

## Report of New Brunswick Theological Seminary

Recognizing New Brunswick Theological Seminary's 238-year relationship with the Reformed Church in America, the seminary welcomes the opportunity to update the General Synod on the status of our institution and our partnership with the denomination.

### Mission Statement

New Brunswick Theological Seminary (NBTS) continues to execute its mission: to educate persons and strengthen communities for transformational, public ministries in church and society. We fulfill this mission through creative, contextual, and critical engagement with texts, traditions, and practices.

### Governance

The seminary's 22-member board of trustees is second to none. The board maintains a close and positive relationship with administration, faculty, students, and community. As president, I am grateful for the board's work to improve governance, specifically around onboarding trustees, charitable giving, efficient processes in committee meetings, and the evaluation and support of the NBTS president. In this past year, the board participated enthusiastically in our accreditation processes. Forthcoming, the board of trustees will collaborate with seminary leadership to update the NBTS mission statement, strategic plan, and constitution.

NBTS board members include representatives from the eight RCA regional synods and RCA coordinator for Women's Transformation and Leadership Rev. Elizabeth (Liz) Testa. The RCA's general secretary, Rev. Eddy Alemán, and the NBTS president, Rev. Dr. Micah McCreary, serve as *ex officio* members of the NBTS board.

### Administration

Administratively, we have focused on institutional analysis and planning during this 2021–2022 academic year. With monies from the Lilly Endowment "Pathways for Tomorrow Initiative" (Phase One) grant, we hired Ministry Architects to conduct a situation analysis focused mainly on operations and to help us plan how we would implement the suggested changes.

This analysis by Ministry Architects focused on the organizational structure and operational efficiencies in the following areas: student services, strategic plan execution, financial processes, and admissions. Ministry Architects met one-on-one with staff from these areas, as well as with members of the administration. Assets and challenges were identified, recommendations were given, and a 12-month timeline for implementation was created.

During the assessment, the following strengths (opportunities) were identified: poised to pivot, inspiring leadership, commitment to confront power and privilege (antiracism), dynamic faculty and staff, a collaborative spirit, a caring community, and a campus designed with innovation in mind. At the same time, the following challenges (obstacles) were identified: staffing vacancies, infrastructure needs, financial fragility, institutional capacity, lack of shared vision and strategy, crisis of clarity, and communication.

Through this assessment work with Ministry Architects, we were able to take a larger view of our institution. This process allowed us to see assets as well as areas for improvement. Our next

step has been to develop one-year operational goals and longer-range goals that will inform the new NBTS strategic plan (the current plan ends in 2022).

We believe these activities are helping us achieve our mission, which can be achieved only with efficient, sustainable operations throughout the seminary.

## **Advancement**

NBTS sustains itself financially through our endowment, tuition, RCA assessments, property rental (office space and meeting space to outside groups and persons), fundraising, and grants. Our advancement office activities are spearheaded by Cathy D. Proctor, the vice president of advancement and recruiting. Ms. Proctor served as the advancement officer with NBTS president emeritus Gregg Mast and helped to develop relationships with donors. She is deeply involved with the current president, Micah McCreary, in cultivating relationships with supporters and giving strategy leadership to our advancement efforts. NBTS respects our donors and our donors' intentions, making sure that all gifts and grants are used as directed.

The mission of NBTS would not be possible without the support of all donors. Our endowments, major gifts, and the annual seminary fund allow us to provide our students with quality academic programs, as well as resources and scholarship support that help them fulfill their call. We celebrate the generosity and efforts of our donors to help our students think critically, act justly, and lead faithfully.

NBTS recently completed our \$1.784 million "A Light In God's Cities" campaign where we honored our past and seized the present. NBTS is now embarking on a new goal to position ourselves for the future. Later this year, we will launch the Legacy Campaign, where we will look to endow two chairs: the presidential chair and one faculty chair. This campaign will also enhance the Gardner A. Sage Library, including adding an elevator for broader accessibility. We intend to conclude the Gardner A. Sage Library component of the campaign in 2025, the 150th anniversary of the opening of the library.

## **Admissions and Recruitment**

Given the changing landscape of theological education, our admissions department is continuing to shift outreach efforts. We hold both online and in-person recruiting events. Zoom information sessions highlight our various programs. Staff members reach out to potential students and inform them of the online and hybrid options available. Many of our students come to us via referrals, so the admissions department works closely with alumni and church pastors to keep them abreast of seminary offerings.

This year, the doctor of ministry and certificate programs have grown while we continue to be challenged by the enrollment in the master's programs. This year, we witnessed a positive trend in the number of certificate students applying to the master's programs.

Currently, NBTS is searching for a director of admissions, which has proven difficult in the current market. In February, we contracted with a search firm to aid us in the search. The job description can be found on the website at <https://nbts.edu/employ-opps/director-of-admissions>.

Alumni relations activity is critical to the mission and success of the advancement and admissions departments and to the vitality of the seminary as a whole. The office is dedicated to engaging and serving our alumni. This year, the NBTS Alumni Association was launched. These alumni provide a base of annual philanthropic support, serve as relations advocates, open doors for potential partnerships, and serve as recruitment ambassadors for the seminary.

## **Academics**

NBTS is proud of the excellent programs we offer, all of which can be found at <https://nbts.edu/academics>. This report will focus on our recent accreditation visits. President McCreary commends vice president of academic affairs and dean of the seminary Beth Tanner, associate dean of institutional assessment Terry Smith, and our entire NBTS community for the indefatigable efforts during our very first accreditation visit from Middle States Commission on High Education (MSCHE) and a full reaccreditation visit from the Association of Theological Schools (ATS).

### *MSCHE Accreditation Visit Hosted October 25–28, 2021*

Upon the conclusion of the visit, the accrediting team commended NBTS institutional leaders for keeping the institutional mission at the forefront of their strategic implementations, with special recognition of faculty efforts to center their research and course development on main aspects of the mission, particularly in the areas of transformational public ministry and critical engagement with traditional fields of theological knowledge. The team further recognized the efforts of the administration, faculty, staff, and students for our innovation, for pivoting to a different delivery modality during the pandemic, and for establishing practices that will facilitate growth and sustainability into the future.

The accrediting team further commended the seminary for recognizing the importance of providing students with advice regarding the costs of seminary education and developing the Financial Stewardship Coaching project to assist students in understanding this aspect of their education. The team also noted that NBTS departments do not work in a silo to service the student population but instead embrace an “all-hands-on-deck” culture that fosters faculty involvement and student organizational involvement.

### *ATS Reaccreditation Visit Hosted February 7–11, 2022*

The ATS reaccreditation committee interviewed administrators, trustees, members of the core faculty, current students, alumni, the director of the library, and most staff members. The committee agreed that all were well engaged and candid in their responses, which were consistent with the self-study report. Each person with whom the committee met seemed committed to the mission of NBTS and expressed appreciation for the school and its administration.

The committee affirmed two distinct NBTS strengths:

1. A mature and exemplary commitment to identifying and dismantling structures of racism, privilege, and unjust power, a value that has guided the school for more than a decade and is amply evident in a richly diverse community of students, staff, faculty, trustees, and alumni. This commitment reveals itself in a well-designed curriculum, in how the

school talks to itself in places as mundane and important as board workbooks, and in a vibrant community life that continues amid a two-year global health crisis.

2. Admirable attention to the needs of students evidenced in services that embody care, competence, and collaboration in multiple ways; in a physical plant that enables, embodies, and energizes in-person learning and community; and in the ways the school is deploying new technology.

The committee highlighted the following issues needing special attention during the next period of accreditation:

1. Developing a comprehensive marketing and communication strategy that supports enrollment and institutional advancement goals.
2. Strengthening the board’s practices of self-evaluation and attending to succession planning (both for itself and for the institution and its leadership).
3. Developing educational policies that require and ensure regular and substantive interaction between faculty and students, including students in online education.

*New Student Information System*

A change that affects academics as well as other areas is that a committee of faculty and staff members approved the selection of Campus Café as our new student information system. As this system is being implemented, NBTS is looking for a new learning management system to be installed this summer. These new systems will enhance the online experience for our students.

**Enrollment**

NBTS continues to grow its student body. Current we have 171 students enrolled. Fifty-four percent of our students are female. Eighty-five percent of our students are people of color, and seventy-seven percent of our students are ages 40–64.

	<b>DMIN</b>	<b>MDIV/MA</b>	<b>CERTIFICATE</b>	<b>RCA STUDENTS</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
<b>2017</b>	48	126	52*	34*	226
<b>2018</b>	31	111	13	17	172
<b>2019</b>	26	95	17	14	138
<b>2020</b>	38	88	28	27	154
<b>2021</b>	50	87	29	32	166

\*Note that in 2017 we had a Certificate in Spanish Language with 24 RCA students.

**Finances**

NBTS’ overall income for this fiscal year (July 2021–June 2022) is behind budget because of limited donor gatherings due to pandemic concerns and less than expected tuition and fee revenue from our master’s degree programs. Fortunately, other programs have seen increases, and permitted drawdowns from existing accounts have met our needs. Though our plant operations and maintenance expenses are slightly above budget, departmental expenses are lower than expected as we have followed pandemic restrictions.

## **Power and Privilege Workshops**

As the reaccreditation committee observed, NBTS' exemplary commitment to identifying and dismantling structures of racism, privilege, and unjust power has become part of our institutional identity. We see this national struggle as a way for NBTS to serve God's church. Many programs on power and privilege leave audiences feeling blamed and shamed. Our Power and Privilege workshops offer a safe and supportive space to consider these issues from a biblical and theological perspective. Congregations, students, and others are challenged to think critically, act justly, and lead faithfully around matters of power and privilege.

## **Closing**

With God's help, Dr. McCreary has just completed his fifth year as president of NBTS. One joy of this position is nurturing the seminary's relationship with the RCA. For example, NBTS is planning a course and pilgrimage to the RCA-supported Al Amana Centre in Oman in January 2023. Dr. McCreary has also had the opportunity to serve the RCA in the following ways:

1. Principal investigator of a \$1,000,000 Lilly Endowment Inc. Thriving in Ministry Grant designed to serve RCA Latino and Black American pastors
2. Member of the Pastoral Formation Oversight Board (PFOB)
3. Member of the Commission on Theology (COT)
4. Member of the newly formed RCA Restructuring Team
5. Guest pastor at RCA churches
6. General Synod Professor

On behalf of NBTS, thank you, RCA, for your partnership in the gospel.

Faithfully submitted,

Micah L. McCreary, MDiv, PhD, LCP  
President, New Brunswick Theological Seminary  
NBTS John Henry Livingston Professor of Theology  
RCA General Synod Professor