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Statement of Research and Teaching Emphases in Relation to the SPST Mission Statement

*Rooted in the Wesleyan tradition
and committed to inspiring passion for ministry
in diverse Christian bodies,*

Saint Paul School of Theology
educates leaders
to make disciples for Jesus Christ,
renew the church,
and transform the world.

Since beginning my doctoral studies and continuing to the present, I have been fascinated by the biblical wisdom books: Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes. The Hebrew wisdom literature is a rich resource for **educating leaders** in the church, not only for its practical advice, of which there is plenty in Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, but also for its teaching of critical thinking integrated with piety and ethical living. In the present postmodern era, where many of the certainties of the past are in question and the place of faith is under renegotiation, Ecclesiastes can inspire **renewal of the church** with its relentless questioning of self-assured poses, be they religious or intellectual. Today we witness on a global scale an ever-widening gap between rich and poor and the corrosive expansion of consumerist culture. Ecclesiastes can inform the church's mission to **transform this world**. The book insists on the futility and emptiness of all self-serving pursuits, commending instead faithfulness and the modest enjoyment of work and sustenance, as God grants it. We rarely hear Ecclesiastes in church, apart from 3:1ff, "For everything there is a season...". I find however that with some encouragement, my seminary students are drawn to this book. They preach from Ecclesiastes profoundly and powerfully. The biblical wisdom literature is good teaching for pastors to dwell with, and for all Christians to embrace. My current research projects in this area include: "Proverbs," in A Theological Bible Commentary, ed. Gail R. O'Day and David L. Petersen (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, publication date: April 2009); "Wisdom Literature," New Interpreter's Bible One Volume Commentary, ed. Beverly Gaventa and David Petersen (Nashville: Abingdon Press, forthcoming); "Recent Research on Ecclesiastes/Ooheleth," Currents in Research: Biblical Studies (in process); and Ecclesiastes, Old Testament Library Series (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, in process).

My other ongoing major project is a commentary on the books of Ezra and Nehemiah: Ezra-Nehemiah, Abingdon Old Testament Commentary Series (Nashville: Abingdon Press, in process). In this commentary, written chiefly for pastors and seminary students, I am suggesting that the example of the Judean people in the time of Ezra and Nehemiah has much to offer for the **renewal of the church** today. The books focus on faithfulness to tradition amidst the social and religious turmoil of the postexilic period. The biblical community is called to forge a new identity for an uncertain future. Paramount are questions of unity and diversity, loss and hope, leadership and community, religious change and continuity. All of this speaks to the challenges and promise of the church in the 21st century.