

# Values of Contextual Education at Wesley Theological Seminary

## 1. **Spiritual Formation**

All components of Practice in Ministry and Mission (PMM) aim to form leaders for the church and the wider community, leaders 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 courses and through accountability and service-learning groups during the seminarian's first 24 hours in the Master of Divinity (M.Div.) program. These requirements give witness to our conviction that Christian ministry must be connected to a discipleship that emphasizes acts of worship, devotion, justice, and compassion.

## 2. **Ministry Focused Settings**

We prepare seminarians for ministry leadership in nonprofits, 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 and leadership in nonprofit settings and in local church as well as associated settings.

## 3. **Accountability**

Christianity flourishes in accountable communities. The PMM Program focuses on balancing the various aspects of a faithful life and helping seminarians to assess the fruitfulness of their ministries in their ministry context. Accountability is ensured by mutually determining the evaluation strategies as part of creating learning goals. Through mutual engagement in ministry learning activities, the learning partnership can plan and carefully manage the use of time and resources, providing more accountability while it develops management skills for competency in ministry leadership.

## 4. **Adult Learning**

We expect seminarians to participate fully in the learning process by identifying their learning needs that they translate into learning goals and by developing learning strategies that align with the formal evaluation of their learning.

## 5. **Lifelong Learning**

Graduates are to be prepared to meet the varied and changing demands of ministry. The seminary cannot anticipate or 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). Seminarians must develop a willingness and ability to assess their needs and address them on their own.

## 6. **Collegiality**

In several ways, PMM provides seminarians with experience, modeling, and guidance in working collegially with lay people and other ministerial leaders. It requires learning partnerships that include a lay or site learning partner who serves on an equal basis with the clergy or mentoring learning partner. PMM colloquies are led by a collegial team of a faculty person and a person from a ministry setting. And PMM staff—the director, associate director, and program administrator—work as a team to guide seminarians through the program.

## **7. PMM formation foci in the following areas:**

### **a. Ministry Leadership**

We expect seminarians 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 seminarians 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. Seminarians 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 goals. PMM encourages seminarians to take risks rather than to operate in their current comfort zones.

### **b. Cultural Awareness**

We expect seminarians to develop cultural awareness in various ways. Examples include learning in a different context than their home setting, engaging diversity in a multitude of manners, and learning the social/political climate of a community. Reflecting upon cultural awareness helps a seminarian to better understand their own identification and leadership proclivities within a context.

### **c. Integration of Theology, Leadership, and Practice**

We expect seminarians to acquire and to develop competence in integrating theology into the practice of ministry and leadership skills. Theological reflection is a tool that offers seminarians 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 seminarians do not have the basic systematic theology course until their final year in seminary. Nonetheless, we seek to strengthen the ability of seminarians to reflect theologically and on leadership 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 through which our seminarians may be 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 seminarians to understand how the urban context influences the context for ministry in affluent, inner and blighted city, suburban, and rural ministry settings. Seminarians need skills in identifying community changes and appropriate ministerial responses to them.

## **9. Diversity**

The diversity of Wesley is an asset in giving seminarians 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 seminarians' 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 seminarian 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.