



UNIVERSITY OF THE FREE STATE  
UNIVERSITEIT VAN DIE VRYSTAAT  
YUNIVESITHI YA FREISTATA

# FACULTY OF THEOLOGY AND RELIGION

## Heritage Day Celebration

### UFS Department of Religion Studies

The Department of Religion Studies at the University of the Free State (UFS) will host the **Heritage Day celebration conference** on **24-25 September 2026** at the **Albert Wessels Auditorium**, in commemoration of South Africa's Heritage Day. The conference will be held under the theme:

**“Drinking from Our Well: Water, Ancestral Memory, and the Decolonisation of Heritage.”**

This scholarly and cultural initiative forms part of the national Heritage Day celebrations and seeks to engage critically with the interconnected themes of ancestry, water, and heritage within broader discourses on African identity, spirituality, and cultural reclamation. Against the backdrop of ongoing efforts to decolonise religion and culture, the conference reflects on the marginalisation of African knowledge systems through colonial interventions and highlights the need to reclaim indigenous epistemologies.

By foregrounding ancestral memory and ecological practices, the conference contributes to contemporary academic and public conversations that affirm African heritage as a vital source of meaning, identity, and intellectual engagement. The programme positions **water** as both a material and symbolic resource, conceptualising heritage as a dynamic and lived process rooted in ritual, memory, and relational worldviews.

In many African traditions, water functions as a medium through which the ancestors are sustained, thus playing a central role in the transmission of cultural knowledge and identity. The conference will explore how these perspectives challenge dominant approaches to heritage studies and offer possibilities for reimagining heritage, institutional practices, and knowledge production within African contexts.

### Thematic Focus Areas

The conference will engage participants around the following thematic areas:

- **Water:** Exploring the symbolic, ritual, and ecological significance of water within African traditions, with particular attention to ancestral presence, memory, and continuity.
- **Heritage:** Examining the role of ancestral memory in shaping collective identity and how water functions as a conduit linking past, present, and future.



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- **Culture:** Investigating water-based practices as central to the sustenance and transformation of African cultural heritage, while challenging colonial interpretations of religion and spirituality.
- **Leadership and Institutions:** Reflecting on Afrocentric leadership practices and their implications for public institutions and governance.
- **Pedagogy:** Contributing to decolonial approaches in teaching and learning within African educational contexts.

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## **Enquiries**

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