

# Truett program tackles emerging issues facing churches

October 19, 2021

WACO—Truett Theological Seminary’s newly established Program for the Future Church is seeking to tackle emerging modern issues facing the church.

By serving as a “visible bridge” between the church and Truett Seminary at Baylor University, the program will include a diverse group of individuals to serve as collaborative partners to religious institutions.



Angela Gorrell

Under the direction of Angela Gorrell, assistant professor of practical theology, and Dustin Benac, visiting assistant professor of practical theology and Louisville Institute Postdoctoral Fellow, the program will bring together professors, church and community leaders, and students to create a time and space for listening and imagining.

The goal is for groups of collaborators and researchers to find system-wide

solutions to system-wide challenges, such as how churches respond to mental health concerns or how churches can prevent pastoral burnout.

“Our hope is that we can be a good partner and a good bridge builder,” Benac said. “Collaboration is the way forward for the future church.”

Truett’s Program for the Future Church sees this time of transition from in-person church engagements to mixed media church opportunities as a time of great possibility.

## **Walk alongside churches to develop solutions**

The organizers hope to be a center for resources and insights as they walk alongside local congregations and faith-based organizations that are taking the next steps in addressing issues faced by churches across the country.

Gorrell emphasized the value of groups with members who have different perspectives to help guide churches to formulate meaningful solutions.

As an example, Gorrell points to the intersection of mental and spiritual health as a chief concern the Program for the Future Church hopes to help address. With a rise in the incidence of mental health issues, she said, she is curious as to what spirituality might have to offer those in need.

“We are working to put together research hubs of practitioners, academics and students who are at different levels of their education, with the goal of the research hub to have practitioners and academics work together to pilot solutions,” Gorrell said.

The directors want to begin by serving Waco, calling on Baylor students and scholars to participate in this initiative to support the vitality of the local community since it is seen as the basis for all future work. The need

for this local collaborative work is to be met primarily with “catalytic collaboratories” and research hubs.

“We are committed first to be attentive to and grounded in our particular locale,” Benac said.

Among many other goals, the group aims to create regular opportunities for scholars and Truett students to engage with the stories of church and community leaders, develop research groups that will investigate pressing and emerging challenges facing the church and contribute to Baylor University’s aspirations to become a Tier-1 institution as a center for research and innovation.

“There’s no sort of bounds to the kinds of meaningful responses that a research hub might come up with for a solution to an issue,” Gorrell said.

*Lexi Nitishin is a student news writer with Baylor University Media and Public Relations.*