



E-Newsletter January 2026

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Did You Know?

You can audit a class at HTS! Learning is a lifelong process; continue the journey with us. For clergy, church professionals, and laypersons. All denominations welcome! Read more [HERE](#)

Also, each course in the Certificate Programs at HTS is \$500 per course. The certificate program courses cannot be applied to any of the master's programs at the Seminary. [Read More](#)

Congratulations Rev. Lester Smith!

Mt. Tabor United Church of Christ *Joyfully Announces a New Pastor*

Mt. Tabor United Church of Christ
Lexington, North Carolina
With gratitude to God and confidence in the Spirit's leading,
Rev. Lester Smith
to serve as our next full-time Pastor.



 Congregational Vote: January 4, 2026
We are excited to welcome Rev. Lester Smith and his lovely wife,
Freddie, and we look forward to this new season of ministry,
growth, and shared faith.

"See, I am doing a new thing!" – Isaiah 43:19
All are welcome to join us as we step forward together
in hope and joy.

**INJUSTICE ANYWHERE
IS A THREAT TO
JUSTICE EVERYWHERE**
~MARTIN LUTHER KING JR

As our nation pauses to remember the life and legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., we are invited into a moment of thoughtful reflection and renewed commitment. Dr. King's work was grounded in a profound moral vision shaped by Christian faith, disciplined study, and courageous action. As a pastor, theologian, and public intellectual, he recognized that the pursuit of justice is not separate from spiritual formation, but rather flows directly from a profound understanding of the dignity of every human being.

Dr. King's leadership was marked by a steadfast commitment to nonviolence and a belief that love, when practiced with moral clarity and resolve, possesses transformative power. His preaching and public witness challenged the nation's conscience while remaining rooted in hope rather than despair. Through his words and actions, he called communities to resist injustice without surrendering their humanity or their faith in the possibility of change.

The legacy of Dr. King continues to speak to our present moment. His insistence that faith must be lived publicly, ethically, and sacrificially remains a guiding principle for those committed to the work of justice and reconciliation. Remembering Dr. King is not only an act of honor, but an invitation to embody the values he lived and taught. May his life continue to inspire thoughtful engagement, courageous leadership, and a sustained commitment to building a more just and compassionate world.



Stay tuned for details regarding opportunities to engage the Center for Financial Empowerment and The Center for Justice, Love, and Belonging.

Center for Financial Empowerment

Grace and peace,

Ministry is a calling—but it is also lived out in real financial realities.

Many clergy faithfully serve others while quietly navigating personal financial questions related to budgeting, debt, retirement, and long-term stability.

The **Center for Financial Empowerment at Hood Theological Seminary** is pleased to offer a space designed specifically to support you in this area.

You are invited to attend the **Clergy Financial Empowerment Conference** on **Saturday, January 24, 2026, from 9:00 AM to 2:00 PM**, at **1810 Lutheran Synod Drive, Salisbury, NC**.

This one-day conference is designed to equip clergy with practical tools and trusted guidance to better understand their current financial realities and to move confidently toward their preferred financial future. Through interactive and accessible sessions, participants will engage essential topics, including:

Finance Basics

Budgeting

Debt and Credit Management

Risk Management

Investing

Retirement Planning

Estate Planning

Our goal is simple: **smarter finances that support stronger clergy and healthier ministry**.

There is **no cost to attend for the first 50 registrants**, but registration is required. Please register using the QR code on the flyer or by visiting:

<https://bit.ly/4rSzbke>

We hope you will join us for a day of learning, reflection, and empowerment, because caring for your financial well-being is an important part of sustaining your call.

Warm regards,

The Center for Financial Empowerment

Hood Theological Seminary

Job Opportunities

Pastor Vacancy Announcement

First St. Paul Missionary Baptist Church
76 Campground Road, Whiteville, NC

Posted Date: January 5, 2026

Closing Date: Until Filled

Position Title:

First St. Paul Missionary Baptist Church Senior Pastor

Position Overview:

The Pastor shall serve as the spiritual leader, preacher, teacher, and under-shepherd of First St. Paul Missionary Baptist Church. He is to provide Christ-centered leadership that reflects the doctrines of the Missionary Baptist faith and adheres to biblical standards. and is accountable to the church body under the direction of the Holy Spirit and the Word of God.

Shannon Register

Assistant to the Church Clerk / Financial Secretary

First St. Paul Missionary Baptist Church
76 Campground Road, Whiteville, NC 28472
Phone: (910) 978-5219



In These Stressful Times: A Reminder

Stress is a normal part of life, but when it becomes frequent or long-lasting, it can take a serious toll on both the body and the mind. Stress generally falls into three categories: acute stress, which is short-term and quickly passes; episodic acute stress, which occurs often and leaves little time to recover; and chronic stress, which persists for weeks, months, or longer. Veterans, first responders, and caregivers are especially vulnerable to the latter two due to repeated exposure to high-pressure situations.

Because stress activates the body's autonomic nervous system, ongoing negative stress can lead to a wide range of symptoms. These include fatigue, headaches, muscle tension, digestive issues, weakened immunity, anxiety, irritability, and depression. Over time, chronic stress can contribute to more serious health concerns such as high blood pressure, heart problems, arthritis, gastrointestinal disorders, weight changes, and reproductive health issues. Prolonged stress also increases the risk of developing mental health conditions like anxiety, depression, and substance use disorders.

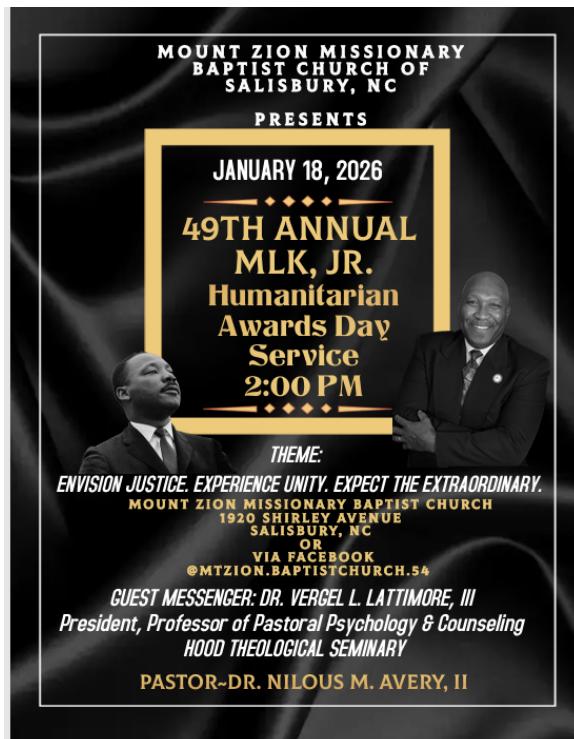
Recognizing stress early and addressing it with healthy coping strategies is essential for protecting overall well-being.



Professor Dora R Mbuwayesango We are pleased to share that Dr. Dora Mbuwayesango has been appointed by the Head of the House of Deputies of The Episcopal Church to serve on the Standing Commission on Anglican and International Peace with Justice Concerns. This appointment reflects Dr. Mbuwayesango's longstanding commitment to scholarship, ecclesial leadership, and global conversations on justice and peace.

A respected member of the Society of Biblical Literature and a co-founder of the African Biblical Hermeneutics Section, Dr. Mbuwayesango continues to bring distinction to Hood Theological Seminary through her leadership, service, and faithful engagement with the church and the academy.

Honoring the Legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.



Planned Giving



Create your legacy through a planned gift by remembering Hood Theological Seminary in a bequest or will with gifts of stocks and bonds, gifts of real estate or personal property, life insurance, charitable trust, retirement funds/IRA or life income gifts.

By making a planned gift, you will become a member of the [Hood Legacy Society](#).

- ~ Do you have an IRA?
- ~ Are you at least 70 1/2 years of age?
- ~ Would you like to help HTS in its mission to prepare women and men for bold and creative leadership for the Christian church for a diverse world?

If you answered "Yes" to all three questions, please consider an IRA Charitable Rollover.

In an IRA Charitable Rollover, the distribution of up to \$100,000 annually made directly from the IRA custodian to a qualifying public charity, such as HTS, is excluded from gross income and counts toward the required minimum distribution.

Contact:

John Everett

Director, Institutional Advancement & Enrollment Management

704.636.6545 jeverett@hoodseminary.edu

Visit our [Planned Giving](#) website for lots of helpful information.

NATIONAL MENTORING MONTH

January is National Mentoring Month. This month focuses on how we can all work together to increase the number of mentors, ensuring young people in our communities have dependable people to look up to and follow in their footsteps. NMM celebrates mentoring and its positive impact on young lives. Its goals are to:

- Raise awareness of mentoring in its various forms.
- Recruit individuals to mentor, especially in programs that have waiting lists of young people.
- Promote the rapid growth of mentoring by recruiting organizations to engage their constituents in mentoring.



Faculty/Staff News

Dr. Vergel L. Lattimore



Dr. Vergel Lattimore, President and Professor, of Hood Theological Seminary

Dr. Lattimore attended the Celebration of Life for Dr. Michael Brown (former Payne Theological Seminary President), Allen Temple A.M.E. Church, Cincinnati, OH (1/9/26)

He preached sermon – “Spiritual Wisdom: Learning to Climb, Learning to Love, Learning to Give,” Class Leaders Sunday, Greenville Memorial A.M.E. Zion Church, Charlotte, NC (1/11/26)

Dr. Lattimore will deliver the Keynote speech: “Preparing the Way for Dr. Martin L. King, Jr.”, 49th Annual Rev. Dr. Martin L. King, Jr. Humanitarian Awards Service & Celebration, Mt. Zion Missionary Baptist Church, Salisbury, NC (1/18/26)

He will participate in the Gift Collaborative Planning Meeting, Philadelphia, PA (1/30/26)

FaithLearnThrive News



EVENT INFORMATION

Learning Community Applications Are Open- New Grant

We're excited to announce that applications are now open for the **2026 FaithLearnThrive Learning Community!** This year brings a *brand-new 6-month experience* designed to strengthen churches with spiritual renewal, strategic clarity, experienced coaches, and access to **implementation grants**.

If your congregation is seeking direction, unity, and new momentum—this journey is for you. Space is limited, so don't wait.

Learn more & apply at: faithlearnthrive.org/learning-community

Join Shepherds Collective for Only \$19/mo.

What a powerful time together!

November's **Shepherds Collective** conversation on *Leading Through Cultural Shifts* reminded us that conviction and compassion can coexist — and leaders don't have to navigate change alone.

Stay tuned for January's topic and register to stay connected with a growing network of pastors committed to thriving leadership.

Join the community → <https://bit.ly/3MmDJgM>

#ShepherdsCollective #FaithLearnThrive #MinistryCommunity #PastoralCoaching #DoChurchDifferently





We are excited to share that we have gotten a fantastic group of coaches set up with our grant recipients to help them with the individual areas they need to focus on to help them thrive.

We had a meeting with the new coaches on Saturday, January 10th on the campus of Hood Theological Seminary.

The coaches are excited about working with the churches, and their enthusiasm was evident on Saturday as they discussed how they plan to work with the individuals they have been matched with.

We're excited for them and excited for the ministries, and are looking forward to seeing the results of their collaborations.

We had lunch with them and had the opportunity to get to know them and talk to them one-on-one. It was a fun and exciting day.

Reverend Damita Jo Wilder attended the Mid-Winter Christian Education Meeting on December 26th, 2025, in Baltimore, MD.

We're busy preparing, scheduling, and planning for 2026, and we look forward to sharing what we have in store for the New Year.



Applications for The Center for Bold Leadership's Leadership Development Cohort are now being accepted. The Cohort begins on January 8, 2026, and runs through November.

The Cohort is open to African American female clergy in their 2nd through 9th year in pastoral ministry. This is a wonderful opportunity for early-career clergy to hone their leadership skills and focus on wholeness, wellness, and

renewal. Coaches and Spiritual Directors will walk alongside Cohort members to provide guidance and help them build strong, sustainable, and successful ministries.

The Cohort includes:

1:1 Clergy Coaching

Spiritual Direction

Wellness Coaching

Classes & Workshops

Renewal Retreat

Book study

If you are interested in applying or know of an early career clergy woman, please click the link to apply:

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSd144eq_lbuEXeKdhUE5c8aoTCJPT2MJm8JK1pibcdOjSELWA/viewform
or go to <https://boldlead.org/program/early-career-and-senior-clergy-cohort/>

for additional information. For questions, please contact Rev. Kimberly Clarke Turner, CBL Program Director at 704-636-6891.

ATS SEMINAR PRESENTATION



Our own Dr. John Everett was a presenter at the ATS 2025 Seminar for New Executive Officers on December 9, 2025, in Charlotte, North Carolina. He spoke to the new presidents of ATS Theological Graduate Schools on "The President and Institutional Advancement-A Needed Relationship for the Success of a Theological Graduate School."



HAPPY BIRTHDAY!!

To all our Faculty, Staff, Alumni & Donors - A Joyful January Birthday with Many More to Come!

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Join the Faithful Friends Partner Recurring Monthly Program!

To become a Faithful Friend Partner, click the link below to donate and become a member for a minimum of \$25 monthly.

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Faithful Friend**



For More Information on Monthly Giving

Contact:
Tyesia Walker
Director,
Annual Giving & Donor Relations
704.636.6926
twalker@hoodseminary.edu



In Memoriam

We hold in prayer all within our community who are grieving the loss of loved ones. Grief is a sacred and complex journey, and there is no fixed timeline for sorrow or healing. In moments of loss, may you know that you are not alone and that your pain is seen and honored.

As a community of faith, we remain committed to walking alongside you with compassion, patience, and care. May the presence of God bring comfort in the midst of sorrow, and may hope quietly emerge as a sustaining gift, even in the hardest days.

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Hood Theological Seminary



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Your gift is essential in promoting the mission of the Seminary. Every gift, small and large, is greatly appreciated and stewarded responsibly!

It's so easy to [donate securely online](#) or mail your check directly to the Seminary at 1810 Lutheran Synod Dr., Salisbury, NC 28144.

Dr. Vincent Howell, Associate Dean, Doctor of Ministry Program, completed his term as 2025 President of the Society of Manufacturing Engineers (SME), the global, non-profit professional organization that connects international manufacturing professionals, engineers, academia, and students to advance manufacturing knowledge, promote technology, develop skills, and support industry growth through resources like certifications, events, publications, and networking, aiming to create a skilled workforce and foster innovation across industries from aerospace to medical. Howell, who was elected to the SME College of Fellows in 2013, is the first African American to serve as president of the 90+ year organization. He was also presented the 2025 Exemplary Leadership Award at a gala in October.

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