

Kathy Winings: UTS MRE degree Equips Those Called to Teach, and Model Peace

Douglas Burton
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Dr. Kathy Winings

In an era in which American churches are losing young people right and left, there is a growing segment calling for clergy to rediscover the teaching ministry and to reinvest in educational ministries equipped with more dynamic and relevant teaching skills, according to Dr. Kathy Winings, Vice President for Academic Affairs at the Unification Theological Seminary (UTS).

“Churches are finding that they are losing young people, and they are concluding that their teaching ministries are deficient. They are looking for people who can teach effectively,” she says.

She cites three reasons why students training for a Master of Religious Education degree can get outstanding preparation at UTS.

“First, UTS is on the cutting edge of brain-based teaching methods. The elective course in “Brain-based Teaching” introduces insights obtained by recent studies of brain functioning which the core courses also introduce. We now know from neuro-science that the brain can’t absorb vast amounts of material from long lectures; in fact, students typically do not retain more than 5 percent of the material presented,” she says.

“Second, the MRE degree is so broad-based in its study of sources of wisdom, it is a great way to shape a minister’s own spiritual life;” she adds.

“Third, for those on the journey of interfaith peace building, this degree gives the knowledge and tools required to meet the challenge of faith-based violence in many parts of the world. “

Among seminaries in the United States, UTS is among a small handful that is both accredited and emphatically interfaith as well as ecumenical. Approximately half of UTS’ incoming class in 2014 hailed from faith communities outside of the religion of the Founders. Students who finished up their degrees in the spring of 2015 included Baptists, Pentecostals, and nondenominational clergy.



Entrance to UTS' campus in New York City

“We are welcoming of students of all faiths, and while they are here, they will learn of other faiths on a basic level,” says Winings.

The core courses and the electives are arranged in two concentrations: either Religious Education or Interfaith Peacebuilding. Either way, the MRE requires a total of 50 earned credits for graduation.

Seminarians heading toward the concentration in Religious Education will take two courses in pedagogy, two courses in Bible Scripture studies; systematic theology, two church history courses and a course in world religions. They will choose two elective courses from a wide range of courses such as the following: Brain-based Teaching; Marriage and Family; Character Education; Curriculum Design; Teaching the Bible as Liberating Word; Online Teaching or courses on specific age groups. Students also have space to take several exciting and relevant free electives.

Students taking the concentration in Interfaith Peacebuilding will take the following six core

courses: Theology of Peacebuilding; World Scripture and World Peace; Ethics and Social Justice; World Religions; and Global Conflict; and two faith traditions other than their own. This cohort of seminarians will choose five elective courses.

All MRE students complete a religious education project or write a capstone paper of about 30 pages and will do a practicum in the field.

Some MRE students we met recently at the main campus in New York City say they like the student body and the faculty for its diversity. The student body includes seminarians from developing countries, several countries in Africa, as well as India, Bangladesh, the Philippines and the Caribbean, yet many of these folks are working at missions of their churches in the New York metropolitan area. Some seminarians, like Christiana Mmadu, a Roman Catholic nun from Nigeria who lives in Brooklyn, say they like the community spirit of UTS.

As she explains, “My church colleagues objected to me coming to UTS for my MRE, but after I came here, it taught me a big lesson. It was the reverse of what I thought. I discovered a community-minded staff. The people here are very serving.”

UTS graduate Mr. Ingill Ra credits being hired in his first job after graduation to his MRE with a concentration in Interfaith Peacebuilding.

Not only is UTS one of the few interfaith seminaries in the USA, it is strategically located in New York City, less than 2 blocks from Grand Central Station. NYC has been described as having the most diverse population in the world, and being the capital of the universe. The city offers unique access to the panoply of religious faiths and cultures, and yet in contrast, in the middle of the city’s hubbub, UTS provides a sanctuary, where students can reflect on their daily discoveries and process the rich training given by skilled professors.