

# Values of Contextual Education at Wesley Theological Seminary

## 1. **Spiritual Formation**

All components of Practice in Ministry and Mission (PMM) strive to form leaders for the church and the wider community who are spiritually mature and consistently practice spiritual disciplines throughout their ministries. The practice of these disciplines is fostered in the Spiritual Formation for Ministry course, and accountability and service learning groups during the student's first 30 hours in the PMM Program. They are continued through on-campus discipleship accountability groups for the student's years in the PMM Program, as well as the requirement for leading a short-term small group focused on discipleship at the student's PMM setting. These requirements give witness to our conviction that Christian ministry and accountability for one's discipleship, emphasizing acts of worship, devotion, justice and compassion, must be connected.

## 2. **Church Centered**

We prepare students for ministry leadership that is based in the local church and in other ministries that grow out of the church's life in community. The curriculum is geared toward preparing leaders for effective and fruitful ministry in local church and agency settings.

## 3. **Accountability**

Christianity flourishes in accountable communities. Covenant Discipleship is one aspect of accountability. Requiring evaluation strategies in the learning agreements is a second aspect of accountability. Engagement in the ministry learning activities by the learning partnership holds the partnership accountable for the use of time and resources in developing the student's competency in ministry leadership and is a third aspect of accountability. The PMM Program focuses on balancing the various aspects of a faithful life, helping students to assess the fruitfulness of their ministries in their ministry context.

## 4. **Adult Learning**

We expect students to participate fully in the learning process. They do this by identifying their learning needs, (which they translate into learning goals), by developing learning strategies, and by creating assessment tools to evaluate their learning.

## 5. **Life-long Learning**

Graduates are to be prepared to meet the varied and changing demands of ministry. The seminary cannot anticipate or have time to inculcate all the skills and knowledge that future ministry will demand, though certain basic competencies are expected at the time of the completion of the PMM Program (see #7 below). Students must develop the skill and propensity to assess their needs and address them on their own.

## 6. **Collegiality**

Students need experience, modeling, and guidance in working collegially with lay people and other ministerial leaders. PMM requires that learning partnerships include a lay learning partner who serves on an equal basis as the clergy learning partner. Our colloquies are led by a collegial team of a faculty person and a person from a ministry setting. Our PMM staff – director, assistant director, and program administrator – work as a team to guide the Program.

## 7. **Competency**

### a. **Ministry Leadership**

We expect students to acquire and to develop basic ministerial competencies that are spelled out in the outcomes of the PMM Program and stated for the Master of Divinity degree of

Wesley Theological Seminary. The students we receive are very diverse in their theology, denominational polity, understanding of the ways in which they will live out their calls, and in their prior ministerial experience. Students do not all have the same learning needs, but we offer them the opportunity to address the ones that they do have through individual and personally oriented learning agreements. PMM encourages students to take risks rather than to operate in their current comfort zones.

**b. Cross-Cultural Awareness**

We expect students to develop and to acquire competence in understanding and being in ministry with cultures other than their own. Since congregations are moving toward increased cultural diversity, rather than homogeneity, our students must be culturally aware and prepared to offer ministry in such settings. The Intercultural Immersion requirement is designed so that students can become more aware of their own selves as persons tied to a culture. This awareness occurs by exposing them to an unfamiliar culture, in order to see its economic, religious, educational, social, and cultural traditions through the eyes of those who live in that culture. The students are to reflect upon those experiences and share them with their ministry settings. This reflection begins a process in which students come to grips with the various ways in which those with whom they are in ministry understand and practice their Christian commitment, due to their cultural identifications. Cross-cultural experiences also increase students' understanding of our globalized reality.

**c. Integration of Theology and Practice**

We expect students to acquire and to develop competence in integrating theology into the practice of ministry. Theological reflection is a tool that offers students the opportunity to look at their experiences through theological lenses and to integrate classroom learnings in other disciplines with their experiences in ministry settings. This is a challenge since many students do not have the basic systematic theology course until their final year in seminary. Nonetheless, we seek to strengthen the ability of students to reflect theologically by encouraging colloquy leaders and learning partners to value and to venture into doing oral theological reflection in colloquies and in the learning partnership meetings.

**8. Contextual Learning**

Wesley is located in an urban setting and in a city that is the urban hub for the suburban and rural communities in which our students are placed for learning. Our society has changed. Even rural communities are no longer self-sustaining but are oriented toward urban centers for jobs and services. It is important that we prepare our students to understand how the urban context influences the context for ministry in affluent, inner, and blighted city, suburban, and rural ministry settings. Students need skills in identifying community changes and appropriate ministerial responses to them.

**9. Diversity**

The diversity of Wesley is an asset in giving students preparation for dealing with the diversity of the religious climate in our communities and congregational settings. PMM tries to use this inherent diversity to shape the students' perspectives and experience of ministry and mission in a diverse world. This diversity impacts the way in which the PMM Program is designed. We take advantage of the diversity in our student body and faculty to make our colloquies as diverse as possible and to deal with cross-cultural understandings and tensions in the orientation for immersions and in colloquy discussions of case briefs and ministry incidents.