

George W. Truett Theological Seminary and Baylor University expand global reach with updated motto

BY TODD D. STILL

If Baylor University has had big dreams and has increasingly sought to be a regional, national, and global university from its inception, it was not until mid-May of this year that the university added the phrase Pro Mundo (“For the world”) to its motto.

Not long after its founding in 1851, then Baylor President Rufus C. Burleson established a motto for the university—*Pro Ecclesia, Pro Texana* (“For the Church, For Texas”). If this Latin slogan may now strike some as parochial and provincial, it was patently not meant to be originally. In fact, the visionary founders of Baylor intended to bequeath to posterity a university “fully susceptible to enlargement and development to meet the needs of the ages to come.” Part of Baylor’s “enlargement and development” was to become a school that existed not only to serve the 28th state of the Union but also the broader region and, increasingly, the nation and the world. The most recent census data reveals that students now enroll at Baylor from all 50 states and 100 foreign countries. Once at Baylor, students are, in concert with the university’s mission, educated for “worldwide leadership and service.”

When a school alters its motto after 173 years, it is worth asking why. While much might be said in response to this question, three considerations merit mention. First of all, Baylor has had a global vision as an institution of higher



Students enrolled in Truett Seminary’s Theology, Ecology, and Food Justice Program toured the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations in Rome last summer. Through the program, students learn about the challenges posed by poverty, ecological degradation, and food insecurity through theological, biblical, and interdisciplinary studies.

education for any number of years now despite its seemingly restrictive 1851 motto. Additionally, George W. Truett Theological Seminary of Baylor University articulates its aim to train “thoughtful and faithful ministers for a 21st century Church and world.” In fact, as Truett’s dean, I have sometimes found myself saying to students and constituents something akin to the following, “*Pro Texana* now also serves as a metaphor for the world.” Even as a native Texan, however, I am far from sure how convincing this interpretative gloss has been!

A second identifiable reason for the expansion of Baylor’s motto to include *Pro Mundo* is our school’s recent recognition as an “R1” (Research One) university. On December 16, 2021, the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education recognized Baylor University as a doctoral institution with “very high research activity.” This sought-for status has led Baylor’s 15th president, Linda A. Livingstone, to speak of both the increased opportunities and responsibilities this desired development accords Baylor to serve and to lead globally.

A final reason that adding *Pro Mundo* to Baylor's motto may be regarded as timely is the university's recently revealed strategic plan—"Baylor in Deeds: Strategic Plan 2024–2030." From beginning to end, the strategic plan underscores the university's commitment to "create a larger network of relationships across the globe, increasing student and faculty mobility, and elevating Baylor's research aims to global issues of high impact." Furthermore, "global impact" is named as one of the key institutional metrics within the strategic plan. The plan indicates that in order "to assess our global impact, we [will] need to measure the global activities of both students and faculty." Thus, the plan declares, "We will increase the number of international undergraduate and graduate students enrolled at Baylor. We will [also] increase student participation in study abroad programs, and we will increase faculty engagement in international activities."

As one of the 12 academic units that comprise Baylor, Truett Seminary—an embedded school—also has its own strategic plan. One identifiable weakness of "OneTruett" is that it fails to address explicitly how our seminary community will intentionally become increasingly global in the coming years.

Nevertheless, over the course of Truett's comparatively short history—the 2024–2025 academic year marks the seminary's 30th anniversary—our school has been actively and enthusiastically, if not always strategically, involved globally. We have welcomed students from across the world to our campuses in Waco, Houston, and San Antonio, and have worked assiduously to place our current students and alumni in ministry contexts around the globe. We have also facilitated faculty exchanges with international colleagues and planned travel study tours to France, Greece, Hong Kong, India, Israel, Italy, Morocco, Nigeria, South Africa, Tunisia, Turkey, the United Kingdom, and Zambia, among others. Through our university and seminary's newly minted membership in the Baptist World Alliance, comprised of 51 million



people and 266 member bodies in 134 countries and territories, we are altogether hopeful that we will be even and ever more globally informed and engaged.

The relationships formed and lessons learned through such interactions have immeasurably enriched our seminary community and will continue to do so. Additionally, in more recent years, our school has been demonstrably strengthened through the not unrelated, increased diversity of our student body, faculty, and staff along racial and ethnic lines. Truett's additional instructional sites in Houston and San Antonio have helped us to increase our non-majority student enrollment even as the formation and increased support of various student organizations have assisted our international, African American, Latinx, and Asian American students to integrate more fully and fruitfully into the life of our seminary. The creation of a faculty, staff, and student committee focused upon such diversity has contributed to that as well.

As we seek to incorporate "Baylor in Deeds" into "One-Truett" and vice versa, we will have ample opportunity to reflect upon how Baylor's Truett Seminary can help our

university become more noticeably *Pro Mundo*. We will also have occasion to pay increased attention to the strategic and ongoing work of the ATS Global Awareness and Engagement Initiative. This intentional strategic planning

process, we trust, will equip and empower Truett Seminary to be more fully *Pro Mundo*.



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