



## Quality Enhancement Plan Executive Summary

Title: Practicing Beloved Community Through Stories

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Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., at a rally on December 3, 1956, declared: “The end is reconciliation; the end is redemption; the end is the creation of the beloved community.” Considering the Christian underpinnings of King’s idea of Beloved Community, this topic aptly fits the mission of Austin Seminary, a school in the Presbyterian-Reformed tradition that seeks to “educate and equip individuals for ordained Christian ministry and other forms of Christian service and leadership.” In line with the topic of the QEP, one of the main goals of Austin Seminary’s mission is to reflect Beloved Community by being and becoming “a winsome and exemplary community of God’s people.”

Yet different sets of data, including a 2015-16 campus climate survey of the Seminary’s faculty, students, and staff, and a subsequent report from consultants who conducted focus groups on campus indicated that acceptance and tolerance of diverse opinions and cultures still remained a growing edge at the Seminary. Moreover, these reports also showed the need for more robust enhancement of students’ spiritual formation. In light of the data, which indicated areas of needed growth and improvement, the QEP Committee of Austin Seminary chose as its topic: “Practicing Beloved Community Through Stories.” This QEP aims to enhance students’ learning and experience by guiding them in practices that will foster the development of Beloved Community.

The main practices of the QEP are students telling their stories and listening to the stories of others. Through these practices, students will grow in their abilities to listen, empathize, practice pastoral care, create better sermons, and express identity. Not only are the improvements of these skills essential to the pedagogical and theological formation of church and community leaders, we believe they will also lead to a greater sense of acceptance, tolerance and community—that is, Beloved Community.

1) By incorporating storytelling and story-listening in the spiritual formation groups in which all first-year master’s-level students participate; and 2) by training a select group of rising senior-level master’s students in narrative methodologies so that they can serve as facilitators of the spiritual formation groups; and lastly, 3) by holding bi-annual storytelling events in which second year master’s-level students will present their stories—the QEP aims to fulfill two student learning outcomes: 1) Students will be better able to tell or narrate their stories, and 2) Students will be better able to hear and respond to each other’s stories. The accomplishment of these two learning outcomes will in turn work to enhance the presence of Beloved Community at Austin Seminary.