

FACULTY OF THEOLOGY

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For the Faculty of Theology, 2010 was a year marked by great energy in the wake of the 2009 celebrations of 150 years of theological training at Stellenbosch. Years of inputs to make our academic standard, capacity and financial sustainability “significantly different, significantly better” are gaining momentum at last. Challenges such as hospitality, diversity, and community involvement – notably, by playing a strong role in Africa – do form part and parcel, after all, of excellence and of a theology of hope.

The University’s HOPE Project has given the Faculty an opportunity to focus more strongly on the promotion of human dignity, including the eradication of poverty. To us this is an integral part of theology; by means of the Project we could formalise (and finance!) it. Our research initiative on the promotion of human dignity was geared up by three appointments that focus on it specifically. However, this initiative remains integrated with the activities of the Faculty.

The first phase of the construction of physical facilities was finalised with the completion of offices in the Attie van Wijk Auditorium. The focus in teaching and research is becoming ever clearer. The Old and New Testament Discipline Group held a day-long seminar on human dignity. Colleagues from all the theological disciplines took part in a conference on human dignity in October. This was held in Kampen together with the Protestant Theological University in the Netherlands – collaboration that has already lasted seven years and has led to a number of publications, bilateral cooperative projects and lecturer and student exchanges.

The staff grew to 20 academic and 17 support staff members. In 2010 we were joined by Prof Julie Claassens (Old Testament, Human Dignity), Dr Mary-Ann Plaatjies van Huffel (Ecclesiology), Ms Shantelle Weber (Practical Theology, Youth Work), Dr Len Hansen (Human Dignity), Ms Helette van der Westhuizen (Human Dignity) and Ms Bonita Robyn (administration). Five members of staff received Rector’s Awards for Excellence in Research or Excellence in Service.

In June, the Faculty’s enrolment stood at 483 students (70% postgraduate). Our undergraduates are primarily from the Dutch Reformed Church and the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa; yet the enrolment from other denominations is rising. Our postgraduates, representing a larger variety of churches, hail from South Africa, the rest of Africa, South Korea and other parts of the world. The enrolment is growing fastest in

the Postgraduate Diploma in Theology, a bridging programme; clearly, it meets a substantial need.

The research output of the Faculty remains the highest per capita at SU. The quality of our research is acknowledged internationally. Five members of our staff are researchers who have been rated by the National Research Foundation. The rate at which master’s and doctoral degrees are being completed is favourable. All of these successes support the Faculty’s financial sustainability.

Regarding teaching we are committed to the access-with-success approach and make an effort with student wellness. We liaise with students, staff and the University’s support services to intercept and solve problems. Senior student mentors offer counselling that is paid for by the Faculty. To ensure the success of our postgraduate students, we invest in the development of their research skills.

Over the past four years the Faculty, in consultation with its partner churches, has been working on new curricula that fulfil the needs of our ecclesiastical and social contexts better and also meet the requirements of the Department of Higher Education. A new degree structure will be implemented in 2012, with a three-year BTh degree (which offers, among others, specialisation in Youth Work, but does not require the Biblical languages Greek and Hebrew), a four-year BDiv (which does offer the Biblical languages) and a one-year MDiv. The Licentiate Programme will be replaced by a Postgraduate Diploma in Christian Ministry, and the DTh will make way for a PhD.

The Faculty’s community interaction has many facets; they range from practical components in teaching programmes to group and individual contributions by students and staff. Research-supported community interaction takes place through our centres. Over the past three years, for example, the Beyers Naudé Centre for Public Theology, with financing from the URCSA and the *Evangelisch Reformierte Kirche* in Germany, carried out a joint research project on globalisation that has led to a comprehensive publication, *Dreaming a different world*.

The co-operation between the Faculty and its three church partners (the DRC, the URCSA and the Uniting Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa) is good. All three partners support the ecumenicity and diversity of the Faculty.

All in all, these exhilarating developments leave the Faculty no option but to strive on, charged with hope and energy!