



FACULTY OF THEOLOGY

Prof Elna Mouton
Dean of the Faculty of Theology

THE YEAR 2009 WAS AN EXCEPTIONAL ONE for the Faculty of Theology – 1 November 2009 marked the 150th anniversary of the day on which the NGK Seminary, the first of many educational institutions in the town, opened its doors.

Theology Stellenbosch 150+ wanted to commemorate the heritage of the Seminary and of the Faculty, which became a faculty of SU in 1963, but also acknowledge the quiet voices over the years. We wanted to bring everyone on board. And we wanted particularly to use the year as a point of departure for a future in which the Faculty will increasingly become a hospitable space for people from different environments, traditions, experiences and convictions who want to practise dynamic, accountable theology – hence the name of the commemorative year, *Theology Stellenbosch 150+*.

The activities started with the Theological Day on 2 February, with the theme *Theology in the spiral of memory and hope*, and concluded with the festive weekend and celebratory church service on 1 November. The year was packed with international conferences, including the week-long Joint Conference for *Academic Societies in the fields of Religion and Theology in SA*, which was attended by more than 500 guests, the annual meeting of the Network for African Congregational Theology (*NetACT*), conferences on the history of theological training at Stellenbosch in commemoration of the 500th birthday of Calvin, and on the promotion of human dignity, and even a unique theological conference by students for students.

The academic highlight was the award, on 2 September, of honorary doctorates to five theologians, namely Profs Denise Ackermann, John de Gruchy, Bernard Lategan, Mercy Oduyoye and Wentzel van Huyssteen – five colleagues who had made a unique and exceptional contribution to the promotion of theology as science, particularly in the areas of *ecumenical and contextual* theology – in South Africa, on the African continent, and worldwide (see page 49).

And the spiritual highlight was the morning when a crowd of interested and involved people sat in the *Moederkerk* of the Dutch Reformed Church on 1 November, just like the handful of theological students and lecturers exactly 150 years previously, and commemorated 15 decades of grace.

The Rector's vision is that SU will be a centre of hope (*for and from Africa*), a home where cultures meet, where all are ensured of human dignity, with fair access for all, particularly students from poor communities. The vision of the Faculty is closely associated with this. We strive to offer academic training of quality in accordance with the nature of Christian faith; to understand and enrich the identity and ethos of churches in different (*primarily African*) contexts; to play a role in communities and to promote the diversity of ecclesiastical and faith traditions, culture, language, gender, standpoint and staff and student profiles.

The Faculty's Business Plan for the future focuses particularly on:

- *Network development with academic and ecclesiastical partners (also via centres), within broader ecumenical contexts (with sensitivity for a diversity of religions), socio-economic-political contexts (of poverty, crime and violence) and the African continent.*
- *Dynamic, hope-creating training in the midst of globalisation, secularisation, social and moral alienation, unrest, mistrust and false hope all over the world.*

The number of students is growing steadily. We currently have more than 400 students, of whom more than two thirds are postgraduates. Women and coloured, black and Indian students are increasing proportionally, as is the number of international students, particularly from other countries in Africa. The Faculty's partners are the Dutch Reformed Church, the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa and the Uniting Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa. However, the students represent a wide spectrum of churches.

As one of four theological faculties in SA and the only one offering dual medium undergraduate training, the Faculty wants to protect that which it does (*well*) and do it in a more coordinated and effective manner. This includes the promotion of student success, more and better housing for students from Africa, the development of staff capacity, the implementation of the process of redesigning the curriculum, and the unfolding of Theology's project linked to the Overarching Strategic Plan, namely Promotion of Human Dignity.