



## **CELEBRATING DECADES OF WOMEN'S THEOLOGICAL EMPOWERMENT**

For 40 years, Hekima University College (HUC) has been faithful to its mission of ensuring excellent religious and personal development, promoting research and scholarship, and providing quality integrated education based on the finest traditions of the Jesuit humanistic and scientific heritage.

### **HUC: Inclusivity and Formation of Young Women Religious**

In 1984, the Jesuit Superiors of Africa and Madagascar (JESAM)<sup>1</sup> founded the Jesuit School of Theology at Hekima College (now HUC). The primary purpose was to provide theological education in a university environment for candidates for the priesthood. Realizing a notable lack of diversity, especially the paucity of women in theological scholarship, Hekima redefined its mission to be more inclusive. From a programme focusing on exclusive Jesuit formation, HUC conceived and kickstarted a holistic religious formation for novices and young, professed religious women to mitigate the challenges of inadequate qualified personnel in most formation houses.

### **HUC: Inclusivity of Programmes and Opportunities**

The above initiative, bore by Rev. Dr. Cecil McGarry SJ, one of the founders of HUC, metamorphosized so that in 1996, HUC opened its doors to women seeking to study for a Bachelor in Theology; thus, committed to the formation of men and women, religious and laity, seeking to participate in the evangelizing mission of the Church. The move aimed to create opportunities for African women to undertake theological formation, promote diverse voices in theological discourse, and enhance the profile of HUC as a leading resource for the Church.

In the succeeding years, this initiative was vigorously pursued by successive principals of HUC, as reflected in the hiring of women theologians as faculty members and the deliberate recruitment of women into various Hekima scholarship programmes. In 2008, five scholarships were offered, with priority given to sisters of the Institutes of Diocesan Right through AOSK. Having received only one applicant from these institutes, the other scholarships were offered to sisters of the Institutes of Pontifical Right. In partnership with Catholic Theological Ethics in the World Church (CTEWC), HUC created a doctoral scholarship programme in 2008-2009 for the advanced training of African women theologians in theological ethics. In partnership with the Hilton Foundation, St. Ignatius Scholarship for Women Theologians, Doctoral Scholarships for African Women Theologians, and individual benefactors, HUC currently offers study opportunities for women theologians at certificate and all degree levels.

### **HUC@40: Celebrating Years of Women Theological Empowerment**

Although Hekima has endeavoured to offer opportunities to women theologians, the latter's voices are still seldom heard. Recognizing these gaps, Pope Francis assigned women to handle key responsibilities in the upcoming Synod on Synodality, providing a golden opportunity to appreciate the role of women in the Church. Celebrating its fortieth anniversary, HUC reaffirms its commitment to educating women theologians by organizing a conference on the theme: "African Women Theologians and Synodality." With this conference, HUC wishes to celebrate its contributions to women's theological empowerment and make the voices of African women louder in theological discourses. Hopefully, this conference will significantly prompt the well-deserved respectful listening of African women theologians by the Church. See the *Addendum* for the details of the conference.

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<sup>1</sup> Now Jesuit Conference of Africa and Madagascar (JCAM)

## Addendum

### **Objectives of the Conference**

- 1) To create a platform for the voices of African women theologians to be heard in global theological and ecclesial discourse.
- 2) To strengthen and channel the intellectual abilities, leadership, and contributions of African women theologians towards the growth of the Church in Africa and beyond.
- 3) To foster a spirit that is liberating and empowering for women.
- 4) To create a network of African women scholars committed to the mission of the Church in Africa and beyond.

### **Outcomes**

- 1) Attracting more women to the field of theological research and respecting their voices in global theological discourse.
- 2) Recognizing and accepting women's abilities as competent intellectual, ecclesial and societal leaders.
- 3) Publishing the proceedings from the conference.

### **Terms and Conditions**

- 1) Application is open to any African woman theologian.
- 2) Other theologians are welcomed upon invitation.
- 3) Prospective participants must submit an abstract not exceeding 500 words.
- 4) HUC, in collaboration with the St. Ignatius Scholarship for Women Theologians, shall fund travel and accommodation of presenters only.

### **Possible (but not limited) sub-themes for consideration**

- 1) Turning challenges into opportunities in ministry and society.
- 2) Gospel witnesses: Grounded in faith and highlighting transformative enterprises.
- 3) Communion, participation, and mission as vital pillars of a synodal Church.
- 4) Deep and respectful listening: witnessing God's love amidst the culture of provisional.
- 5) Witnessing to those at the peripheries of our world.
- 6) Making Synodality the evangelical path in the service of God's kingdom.

### **Submission Deadline**

- 1) Please submit a PDF file abstract to [awt.conference@hekima.ac.ke](mailto:awt.conference@hekima.ac.ke) before 24 Nov 2023.
- 2) Successful applicants will be notified by 1 Dec 2023.
- 3) Once selected, participants must prepare a presentable and publishable conference paper.
- 4) The conference will take place from 7 –11 March 2024 at Hekima University College (HUC), Nairobi, Kenya. Activities are as follows:

7 Mar 2024	Arrival
8–9 Mar 2024	Conference (Full-days)
10 Mar 2024	Conference and Evaluation (Half-day)
10 Mar 2024	Rest, Outing, Sightseeing or City Tour (Afternoon)
11 Mar 2024	Departure

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