

CENTRAL SEMINARY | SUMMER 2025

# THE VOICE

The background of the entire page is a photograph of a library or study. In the foreground, a stack of three books is visible, with the top one open. To the right, a laptop is partially visible. The background is filled with rows of wooden bookshelves and warm, glowing lights, creating a bokeh effect.

## **ADAPTING** *for Tomorrow*

Innovative Approaches to Theological Education





Central Seminary alumni enjoyed a tour and lunch at the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art in Kansas City as part of Central's annual alumni retreat.

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# A Word from the President

## 리더십의 중심 센트럴, 센트럴에서 리더십으로

Theological education is in a season of profound change. Dr. Frank Yamada, executive director of the Association of Theological Schools, recently noted that both students and the ways theological schools recruit and train them are transforming. Schools are rethinking how best to prepare students for a world far different from the one they have known.\* At Central Seminary, we are responding to these shifts with intention, creativity, and deep commitment to the church.

Long before the pandemic made online learning commonplace, Central had already embraced Zoom classrooms. We understood that flexibility and access are crucial for today's students—many of whom are already serving in ministry, balancing professional and personal lives, or come from historically underserved communities.

Yet responsiveness means more than adjusting delivery models—it requires a commitment to listening to and learning from those we serve. At Central, we have been asking: What do congregations need now? How can theological education best empower leaders to thrive? These questions shape our denominational partnerships, community engagement, and how we listen to students.

This fall, in response to student feedback, we will launch a new Master of Arts in Ministry—a 36-credit program designed for second- and third-career students seeking an accessible path to ministry. Central also remains committed to welcoming students from around the globe. We now serve students from 13 countries and offer courses in multiple languages. This global diversity is not incidental but integral to our mission. As the church becomes more multilingual and multiethnic, our classrooms reflect these realities, preparing leaders for diverse, dynamic contexts.

At its core, Central Seminary's mission is unwavering: to form faithful leaders for a transforming world. We are grounded in tradition, receptive to innovation, and resolute in our commitment to serve both God and the church. 🌿

신학 교육은 지금 중대한 전환의 시기를 맞고 있습니다. 신학대학원협의회(Association of Theological Schools)의 사무총장 프랭크 야마다(Dr. Frank Yamada) 박사는 최근, 학생뿐만 아니라 신학교의 학생 모집 방식과 교육 방법 자체가 변화하고 있다고 언급했습니다. 신학교들은 이제 과거와는 전혀 다른 세상 속에서 사역할 학생들을 어떻게 준비시킬 것인가에 대해 근본적인 고민을 하고 있습니다. 센트럴신학대학원(Central Seminary)은 이러한 변화에 대해 의도적이고 창의적이며 교회를 향한 깊은 헌신으로 응답하고 있습니다.

팬데믹으로 온라인 학습이 일반화되기 훨씬 전부터, 센트럴은 이미 줌(Zoom) 강의실을 도입해 왔습니다. 우리는 오늘날의 학생들—이미 사역에 종사하고 있거나, 직업과 가정을 병행하며 살아가고 있거나, 역사적으로 교육에서 소외된 공동체 출신일 수 있는 이들—에게는 유연성과 접근성이 필수적이라는 사실을 잘 알고 있었습니다.

하지만 '대응한다'는 것은 단지 교육 전달 방식만 바꾸는 것이 아닙니다. 진정한 대응력은 우리가 섬기는 이들의 목소리에 귀 기울이고, 그들로부터 배우려는 헌신에서 비롯됩니다. 센트럴은 계속해서 스스로에게 질문하고 있습니다. “지금 교회가 진정으로 필요로 하는 것은 무엇인가?”, “신학 교육이 어떻게 하면 지도자들을 더욱 잘 준비시키고, 그들이 성장하도록 도울 수 있을까?” 이러한 질문은 우리의 교단 파트너십, 지역사회 참여, 학생과의 소통 방식 전반을 형성하고 있습니다.

올가을, 학생들의 의견을 반영하여 새로운 목회학 석사(Master of Arts in Ministry) 과정을 개설할 예정입니다. 이 과정은 제 2, 제3의 커리어로 사역을 준비하는 이들을 위해 설계된 36 학점 프로그램입니다. 또한 센트럴은 전 세계에서 온 학생들을 계속해서 환영하고 있습니다. 현재는 13개국 출신의 학생들을 대상으로, 다양한 언어로 강의를 제공하고 있습니다. 이러한 글로벌 다양성은 단지 우연이 아니라, 우리 사명의 핵심입니다. 오늘날의 교회가 점점 더 다언어적이고 다민족적으로 변화함에 따라, 우리 교실도 이러한 현실을 그대로 반영하며, 다양한 맥락에서 활약할 리더들을 준비시키고 있습니다.

변화하는 세상을 위한 신실한 지도자를 양성한다는 센트럴신학대학원의 사명은 흔들림 없이 변함없습니다. 우리는 전통에 뿌리를 두되, 혁신에 열려 있으며, 하나님과 교회를 섬기겠다는 결연한 헌신으로 나아갑니다. 🌿

**Pamela R. Durso**

\*Matt Huffman, “The Future of Theological Education,” In Trust Magazine, Spring 2025.

\*맷트 후프만, “신학교육의 미래,” In Trust Magazine, 2025년 봄호.

# ADAPTING *for Tomorrow*



## Innovative Approaches to Theological Education

In 1905, Frederick Augustus Bruner and William Phillips Jenkins earned the Bachelor of Theology degree, becoming Central's first graduating class. The following year, Central's first graduates of the Bachelor of Divinity degree joined their ranks. By 1911, the seminary began offering graduate degrees in theology and missions, and by 1919, Central graduated its first doctoral candidate.

Then, as now, seminaries have worked to respond to the evolving ministry needs both locally and globally, developing new programs and adapting existing ones

to meet those challenges. Aspiring ministers choose programs that best align with their vocational goals and values, seeking institutions that can prepare them for the future of ministry.

In the early 20th century, while Central and other seminaries offered a range of degrees—such as the Bachelor's and Master's in Theology, Missions, and Religious Education—the Bachelor of Divinity was the most common degree for training clergy. This degree remained the standard for many decades.

Not until the 1960s did the Master of Divinity (MDiv) degree emerge as the cornerstone of theological education. The MDiv was designed to professionalize ministry

training, elevating it to the same level of academic rigor as other prestigious fields such as law. It quickly became the preferred pathway to ordained leadership in many Christian denominations. Central awarded its first MDiv degrees in 1968.

Until recently, the MDiv degree remained the flagship program for ministry preparation at most seminaries, including Central. But in recent years, trends in MDiv enrollment and post-graduation careers have undergone a significant shift.

The Association of Theological Schools (ATS), one of Central’s accrediting bodies, noted in its 2024-2025 annual report that from 2020 to 2024, MDiv enrollment dropped by more than 14% across all ATS-affiliated schools. At Central, MDiv enrollment also saw a decline of 48% over the same period. While some of this decrease can be attributed to the impact of COVID-19, the decline had already begun before the pandemic and has continued afterward.

The consensus across theological education and denominational bodies is clear: while the MDiv remains an important degree, it is no longer viewed as the only pathway to professional ministry or ordination. Today, there are multiple routes for preparing for ministry, offering greater flexibility and diversity of options for those answering the call.

**Central’s History of Innovative and Timely Programming**

As part of “The Future is Central,” three strategic initiatives designed to lead the seminary into the future, Central’s leadership is committed to the creation of innovative and relevant programming.

Central has always been at the forefront of educational innovation, including pioneering work in distance and online education. In recent years, the seminary has launched several new programs, including:

- A Korean Language Program with degrees offered entirely in Korean
- Doctor of Ministry in Creative Leadership
- Master of Arts in Counseling
- Certificate in Peace and Justice Ministry
- Certificate in Chaplaincy

In the same ATS annual report that highlighted a decline in MDiv enrollment, it also reported a 6% increase in enrollment for professional Master of Arts (MA) programs. These professional programs are typically shorter in duration and allow students to tailor the curriculum to meet their educational and vocational goals.

**Master of Arts in Ministry Curriculum**

*Central Seminary Core – 11 credit hours*

- Thinking Theologically
- Global Conversations I
- Christian Ethics
- Biblical Interpretation

*Master of Arts in Ministry  
Required Courses – 13 credit hours*

- Forming Spiritual Community
- Hebrew Bible
- New Testament
- Christian Heritage

*Personalized Study Track – 12 credit hours*

- Options:
- |                           |                              |
|---------------------------|------------------------------|
| • Bible and Theology      | • Pastoral Ministry          |
| • Chaplaincy              | • Peace and Justice Ministry |
| • Counseling              | • Build Your Own Track       |
| • Ministry Leadership     |                              |
| • Multi-Cultural Ministry |                              |

As part of its ongoing commitment to educating and forming creative leaders to minister to and serve humanity in a rapidly changing global environment, Central has responded to both congregational needs and student desires by designing a new professional master’s degree.

**Introducing the Master of Arts in Ministry [MAM]**

In August 2025, Central will launch a Master of Arts in Ministry (MAM) program, a professional degree program that equips students for ministry both inside and outside of congregational settings. Students complete a core curriculum of 24 credit hours plus 12 hours in a personalized study track concentration of their choice. The MAM is designed for those who want a flexible yet rigorous education that prepares them for practical ministry roles.

The MAM and MDiv share some of the same coursework and both are designed to prepare individuals for an active ministry. However, the MAM (36 hours) is shorter and more focused than the MDiv (72 hours). Central also offers the MA in Theological Studies (MATS) (36 hours) which is an academic degree allowing students to engage in the in-depth research and can be used to prepare students for further academic study.



The MAM program is offered in English and is fully delivered online through virtual classrooms. Central's online classes combine the best aspects of two educational formats: live, interactive classes that foster a community-oriented learning environment with professors providing real-time instruction and feedback, and students participating from anywhere in the world.

Dr. Kathy Maxwell, Vice President of Academic Affairs and Dean of the Faculty, shares her thoughts on the new program: "Central's Master of Arts in Ministry is both accessible and relevant. The personalized study track allows students to focus on their vocational goals and complete their degree without the need to relocate. At the same time, courses such as Forming Spiritual Community and Global Conversations ensure that Central students continue to benefit from the diverse experiences and perspectives of their peers, who are located across the country and around the globe."

While Central will continue to offer the MDiv degree and encourage those specifically called to congregational ministry to pursue that path, we also understand that students today seek more options. Our experience shows that students are increasingly aware of the changing nature of job opportunities upon graduation. Many

recognize that their future paths may include part-time, bi-vocational ministry or the need for non-ministry employment to support their financial needs.

We also recognize that our students are pursuing ministry through more diverse avenues than ever before, including chaplaincy, non-profit leadership, and clinical counseling. Additionally, the average age of our students is 44, and many are balancing significant time commitments and financial pressures. As a result, many of our students prefer shorter, more affordable degree programs that emphasize practical application and adaptive leadership.

We also know that many of our students are already employed in ministry and need training that can be immediately applied to the challenges they face daily. The Master of Arts in Ministry degree is designed to meet these needs by providing a focused, flexible curriculum that equips students to respond effectively to real-world ministry challenges. 🌱



**Scan the QR code for more information about the Master of Arts in Ministry program**

## New Classes at Central

These courses are now part of all master's level programs at Central, including the MAM, MDiv, and MATS.

### Forming Spiritual Community

Ministry is inherently communal and, by its nature, should foster connection, conversation, and spiritual growth. This course is designed to build community and collegiality among seminarians, supporting both personal and professional development. It emphasizes self-reflection and corporate dialogue and is aligned with the broader curricular journey. By drawing on the students' experiences and growth throughout their program, this course aims to cultivate meaningful relationships that enrich the seminary experience.

### Global Conversations

This course equips students with the skills necessary for engaging in productive, cross-cultural dialogue. Focused on developing active listening, empathic communication, and the ability to engage across a wide range of geographic locations, theological perspectives, and cultural backgrounds, the course is essential for those doing ministry in today's globalized world. Through this course, students will develop the tools needed to facilitate conversations that transcend cultural and ideological boundaries, fostering a deeper understanding of others in a global ministry context.

### Thinking Theologically

This foundational course introduces students to the key terms, concepts, methods, and tools for engaging in theological discourse. It provides an opportunity for students to begin developing their own theological framework while learning how to assess and engage with the theology and faith systems of others. Students will practice reflective and critical thinking as they articulate their own theological points of view and engage in meaningful dialogue with the broader theological community.



# Thriving in Ministry

## A Conversation with Mentor Mary Wood and Mentee Pehwah Mu

Thanks to the generous support of the Lilly Endowment, Central Seminary offers students in the final stages of their seminary journey a unique opportunity to participate in our mentoring program. This initiative pairs students with experienced clergy mentors who offer a safe, reflective space to discern and refine their sense of calling and ministry practice. The mentor-mentee relationship provides invaluable support during this critical time of transition and growth.

In 2024, Central had 27 active mentors, who hosted 143 mentoring sessions and served 30 students. Below, we have the privilege of hearing from Mary Wood and Pehwah Mu as they share the significance of their mentor-mentee relationship.

### How was this experience meaningful for you?

**Mary Wood:** I deeply appreciated Pehwah's trust and confidence in sharing with me her experiences as a refugee. We learned from each other. I was her listening ear about classroom assignments, questions, and yearnings, while she was my confidant and helped me understand my two Karen "sons," who are refugees still living along the border. We leaned on each other's understandings and developed what I would describe as a true friendship.

**Pehwah Mu:** This experience was very meaningful to me because I now have someone that I can talk to openly, someone who listens to my ideas and thoughts and shares her own insights as well. It has created a two-way communication and a genuine relationship that allows us to learn from each other. Having this support and connection makes me feel encouraged and understood, and it motivates me to grow both personally and professionally.

### Why is having a mentor important for seminary students?

**Mary Wood:** The mentoring program provides a unique space for mutual sharing and learning. Pairing a mentee to a mentor who has shared similar life experiences is crucial. As a mentor, I had to remember that I was not

there to fix problems for Pehwah, but rather I was a fellow traveler accompanying her on her journey.

**Pehwah Mu:** Having a mentor is incredibly important for seminary students. In my experience, I was provided with guidance, support, and spiritual accountability during a time of deep personal and theological development. A mentor, especially one who has experience in ministry and knows our situation, helps her mentee navigate challenges with wisdom and perspective in ways that go beyond textbooks and lectures.

*This mentor-mentee relationship highlights the power of community, shared wisdom, and mutual growth. Central's Mentoring Program continues to be a transformative force for both students and mentors, creating bonds that enrich the ministry experience and support the development of future leaders in the church. 🌿*

Read more about Mary and Pehwah's mentor-mentee relationship



# Holistic Care

## How Central's Faith-Integrated Approach to Counselor Education is Equipping Counselors



*By Dr. Lindsay Bonebrake  
Director of the Counseling  
Programs and Associate Professor  
of Counseling*

The demand for counselors who address both spiritual and psychological needs is growing in today's complex mental health landscape. The mental health crisis in the United States has revealed gaps not only in access to services but also in the approach to care. Increasingly, clients are seeking support that considers the whole person—mind, body, and spirit—rather than focusing solely on clinical interventions. Many individuals value the integration of their faith into their counseling experience, seeing it as an essential part of their healing process.

Central is uniquely positioned to meet this demand. Our counseling program integrates evidence-based psychological practices with faith-informed principles, equipping future counselors to offer holistic care. By preparing professionals who can address the spiritual dimensions of mental health, Central ensures that its graduates are ready to serve clients with compassion, competence, and integrity.

Central's counseling program operates on the principle that faith and psychology are not opposing forces but complementary elements in the journey toward healing. This perspective recognizes that addressing a person's spiritual beliefs can enhance the therapeutic process, particularly for individuals whose faith plays a central role in their identity.

Concepts such as grace, forgiveness, and hope naturally align with many therapeutic goals. For example, forgiveness interventions—grounded in both psychological research and spiritual traditions—can help clients release resentment and move forward. Similarly, the concept of hope, which is a key factor in both resilience and personal

growth, can empower clients to envision and work toward a healthier future.

Research supports the value of integrating spirituality into counseling. Studies indicate that clients who engage in spiritually informed therapy often report greater satisfaction and improved outcomes, particularly when addressing grief, trauma, and existential concerns. By combining clinical expertise with spiritual sensitivity, counselors can provide a deeper and more meaningful level of care.

### **KEY FEATURES OF CENTRAL'S COUNSELING PROGRAM**

Central's program is designed to provide students with the tools and experiences they need to become skilled, faith-informed counselors. Several key features set the program apart:

#### **1. Courses that Focus on Spiritual Formation and Holistic Care**

The curriculum incorporates elements of spiritual formation and holistic care across courses. Students explore the intersection of theology and psychology, gaining insight into how to incorporate spiritual perspectives into their counseling practice. From foundational courses in counseling theories to advanced training in the helping relationship and the internship phase, faculty provide frameworks for addressing clients' spiritual concerns alongside their psychological needs.

#### **2. Practical Training Opportunities**

Central emphasizes the importance of hands-on experience. Students engage in supervised clinical internships where they apply their knowledge in real-world settings. These opportunities include working with both faith-based and secular organizations, allowing students to see firsthand how integrating spirituality into care can enhance client outcomes.



### 3. Faculty Expertise and Mentorship

Central faculty bring a wealth of experience in both counseling and ministry. Professors serve as both instructors and mentors, guiding students in their professional and personal development. Their expertise ensures that graduates are well-prepared to navigate the complexities of counseling in a variety of settings, whether faith-based or secular.

### 4. Support for Personal Growth

The program also emphasizes the counselor's personal development. Through reflection and self-care activities, students are encouraged to explore their own values and beliefs, ensuring they remain grounded and authentic in their work. This focus on self-awareness helps counselors maintain resilience, wellness, and ethical integrity in their practice.

### PREPARING GRADUATES FOR MEANINGFUL CAREERS

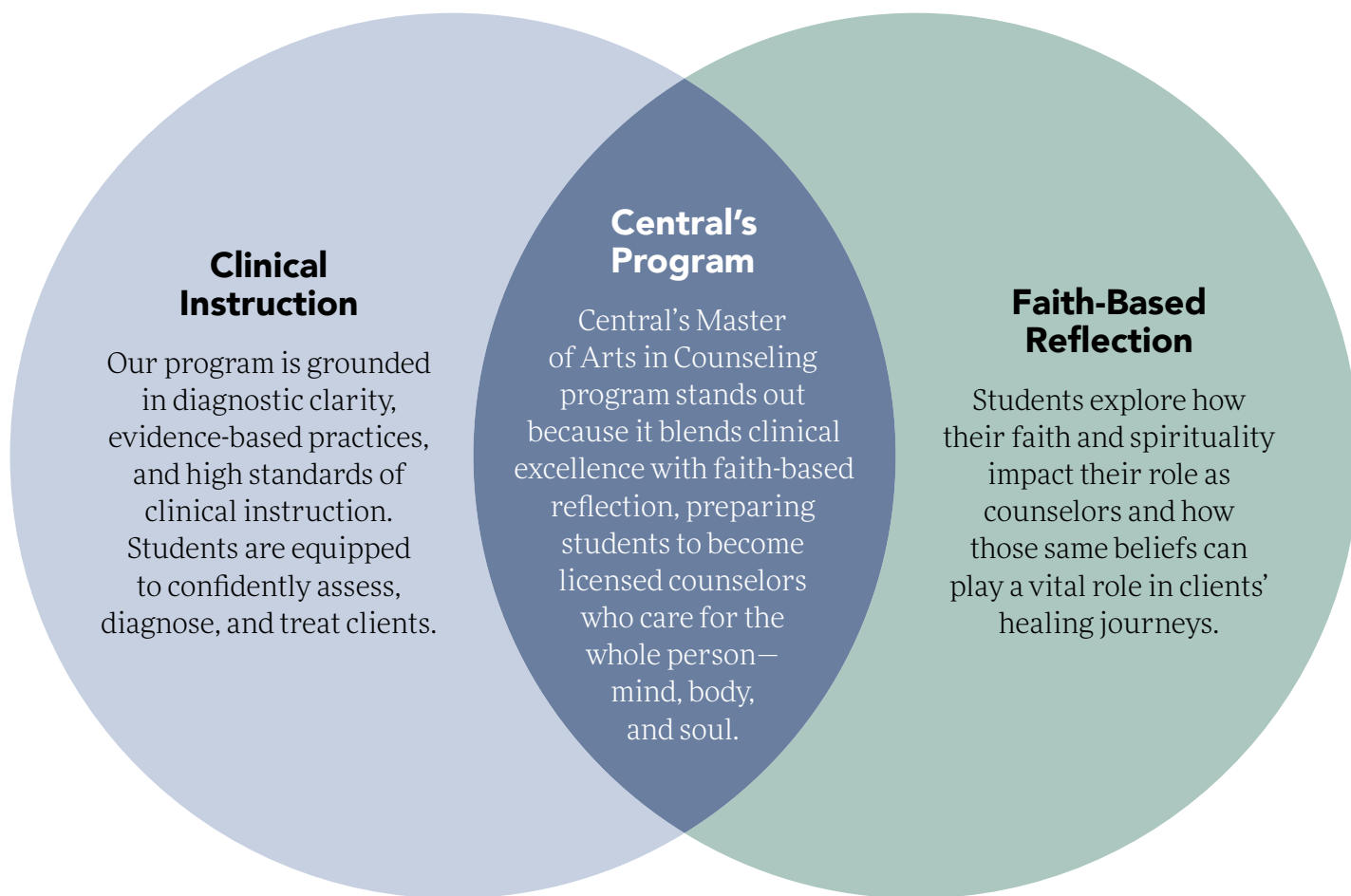
The effectiveness of Central's approach is evident in the success of its alumni, who are making a difference in diverse settings.

For those considering a career in counseling, Central's program offers not only professional training but also personal fulfillment. Counseling is inherently rewarding, allowing practitioners to support meaningful transformation in their clients' lives. For many faith-informed counselors, this work carries an added dimension of purpose, as they help clients align their values, beliefs, and mental health goals.

Current students often describe their decision to join the Central program as driven by both their personal convictions and their desire to serve others. As the demand for mental health services continues to rise, the need for counselors who can integrate faith and psychology becomes increasingly clear. Central's counseling program equips graduates to meet this need, offering a unique blend of clinical expertise, spiritual awareness, and hands-on experience. 🌱



**Scan the QR code to learn more about Central's counseling program**



# You're Invited!

## Fall Climate Conference

### *Faithful Responses to Climate Change*

September 20, 2025

This one-day, in-person conference in Kansas City will be focused on educating, inspiring, and connecting congregations and people of faith for responding to the challenges of climate change. Keynote speakers from both theological and scientific perspectives will speak to the urgency of addressing climate change, the impacts it is already having, the theological and ethical questions it raises, and the ways to faithfully respond that will have an impact.

For those unable to attend in person, parts of the conference will be livestreamed.

**For more information or to register,**  
**scan the QR code or visit [www.cbts.edu/buttry](http://www.cbts.edu/buttry)**



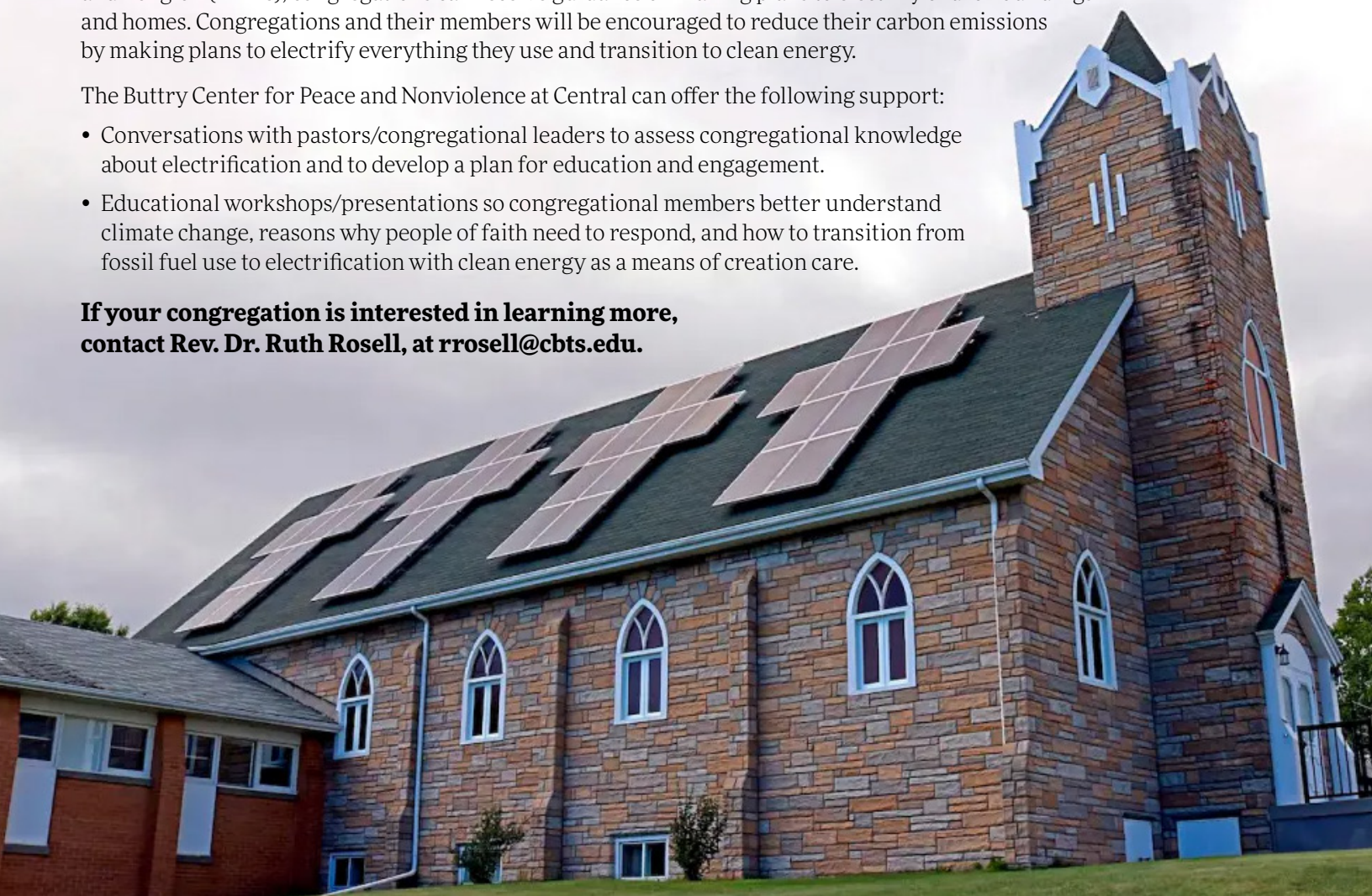
## Making a Plan to Electrify Your Congregation

As part of Central's Climate Science in Theological Education grant received from the Dialogue on Science, Ethics, and Religion (AAAS), congregations can receive guidance on making plans to electrify church buildings and homes. Congregations and their members will be encouraged to reduce their carbon emissions by making plans to electrify everything they use and transition to clean energy.

The Buttry Center for Peace and Nonviolence at Central can offer the following support:

- Conversations with pastors/congregational leaders to assess congregational knowledge about electrification and to develop a plan for education and engagement.
- Educational workshops/presentations so congregational members better understand climate change, reasons why people of faith need to respond, and how to transition from fossil fuel use to electrification with clean energy as a means of creation care.

**If your congregation is interested in learning more,**  
**contact Rev. Dr. Ruth Rosell, at [rrosell@cbts.edu](mailto:rrosell@cbts.edu).**





# Cultural Competency in the Classroom

## 3-Part Video Series Featuring Central Seminary Faculty

As classrooms become increasingly diverse, educators must cultivate the skills and knowledge needed to provide an exceptional educational experience for all students. Today's educators are called to design course content, assessments, instructional methods, and classroom expectations through the lens of cultural competency. Thanks to the generosity of the Henry Luce Foundation, Central Seminary is proud to offer this three-part video series and discussion guide to support educators in creating more inclusive and effective learning environments.



### **VIDEO 1: THE CULTURALLY COMPETENT EDUCATOR**

This video explores the key skills educators need to be culturally competent and invites them to reflect on assumptions and biases that shape how they plan, teach, and assess their courses.

### **VIDEO 2: PLANNING FOR A CULTURALLY DIVERSE CLASSROOM**

This video presents effective strategies for creating learning experiences that resonate with students from various cultural backgrounds.

### **VIDEO 3: TEACHING AND ASSESSING CULTURALLY DIVERSE STUDENTS**

This video explores how educators navigate the varying cultural expectations of students and shares valuable insights from those with experience teaching in culturally diverse classrooms.

**SCAN THE QR CODE  
TO WATCH THE VIDEOS  
AND DOWNLOAD THE  
DISCUSSION GUIDES**



This project has generously been funded by



*Interested in Central hosting a conversation for your group? We would be honored to lead a session on cultural competency in the classroom for you. Email us at **marketing@cbts.edu***



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RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED



*"I appreciate the diversity of perspectives in every single class. I have learned how to express what I believe in an atmosphere of mutual respect. We can all come together and learn from each other."*

Lily Wood  
Current Student  
Master of Divinity program

*Lily is also grateful for the seminary's emphasis on affordability without the burden of debt.*

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