

VISION STATEMENT AND ELECTION PROGRAMME

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BEYOND THE TURN OF THE TIDE, ANCHORED IN HOPE

Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies

KU Leuven

*Where the courage to improve is silenced,
goodness also falls silent.*

INTRODUCTION: BEYOND THE TURN OF THE TIDE, ANCHORED IN HOPE

1. Where we stand

Our faculty is approaching its 600th anniversary. For six centuries, through changing social, cultural, political and religious circumstances, it has proven its relevance and resilience. This long history inspires both gratitude and responsibility. It reminds us that each generation has a renewed mission to build on what has been entrusted to it.

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The past four years have been a period of transition and growth. Substantial achievements have been accomplished: new structures for participation and consultation, investments in people and well-being, initiatives that have stimulated connection and cooperation across all levels. Think of the ZAP support initiative, the disconnection and email policy, the Theo Teams, the appointment of a faculty chaplain, the reinstallation of ACIS, the sustainability of staff statutes, transparency in financial matters, greater participation in governance and the structural anchoring of team consultation. The full list of achievements can be found in the [follow-up plan](#).

At the same time, the RASAS review by IDEWE revealed valuable insights into where further growth is needed. That analysis deserves to be taken seriously — not as an indictment, but as a compass for the coming years.

This programme does exactly that. It reports [on what has been achieved](#), identifies where adjustments are desirable, and formulates an ambitious but realistic course for 2026–2030. Based on the realisation that, after four years of experience, we have a better understanding of where the challenges lie and where the opportunities await.

2. Beyond the turn of the tide

Four years ago, I wrote about 'a tide for turning, a time of hope'. Since then, much has been set in motion. New paths have been embarked upon, new voices heard, new forms of collaboration undertaken. Not everything went according to plan — some ambitions took more time than anticipated, others collided with a complex reality. That is part and parcel of a mandate that dares to aim for change.

But we have passed that turning point; the tide has turned. The faculty is in a different place today than it was four years ago: open to growth in its governance culture, striving for even stronger participatory structures, more aware of both its strengths and its areas for growth.

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3. Anchored in hope

Hope is not vague optimism or naive wishful thinking. Hope, as understood in the Biblical tradition, is an active attitude: it acknowledges reality with all its limitations and nevertheless chooses to build something better. That attitude — sober and driven, realistic and ambitious — inspires this programme.

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This election programme builds fundamentally and unabatedly on the 2022–2026 vision statement, which remains available for consultation as a frame of reference (www.benedictelemmelijn.be). It translates the insights from the review into concrete areas of action, links these to the new university strategic plan, and sets a course towards a faculty that is recognised worldwide for its excellent research and education as well as for its humanity.

4. Continuity, accountability and ambition

The 2022–2026 vision text was rooted in an ambitious vision that became a vision and policy plan. In recent years, the management team has worked day in, day out to bring it to fruition, as evidenced by the annual [follow-up plan](#) that was submitted to the Faculty Board and Faculty Council.

Substantial progress has been made. The results are visible and tangible in a number of areas, as can be seen from the summary of fundamental [achievements](#). In other areas, particularly where the dynamics proved more complex than anticipated, the dream was tested against reality and the work is not yet complete. This is an honest reflection of a transition process that requires time and perseverance. The achievements deserve to be consolidated and refined; the areas for growth deserve a renewed approach.

At the same time, this programme sets an ambitious course: towards a faculty that is among the world's best in research and education, and which is also a community where people can flourish. Not based on the illusion of perfection, but on the conviction that we owe it to ourselves and to those who come after us to continue to pursue that ideal.

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5. Listening as starting point

There is one thing I would like to emphasise at the start of a new term of office. Before putting together a new management team, I want to listen again, thoroughly — to all sections, to all voices, to what is going on and what matters. The team will only be put together after a broad, open consultation. Not as a formality, but as an essential starting point.

Over the past four years, I have learned that listening is an ongoing task — not something you only do at the beginning and stop thereafter, but a fundamental attitude that must underpin every decision, every conversation and every course correction. I am taking that lesson with me. A management team that is supported starts by listening to those it represents. And a dean who wants to serve starts with a willingness to really hear what is being said. I am learning to do that, even when it is sometimes uncomfortable.

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I. FUNDAMENTAL OPTIONS: CONTINUITY, DEEPENING AND REFINEMENT

The fundamental options formulated in 2022 remain the compass for this programme. They are confirmed, deepened and, where necessary, adjusted in light of four years of experience and the insights gained from the review.

1. Servant leadership

In the Biblical and monastic tradition — which, as 'Bénédicte', is not coincidentally close to my heart — leadership is understood as service. Three aspects are central to this: openness, with empathy and attention; humility, in the realisation that it is not the leader but the greater good that is central; and compassion, the willingness to be touched by the tasks and the people entrusted to us.

Leadership is understood as service: openness with empathy, humility in the awareness that it is not the leader but the greater good that is central, and compassion as the willingness to be moved.

This threefold attitude translates concretely into leadership that is realised in a team context and in four steps: receptive observation and an open willingness to listen; broad and participatory analysis and decision-making; acting with truthfulness and integrity; and transparent communication. Not as an unattainable ideal, but as daily practice, with the humility to recognise that even a dean grows and learns in this process.

The management team I have in mind will once again be characterised by polyphony and a diversity of powerful personalities. Strong councillors, to quote Sirach, who each contribute their own perspective and thus contribute to more representative and supported decision-making. This diversity sometimes makes consultations more intense, but leads to richer outcomes. As emphasised earlier, the composition will only take place after broad consultation and with an eye for complementarity, trust and shared responsibility.

Personally, I attach particular importance to proximity and approachability. The dean's door is open: literally and figuratively. This is not a rhetorical formula, but a conscious choice that has been put into practice day after day over the past four years and which I am determined to continue.

2. An a priori of trust

Trust remains the cornerstone of everything we do. It is the foundation on which cooperation, creativity and mutual respect can grow. That conviction was there four years ago and it has only grown stronger.

The RASAS review has shown that trust in our faculty is not experienced equally strongly everywhere. I take that fact to heart. Trust is never an end point; it is an ongoing process that requires care, attention and consistency. It is also fragile: it can be damaged by misunderstandings, lack of communication, or dynamics that are not always visible on the surface. This makes it all the more important to continue to work on it actively and structurally, with all those involved, at all levels.

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In concrete terms, this means:

- Believing in everyone's good intentions and genuine commitment as a starting point
- Transparent communication about decisions, procedures and expectations
- Consistent application of agreements and rules, without distinction
- Room for vulnerability, doubt and open dialogue
- Recognition and appreciation of everyone's contribution, in word and deed
- An attitude of mutual respect and generosity — in which we assume the best in each other and bring it out

Trust is built together. It requires effort from everyone — from the board, from the various sections, from each individual. In the coming years, I want to make that shared responsibility even more visible in our processes and relationships.

3. Excellence and well-being: two sides of the same coin

There is a persistent misconception that excellence and well-being are mutually exclusive, that those who truly want to excel must sacrifice balance and health. Nothing could be further from the truth. Creative thinking, scientific insights that blossom in serendipity, intensive and inspiring education — these do not arise under chronic pressure, nor do they flourish in a climate of fear. They flourish where people feel safe, are recognised and are given the space to grow — including through failure.

Creative thinking and inspiring education do not arise under chronic pressure. They flourish where people feel safe, are recognised and are given the space to grow — including through failure.

Conversely, well-being also requires excellence. People thrive when their work matters, when their expertise grows, when their skills are utilised and their efforts recognised. A culture that strives for excellence in a warm and humane way provides existential meaning, significance and satisfaction.

Excellence and well-being form an essential synergistic duo. Over the next four years, we will cultivate this synergy by:

- Creating time for deep thinking, collegial exchange and adequate support
- Making achievements visible and celebrating them — in research, education and service provision
- Promoting a culture in which failure is not a disgrace but a learning moment, where vulnerability does not equate to weakness
- Considering rest and recuperation as fuel for sustainable performance and mental well-being

4. Respecting and promoting existential balance

Our faculty is home to highly valuable individuals who, each in their own way, in their own tasks and responsibilities, are extremely dedicated to their work. That dedication and passion should and must be acknowledged. At the same time, we are all people with lives both inside and outside the faculty, and it should not be taboo to talk about things other than work and projects.

It should be perfectly normal for someone to be unable to attend a meeting because they have to pick up their children — no excuse or white lie is necessary. It should be self-evident that someone disconnects digitally in the evenings or at weekends. We can work hard — and even very hard, if we want to — but we must not lose sight of one important thing: our inner freedom and our right to make our own life choices.

Ora et labora, as the Benedictine rule teaches: in balance. Drive and passion are wonderful, but they should not become slavery. At our faculty, people should become more human through their work, not less. Specifically, we are committed to:

- Work-life balance as an explicit faculty value
- Disconnection as a right, not an exception
- Structural attention to mental health and psychosocial well-being
- A culture in which concerns can be shared without stigma

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5. A safe and secure working environment

Every person has the right to a working environment in which their individuality is respected and in which they feel existentially safe. Social awareness of inappropriate behaviour has grown, and rightly so. We have come to realise that every person has the right to space to exist and develop in their own individuality.

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This involves two interrelated aspects. On the one hand, respecting diversity in all its forms: origin, gender, age, personality, ability. On the other hand, actively creating a context in which open, constructive and encouraging communication is the norm, and in which people feel free to be themselves in order to do their work in their own way, using their own qualities and talents.

This is still a point of attention in every survey conducted at our university and faculty. It is an aspect that we must face up to, critically evaluate and constructively remedy, and around which we are increasingly raising awareness and promoting thorough follow-up and effective policy. This requires constant vigilance, concrete training, clear procedures and a willingness to act where necessary.

6. Diversity as enrichment: also in faith and philosophy of life

Diversity is one of the richest characteristics of our faculty. We bring together people from all corners of the globe, with diverse academic backgrounds, cultural frames of reference and life experiences. This diversity is not a problem that needs to be managed, but a resource that should be cherished and utilised.

In a faculty of Theology and Religious Studies, diversity also has a special dimension. Our community includes people with very different religious beliefs and philosophical choices: believers in various traditions, seekers, doubters, agnostics and non-believers. It is essential that all these voices are recognised, respected and welcomed. A faculty that is concerned with the study of religion and philosophy of life must be a place where the conversation about faith, meaning and existential choices can be conducted in all openness and mutual respect, without any one perspective, on either side of the spectrum, being considered the norm.

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In concrete terms, this translates into:

- Systematic attention to inclusion and diversity in policy-making, communication and events
- Actively recognising and welcoming philosophical diversity within all sections
- Facilitating inter-philosophical dialogue as part of faculty life
- Targeted welcoming of and guidance for international colleagues, with attention to cultural and religious diversity
- Attention to physical and digital accessibility
- Inclusive communication as standard

7. Participatory and polyphonic governance

The model of broad participation that was introduced in 2022–2026 will be continued and refined. We will continue to explore how the Faculty Council can be further developed as a place for dialogue and genuine participation, where concerns can be shared and referred to the appropriate bodies for follow-up. The Faculty Board will remain a team of polyphonic voices, each contributing their own perspective in order to arrive at supported decision-making.

The vice-dean core teams, which were innovatively initiated in 2022–2026, are being adjusted. The distribution of responsibilities and powers within the teams proved to be efficient and generated accurate follow-up. At the same time, experience has shown that the large number of board members sometimes hindered swift and decisive consultation. The core teams will therefore be refined: in addition to board members in the strict sense, mandate holders will be appointed for specific responsibilities, who will take up their duties in collaboration with the respective vice-deans. Transparency about who decides what and how mandate holders can make their voices heard remains essential in this regard.

What will remain unchanged are the shortened and regular meetings, the structural preliminary consultations with all sections two weeks before each board meeting, the open consultation hours with the dean, and above all the principle that decision-making is supported because it is shared and participatory.

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II. BUILDING AN EXCELLENT AND WARM-HEARTED FACULTY

Over the past four years, the emphasis in our work and collaboration has been on a warm human climate, in which not only professional but also existential development is given a place. There was room for conversation, room for expressing joy and pride, but also for fragility that had sometimes lain dormant or remained unspoken for many years.

Against this backdrop, the faculty has participated with great enthusiasm and goodwill in the RASAS analysis conducted by IDEWE over the past year. The results are clear and unambiguous. Valuable aspects of our faculty's reality were strongly emphasised. Pain points, vulnerabilities and opportunities for growth were identified.

The eight recommendations that were presented form beacons for the route ahead. They are translated here into eight positive areas of action — not as a cosmetic reformulation, but as a concrete programme for the next four years. We are translating the analysis into policy. Together, we are taking active and decisive action to improve what can be improved. The action plan, which will be further developed in the coming months, will generate signposts for the journey ahead.

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Action area 1: Strengthening and anchoring trust

Vision: A faculty where people feel safe, where differences of opinion are discussed constructively, and where we look ahead together based on shared trust.

Trust is a living entity — it must be constantly nurtured and protected. In every organisation, and certainly in an academic community with its inherent tensions, there are moments when that trust comes under pressure. The review has shown that trust is not experienced equally strongly throughout our faculty. This finding is a call to action for all of us: to the board to communicate even more consistently and transparently, and to the entire community to continue to engage in dialogue with each other in a spirit of goodwill.

Concrete actions:

- Use of professional external guidance to facilitate dialogue and, where necessary, reconciliation
- Structured meetings with space for sharing perspectives and bridging differences
- Drawing up clear and accessible guidelines for dealing with conflicts and tensions
- Expanding bystander training for all levels

- Periodic peer review and reflection sessions on social safety, ethical conduct and scientific integrity
- Training in giving and receiving feedback: a skill that each of us can strengthen

Action area 2: Leadership that inspires and supports

Vision: Academic leaders who are not only excellent in research and education, but also in guiding and supporting their team — leaders who lead by example, not by control.

- Continuing and deepening the leadership programme, with a focus on authentic, vulnerable and connecting leadership
- Raising awareness of the inherent hierarchical dynamics in academic relationships and how to mitigate them
- Periodic peer review sessions for ZAP members on coaching, conflict management and communication
- Integration of leadership qualities into evaluation and performance reviews
- Further development of appreciative career interviews: a culture in which ZAP members are also allowed to share their concerns and doubts

Action area 3: A culture of constructive feedback

Vision: A faculty where feedback is normal, where it is not about criticism but about opportunities for growth, where people help each other to improve.

- Creating a safe feedback environment through explicit agreements and exemplary behaviour
- Encouraging two-way communication: actively asking for and giving feedback at all levels
- Offering training and peer review on feedback skills
- Structurally embedding feedback in project discussions, annual reviews and team meetings
- Highlighting and celebrating good feedback practices as inspiration for the entire community

Action area 4: Investing in our young researchers

Vision: ABAP members and doctoral students who not only provide support, but are also properly supported and grow towards excellence themselves — with clear prospects, fair opportunities and structural recognition.

The position of young researchers deserves special attention. The inherent power dynamics between supervisor and doctoral candidate in an academic environment is a structural issue

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- Evaluating and optimising the welcome and supervision of all new ABAP members and doctoral candidates
- Systematic appointment of supervision teams with an active role in each PhD programme: multiple points of contact as standard
- Introduction of structural exit interviews upon termination of contract, as a basic tool for organisational learning
- Transparent communication about career prospects, expectations and opportunities, and further implementation of the initiated interview framework
- Buddy or mentor system for new researchers
- Periodic career discussions with someone other than the supervisor
- Clear teleworking and disconnection policy, also for junior researchers
- Specific policy for self-supporting doctoral students
- Active celebration of young researchers' achievements: publications, grants, presentations
- Clear procedures for non-renewal, with respect and transparency
- Promotion of community-building across research units (cf. Research Happening or Graduate Conference, doctoral excursion, *transferable skills* training)

Action area 5: Clear paths to support

Vision: Everyone knows where to go with questions, concerns or problems and dares to take that step.

- Proactive and regularly repeated communication about available support
- Integration of support information into the welcome process for all sections
- Evaluation of faculty initiatives in coordination with university-wide structures and offerings
- Clear role descriptions where faculty support roles are retained
- Low-threshold accessibility as an explicit priority

Action area 6: Diversity as an asset

Vision: A faculty where everyone feels welcome and valued, where individuality in all its forms — cultural, philosophical, personal — is respected as an enrichment.

- Targeted welcome and guidance for international colleagues upon their arrival at the faculty
- Systematic attention to inclusion and diversity in policy-making and events
- Involvement of diverse voices — including philosophically diverse voices — in new initiatives
- Inclusive communication as standard in all faculty channels
- Developing a faculty diversity plan
- Periodic evaluation of inclusivity

Action area 7: Strengthening connectedness

Vision: A faculty that is more than the sum of its research groups — where people know each other, celebrate together and support each other, and where the pursuit of excellence in well-being is a shared project.

- Structural attention to welcoming all new colleagues: introductions, sharing information about practical aspects, expectations and well-being
- Special attention to the additional needs of international colleagues
- Encouraging initiatives across research groups: substantive collaboration and social events
- Investing in a pleasant infrastructure that facilitates meeting and collaboration
- Creating informal meeting places and moments
- Celebrating collective successes: faculty research awards, major projects, anniversaries
- Encouraging participation in university-wide, community-building events

Action area 8: Clear structures, clear roles

Vision: A faculty where everyone knows how decisions are made, who is responsible for what, and how everyone can participate. Policy development with cards on the table.

- Evaluation and refinement of the current policy and decision-making structure: consultative bodies, policy teams, formal and informal roles
- Clarifying and widely communicating procedures, powers and responsibilities
- Framework of agreements for ABAP, ATP and student representatives in consultative bodies
- Simplify where possible, clarify where necessary

- Data-informed and data-driven decision-making as the norm, including at faculty level
- Transparency in processes and communication as a permanent touchstone

III. RESEARCH, EDUCATION AND INTERNATIONALISATION

1. Research: excellence that inspires intellectually, enriches existentially and generates social impact

Our faculty is internationally renowned for the quality of its research. We want to not only maintain this excellence, but also strengthen it: not by increasing pressure, but by providing better support and a stimulating environment. In addition to the initiatives already taken in 2022–2026, we will strive to achieve this in three areas.

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Cultivating excellence

- Creating and safeguarding time and space for in-depth research
- Facilitating collegial exchange and feedback
- Providing targeted support to research groups and individual researchers
- Actively promoting bold and interdisciplinary research, including through the 'Theo Teams', also for junior scholars
- Strengthening support for project applications and research funding
- Investing in research infrastructure and adequate work and meeting space

Recognising excellence

- Making research achievements visible within and outside the faculty through effective PR and communication
- Actively celebrating publications, grants, awards and recognitions: in communications and at an event to be organised
- Science communication as shared responsibility and collective pride: strengthened integration of TRN and other communication channels
- Recognition of various forms of excellence: fundamental research, social engagement, methodological innovation, public theology, artistic-theological output

Sharing excellence

- Promoting interdisciplinary collaboration within and outside the faculty
- Strengthening connections with and services to the university, church and society
- Science communication: learning and strengthening external communication
- Structurally embedding mentoring of the next generation of researchers

2. Education: quality, relevance and future orientation

Our programmes offer a unique combination of scientific depth and social relevance. Safeguarding this valuable reality requires continuous attention to development and adjustment on the one hand, and dialogue with social reality on the other.

One of the most important tasks for the coming period is to thoroughly reflect on our range of programmes. Rationalisation is inevitable, and that word must not only be mentioned but also put into practice. These are difficult choices: which programmes do we strengthen, which do we reposition, and where is bundling or reorientation needed? This reflection will be conducted transparently, in close consultation with the research units and with an eye to staffing levels in the coming decade. The search for a better balance between classical theological and religious studies fundamentals on the one hand and contemporary perspectives and hermeneutics on the other requires both caution and boldness in equal measure.

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Specific points of attention:

- Quality assurance and development of all programmes, with an eye for necessary adjustments and rationalisation
- Thorough reflection on the rationalisation of educational tasks, in collaboration with research units
- Repositioning of the initial master's programme: a clear profile, a clear target group, a renewed structure
- Innovation in teaching methods with attention to diverse learning needs
- Thorough exploration of possibilities for distance learning and working students
- Integration of student welfare into education policy
- Strengthening the coherence between Dutch-language and English-language programmes
- Alignment of civil law and canon law programmes, taking into account developments in the Dicastery for Culture and Education
- Thorough reflection on the use of AI in education and research, including in relation to master's theses and papers
- Consolidating the position of RZL within the university and the KU Leuven Association
- Active participation of students in policy-making: representative consultations with the dean, faculty board, faculty council, POC

3. Internationalisation: global connections

Our faculty is a pioneer in international theological programmes. For more than fifty years, we have been bringing together students and researchers from all over the world. This tradition is an asset that we must strategically strengthen, especially now that KU Leuven as a whole wants to embed internationalisation as an integral part of all its processes.

In the coming period, we will adopt two complementary perspectives. On the one hand, we will invest in strategic partnerships with strong academic institutions, focusing on *joint degrees*, joint research projects and exchange programmes. On the other hand, solidarity with the *Global South* remains an essential task: in service to the universal Church and with an explicit option for the poor and vulnerable, collaboration with us means a springboard for our partners in the South to gain greater recognition and impact in their region.

Solidarity with the Global South remains an essential task: for partners in the South, collaboration with us is a springboard to greater recognition and impact in their region.

The increased tuition fees for non-EEA students poses a real challenge. The *Committee for Study Allowances* has already introduced a differentiation between full scholarships and partial waivers. In addition, we are actively working on tapping into new sources of funding: targeted fundraising, alumni networks and institutional partnerships to grow the Scholarship Fund.

In terms of internationalisation, I would like to involve all sections of the university, without any obligation: ZAP and ABAP staff who can teach or explain research, ATP staff who can share their expertise, and students who can broaden their horizons through exchanges. The rapidly growing online opportunities offer additional possibilities in this regard. Further priorities:

- Evaluation of existing cooperation agreements in terms of effectiveness and added value
- Strengthening the role of ACIS in administrative processes
- Optimal use of online opportunities for international exchange
- Transparent communication about all international opportunities for all sections
- Targeted welcome and guidance for international students and researchers

IV. IN LINE WITH THE UNIVERSITY STRATEGIC PLAN

The new university strategic plan, with the guiding principle of 'Trust as a foundation', provides a framework within which our faculty can set its own priorities. The following ten areas link faculty policy with the university's ambitions. For each area, we indicate where our faculty can make a specific contribution — in the conviction that theology and religious studies have an indispensable voice in a number of areas.

1. AI literacy and critical thinking as twin competencies

The strategic plan emphasises AI integration in curricula and the importance of what is fundamentally human: critical judgement, moral consideration and meaning construction. Our faculty can make a significant contribution here by conducting a faculty-wide screening of course components for AI-related learning outcomes and forms of assessment, linked to a strengthened focus on ethical reflection as a core competence. AI coaching will be structurally embedded as part of theological and religious studies education.

2. Reprofiting and rationalisation of the range of programmes

The plan calls for internal rationalisation and a clear, attractive range of programmes. For our faculty, this means – as mentioned above – a thorough evaluation of the curriculum landscape: which programmes overlap, where can they be bundled, how can we achieve greater coherence between the Dutch-language and English-language programmes, and how can we refine our profile? The course components relating to religion, meaning and philosophy on the one hand and ethics on the other are more relevant than ever in a polarised society. A clear, appealing profile is essential.

3. Engaged education: service learning and sustainability

The university's strategic plan aims to ensure that every student comes into contact with engaged learning. Our faculty can play a pioneering role in this by structurally embedding service learning: collaboration with religious communities, interfaith organisations, refugee work and peace initiatives. Sustainability is embedded through the *Sustainable Development Goals* as a hermeneutic framework for theological and ethical reflection.

4. Internationalisation with a strategic focus

Evaluation of existing collaborations for added value, consolidation of strategic partners, strengthening of *blended* and virtual mobility, *solidarity and strengthening of partners in the global South*, and special attention to international intake through better welcoming and guidance of international students and researchers.

5. Well-being, workload and social safety as a faculty priority

The university's strategic plan is unusually explicit about work pressure, social safety and the tension between core tasks and administrative burdens. At faculty level, this implies improved work pressure measurement and monitoring, transparent task distribution, coaching for managers and an accessible reporting centre. The new ZAP assessment framework and 360° feedback are being actively implemented, with recognition for the broad range of academic output and socially relevant contributions.

6. Recognition of various forms of academic output

In line with the university's plea for the recognition of socially relevant contributions, the faculty is developing its own assessment framework that does justice to the specificity of our research: *e.g.* policy advice, public theology, interreligious dialogue, educational materials and artistic-theological output.

7. Interdisciplinarity and collaboration

Our faculty can build bridges to psychology and educational sciences (welfare, mental health care, teacher training), to law (human rights and religion), to social sciences (polarisation and diversity) and to biomedical sciences (ethics), to arts (text and source studies, history, art, etc.) and, *last but not least*, to philosophy (conceptual thinking, systematic theological research, public theology, ethics, etc.). Concrete instruments: interfaculty educational innovation projects, joint research applications, active role in KU Leuven institutes, and interdisciplinary exploration in the 'Theo Teams'.

8. Diversity, inclusion and the philosophical dimension

The university's strategic plan confirms diversity, equality and inclusion as guiding principles and explicitly mentions philosophical diversity. Our faculty positions itself as a centre of expertise for this dimension: active contribution to the Diversity Council, development of a training programme on philosophical literacy for the entire university, and a faculty diversity plan that pays attention to the uniqueness of our student population.

9. Lifelong learning and social services

The faculty positions its unique expertise and networks more strategically through a comprehensive lifelong learning programme: MOOCs, accessible but high-quality microcredentials and targeted training programmes. This also strengthens social visibility and relevance.

10. Governance, efficiency and communication

A critical review of all committees, working groups and meeting structures is desirable. Anything that no longer contributes will be abolished. Decision-making lines will be clarified, the POC level will be strengthened in accordance with COBRA, and there will be a focus on internal communication that connects without overloading. Data-informed and data-driven decision-making will become the norm.

V. SPECIFIC ATTENTION FOR EACH LEVEL

1. ATP: the foundation of the faculty

Our administrative and technical staff form the foundation for all our activities. Service provision and expertise are two sides of the same coin; together, they make our faculty a reality. Our faculty is blessed with a staff that offers every possible support with boundless dedication. However, that support must also be supported itself.

It is important to systematically review what tasks there are and who does what, but also to recognise the rich diversity of talents and abilities that ATP staff members bring to the table. Does everyone feel that they are in the right place? Can work be redistributed, not purely on the basis of pragmatic efficiency, but on the basis of individual preferences and strengths?

- Systematic evaluation of task distribution and workload
- Attention to talents and preferences in job allocation
- Clear and supportive policy on working from home, tailored to individual situations
- Create space for ATP to mention their limits in workload
- Involvement in policy through direct consultation in various sub-areas, through representation and through direct communication
- Recognition and appreciation of expertise as a valuable contribution to the faculty community
- Paying due attention to practical and administrative assessments and targeted advice on the implementation of new initiatives

2. ABAP: growing towards excellence

Our faculty is largely supported by the diverse and multifaceted efforts of its assistant and special academic staff. This gives us a wealth of intellectual potential and goodwill in people who, with youthful enthusiasm and sincere ambition, conduct research and support both education and services. They are extremely willing to take on many and varied tasks. This is something we need to be more aware of and for which we should appreciate them.

However, their position is structurally vulnerable. Their dependence on contract renewal, publication strategy and career prospects means that a truly equal relationship with their supervisor is not a given. In a culture of *'ownership'*, all those involved become stronger when the organisation also creates added value for the individual. This requires not only good intentions but also structural guarantees:

- Thorough, committed supervision and dialogue about research as a right, not a favour

- Tasks that are entrusted must contain a real component of professional development, which must be recognised and made explicit
- Substitute or assistant teaching must be accompanied by training and guidance
- Recognition for work done, in words and in evaluation
- Structural exit interviews as standard for every non-renewal or contract termination
- Open discussion about future prospects and concerns, including directly with the dean
- Mutual responsibility and accountability, both on the part of the coaching ZAP member and the ABAP member

3. ZAP: leadership and collegiality

Our professors bear a great and multifaceted responsibility that sometimes greatly increases their workload. In addition to further improving the functioning of the various bodies in which their voice is heard and open discussion is facilitated, more attention will be paid to:

- Support in leadership development, focused on guiding teams and inspiring employees
- Space for reflection and open dialogue: ZAP breakfast and evening, thematic consultations
- Appreciative and empathetic career discussions with a focus on individual aspirations and personal well-being
- Promoting collegial solidarity: meeting space, annual excursion, celebrating joint achievements
- Active implementation of the new ZAP assessment framework with recognition for broad academic output and social contribution

4. Students: the future of the faculty

Students are active members of our community. They embody the faculty and guarantee its future. The current generation of students is explicitly choosing a less obvious field of study, but at a world-renowned faculty that can rightly be proud of its achievements. Students can be proud of the value and quality of a degree from our faculty. We want to share in that pride with them, highlighting and endorsing it.

Students are active members of our community. They embody the faculty and guarantee its future.

It is important to emphasise the special character of our faculty both internally and externally. We should not shy away from the limelight, but claim our place with appropriate pride, within the university, in society, in the church and in other contexts of philosophical meaning.

- Active participation and accessibility in all governing bodies
- Investing in well-being and connectedness, with a special focus on integration between Dutch-language and English-language programmes
- Further expansion of ACIS as a platform for international students, with Dutch-speaking representation
- Guaranteeing a pleasant student lounge and spaces for personal reflection and prayer in all diversity
- Further facilitating and supporting our excellent student activities: Katechetika and Katechetika International
- Sense of belonging as a guiding principle: every student belongs, regardless of background or programme

VI. OUR VIEW OF THE HORIZON: BEYOND 2030

A four-year deanery is short. Over the past four years, paths have been mapped out, new initiatives launched, and emphases redefined. All these aspects now need to be fortified. What's more, what we do in the coming term must also extend beyond the next election. Sound policy involves long-term thinking, drawing up strategic lines and proactively addressing potential challenges.

Fundamental questions arise, and a serious long-term vision is needed. What will our faculty look like in ten or twenty years? What role does theology play in a rapidly secularising society? How do we remain relevant to both the church and the world? Which research themes will become crucial? How do we train the next generation of theologians and religious scholars? What role will they play in the society and church of the future?

What role does theology play in a rapidly secularising society? How do we remain relevant to both the church and the world?

To ensure that these questions do not remain unanswered, we are focusing on:

- Future studies in working groups, brainstorming sessions and open dialogue, involving all sections
- A multi-year plan for staffing, taking into account retirements, new needs and allocation developments
- Transparent discussion of financial aspects and budgetary scenarios
- Reflection on the structure and organisation of research units
- Connection with university and societal developments
- Concretising a shared vision that offers inspiration beyond 2030
- Preparation for the celebration of 600 years of the Faculty (2032) as a moment of reflection and aspiration

CONCLUSION:

BEYOND THE TURN OF THE TIDE, ANCHORED IN HOPE

This programme is based on a dual recognition: much has been achieved, and there is much that can and must grow further. This combination of gratitude and a realistic perspective forms the foundation on which the next four years can be built.

Four years ago, I wrote about *'A new wind in our sails. A tide of change, a time of hope'*. That wind has set us in motion, changed our direction and filled our sails. We have passed the turn of the tide. What follows now is not the triumphant entry into a harbour, but setting course for the open sea, abiding in hope: with a reliable map, a skilled crew and the realisation that the horizon always extends beyond the point you can see.

We sail together. Not each on our own, but as a community. With the wind behind us where possible, and with sails set where necessary. In the knowledge that our faculty, with its six centuries of history, has a resilience that can withstand the current challenges, provided we have the courage to do what is necessary and the magnanimity to do it together.

After four years of experience as dean and after serious reflection and discernment, I am ready and motivated to take on this mandate, with the full availability and dedication that the task requires. Not from the illusion that I can solve everything, but from the conviction that servant leadership — willingness to listen and learn, being approachable and transparent — can make a difference. Those who know me know that I am naturally a person of closeness and dialogue, of drive and warm commitment. I want to put these qualities at the service of our faculty in the coming years and also continue to grow in them myself, as a person.

The first step will be to listen. To each and every one of you. To what matters, what weighs heavily and what is hoped for. Only then will we proceed to put together a new team, characterised by diversity, complementarity and shared responsibility. A team of strong advisers, reflecting the polyphony of our faculty.

In the biblical tradition of wisdom, leadership is understood as service in responsibility, aimed at creating optimal opportunities for development and growth for everyone, in mutual respect. That conviction inspires this programme. In light of the vision and the reinforced emphases outlined above, I want to work with each of you to set beacons of hope for a radically new era that may dawn. Beyond the turn of the tide, anchored in hope.

Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 13 — 'and now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity' — form a compass that remains relevant for the governance of a

faculty of theology and religious studies. Not as a rhetorical ornament, but as a practical attitude. Faith without hope is groundless, hope without love remains abstract, and love without faith lacks direction. Together they form the inspiration for this programme. Faith that trusts in the future of this community. Hope that is not discouraged by what is not yet perfect. And love as the concrete care for those entrusted to us, in all their diversity, with all their talents, vulnerabilities and dreams.

Faith that trusts in the future of this community. Hope that is not discouraged by what is not yet perfect. And love as the concrete care for those entrusted to us, in everyone's diversity, with everyone's talents, vulnerabilities and dreams.

Beyond the turn of the tide, anchored in hope: based on faith in 'leadership that strengthens hope and love' (Marinus van den Berg).

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