Unit, Stellenbosch University, Stellenbosch, South Africa, March 2025..
- Society for New Testament Studies African International Initiatives Pre-Conference, Regensburg, Germany, August 2025.
- International Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature and the European Association of Biblical Studies, Uppsala, Sweden, June 2025.
- Dr Anneli Machin attended the following conference:
- International Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature (ISBL), Uppsala University, Uppsala, Sweden, 23–27 June 2025.



Drs Machin and Müller van Velden at the International Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature (ISBL), University of Uppsala, Sweden.

Dr Machin extended her research leave in 2025. During this period, she visited the Catholic University of Leuven (KU Leuven) from 9 to 20 June 2025 to conduct research and contribute to a forthcoming book. Congratulations are due to Dr Müller van Velden, who received a National Research Foundation (NRF) y-rating. She is also a member of the Emerging Scholars' Acceleration Programme (ESAP) 2025–2026 cohort at the UFS. In addition, she was awarded an invitation and a full bursary from the Society of New Testament Studies (SNTS) to participate in its Annual Meeting and pre-conference in August 2025 in Regensburg, Germany.



SNTS Pre-conference participants in Regensburg

In 2024, extending into 2025, Prof Sutton was awarded a University Capacity Development Grant (UCDG) for a cluster initiative titled the Embodiment and Ancient Texts project. The project is co-led by Prof Sutton and Dr Müller van Velden and aims to foster interdisciplinary dialogue, engagement, and research on embodiment within the institution. The department also organised a writing retreat for the project in Ladybrand.



Embodiment Writing Retreat at Ladybrand



Prof Sutton was elected to serve on the Work Group on Institutional Transformation and Social Justice at the UFS. The purpose of this work group was to foster the development and realisation of a transformative institutional culture that reflects the values of the University. Additionally, it aimed to contribute to the establishment of an environment that encourages and welcomes constructive and critical engagement. The group also sought to initiate, enable, facilitate, and deliberate the advancement of social justice in collaboration with relevant stakeholders and role players.

Prof Sutton was appointed by the Southern African Society for Near Eastern Studies (SASNES) and the Old Testament Society of Southern Africa (OTSSA) to organise and host the 2025 annual conference at the UFS. The meeting was conducted both in person and virtually from 8 to 11 September 2025. Over 60 academic papers were presented by national and international scholars.



SASNES and OTSSA meetings at the UFS



In relation to national and international engagements, Prof Sutton and Dr Müller van Velden undertook a research visit to Turkey in March, focusing on significant archaeological sites and locations connected to the writings of the New Testament, under the guidance of Prof Stephan Joubert. Later, in October, Prof Sutton and Dr Anneli MacHin conducted a research visit to Greece and Italy, once again exploring important archaeological sites and locations relevant to the New Testament writings, with Prof Stephan Joubert leading the initiative.

Public Engagements and Engaged Scholarship

Members of the department regularly contributed to public engagement and engaged scholarship by preaching at churches in the Bloemfontein area and serving in various ecclesial leadership structures.

Prof Sutton served as Secretary of DRC General Synod's General Task Team for Bible Translation and Interpretation (ATBV), the DRC's advisory body on Bible translation and interpretation.

Dr Müller van Velden served in the following capacities:

- Member of the DRC Free State Synod Curatorium Executive Committee since 2024;
- Member of the DRC General Synod Curatorium Executive Committee member since 2024;
- Chairperson of the DRC General Synod Lecturers' Council since 2024;
- Chairperson of the DRC Free State Synod Lecturers' Council since 2024;
- Member of the General Synod Bible Translation Commission, serving as the New Testament specialist from the UFS; and
- Workgroup coordinator of the Reproductive Health: Workgroup of the DRC General Synod's Task Team for Doctrinal and Ethical Matters since 2021.

Prof Sutton and Dr Müller van Velden also co-presented 'Verantwoordelike hermeneutiek in die 21ste eeu' ('Responsible hermeneutics in the 21st century') as part of the ongoing theological training programme hosted by the DRC Synod of the Free State

Under the guidance of Dr Müller van Velden, the department hosted the Thursdays in Black campaign within the faculty.

In every country, gender-based violence is a tragic reality. This violence is frequently hidden, and victims are often silent, fearing stigma and further violence. We all have a responsibility to speak out against violence, to ensure that women and men, boys and girls, are safe from rape and violence in homes, schools, work, streets – in all places in our societies. The campaign is simple but profound. Wear black on Thursdays. Wear a pin to declare you are part of the global movement resisting attitudes and practices that permit rape and violence. Show your respect for women who are resilient in the face of injustice and violence. Encourage others to join you (source: <https://www.oikoumene.org/what-we-do/thursdays-in-black>).



PROF
LODEWYK SUTTON

Departementshoof: Ou- en Nuwe-Testamentiese Studies, Fakulteit Teologie en Religie, asook mede-professor in Ou Testament aan die Universiteit van die Vrystaat (UV).

Verantwoordelike Hermeneutiek in die 21ste eeu

"Kom ons praat oor geweld" – 'n Hermeneutiek van geweld, met voorbeelde uit die Psalms"

zoom Dinsdag 2 September | 19:00-21:00

DR
NINA MÜLLER VAN VELDEN

Dosent in Nuwe Testamentiese Studies aan die Universiteit van die Vrystaat (UV).

Verantwoordelike Hermeneutiek in die 21ste eeu

"Wie is familie? – Die aangenome huishouding van God in die Nuwe Testament" (Matteus 12:46-50; Galasiërs 4:4-5; Efesiërs 1:4-6)

zoom Dinsdag 26 Augustus | 19:00-21:00

Prof. Sutton and Dr Müller van Velden in Ephesus, Turkey



Office of the Dean**Authored books:***Chapter in book:*

Hoffman, L., Catechesis in the Reformed Tradition and the Formation of Religiosity among Youth, IN Youth and Religiosity – A South African perspective, Barnabas Academic Publishers 28–46

Journal articles:

Hoffman, L., Toerusting van begeleiers op die geloofsreis, Verbum et Ecclesia 46(2):1–7

Historical and Constructive Theology*Chapter in book:*

Fortein, E.A., What does it mean for the Ecumenical Church to Confess “Jesus Is Lord” Today? IN Fragility of Social Order & Stability of Faith: URCSA at 30 Years, Barnabas Academic Publishers, 79–90

Mawson, M., Preserving Autonomy and Rights in the Context of Disability Theology IN Redeeming Autonomy: Theology, Agency, Social Justice (London: Bloomsbury) 101–114

Resane, K.T., Unity of God amidst diversity: Navigating sangomaism IN Faith, Spirituality, and Praxis, Routledge, 253–267

Journal articles:

Bosman, F.G., Look into My Eyes, Journal of Religion and Popular Culture 37(1) 45–55

Fortein, E.A., The Story of Allan Aubrey Boesak: The Making of a Prophet, Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae 51(2)

Iheanacho, V.U., The Pact of the Catacombs as a Pathway for a Poor–Servant Church, Religions 16(208):1–17

Pieterse, A.C., Artificial intelligence and human nature: Consciousness the final frontier and humanity’s cosmic footprint, Stellenbosch Theological Journal 11(1):1–27

Resane, K.T., John Mbiti: An African theologian fifty years and beyond, Verbum et Ecclesia 46(1):1–6

Resane, K.T., I believe in the Holy Spirit: Power and technology at crossroads, African Journal of Pentecostal Studies 2(1):1–7

Resane, K.T., Leadership insights from selected Setswana proverbs: An African perspective, Inkanyiso 17(1):1–6

Resane, K.T., Mafsa: Communion ecclesiology of Acts 2:42–47 in action, In die Skriflig/In Luce Verbi 59(1) 1–7

Resane, K.T., South African Pentecostal Missions Parochial or Incarnational, Missionalia 53 119–130

Strauss, P.J., Paul Kruger: ’n Christenstaatsman en Boerepolitikus in sy toesprake as president, In die Skriflig/In Luce Verbi 59(1):1–9

Strauss, P.J., Die Volkeregtelike Status van die Afgevaardigdes dan die Boererepublieke by die Vrede van 31 Mei 1902, Koers 90(1) 1–15

Ullrich, C.D., Marian Materialisms? Reflections on Tina Beattie, Marika Rose, and Catherine Malabou, Religion & Theology 32:138–164

Venter, R., Nicaea, the nature of God and the construction of knowledge, Stellenbosch

Practical and Missional Theology

Authored books:

Chapter in book:

- Joynt, S., Clergy, Spiritual Practices, and their Benefits, In: Spiritual Practices of South African Clergy – State of the Clergy, USA: Lexington Books
- Joynt, S., Findings and Recommendations, In: Spiritual Practices of South African Clergy – State of the Clergy, USA: Lexington Books
- Joynt, S., Introduction: Clergy, Luke 2:52, and the Biopsychosocial-Spiritual Model, In: Spiritual Practices of South African Clergy – State of the Clergy, USA: Lexington Books
- Kloppers, E.C., Singing for God's Blessing – Faith Embodies, Existence shared, Hope sounded, In: Christus Predigen in Wort, Tat and Ton, Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, Leipzig
- Kok, J., Soteriology and its relation to restorative *φιλανθρωπία* in 1 Timothy and Titus. An exegetical and social identity analysis, In: Aspects of Soteriology in John and Paul, Mohr Siebeck (279-298)
- Kraus, T.J., The text of Hebrews and the Catholic Epistles, In: The Oxford Handbook of Hebrews and the Catholic Epistles, Oxford University Press (3-24)
- Kraus, T.J., Traditions of the Descent of Christ into Hell (Descensus Christi ad inferos) with a Focus on the Gospel of Nicodemus, In: Narratives of Jesus's Passion and Resurrection between the Second and Seventh Centuries, Mohr Siebeck (235-256)
- Marsay, G.M.D., Cross-Cultural Perspectives on the Nature and Value of Social and Emotional Learning Skills, In: Social and Emotional learning as Foundation for Future Readiness, Springer 3-8)
- Marsay, G.M.D., Nature and Value of SEL in the Global South, In: Social and Emotional learning as Foundation for Future Readiness, Springer (65-84)
- Marsay, G.M.D., Intervention Design Considerations for Countries in the Global South: Hope-Based Interventions in South Africa, In: Social and Emotional learning as Foundation for Future Readiness, Springer (165-186)
- Marsay, G.M.D., Considerations for Conducting Cross-Cultural Collaborative Research, In: Social and Emotional learning as Foundation for Future Readiness, Springer (267-278)
- Marsay, G.M.D., Future Directions: Key considerations for successful Design and Implementation of SEL Initiatives, In: Social and Emotional Learning as Foundation for Future Readiness. Springer
- Van Der Watt, G., The Broken Body of Christ in a Broken World: A Lutheran perspective on the Eucharist and Diaconia, In: Diaconia – Acts, understandings and stories of service in a pluralistic Southern Africa, Barnabas Academic Publishers
- Van der Watt, J.S., Transforming Diaconia in the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa: Compassionate Service Demanding Justice and Reconciliation, In: Diaconia – Acts, understandings and stories of service in a pluralistic Southern Africa, Barnabas Academic Publishers

Journal articles:

- Tucker, A.R., Adapting prophetic sociopolitical witness to coalition governments in South Africa, HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies
- Verster, P., A missiology of life: Engaging Nelus Niemandt's missiology, Verbum et Ecclesia 46(4):1-7
- Verster, P., AI and mission: Answers to questions on mission to AI and evaluation of the replies, Pharos Journal of Theology 106(4):1-15
- Verster, P., Die sendeling: 'n Evaluering van die rol en betekenis van die sendeling, Tydskrif vir Christelike wetenskap/Journal for Christian Scholarship 61(1&2):111-134
- Verster, P., J.D.Kestell: Godsdiensoortuigings vir vrede en die voortsetting van die stryd tydens die Suid-Afrikaanse oorlog (Anglo-Boereoorlog), LitNet Akademies
- Verster, P., Biblical mission in the context of vulnerability in Africa. 1 Cor. 2:1-11 and vulnerability in Africa, Missionalia

Religion Studies

Authored books:

Boaheng, I., Gyanvi, B.J., The Bible, Divination and the Twelve Apostles Church, Noyam publishers
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