



Louisville
Institute

2026 Doctoral Fellowship Application Guide

The two-year Louisville Institute Doctoral Fellowship invites Ph.D. and Th.D. **students currently in their first or second year of a doctoral program** to consider *theological education as a vocation*. Doctoral Fellows receive US\$3,000 each year for two years, and join with a peer cohort of other fellows for three formational gatherings each year as part of the Vocation of the Theological Educator Initiative.

FELLOWSHIP DETAILS

Application Due Date:

March 1, 2026
(11:59 p.m. ET)

Doctoral Fellowship Amount:

US\$3,000 each year for 2 years

Fellowship Timeframe:

Fall 2026 — Spring 2028

Awards Announced:

May 2026

**Vocation of the Theological
Educator Gatherings:**

October 2026;
January, May, & October 2027;
and January & May 2028



QUESTIONS? Please email fellowships@louisville-institute.org.

APPLY ONLINE: WWW.LOUISVILLE-INSTITUTE.ORG

APPLICATION DEADLINE: MARCH 1, 2026



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WHAT ARE DOCTORAL FELLOWSHIPS?

The two-year Louisville Institute Doctoral Fellowship invites current Ph.D. and Th.D. students in their first or second year of a doctoral program to consider theological education as a vocation. As part of the Louisville Institute's Vocation of the Theological Educator Initiative (VTE), Louisville Institute Doctoral Fellows receive a US\$3,000 grant each year for two years, and join with other fellows at three formational gatherings a year (October, January, and May). All expenses for participating in the VTE gatherings, held in Louisville, KY, are covered by the Louisville Institute.

Preference for Doctoral Fellowships is given to students who demonstrate an interest in theological education as a vocation, who express an understanding of the current challenges and opportunities of theological education, and who articulate connections between their doctoral work and these trends and dynamics. The Louisville Institute understands theological education as encompassing the academic study and teaching of religion and its practices, as well as formation for ministry, leadership, social justice and public service, nonprofit and other agency work, etc.

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY "THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION"?

The Louisville Institute defines "theological education" broadly, encompassing the academic study and teaching of religion and its practices, as well as formation for ministry, leadership, social justice and public service, nonprofit and other agency work, etc.



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WHO IS ELIGIBLE FOR A DOCTORAL FELLOWSHIP?

Eligible applicants:

- must, at the time they apply, be students in their first or second year of a Ph.D., Th.D., or pontifical S.T.D. program at an accredited graduate school in the United States or Canada. D.Min. students and others in non-research or practical degrees are not eligible for this fellowship.
- must reside in the United States or Canada, and be U.S. or Canadian citizens or international students with an appropriate student visa to study in North America. Students enrolled in North American doctoral programs but living outside of the United States and Canada are not eligible.
- must have at least two years remaining in their program at the time they apply. Most applicants are in or have recently completed coursework when they apply. Those who have applied for but not yet started a doctoral program, or who are already writing their dissertations, are not eligible for this fellowship.
- are passionate about theological education and the future of the Christian church in North America.
- may work in a variety of disciplines (history, ethics, practical theology, biblical studies, etc.), or work interdisciplinarily.

Additional eligibility requirements:

- Individuals may only apply for one LI grant or fellowship between June 1, 2025, and May 31, 2026.
- Any previous grants from the Louisville Institute must be completed and final reports submitted before applying for another LI fellowship or grant.
- Members of the Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary staff, faculty, Board of Trustees, or student body or their immediate family members (parents, spouses, or children) are ineligible for Louisville Institute grants or fellowships. Members of the Louisville Institute Advisory Board and their immediate family members are also ineligible.
- Louisville Institute grantees may not simultaneously hold two individual grants or fellowships from Lilly Endowment-funded organizations that together total more than US\$55,000. Please contact us if you have questions about this stipulation: fellowships@louisville-institute.org.



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WHAT IS THE VOCATION OF THE THEOLOGICAL EDUCATOR INITIATIVE (VTE)?

The heart of Louisville Institute's Vocation of the Theological Educator Initiative (VTE) is the conviction that theological schools and churches in North America need teacher-scholars who are attuned to both the life of the church and the life of a scholar. Many VTE participants are themselves ordained pastors or leaders in their religious communities, and bring together convictions of the heart, mind, and spirit through their work in the academy and the church. At VTE gatherings, fellows participate in conversation, discernment, collegiality, and connection with other scholars and pastors to engage deep questions of theology, justice, pedagogy, ministry, and vocation.

The VTE Initiative comprises both Doctoral Fellows in the early stages of their doctoral programs, and Postdoctoral Fellows who have completed their degrees and are placed in two-year teaching positions throughout North America.

WHAT ARE VTE GATHERINGS?

Three times a year (October, January, & May), LI Doctoral and Postdoctoral Fellows gather in Louisville, KY, for vocational and professional formation, relationship building, and mutual support as part of the Vocation of the Theological Educator Initiative (VTE). With their cohorts, fellows engage vocational questions about theological education, discernment, leadership, pedagogy, mentoring, research and writing, employment and tenure, public theology, guild participation, and other relevant issues. Through peer learning and in conversation with mentor-facilitators and invited resource persons, fellows together create space for dialogue, imagination, collegiality, and growth within and across the academy and the church. All expenses for participation in the VTE gatherings are covered by the Louisville Institute.



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HOW DO I APPLY?

- Specific application requirements are described starting on [page 8](#).
- All applications are submitted online through our application portal. Click the APPLY button and select Doctoral Fellowship to begin your application.
- Applications are due by 11:59 p.m. ET March 1, 2026. Recommendation letters are due from your recommenders March 8, 2026.

WHAT IS THE SELECTION PROCESS?

- The Louisville Institute appoints a selection committee to review proposals and award Doctoral Fellowships. Selection takes place about 8 weeks after the application due date.
- We typically receive about 60 eligible applications for Doctoral Fellowships. In 2026, we will award 10 fellowships.
- All applicants will be notified by email as soon as possible following the selection process. Awards will be announced publicly in May 2026.
- Fellowship funds are dispersed in September of each award year.



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WHAT MAKES A STRONG APPLICATION?

- Read the application materials and follow the instructions carefully. Make sure you meet the eligibility requirements ([page 3](#)) before submitting an application.
- Competitive applications demonstrate an interest in and passion for theological education, and a sense of the challenges and opportunities facing theological education in North America.
- Strong essays draw connections between the applicant's vocational trajectories, doctoral program and focus, and trends and dynamics in the Christian church and in theological education.
- We strongly encourage you to share your proposal with trusted advisors and colleagues – ideally those who will write your recommendation letters – to receive feedback and suggestions prior to submitting your application.
- Please don't hesitate to ask questions as you go along! Email fellowships@louisville-institute.org.



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PREPARING YOUR APPLICATION

- 1 **Read through all the application materials** in this guide carefully.
- 2 **Prepare your application materials early** so that you can get feedback on your essay, request a copy of your transcript, and ask for recommendation letters.
- 3 **Create an online profile on our [application portal](#).** You will be asked to provide your name, contact information, and other information about yourself. If you have previously applied for a Louisville Institute program, make sure to update your contact information.
- 4 Once you have created your profile, **click the “Apply” button and select “Doctoral Fellowship”** to begin entering the elements of your application.
- 5 **Applications are due by 11:59 p.m. ET March 1, 2026.** We recommend that you put together the application elements in time to share them with friends or colleagues for feedback before submitting them. Please do your best to provide clear, refined, and edited documents, noting which elements should be submitted as PDFs.
- 6 **Recommendation letters are due *from the recommenders* March 8, 2026.** In the application portal you will be asked to provide contact information for your recommenders — name, email address, and phone number — and we will send them a link to upload their letters.



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APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS

Doctoral Fellowship applications require the following elements. After you have created your online profile, you will be prompted to provide the following

1 General information about your doctoral program and progress, including:

- The school you currently attend
- The degree you are pursuing (PhD, ThD, etc.)
- When you started your program (month, year)
- If you are attending full time or part time
- Your academic discipline/field
- The focus or subject of your anticipated dissertation research
- Keyword tags of 3-5 words to describe your anticipated dissertation research.
- Your doctoral progress: the dates you anticipate completing your coursework, comprehensive or qualifying exams, and receiving approval of your dissertation proposal or thesis topic.
- Other graduate degrees completed (Institution, degree & completion date)

2 **Application essay:** In an essay of no more than 1500 words (5-7 pages, double-spaced, 12-point font), describe why theological education has been important to you, why you have chosen to pursue a doctoral degree related to religion, and what hope your vocational trajectory might be. From your perspective and social context, reflect on current dynamics and realities of theological education and the church, the possibilities and challenges ahead, and how you see your gifts, skills, and academic goals within this larger context. Additionally, please describe why a Louisville Institute Doctoral Fellowship and participation in the VTE program is of interest to you as you consider your vocation(s). In this essay, we are more interested in your ideas, analysis, and passion for theological education than a recitation of your resume. Include your name on each page of the essay, number the pages, and upload the document as a PDF.

(Note: The Louisville Institute understands theological education as the academic study and teaching of religion and its practices, as well formation for ministry, leadership, social justice and public service, nonprofit and other agency work, etc.)



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- 3 Doctoral transcript:** One transcript (unofficial or official) from your doctoral program to date must be uploaded to the application portal. Transcripts are due with the application, so make sure to request them in advance so they are received in time.
- 4 Curriculum vitae or resume:** Provide a PDF of your CV or resume (maximum four pages) including but not limited to:
 - Institutions of higher education you've attended and degrees earned, including dates, starting with the most recent
 - Teaching and/or employment experience, starting with the most recent
 - Major academic honors you've received
 - Titles and citations of your publications, starting with the most recent
 - Other relevant experience that will help the selection committee get to know you, such as church leadership, guild membership, volunteer service, etc.
- 5 Two letters of recommendation, due from recommenders on March 8, 2026.** In the online application portal, you will be asked to provide contact information (name, email address, and phone number) for your recommenders, and they will be sent a link by email through which they can upload letters. As soon as you submit contact information, your recommender will automatically receive that email. Make sure to contact your recommenders in advance to explain the fellowship and to share your application materials.
 - Faculty mentor/advisor letter of recommendation: Your first letter of recommendation should come from your faculty mentor/advisor who will be asked to assess your doctoral work thus far, your vocational interest in theological education, and your promise as a teacher and scholar.
 - Second letter of recommendation: Your second letter of recommendation should come from an academic mentor or colleague who can speak to your scholarly promise and assess the quality of your doctoral work and research. In addition, this recommender will be asked to comment on your personal qualities and commitments, including engagement with faith communities, if applicable.

We will notify you via email when we receive the letters from your recommenders.



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COMPLETING THE APPLICATION

All elements of the application, including transcripts, must be submitted by 11:59 p.m. ET on March 1, 2026, except the recommendation letters, which are due from the recommenders March 8, 2026. You can edit all portions of your application until the deadline, after which changes cannot be made. Late applications will not be accepted.

In the week after the application deadline, LI staff will process the applications to prepare for the selection committee. We will follow up with you if your application is incomplete. We will also send you confirmation when we receive your letters of recommendation, and will email you when your application is complete.

If you have questions or encounter problems with the application, email fellowships@louisville-institute.org.



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WHO WE ARE

Funded by the Religion Division of Lilly Endowment, Inc., the [Louisville Institute](#) bridges Church and academy by awarding grants and fellowships to those who lead and study North American religious institutions, practices, and movements, and thereby promoting scholarship that strengthens Church, academy, and society, and ultimately contributes to the flourishing of the Church. To find out more:

[Grants](#)

[Fellowships](#)

The Institute's [Advisory Board](#) shapes mission and direction, helps review and approve grant and fellowship proposals, and evaluates initiatives and programs. Our [staff](#) guides the Institute's work on a daily basis from our offices on the campus of [Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary](#).



The [Religion Division of Lilly Endowment](#) names as a primary aim of its grantmaking "to deepen and enrich the lives of Christians in the United States, primarily by seeking out and supporting efforts that enhance the vitality of congregations and strengthen the pastoral and lay leadership of Christian communities. The Endowment also seeks to improve public understanding of diverse religious traditions by supporting fair and accurate portrayals of the role religion plays in the United States and across the globe."



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2026-2028 PRIORITIES

The Louisville Institute supports cutting-edge and visionary research that is significant to the North American church in all its diversity and richness. As the academy and the Christian church imagine the future at the quarter mark of the 21st century, the Louisville Institute seeks to contribute in particular ways to that future, specifically by:

- ***Cultivating repair*** through projects and ideas that address social injustice, trauma and healing, historical harms, restoration and reconciliation, relationships of trust, and interdependence and interconnectedness.
- ***Building collaborative learning communities*** that cultivate relational, supportive, and non-competitive research communities, the participatory inclusion of unheard or underrepresented voices, and gatherings of pastors and scholars for mutual learning and collaboration that strengthens and enriches wisdom and discovery.
- ***Supporting purposeful risk-taking*** that asks questions in new ways, brings together unconventional ideas or concepts, shows courage and ingenuity in the face of an unknown future, and combines grounded thinking with strategic purpose and lively imagination.

For more information about the Louisville Institute, contact us:

1044 Alta Vista Road
Louisville, KY 40205
www.louisville-institute.org
502.992.5432
info@louisville-institute.org



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