

Perth College of Divinity

<i>President</i>	John Dunhill
<i>Vice President</i>	Suzanne Boorer
<i>Anglican Representatives</i>	Gregory Seach
	Mark Jennings
	Andrew Webster
<i>Uniting Church Representatives</i>	Rev Dr Ian Tozer
	Rev Bev Fabb
	Rev Dr John Squires
	Nancy Ault

The Perth College of Divinity came into being in 1985 to enable co-operation between Murdoch University and the churches in WA, for the teaching of Theology. This it continues to do, although much has changed during this time. For example, there are now many more options for theological study, both locally and online. The key to the current operation of the PCD is the 1994 Agreement with the University supporting a range of appointments in Theology, each jointly funded by Murdoch and one church institution.

The active participating institutions of the PCD are currently:

- Wollaston Theological College (Anglican)
- the Perth Theological Hall of the Uniting Church in Australia.

Under the agreement between Murdoch University and the PCD, Murdoch now offers the following awards:

- BA (Religion) – which may include some Theology
- MDiv – designed primarily to address the needs of graduate ordinands
- Graduate Certificate in Theology, and Graduate Diploma in Theology
- Graduate Diploma in Chaplaincy, and Master of Chaplaincy
- Research Masters with Training (MTheol)
- MPhil and PhD (research degrees)

Enrolment statistics for our post-graduate programmes are:

Grad Certificate in Theology 3

Grad Diploma in Theology	5
Master of Divinity	14
Grad Dip in chaplaincy	16
Master of Chaplaincy	6
TOTAL	48

Enrolments in Theology have been low overall for some years, but are now steadily improving across the board, year by year, while interest in the new chaplaincy courses is very positive. Within the BA, there are very high enrolments in a few Religion units, from a wide range of students; however the BA (Religion) major degree, with only a minimal Theology component, has not proved attractive and the university has stopped enrolments in that degree at least for 2017. The removal of Theology units from the BA means that while the graduate-entry MDiv is growing, non-graduates are barely able to access Theology at all. These non-graduates include some who are seeking to study for ordination in the churches, causing serious difficulty for programming and for their formation. This remains a matter for concern which is being addressed.

I. UNITING CHURCH ISSUES

Since 2015, the Perth Theological Hall has expressed doubts about whether the PCD arrangement continues to meet the needs of the Uniting Church in WA. The issues were thoroughly discussed by the Review panel in 2015, which reported in February 2016. Since then, a new set of National Standards for Theological Education has been published in November 2016. As anticipated, these call for different emphases in the way study is

provided, including a priority on flexible access to Theological study for candidates with lower qualifications (a problem for others in the PCD at this time, as noted above). The Standards also stress the need for engagement in and commitment to the churches' missional purposes; this is sometimes seen as conflicting with the conditions of University-based study.

2. STAFFING CHANGES

In face of these changing circumstances and priorities, the UCA has hesitated to commit itself to a new permanent joint-appointment in Systematic Theology following the departure of Dr Alex Jensen in 2015. It eventually approved this in June 2016, but again placed the process on hold in August, pending the arrival of Dr John Squires, the new Principal of PTH in February 2017. This delay has made it impossible to fill the post for either the start or middle of 2017 and leaves a significant gap in teaching and research leadership.

Advertisement for the Anglican-based vacant post of Lecturer in New Testament was also held up for a time, pending the UCA's commitment, but was able to go ahead in June 2016. Out of a strong field Dr Robert Myles from Auckland University was appointed and commenced in January 2017.

Dr Jim Trotter has now resigned from his joint Anglican-Murdoch post from mid- 2017. He has been teaching Old Testament since 1994, and for the past three years has been seconded as Deputy Dean of the School of Arts. He will be much missed and we wish him well in his future career in University administration. During the last two years of that period of secondment Dr Mark Jennings was appointed in Jim's place, as Lecturer in Religion. It is to be hoped that his appointment can be extended to enable continued development of Religion as a distinct field of studies.

3. UNITING CHURCH WITHDRAWAL FROM THE PCD

On 16 March 2017, the UCA Presbytery Standing Committee informed the PCD that 'it will not appoint a lecturer in Systematic Theology at this time', without providing any

further indication of its intentions. The University has questioned whether this process fulfils the obligation, under the 1994 Agreement, to consult with partners before making major changes. The University has also challenged the PCD to find ways to supply a full suite of six lecturing staff or else face probable dissolution of the 1994 Agreement.

In these circumstances, the PCD has formally asked the UCA to clarify its intentions, and has received a formal Notice of Withdrawal of Perth Theological Hall from the PCD, as from 30 June 2018. The letter gives the required one year's notice.

For the PCD, this move, while the reasons for it are understood, is highly regrettable and puts in jeopardy much that has been achieved over many years. Many things remain unclear still, including how the UCA proposes to discharge its obligations under the present arrangement. To be equitable, it is essential that the outcome honours commitments made in good faith by and to existing staff and students of all participating institutions, as well as the Theology programme and the University as a whole. These matters will have to be worked out in detail in the coming months.

The PCD for its part remains committed to working in a spirit of constructive partnership with the University and other institutions to achieve such an outcome; and to secure the future of this highly-regarded and broadly-based programme with its recognised contribution to the churches and the wider community of WA.

John Dunnill
President
johndunnill@amnet.net.au