

The United Church Studies Program at Montreal Diocesan Theological College Report to the Nakhonhaka Regional Council February 2023

Forming a new ecumenical college

The amalgamation of The United Theological College (UTC) and Montreal Diocesan Theological College (Dio) in 2022 is the culmination of five years of planning and collaboration. The process has called for courage and risk, letting go of the past, vision, prayer and discernment, and a deep commitment to ecumenical collaboration.

In September 2022, Montreal Dio amended its constitution to provide for United Church participation in its governance and agreed to ensure the continuity of United Church theological education in Montreal, under the working name of *United Church Studies at Dio*. It is now required that one-third of the Dio Board be members of the United Church of Canada. The position of Director of United Church Studies was created to support ministry formation in a United Church tradition and ensures that United Church-affiliated students meet requirements for United Church Testamur. Montreal Dio is now an *ecumenical* institution forming students for ministry in the Anglican, United Church, and other traditions, in partnership with the Montreal School of Theology and McGill University.

We are encouraged by the continued growth and increasing diversity of our student body. Over half the United Church-affiliated students are francophone or fluently bilingual, most were born outside North America, and over 85% of them are newcomers to the United Church and to Canada. Outside of our regular degree programs we offer courses for Admission Ministers and a week-long residential orientation program for leaders new to the United Church. These programs are intercultural in nature, opening us up to conversations and relationships that nurture our growth as an institution with regards to justice and spirituality. This rich diversity of language, culture, and tradition is changing us and the church – informing how we teach and learn, how we converse across differences, including theologically, and how we experience God's spirit in our midst.

Courses and Events for Lifelong Learning and Ministry

The amalgamation of UTC and Dio has enabled us to expand our offerings and extend the reach of our programs for lay people and ministry personnel. We are focusing on programs that support a renewed and vibrant church and that help people grow in faith and in leadership.

Open Enrolment Courses Winter 2022 to Spring 2023

These online courses are offered for four to six weeks. Often, groups from congregations take the course together. We offered 9 courses this year on various topics related to the Bible, spiritual formation, and Christian leadership and attracted over 120 participants from across the country.

What Next for the Church: Congregational Ministry in a Pandemic Shaped World
October 29, 2022. Day-long, in-person conference with The Rev. Dr. Tim Dickau and ecumenical panelists.

Conflict Resolution Jesus Style
February 9, 2023. Day-long in-person event with The Rev. Susan Brasier, J.D., and The Rev. Dr. Karen Petersen Finch.

Formation for French and Bilingual Ministry
One of our key areas of focus this year has been equipping the church to minister in the unique context of Quebec and strengthening French ministries across the United Church. This includes a partnership agreement with *La Table des ministères en français* of the United Church which helps us to support ministry formation for francophones. We have also expanded our program for bilingual ministry by hiring a dedicated program director to oversee French formation for students and implement the revised *Certificate in Bilingual Ministry* program. In May of 2023, we will be offering a week-long *French for Ministry* intensive course designed to strengthen the linguistic competence and cultural know-how of those working in French or bilingual ministry and pastoral contexts.

Montreal Mission Internship
In summer 2022, Dio launched the Montreal Mission Internship, a 9-week program for 18- to 25-year-olds that combines social service work with theological reflection and intentional community. Last summer, thirteen young adults from across the country came to Dio to put their faith into action and explore a call to Christian ministry beyond the walls of the church. Applications are now open for the 2023 program, which has been expanded to host 18 participants.

United Church Orientation Learning Circle May 2022 and May 2023
A week-long residential event was held in Montreal from May 30 to June 3, 2022 for United Church Admission Ministers to learn the historical and theological context of the United Church, the core values, structures, policies, and vision; and to help the church live out its commitment to anti-racism and intercultural community. This event will be offered again in May 2023 to an expanded cohort of leaders, lay people, and ministers who are new to the United Church.

Plans for 2023

In addition to our regular programming and courses, Dio will begin to develop a long-term plan for its future as a renewed ecumenical institution. In the face of challenges and transitions within and beyond church walls, the college will seek to discern its role and the ways it will continue to form leaders for a vibrant future church.