

End of Year Message from President Walrond

Dear Friends

What an amazing year we have had at New York Theological Seminary. It has been a true blessing to serve NYTS as it's twelfth and first woman President this past year. When I consider the trials we faced and the accomplishments we have made I am amazed that it has only been twelve months. This time has been full of challenges, surprises and victories, and your support has been central to our continued success. As we approach the end of our academic year and you determine your end of the year gift, please know that every gift makes a difference. Here are some highlights of 2019-2020.

COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 global pandemic forced NYTS to transition completely to an online teaching model via Zoom in March. The faculty online committee did an excellent job of training our professors and provided training modules for our students. We will continue classes online through the summer and possibly the fall as we await further instructions from our Governor. Faculty and staff are currently working remotely and due to budget constraints, the majority are using their own computers and phones to conduct NYTS business. One of our fundraising hopes is that we will be able to provide each staff and faculty member with a laptop by the end of the summer.

Due to the virus, we were forced to postpone our commencement activities. Graduation is tentatively scheduled for December 12, 2020, at Abyssinian Baptist Church. We were also forced to suspend our classes at Sing Sing Correctional facility, however, we will be able to extend the year to enable our students to complete the requirements to earn their degree. We are committed to continuing this program and are awaiting instruction from the Department of Corrections to determine our next steps. Graduation plans for our students at Sing Sing are currently on hold.

Technology

We are excited to have completed a soft launch of our website. The team has worked diligently over the past several months to make this dream a reality. We continue to work out the glitches so that we can make a public announcement soon. Our next priority is ensuring that all of our forms are digitized by the end of the summer. We have also begun to highlight new classes taught by faculty via video as a part of our recruitment strategy to engage new students.

Thanks to the diligence of our interim VP and Academic Dean, we submitted our distance learning application for the M.Div program. Once we receive our approval, we will submit applications for our remaining MA and DMin programs. Our transition to the Blackbaud online student engagement and learning platform should be completed by the Spring of 2021. Last month, we conducted an online survey with our students about our transition to online classes in March. The majority of our students prefer a combination of both in-person and online classes. We will continue to move in that direction.

Future Initiatives

Even as we celebrate these accomplishments we are grieved by the turmoil in our world. COVID-19 has exposed the injustice in our healthcare system, and the recent killings of unarmed African Americans and the protests worldwide have exposed the racial injustice in our justice

system. NYTS is prepared to speak to both of these crises through the development of two new centers.

This summer, NYTS will launch the **Center for Health Equity** which will equip faith leaders with the tools necessary to understand the intricacies of the health care system - including physical, mental, spiritual and emotional health. Faith leaders will be equipped to navigate the complexities of the health care system in order to better advocate for their communities. This center will also conduct cutting edge research and lead workshops that will promote healthier individuals and families.

In the fall, NYTS will launch the **Center for Justice and Restoration**. This center will expand the criminal justice reform work that NYTS has engaged for over 40 years and serve as a hub for the many ministries connected to our Master of Professional Studies degree at Sing Sing Correctional Facility. Anchoring this center will be the Coming Home Institute, a prison re-entry program for individuals that will help to facilitate their transition back to their families and communities. It will offer restorative care, educational opportunities, training for advocacy, research and collaborative opportunities to dismantle the racist policies that continue to strain our communities.

Both these centers are extensions of the work that New York Theological Seminary has been doing for the past 120 years. Truth is, NYTS has been an anti-racist institution for generations - challenging inequality, injustice, and oppression from our inception. Today, as we stand at the edge of an unpredictable future, NYTS remains committed to equipping students for this critical work. We will offer students in our degree programs opportunities to have practical experiences that will prepare them for a bright future as leaders in our world.

In addition to your annual gift for student scholarships and the general work of the Seminary, we ask that you sow a special sacrificial seed to help us launch these new centers. This is a critical time for our seminary, our country, and our world. Your support of our work will help us fulfill our urgent mission of preparing faith and thought leaders to engage in relevant, restorative and revolutionary ministry.

I thank you in advance for considering a generous end-of-year gift.

Yours in service,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Lakeesha Walrond', written in a cursive style.

The Rev. Lakeesha Walrond, Ph.D.

President