Duke Chapel has one of the largest congregations and is home to one of the most active religious life programs on a U.S. campus. More than 30 campus ministers and chaplains provide leadership to love than 1,500 Duke students

DURHAM, N.C. – The Reverend Dr. Luke A. Powery of Princeton Theological Seminary will become the new dean of Duke Chapel, Duke University President Richard Brodhead announced last week.

Powery, 38, will start his new position on Sept. 1. He succeeds the Rev. Dr. Samuel Wells, who returned to England this summer to become the vicar of St. Martin-in-the-Fields in London.

Powery, who will be the first Black dean of Duke Chapel, has taught at Princeton Theological Seminary since 2006, where he is the Perry and Georgia Engle assistant professor of homiletics. He has taught courses and lectured at numerous other educational institutions and has been a frequent guest preacher and singer at various congregations and conferences.

“Luke Powery is a compelling preacher whose gifts of mind and heart will be evident to all who hear him,” Brodhead said. “He will give a powerful presence to the life of the spirit and will connect with every part of our community – students, faculty, staff, and our Durham neighbors.”

Brodhead said he was grateful to the search committee, which was chaired by Richard Lischer, the James T. and Alice Mead Cleland professor of preaching at the Divinity School.

The 14-member committee, which included faculty, a student, staff and congregation members, conducted an international search and selected Powery from a field of more than 130 applicants.

“Our committee worked in close-knit partnership for six months, reviewing many wonderful candidates,” Lischer said. “We came together very quickly around Luke Powery for the exciting gifts he brings to ministry and the richness of his promise for the future of Duke Chapel.”

As dean, Powery will oversee the operation of the chapel, which has a staff of about 25 and several student interns. The dean of Duke Chapel plays an integral role in connecting the academic and spiritual lives of the university’s students, faculty and staff. In addition to overseeing planned worship, counseling and preaching, the dean serves as a focal point for ethical and theological discussions on campus covering a wide range of topical issues.

“Dr. Powery is a compelling and creative preacher, as well as an intentional and compassionate pastor,” said Ashley Crowder Stanley, a university trustee, Methodist minister and member of the search committee.

“He impressed me with his commitment to engaging both the Duke and Durham communities in dialogue, noting, ‘Before I ever speak, I have to listen.’ Dr. Powery brings prophetic and dynamic leadership to Duke Chapel and we look forward to welcoming him.”

Powery received his Bachelor of Arts degree from Stanford University, his M.Div. from Princeton Theological Seminary and his Th.D. from Emmanuel College, University of Toronto.

He is the author of “Spirit Speech: Lament and Celebration in Preaching” (Abingdon Press, 2009). His most recent book, “Dem Dry Bones: Preaching, Death, and Hope,” on the spirituals as a resource for preaching, was published by Fortress Press earlier this month.

Powery’s teaching and research interests include the Holy Spirit and preaching; lament, loss and Christian hope; African American preaching and worship; and worship’s relationship to social justice. Seeking to spread the Gospel through both the spoken word and song, he has recorded on albums representing musical forms as diverse as Christian hip hop and children’s nursery rhymes.

Raised in the Holiness-Pentecostal tradition, Powery was ordained by the Progressive National Baptist Convention and has served in an ecumenical capacity in religious settings around the world.

Prior to entering the academy, he was associate pastor of the International Protestant Church of Zurich, an interdenominational and intercultural congregation in Switzerland. He also has served as campus minister at Westminster Choir College of Rider University in Princeton, N.J.

Duke University is historically affiliated with the United Methodist Church, but services at Duke Chapel are ecumenical.

“I am deeply grateful, overjoyed, humbled, and honored to be entering the living tradition of Duke Chapel’s ministry in word and deed to its various constituencies,” Powery said. “I look forward to continue, as the Chapel motto says, ‘keeping the heart of the University listening to the heart of God,’ which beats with love for the world.”

Powery served as a member of the executive lectionary team for The African American Lectionary, an online ecumenical project funded by the Lilly Endowment, Inc.

He is the recipient of numerous scholastic fellowships and awards from organizations such as

the Wabash Center for Teaching and Learning in Theology and Religion and the Fund for Theological Education. In 2008, The African American Pulpit named him as one of “20 to Watch,” an honor given to 20 outstanding Black ministers under the age of 40 who are helping to shape the future direction of the church.

He is married to Gail Powery, with whom he has a daughter, Moriah, and a son, Zachary.

Duke Chapel has one of the largest congregations and is home to one of the most active religious life programs on a U.S. campus. More than 30 campus ministers and chaplains provide leadership to love than 1,500 Duke students involved in religious life on campus.

The Gothic-style Duke Chapel seats about 1,600 people and features 77 stained-glass windows, three pipe organs and a 50-bell carillon. It was designed by Julian Abele, one of America’s first prominent African American architects.