



Louisville  
Institute

## 2026 Postdoctoral Fellowship Application Guide

The Louisville Institute Postdoctoral Fellowship **provides early career theological educators** with vocational and professional formation through a two-year placement as a visiting scholar at a graduate theological school, college, university, or education and research organization in the United States and Canada. As part of the Louisville Institute's Vocation of the Theological Educator (VTE) Initiative, these fellows engage in intentional, focused, professional formation and teaching as they *explore a calling to be a theological educator* for future pastoral leaders.

### FELLOWSHIP DETAILS

#### Application Due Date:

October 15, 2025  
(11:59 p.m. ET)

#### Postdoctoral Fellowship Benefits:

annual minimum stipend of US\$50,000, plus housing, health insurance, and moving costs (exact figures vary based on placement location)

#### Postdoctoral Fellowship Timeframe:

Fall 2026 — Spring 2028

#### Awards Announced:

Spring 2026

#### Vocation of the Theological Educator Gatherings:

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



**QUESTIONS? Please email [fellowships@louisville-institute.org](mailto:fellowships@louisville-institute.org).**

**APPLY ONLINE: [WWW.LOUISVILLE-INSTITUTE.ORG](http://WWW.LOUISVILLE-INSTITUTE.ORG)**

**APPLICATION DEADLINE: OCTOBER 15, 2025**



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## WHAT ARE POSTDOCTORAL FELLOWSHIPS?

Louisville Institute Postdoctoral Fellowships provide early career theological educators with vocational and professional formation through a two-year placement as a visiting scholar at a graduate theological school, college, university, or education and research organization in the United States and Canada. As part of the Louisville Institute's Vocation of the Theological Educator (VTE) Initiative, these fellows engage in intentional, focused, professional formation and teaching as they explore a calling to be a theological educator for future pastoral leaders. Postdoctoral Fellows receive pastoral and faculty peer mentoring as part of their formation, as well as joining their cohort at the October, January, and May VTE gatherings.

Applicants are typically scholars studying Christian faith and life, the practice of ministry, religious trends and movements, Christian and other faith-based institutions, and religion and social issues. Preference for fellowships is given to doctoral students or recent graduates 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 Postdoctoral Fellowship provides an annual minimum salary stipend of US\$50,000, plus housing, health insurance, and moving costs. Final amounts are negotiated between the placement institution and the Louisville Institute to ensure the fellow receives adequate and appropriate compensation as a visiting professor.

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## 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 POSTDOCTORAL FELLOWSHIP?

### Eligible Applicants:

- are scholars based in the United States and Canada who will complete all Ph.D./Th.D. work, defend their dissertations, and receive their degrees no later than June 30, 2026.
- demonstrate appreciation for the Christian church and a commitment to theological education, and are able to articulate how their doctoral work and other experiences have prepared them to be a theological educator
- come from diverse fields such as history, systematic and practical theology, pastoral studies, social sciences, ethics, or biblical studies, or bring interdisciplinary approaches to their scholarship
- are aware that postdoctoral placements often require relocation in order to match fellows with appropriate schools/departments

If you expect to complete your doctoral program after June 30, 2026, we encourage you to wait and apply for a Postdoctoral Fellowship for 2026. Previous LI Doctoral and/or Dissertation Fellows are eligible to apply to be Postdoctoral Fellows. Preference for Postdoctoral Fellowships is given to recent doctoral graduates.

### 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](mailto: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 9](#).
- All applications are submitted online through our application portal. Click the APPLY button and select Postdoctoral Fellowship to begin your application.
- Applications are due by 11:59 p.m. ET October 15, 2025.
- Recommendation letters are due **from** your recommenders October 22, 2025.



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## WHAT IS THE SELECTION AND PLACEMENT PROCESS FOR THE POSTDOCTORAL FELLOWSHIP?

- We typically receive about 50-60 eligible applications for Postdoctoral Fellowships. For 2026, we will award 8 fellowships.
- The Louisville Institute appoints a selection committee to review proposals and name Postdoctoral Fellowship semi-finalists. Selection of semi-finalists takes place about 8 weeks after the application due date.
- All applicants will be notified as soon as possible following the selection committee process. Semifinalists will then be interviewed in January 2026 to begin to coordinate possible placements.
- Ordinarily, the Louisville Institute will place Postdoctoral Fellows in ATS-accredited theological schools, and less frequently at a college or university. We have also placed fellows in hybrid teaching/program-oriented settings. As a semifinalist, your preferences and needs will be prioritized throughout the process, and you will have multiple opportunities to discuss your hopes and desires with us. Candidates with the capacity to relocate are likely to have more options available to them, but each year is different and placements depend on many factors, including fields of study/expertise, an institution's capacity to host a postdoc, where LI Postdocs have recently been placed, etc.
- Throughout the process, it is neither necessary nor appropriate for applicants to pursue possible placements on their own. The Institute arranges placements based on relationships with and knowledge of the needs of various institutions, and theological and contextual fit between fellow and institution.
- As part of the placement process, we will ask you about other placements or jobs you may be pursuing (which are kept confidential). This is for our information and does not have any bearing on whether or not you will receive a Postdoctoral Fellowship. Our desire is to help find the best option for you — be it in one of our Postdoctoral Fellowships, or elsewhere — and we ask that you be open and transparent in these conversations so that we can best assist you, wherever you land.
- Awards will be announced publicly in Spring 2026 after all placements are finalized.



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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 9](#)) 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 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](mailto:fellowships@louisville-institute.org).



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## PREPARING YOUR APPLICATION

- 1 **Read through all the application materials** 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 “Postdoctoral Fellowship”** to begin entering the elements of your application.
- 5 **Applications are due by 11:59 p.m. ET October 15, 2025.** 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* October 22, 2025.** 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

**Postdoctoral 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 dissertation program and progress to date, including:**

- Name of your doctoral school
- Your academic discipline/field
- Your anticipated doctoral defense and graduation dates
- Your dissertation title and summary/abstract: a brief description of your dissertation, its claims, and its significance. (Limit 2000 characters, about 200 words.)
- Keyword tags of 3-5 words to describe your dissertation.
- Your doctoral progress: the dates you completed your coursework and comprehensive or qualifying exams, and received approval of your dissertation proposal.
- 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 your interest in theological education, how your experiences in theological education have influenced your sense of vocation, and your understanding of the significance and realities of theological education in the twenty-first century. 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 vocational goals within this larger context. Additionally, please describe why a Louisville Institute Postdoctoral 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 as a theological educator 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 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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## APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS

- 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 October 22, 2025.** 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 a faculty mentor or advisor who can attest to your promise as a teacher and scholar in theological education, the significance of your work thus far, and your interest in and understanding of the role and purpose of theological education. The recommender will also confirm your expected graduation date.
  - Second letter of recommendation: Your second letter of recommendation should come from an academic mentor or colleague (preferably an experienced or senior scholar) who can speak to your academic promise and your interest in theological education. 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 October 15, 2025, except the recommendation letters, which are *due from the recommenders* October 22, 2025. 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](mailto: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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## WHO WE ARE

### 2025-2027 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](http://www.louisville-institute.org)  
502.992.5432  
[info@louisville-institute.org](mailto:info@louisville-institute.org)



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