

WHAT IS PERTH COLLEGE OF DIVINITY (PCD)?

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Each denomination of the Christian church finds ways to offer theological education for its lay members and its ordinand members, and further education for its ordained members. In the Uniting Church in WA, Perth Theological Hall has provided such programmes and opportunities.

In 1985, the Anglican, Baptist, Catholic and Uniting Churches responded to a rare opportunity to share their theological resources in a unique collaboration with Murdoch University. Because the university could not sensibly negotiate with each individual denomination, the denominations allowed their theological halls and colleges to form a separately incorporated body, the Perth College of Divinity, Inc. Its work was the ongoing negotiations and academic collaboration with Murdoch University. The widespread support for this was such that Perth College of Divinity's public fund-raising built the Murdoch University Worship Centre.

Through PCD, the burden of resourcing the five areas of tertiary study usually required for ordinands (New Testament, Old Testament, Systematic Theology, Church History and Practical Theology) is shared between the denominations with Murdoch University now contributing 40% of the cost of staff, as well as contributing staff rooms, computers, research support, lecture rooms and theatres, administrative offices, and acquisitions and staff for the theological library. This offers the most cost-effective provision of mainstream tertiary theological education in Australia.

The churches' lecturers cooperate in a common teaching program, providing a much fuller coverage of the field and richer programme than any one small college with limited staff could provide. The present programme offers a BA(Religion) with some Theology included, an MDiv for graduates as the course for ordination, graduate diplomas in Theology and in Chaplaincy, a graduate certificate in Theology, a Research Masters with training (MTheol), and the MTheol and PhD. Five Murdoch PhD's now teach Old Testament at tertiary level around the world, including at the Uniting College in Adelaide.

When the Baptist Church pulled out of PCD, Baptist lecturers advised that the extreme conservatism of Baptist students rejected theological study in an ecumenical context. Notre Dame University's College of Philosophy and Theology remains a participating institution, but Catholic lecturers now teach at Notre Dame and only occasionally at Murdoch. The Anglican and Uniting Churches have continued to enjoy a strong theological partnership and all the benefits that flow from ecumenical dialogue and cooperation.

The members of Perth College of Divinity are equal partners. A working partnership does, however, require each member to play the part it has agreed to play. The Uniting Church has been in breach of its agreement to provide a Systematic Theology lecturer since 2015.

The denominational formation also usually required for ordinands is not provided by the Perth College of Divinity, but by each denomination individually, in our case by Perth Theological Hall. Perth Theological Hall has always called upon and valued a large contribution from Uniting Church congregations and ministers, institutions and chaplains, in this work of formation. Non-tertiary courses, for lay people and others, have also been provided by Perth Theological Hall. Ordained graduates could take advantage of further work with Perth College of Divinity or completely different opportunities for further education, such as were approved.

Our cooperative work in the Perth College of Divinity has allowed the sustainable provision of theological teaching for the core academic requirements for ordinands, set by the Uniting Church Assembly, without limiting the nature or amount of other educational innovations as may also be found beneficial.