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Esposing no single theological or denominational viewpoint, *In Trust* publishes news and other articles relevant to the work of board members, administrators, faculty, and other stakeholders of theological schools. Our mission: **To strengthen theological schools by connecting their leaders to essential resources for mission vitality.**

In Trust (ISSN 1065-9307) is published quarterly by the Association of Boards in Theological Education, d/b/a In Trust Center for Theological Schools, 100 West 10th Street, Suite 703, Wilmington, Delaware 19801-6614. Subscriptions are \$48 per year. Periodical postage paid at Wilmington, DE, and additional mailing offices.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to *In Trust*, 100 West 10th Street, Suite 703, Wilmington, DE 19801-6614.

I wrote this column several weeks ago — before the murder of George Floyd, before the anguish, anger, pain, and outrage exploded across the world, before the horror of the injustice that persists in our country, in our world, and among us all became, rightly, the most talked-about subject of the day. And I am grateful to my vigilant and exemplary Black colleagues who work tirelessly for equity and justice, and who shine a light and teach me to use my mind, my heart, and my voice to do better — to work for a more inclusive and equitable world.

OVER THE PAST several months, the In Trust Center, like most organizations and educational institutions, has completely changed the way it does business. Not only are we working from home, but we have had to reimagine our programs and outreach. We have wholeheartedly embraced the technology that connects us to our members, constituents, and peers. We have held many webinars and have hosted facilitated videoconferences with theological school presidents, board chairs, and other leaders, all of whom are grappling with what their new normal is and what it will be in the coming months and years.

In most of these conversations, instead of despair, I have heard hope, gratitude, praise, support, and caring. For faculty who have pivoted at a moment's notice to teaching all their classes online. For students whose education has been disrupted, who have been displaced, and who have been forced to adapt suddenly to new educational experiences. For staff who are working remotely and finding new ways to get their jobs done from their living rooms, while still meeting deadlines and goals.

Of course, I have also heard a great deal of concern — about enrollment, fundraising, mission fulfillment, and financial stress. I have heard leaders muse that their crystal balls are broken, that the path forward is so very uncertain.

I have also heard positivity. Many reflect on the familiar idea that a "good crisis" ought not be wasted — that this stressful


time, ironically, offers an opportunity to rethink norms and practices and possibilities for collaboration, change, and renewal.

From numerous conversations with leaders, it seems clear to me that there are at least three critical acts of leadership every leader should be tending to right now:

1. Careful communication. During periods of disruption and uncertainty, communities look to their leaders for direction and clarity. Consistent, direct, and honest communication is valued and needed.

2. Strategic thinking and scenario planning. Never has there been a more important time to engage in scenario planning, not simply for reopening campuses, but for long-term strategies. *The Wall Street Journal*, *Inside Higher Education*, and organizations such as Praxis have published numerous articles about planning — planning with many unknowns, leading without a map, and focusing on what lies ahead, not what came before.

3. Listening to different perspectives, welcoming new voices, and engaging new partners. Are you making room for different perspectives in your institution — and in the boardroom in particular? Legal counsel, insurance experts, development and marketing experts, and entrepreneurial visionaries are a few of the partners all of us should invite in to test ideas and explore solutions while mitigating risk. And remember, it is often the disruptors, dissenters, and challengers who inspire us to ask and consider the hard questions.

I pray for your leadership and for your communities during this uncertain time. Unprecedented times call for unprecedented leadership. May God provide you with the wisdom to lead, the grace to serve, and the vision to fulfill your mission. 

Amy L. Kardash
President

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NEW RESOURCES

You asked, we listened

DURING THE PAST few months, the In Trust Center staff has been hosting conversations with you, our members, to learn about your school's unique challenges and to provide a meeting place for you to discuss with colleagues the issues you are confronting.

These conversations also highlighted many ways in which we can assist you as you think strategically about your school's future, particularly as you think "beyond the pandemic." As we listened to the challenges many of you are facing, we began assembling a trove of resources.

A crisis can be a powerful accelerant for needed change — and this change can often benefit from the perspectives of outside voices and new resources. To help with this, our Resource Consulting team has developed a new set of resources on governance, board responsibilities, educational models, strategic planning, and more. Some topics addressed include:

- How to engage a consultant when you don't know where to start.
- How to write monthly board updates.
- How to start an alumni program.
- How to start thinking about mergers and partnerships.

We have also recently hosted a four-part COVID-19 webinar series on subjects such as strategic thinking, collaboration, communications, and fundraising strategies. For more information, or to watch recorded webinars, go to www.intrust.org/Webinars/COVID19-Webinar-Series.

For information on guides and resources, email us at resources@intrust.org.

L E T T E R S

To the editor:

I was delighted to read David Sumner's article on ministry and disability. In 37 years of practicing pediatric and adult neurology, as well as being medical director for a statewide program for children with special healthcare needs, I encountered quite a few parents and children who had been essentially rejected by their churches. One mother was told that her son was an "object of prayer" but he was too disruptive to be in worship or be anywhere else in the church.

The church must find a way to be church for everyone. I have seen changes over the years, but more changes and understanding are needed.

I hope the article is widely read. I am calling it to the attention of our board and faculty.

J. William Holmes, M.D., M.Div.
Member, Board of Trustees
Baptist Seminary of Kentucky
Georgetown, Kentucky

Publisher's note: For other *In Trust* articles on ministry and disability, see "Disability on Campus: The Board's Role in Assessment and Planning" (New Year 2009) at bit.ly/ITDisabilityOnCampus, and "Our Condition: Americans with Disabilities Act, 25 Years Later" (October 1, 2015) at bit.ly/ITADA25YearsLater.

To the editor:

Thank you for the article "Preparing for Ministry to People with Disabilities" which was published in the spring 2020 issue. It's a great article, but I must take issue with the phrase "ministry to people with disabilities" on the cover of the magazine.

It seems like a small thing, but language is important. When we say ministry *to* people with disabilities, we imply that people with disabilities are passive recipients of our work. On the other hand, when we say ministry *with* or ministry *alongside* people with disabilities, we imply that we are co-laborers together in God's work.

Two quotations in the article carefully use "ministry *with*" language, but both the text on the cover and article headline jump out at me as needing a rewrite.

For several years in the early 2010s, when I worked at Friendship Ministries (a ministry with adults who have intellectual disabilities), there were two volunteers who traveled on our behalf, working to convince seminary deans that teaching students how to do disability ministry well should be an important part of a seminary's curriculum. Maybe the *In Trust* article will do even more to help the idea catch on.

LaVonne Carlson
Grand Rapids, Michigan

Longtime publisher of *In Trust* magazine stepping down at the end of 2020

Jay Blossom, the In Trust Center's vice president for communication and the driving force behind 15 years of *In Trust* magazine, has decided the time is right to move on to a new chapter in life. He will be transitioning from his role at the end of 2020.

Jay will leave behind an impressive legacy.

By the end of December 2020, he will have published 64 issues of the magazine — hundreds of articles imagined, assigned, written, rewritten, and edited, countless interviews with theological school leaders, thousands of images chosen, and pages proofed. Under Jay's leadership, *In Trust* has won 30 "Best of the Christian Press" awards from the Associated Church Press.

During his tenure, Jay assembled a talented and dedicated team of writers from across the United States and Canada. In 2007 he launched the popular annual Writer Workshop, taking In Trust Center staff members and magazine writers to the campuses of theological schools in different states and provinces. The Writer Workshop has offered *In Trust* writers and staff a unique inside look at theological schools and has provided the opportunity for writers to talk to leaders and students and to see what is happening on the ground in our member schools.

As a member of the In Trust Center leadership team, Jay visited dozens of schools and represented the In Trust Center at numerous events, including seven ATS Biennial Meetings — always intent on understanding issues from all stakeholders' points of view.

With his exhaustive knowledge and deep understanding of theological education and church and religious history in general, Jay has served as a valuable thought partner and advocate for theological educators.



In this past year, Jay has been overseeing the redevelopment of *In Trust* magazine, which will be unveiled in the autumn 2020 issue.

Through his work at the In Trust Center and his care and concern for theological education, he has made a profound contribution to the field and has made countless friends along the way.

The In Trust Center is grateful for Jay's contributions to and passion for our mission. He will be missed. 

To send a personal communication to Jay, write to jblossom@intrust.org.

Search for a new In Trust Center vice president for communication has officially started

The In Trust Center for Theological Schools is excited to partner with the Dingman Company in the search for its next vice president for communication. The vice president creates, oversees, and executes the communication plan for the Center by delivering insights, resources, and strategies to stakeholders, stewarding brand management, curating multiple media platforms, and cultivating external relationships.

A graduate degree in journalism or communications is preferred. An earned degree with significant media experience is necessary. Candidates should have 10 years of experience in publishing and editing; demonstrated success in storytelling, research, and audience engagement within a variety of communications media; exceptional oral and written skills; and an appreciation for the breadth of Christian theological education in North America.

The opportunity profile is available at <https://dingman.com/non-profit-searches/>.

For more information, contact David Dingman at david@dingman.com.



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If your institution is not listed, please email us at membership@intrust.org or call us at 302-654-7770.



Theological schools and the challenges of the times

How do we { *move beyond the pandemic?*
work toward a more just and equitable world?

FROM MARCH TO JUNE, the In Trust Center hosted more than 20 webinars and Zoom conversations for administrators and board members of theological schools in the United States and Canada, both freestanding and embedded.

The webinars included a four-part series: Planning beyond COVID-19; collaboration with other schools; fundraising during COVID-19; and communicating with care during COVID-19. We also hosted a two-part webinar series on diversity, equity, and inclusion led by Dr. Doris García Rivera. All are available at www.intrust.org/webinars.

The Zoom meetings were facilitated, loosely structured conversations with different groups of leaders.

The first, which we titled “Governance in Times of Crisis,” provided a meeting place and discussion forum for board members and chief executives. The next was for board chairs — and we held several conversations over a few weeks, during which time many of the participants built a kind of online community with their peers. We also held conversations for presiding officers, with separate meetings for leaders of Canadian schools, leaders of theological schools embedded in colleges or universities, and new presidents who are in their first years of service.

What did these leaders choose to discuss? Here are some of the topics:

- **Agility.** The need to be able to respond quickly to environmental changes.
- **Board engagement.** Understanding the board’s role. Board culture. The importance of focusing on mission fulfillment during and beyond the pandemic.
- **Challenges and opportunities for embedded schools.** How university-wide mandates, budget cuts, and policy decisions affect embedded schools and how university affiliation offers opportunities and access to services.
- **Community care during the crisis.** Care for faculty, staff, donors, students, and alumni.
- **Crisis management.** Deciding which initiatives to drop or add, either temporarily or permanently.
- **Encouragement and hope.** Providing appropriate spiritual and psychological resources for the seminary community during emergencies.
- **Enrollment and recruitment.** Virtual recruitment strategies, enrollment forecasting, and the impact of the pandemic on summer 2020, fall 2020, and 2021 enrollment.
- **Event planning and management.** Making decisions about, planning for, and implementing commencement, board meetings, summer events, and fall classes.
- **Executive leadership.** Planning and implementing executive transitions during a crisis.
- **Field education, internships, and CPE.** What these programs will look like, how students will access them, and how restrictions may affect them.
- **Finances.** Government programs and funds. Salary reduction, staff retention, layoffs, financial forecasting, financial stress. The need to rightsize.
- **Fundraising.** Donor outreach, engagement, and care. Capital campaign implications. The impact of long-term declines in denominational support.
- **Online learning after the crisis.** Pedagogical quality and the difference between emergency response remote teaching and true online learning. (Participants pointed out that there are many resources on this topic on website of the Wabash Center for Teaching and Learning.)
- **Partnerships.** Explorations of collaboration, shared services, and creative resource-sharing among theological schools.
- **Strategic planning.** Engaging the board, focusing on mission fulfillment, and planning for an uncertain future.
- **Thought leadership.** Seminaries as resources for the church, community, and society as a whole on the subjects of ageism, anti-racism, medical ethics, and more.
- **Worship resources.** Opportunities for theological schools to serve the church by providing theological and liturgical resources.

The articles in the following pages address a few of these issues. We trust that you will find them helpful as you work to fulfill your mission in the coming months.



Beyond COVID-19: Relaunch and reconnect

Restarting your school in the new normal requires a “stagile” mindset

By John Spurling

SERIOUS DISRUPTION is not a new challenge for board members and senior administrators of theological schools. Shrinking enrollment, massive changes in the cultural landscape, emerging technologies, and painfully tight budgets have been part of the rhythm of theological higher education for many years. But the global pandemic has brought disruption to a new level — one so unsettling that theological school leaders must dig deep and pray to find the strength and wisdom to lead through it.

If the pandemic is like past disasters and world calamities, at some point most of us will find ourselves returning to something that resembles normal, even if it is a new kind of normal. Eventually, the isolation and social distancing will give way to face-to-face classes and the busy campuses we are used to. While we wait for that day to arrive, there is a monumental question every leader will need to answer: Will you be ready to embrace the reality of life beyond COVID-19?

For those who work in higher education, every day of the past several months has been consumed with decisions about remote learning platforms, completing the spring semester, alternative graduation plans, and processing the impact of the new financial and economic landscape. But now, especially as the fall semester is just around the corner, it is also the time to embrace an intensive period of planning — long-range strategic planning, financial planning, and even spiritual planning — for what the new normal will look like, not only in the next six months, but in the next two years and beyond.

One thing is clear: How you lead people out of this crisis will be as important, or even more important, than how you lead them during the crisis.

While that statement may seem ridiculous given current realities, the fact remains: the challenges you will face in the aftermath of the pandemic will far exceed those that currently consume your days and keep you up at night. Like with a weather-related disaster, the greatest test of leadership occurs on the other side of the storm, when the calamity has subsided, when attention shifts to assessing the damage and determining the best road to recovery.

The five specific action steps below may help you formulate strategic thinking and wise decision making plans as you navigate your school through the uncertainties of what lies ahead.

Action step 1: Review your relaunch process

- As lockdown restrictions are lifted, mapping out a long-term plan of operation for the school is an essential step. While we all want to get back to the business of education, there may be a tendency to want to relaunch everything simultaneously, but wisdom and caution must prevail; it will not be possible to return to the pre-virus world, and the steps taken must be incremental. Shift your thinking into a different gear, and make a coordinated effort to scrutinize every aspect of everything you do. Identify the most challenging issues you are facing at your school, and basing your assessment on hard data, allocate resources to the right places sensibly, strategically, and promptly.

- Connect with other academic leaders to discuss pressing concerns. While no one has a solution to the myriad problems theological school leaders (and leaders of all colleges and universities) are currently facing, innovative ideas are being implemented with great creativity in schools, not only in North America, but all over the world.
- Adopt a “stagile” mindset — this made-up word captures the essential challenge of balancing the need for both *stability* and *agility* during this time of intense disruption. Right now, theological schools are being forced to operate in ways that have never even been considered before. And, after the immediate crisis of the pandemic subsides, it will be essential for leaders to leverage the same creative agility that has been on display during

the pandemic. Returning to a business-as-usual mindset will not be productive within the realm of our new normal. Exponentially increase your commitment to innovative thinking and adaptive planning — one that cultivates a cultural mindset of “stagility.”

- Consider a multiphased approach for reopening your school, similar to the reopening plans currently being carried out on a national and international level. Keep in mind that plans need to be flexible so they can be adapted to changing conditions. Of course, as you reopen one area, it will naturally affect another and for this reason, it is essential to be strategic and forward-thinking. Critical throughout the relaunch process will be the need for clear communication to all involved, careful assessment, and considerable patience.

Action step 2: Regroup and assess the damage

In the early days and weeks after the onset of COVID-19, most leaders were understandably consumed with “working the problem” — addressing the most pressing matters first. Yet now that the intensity of the challenges appears to be subsiding, it is time to inventory the damage that has occurred, or maybe is still occurring, in the lives of the people you work with.

For seminary leaders, approaching your colleagues with emotional intelligence and large doses of empathy is critical right now, just as it was for those coming to the aid of survivors after 9/11. Invest the time to connect with your team. Be intentional about carving out times to gather and regroup, even as you face the mountain of other challenges still looming on the horizon.

When meeting with colleagues, approach them with a tender ear and be ready to relate to each of them on a personal level. Remember, everyone is facing their own challenges and losses as they go through this ordeal. These are not things you can know about unless you give people a chance to share their experiences. Provide them with updates on your reopening plans and allow them to ask questions. It is important to make sure your team knows their emotional and physical wellness and safety are high priorities for you — that you are there for them.

As you continue to work toward reassembling the various facets of seminary life, remember that honest and clear communication is essential. Make yourself available by phone, email or videoconference — whatever seems to work best for them.

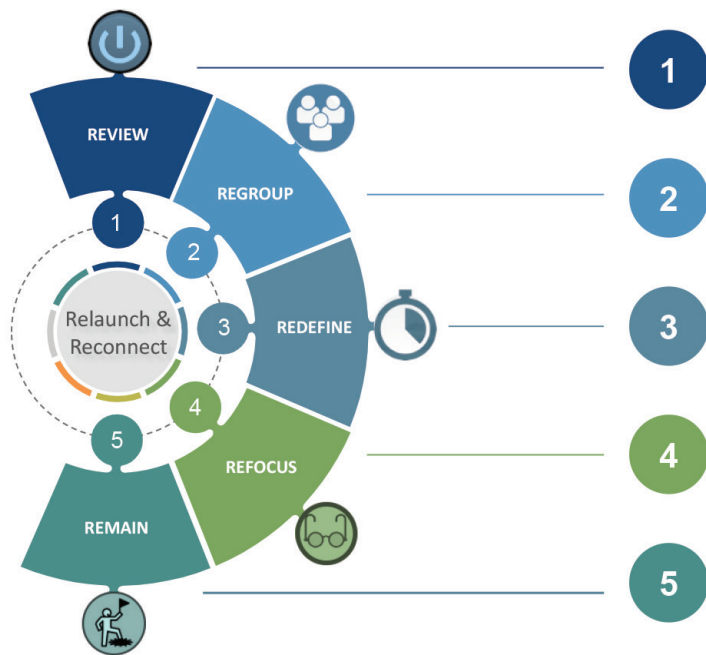
Action step 3: Redefine your short-term reality

There is a great deal of conversation and speculation right now about what the post-COVID-19 world will look like. From government offices to the business sector to the professional sports world to schools, everyone is working fervently to regroup and look ahead, even if just for the short term. As a theological school leader, it is important to define new short-term realities and discuss important questions such as what will your new normal look like. Will you be prepared to adjust the operations of your institution to comply with restrictions in your city, state, or province, and flexible enough to accommodate likely changes in the rules? Seminary leaders should be assessing the changing landscape and how it will affect “doing life together” when school starts.

In anticipating a world beyond COVID-19, it is advisable to review every aspect of campus life. That means assessing the unique set of circumstances of every department and determining what needs to be implemented before opening the doors this fall. Below is a list of questions and concerns that will stimulate your thinking on reopening school right:

- If the social distancing guidelines that are in place now are still recommended when school starts this September, how will it impact classes and student life on campus?
- Should you limit enrollment for the fall semester?
- Should you limit the number of students allowed in a classroom at one time?
- Should you reduce class sizes by adding additional sections?
- How are you going to handle administrative staff? Can some of them continue to work from home? Or perhaps alternate the days on which they come into work to maintain a supportive presence for students but still adhere to social distancing guidelines?
- Do you have plans in place to maximize safety and minimize potential exposure? These may include testing, sanitizing, contact tracing and point-of-care protocols such as temperature readings before people enter buildings. Have you considered infrared camera technology checkpoints to monitor elevated temperature readings?
- Which added responsibilities and protocols relating to testing and screening will accompany the start of the new school year, and who will be responsible for implementing or overseeing them? Will you assign staff to these duties or hire outside help?





GRAPHIC: JOHN SPURLING

- 1 **REVIEW**
Review your relaunch process.
- 2 **REGROUP**
Regroup and assess the damage.
- 3 **REDEFINE**
Redefine your short-term reality.
- 4 **REFOCUS**
Refocus on the future after reflecting on the past.
- 5 **REMAIN**
Remain personally resilient.

- Do you have COVID-19 testing kits? How many will you need? Which lab will you use?
- Who will you test (staff, faculty, and students), and how often?
- Will you allow faculty and staff with pre-existing medical conditions or who are over 65 to teach or work on campus?
- How will you handle guests and visitors to the campus? Will you screen them before allowing entry?
- Do you have a plan for cleaning and disinfecting the school? How often? When and where? Will you need to hire additional custodial support?

Action step 4: Refocus on the future after reflecting on the past

Many leaders can identify the next mountain that needs to be climbed. But in times of crisis, it is easy to become so immersed in the task at hand that you overlook the need to pause, reflect and learn from the past, and apply those lessons both to the present and to the future. Reflective thinking is one of the most valuable qualities of effective leadership, and it is especially valuable now when so many big decisions are on the table — decisions like when and how to reopen a school.

Essentially, the challenge facing every theological school leader is to find the balance between what

was working before the pandemic and what needs to change in the new normal.

Use this time not only to reflect on the past, but also to think about how this unique experience offers opportunities to do things differently. For example, because millions of people have been working from home, all in different ways and from different starting points, learning to use technology effectively has become a steep challenge but an essential task. Teleconferencing and the emerging field of telepres-

ence are commonly used in the business world, but some theological schools have been slow to leverage their power. Use the pandemic to open the creative floodgates and explore how you can expand your reach to more people and change more lives for the better.

Action step 5: Remain personally resilient

Throughout history, times of intense crisis have provided unique opportunities for leaders to step up and inspire a generation — to withstand despair, to face fears, and to overcome the common enemy. This moment in time offers theological school leaders this same opportunity. People are looking for leaders with strength of character, who are fueled by personal conviction, who inspire confidence, and remind us all that this pandemic is not bigger than the God we serve. As you work to manage the pandemic, both in your own life and in your school, be sure to consult your personal dashboard to see what the gauges are telling you about your spiritual, emotional, physical, mental, and relational energy levels. The question is not, for example, whether you are tired — because undoubtedly you are tired. The question is how is your fatigue affecting your ability to provide quality leadership, make good decisions, and stay healthy.

To be personally engaged, you need to be emotionally connected. That requires awareness of your overall well-being. However, you should recognize that the best judge of your well-being, especially during

a prolonged crisis, may not be you. A genuine desire to lead and serve those in need during this challenging time may cloud your self-awareness. Seeking wise counsel and relying on insight from those close to you will provide a counterbalance for the common tendency to do too much. Having people who will listen lovingly and hold you accountable will be immensely valuable as you lead the transition from reclusion to reconnection.

By demonstrating resilience as a leader, you show that you can rebound from setbacks and remain strong when the storms of life are wreaking havoc all around. Now, more than ever, you need to embrace shared leadership and ongoing collaboration — all with a calm demeanor and a willingness to invite others to participate in the process.

Leading any organization or academic institution through a crisis can be very difficult. Don't allow the challenges to consume you. Remember that we are merely stewards of the theological schools we serve. Ultimately, we all need to check our pride at the door and allow God to lead and guide through unprecedented days. Bend with the changing winds that shape the road ahead as you resolve to stand your ground through this crisis and find God's greater good. You are making a tremendous difference, and many lives are being profoundly impacted because you remain resilient! **IT**

John Spurling is the executive director for strategic leadership at Southeastern University in Lakeland, Florida. He was previously president of The King's University and associate senior pastor at Gateway Church in Southlake, Texas. To share comments or to receive a copy of the longer white paper on which this article was based, email the author at jhsurling@seu.edu.

Should we go on?

Amid the pandemic, some seminary leaders may need to ask the hardest question of all

By Michael Cooper-White



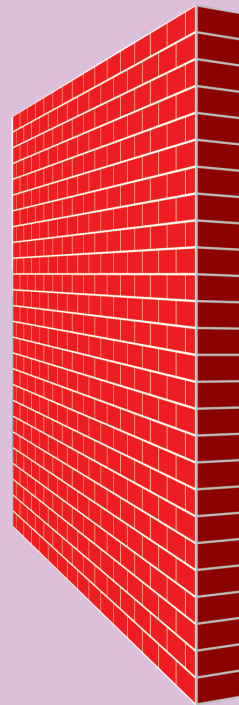
BEFORE THE ONSLAUGHT of the COVID-19 pandemic, leaders at educational institutions were often challenged with hard questions, but now — with hemorrhaging enrollments, plunging donor income, and reduced endowment values — boards and administrators may be asking a much harder question: “Can we go on?”

In a recent post in *Inside Higher Ed*, former [Reed College](#) president John Kroger predicts that the pandemic may lead to the closure of 750 to 1,000 colleges (bit.ly/pandemic-predictions). Many seminaries, with their small enrollments and weak balance sheets, are likely to be among the institutions that will be reckoning with dramatic changes. Some may have to consider a merger or a consolidation. Some may have to close.

I have been down that road. After 15 years as president at Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg, I began questioning the long-term sustainability of the school. After the president at Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia suggested once again trying to unite our two schools (it had been tried several times previously, but never successfully), I encouraged the board to give it strong consideration. Within 18 months, the two schools consolidated to form [United Lutheran Seminary \(ULS\)](#). As has been widely publicized, the new entity navigated through heavy turbulence in its early years, but now things are looking up.

Based on my experience with the transformative (and disruptive) process that led to the creation of ULS, as well as personal observation and studying how other schools have made transformative decisions, I offer the following counsel to boards, presidents, and other key decision-makers.

Steel yourselves to face reality. Leaders of seminaries tend to be optimistic and hope-filled, as we should be, but refusal to acknowledge consistent year-by-year declines in enrollment, in income, and in the condition of our facilities will prove



disastrous. Failure to respond in a timely way precludes creative realignments — new arrangements into which a school can bring both assets and influence.

First ask, “Can we go on as we are?” Then ask, “But should we?” With its relatively strong balance sheet, Gettysburg could have continued on its own for perhaps another decade. But as I grappled with the enrollment decline and other factors, I repeatedly encouraged the board to ask, “Is this our best stewardship?” Too many schools press on, year after year, until endowments are below water, physical plants are crumbling, and major indebtedness has been incurred. Would it not be better to bring a school to a gentle final landing, one that allows all aboard to survive and move on to a new future?

Expect transformative change to be messy and unpopular. Trustees and administrators who lead institutions through closures or consolidations must be prepared for criticism and even anger from many quarters. Employees, graduates, and other key stakeholders will feel deep disappointment and a sense of loss if their school closes. While there may be less grief over a formal partnership because the school’s identity lives on, one can still expect sharp critique, blaming, and a barrage of “if only we had done this or that.”


For dramatic change to occur, shared governance must be rebalanced. In normal times, the board and faculty work closely as partners in guiding a school, but that is not likely if closure or reconfiguration are on the table. Faculty tend to be deeply committed to their students, their scholarship, and their institutions, but financial forecasting is not their job. They are unlike-

ly to look at the numbers and say, “This is unsustainable.”

If faculty and staff are unable to back the decision to close or consolidate, they will naturally feel the action was done *to* them, not *with* them. Trustees and presidents must bear the burden of knowing that the lives of valued colleagues and friends will be severely disrupted by a move like this. In the consolidation process of which I was a part, despite early and ongoing efforts to provide support to employees of both schools, some long-term faculty and staff members felt betrayed and some were harmed.

Consultants can help guide the process. Any institutional closure or reconfiguration requires assistance from attorneys, accreditors, governmental regulators, and other professionals, but often overlooked is the need for coaching in communication, group dynamics, and “human factors.” While navigating our process, I benefited greatly from a workshop on consolidations sponsored by the In Trust Center, and from studying the previous attempts to combine our school with our sister seminary. Looking back, the turmoil that arose in the first year of governing United Lutheran Seminary may have been partially due to not recognizing the dramatically different styles in the way the two predecessor schools’ boards operated.

When the going is roughest, fall back on the bedrock of faith. When I taught congregational studies, I introduced students to a typical parish lifecycle curve. I pointed out that in their future ministries, some of them might be called to help close a dying congregation. Human institutions are born, they live and carry out their missions, and at some point, they conclude their ministries.

Those who lead institutions through great transformations or into their final chapters may require special charisms. Wallowing in self-doubt and personal “if onlys” may stand in the way of getting the job done. Confidence in St. Paul’s promise that “nothing in all creation can separate us from the love of God” is especially important for those called to confront the hardest question of all: “Should we go on?” 

Michael Cooper-White is president emeritus of the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg (now a part of United Lutheran Seminary), director of Lutheran formation at Union Seminary in New York, and president of the Gettysburg Group, a consulting collective that specializes in coaching and communication. He is also a member of The Registry, which assists schools in transition.



COVID-related legal issues for theological schools

A Q&A with lawyer James Robertson, board chair at Hartford Seminary

By Amy L. Kardash

AT MOST THEOLOGICAL SCHOOLS, the governing board is the principal fiduciary of the institution. And in times of crisis, the singular role of the governing board is to ensure that the seminary is doing everything possible for the success of the institution and the fulfillment of its mission. Now it is time for boards to be engaged, involved, and aware — and focusing on board-level issues only.

Now is also the time for boards to focus on a particularly critical subject: legal issues.

In Trust recently interviewed **James K. Robertson Jr.**, chair of the board of trustees at **Hartford Seminary**, about potential legal actions resulting from the pandemic and how to mitigate risks that may be associated with it. Robertson is a partner at a Connecticut law firm, Carmody Torrance Sandak & Hennessey LLP, and also an ordained minister in the United Church of Christ.



Which legal issues should seminary boards be focusing on right now?

These are turbulent times, with many legal challenges facing seminary boards. For example, in response to the COVID crisis, institutional leaders need to take reasonable steps to protect the health and safety of their students, faculty, and staff. They may also need to rightsize the faculty and staff to accommodate declining revenues. They may face challenges from both students and faculty about the need to reduce in-person teaching. They may have to decide whether bequests and gifts can be used for urgent needs beyond the donors’ original expectations. They may even face existential quandaries about necessary structural changes.



What are some of the potential legal actions and associated risks administrators need to be aware of?

From a liability perspective,

there are two major categories of risks: those involving negligence claims and those involving breach of contract claims.

Negligence claims vary somewhat from state to state but generally involve the breach of a legal duty that proximately caused some damage. Claims may arise in several contexts — for example, failure to provide a safe environment for employees and students once they return to school; failure to provide a safe and secure remote learning platform during closures; inadvertent disclosure of personal health information when notifying others of potential exposure; failure to provide adequate notice of health hazards; and inadvertent disclosure of personal information via remote learning “hacks.”

No one expects a theological school to guarantee that students and faculty will remain free from injury or illness. The school’s duty is rather to provide *reasonable care* under the circumstances. Furthermore, it is usually the claimant’s burden to prove the sickness or injury was caused by the seminary’s conduct and not some other source.

Contract claims can be brought by faculty, staff, students, or donors. Students may claim the education promised to them was not delivered. Staff and faculty may claim job expectations during and after the pandemic exceed what they originally agreed to. Donors, accreditors, and other educational regulating agencies may claim that by moving classes online so quickly, the school was excessive in its response to the pandemic. However, schools may be able to defend their actions by claiming that original contracts are overridden by what is ironically called an “act of God” or “force majeure.”



What are some of the ways that risk can be mitigated?

While a lot of risk mitigation is common sense, it requires leadership, discipline and good record keeping. Here are some ideas:

- 1. Take reasonable steps to reduce disease transmission on campus**
 - Create or revise health safety protocols.
 - Promote social distancing and good hygiene.
 - Inquire about and encourage disclosures of illness and exposure for contact tracing purposes. Be careful to reveal only the minimum information when notifying others of potential exposure.
 - Develop a plan for extended absenteeism to avoid sick students feeling compelled to attend classes. Provide and facilitate alternative teaching and learning options where feasible.
 - Discourage large group gatherings and close common areas where groups may gather.
 - Provide remote learning opportunities when appropriate.
 - Consider having students who plan to attend in-person classes sign a liability waiver, although such waivers are unenforceable in many states.
- 2. Take reasonable steps to ensure the appropriate use of remote programming**
 - Use organization-approved technology programs.
 - Restrict access to approved users only.
 - Develop written policies and guidelines on the safe use of remote platforms and share them with all users.
 - Discourage the online sharing of identifiable personal information.
 - Avoid the use of public Wi-Fi and use secure password-protected networks only.
 - Work with IT professionals to implement data security and other technical protections.
- 3. Review contracts and insurance policies**
 - Review all contracts with employees, students, vendors, etc.
 - Assess the availability and applicability of business interruption insurance and other policies. The pandemic has caused insurance mayhem — institutions all over the country are claiming business interruption coverage, but many insurance companies are declining this coverage. Consult your institution's brokers and lawyers.

4. Closely monitor government orders and official health guidelines

- As everything related to the pandemic is evolving rapidly; be sure to stay up to date on federal, state, and local requirements and guidance, including social distancing and other measures that prevent the spread of the virus.

5. Keep good records

- Do not let good record keeping protocols fall by the wayside as you are busy navigating these turbulent times. Claims are successfully defended when there are good records.



What advice can you offer to seminary executive leadership during this time?

Don't be overwhelmed. Acting too quickly or too unilaterally can lead to mistakes. This is a time for leaders to be thoughtful.

Feel free to brainstorm. Also, don't keep everything all to yourself. Executive leadership can be a lonely role. Communicate with your board and other trusted colleagues. These relationships are important.



And what advice do you have for seminary board members?

There probably are not many seminary board members in your neighborhood. Seminaries are unique and sometimes

fragile institutions, and boards may feel like they are governing from a silo, without the support of others who are facing similar circumstances. You should try to make connections and stay in conversation with others who are facing similar challenges. ATS and the In Trust Center offer this kind of network, and I have found the Center's idea-sharing opportunities to be valuable.

Finally, times of crisis provide a reminder of the importance of the board-building cycle. We are fortunate that Hartford's board includes individuals with diverse talents and areas of expertise. This kind of diversity should be cultivated on your own board so that you can lean on it in challenging times. **IT**

Amy L. Kardash is president of the In Trust Center for Theological Schools.



Zoom board meetings: Something is missing

By William Harrison



IN APRIL, I met on Zoom with the board of governors of my school, **Lutheran Theological Seminary** in Saskatoon. I'm thankful for the opportunities videoconferencing technology affords. It is definitely better than a telephone conference call and miles ahead of nothing at all. I'm not entirely sure we had a *real meeting*, though — and I'm concerned about that.

The shortcomings of videoconferences are considerable. Personal cues are limited. The visual context is overly rich, making it hard to stay focused. Being on camera all the time is awkward. The extended screen time is physically tiring. I hope that by using Zoom as often as I do these days, it will help me adapt to some of these drawbacks, perhaps by adjusting how I read people and how I present myself in the medium.

Yet what bothers me most about Zoom is one limitation that cannot be adapted to or resolved: it does not lend itself to casual hangout time with my colleagues, such as taking breaks and eating meals together. And efforts to do so virtually — for example, sharing a "quarantini" during a Zoom happy hour — do not come close to replicating what to me is an essential component of interacting with my colleagues.

Watercooler conversations and coffee breaks are not just friendly and relaxing interludes. They are not simply group formation. Instead, they are the times when ideas percolate. They provide the space to form consensus and raise unsettling questions. When important issues are on the line, we need that time to talk to each other.

That April Zoom board meeting was a significant one for our seminary. We are in the process of imagining a new relationship with our Saskatoon Theological Union partners, and we are also moving into a common building with the two other Union schools. We are seeing the culmination of a game-changing curriculum project. We are looking forward to an accreditation visit in the fall (COVID permitting). All of this is being tied together in a new strategic plan, one that we committed to in that Zoom meeting. These changes are connected to deep questions about our Lutheran identity — questions already raised by shrinking numbers in our supporting de-

nomination and highlighted by our growing ecumenical vision.

And it is here that Zoom failed us. Working on the strategic plan, reviewing flooring samples for renovations in our new space, viewing the curriculum website — all of these were easy to do on Zoom, maybe easier than they would have been in a physical room. "Share screen" is our friend!

But we also needed to discuss what our denominational identity means, what our contribution to an ecumenical context might be, and the ecclesiological significance of the shifting world — the kinds of challenges seminary leaders would ordinarily kick around over beers deep into the night.

These kinds of discussions are not the sort of things that happen easily according to rules of order, even in a committee of the whole. We need space, freedom, and hours together. These are the issues that put the lie to the phrase "quality time," demonstrating that a few especially intense moments on screen are no substitute for long hours in person — especially when those hours involve pizza, laughter, and the arguing of outrageous theses.

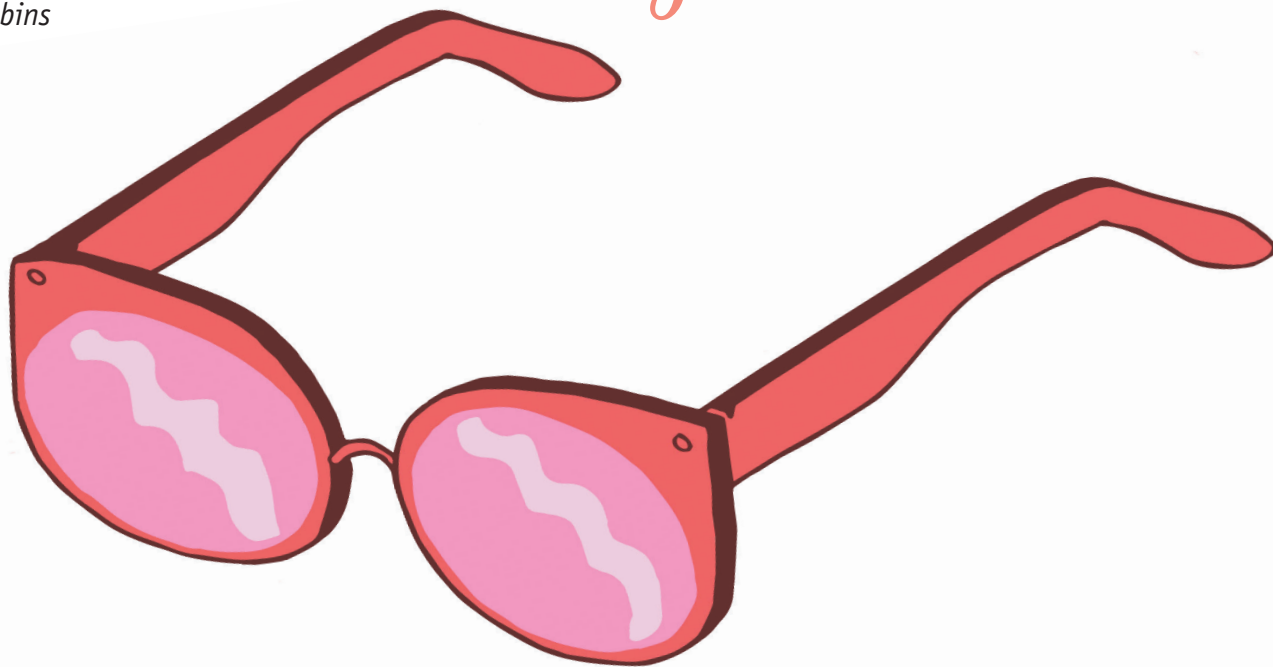
Zoom doesn't give us that time or space. And I don't think it's likely to do so in the foreseeable future. Certainly my experience thus far of "Zoom parties" doesn't encourage me to be optimistic that they are about to replace the in-person sort. I don't think my board — which happens to be a friendly, dedicated, thoughtful, and supportive group — is going to work through our school's identity issues for real until we are in one place for a good, long time. Let it come soon! **IT**

The Rev. Dr. William Harrison is president of Lutheran Theological Seminary in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan.



The mission of the seminary in an age of *nostalgia*

By Anna M. Robbins



EVERYTHING WAS BETTER BEFORE. That sentiment sets the tone of the Netflix series “13 Reasons Why,” a fictional account of the relationships of a high school student before she commits suicide. Hearing those words hit me hard — almost like I had been kicked in the stomach. The show deals with hard-hitting issues like belonging, sexual assault, and bullying, but what struck me most was that these young people feel they exist in a bleak world of malaise and where nostalgia for the good old day is always lurking. I am afraid this kind of melancholy resonates with an entire generation, maybe even an entire culture.

Young people are *never* supposed to think that everything was better before! They are supposed to think everything before was rubbish, that their parents messed up, and that they will and can do better! They are supposed to make a difference, change things, make the world a better place!

When real life comes knocking — which of course it will, and sooner than kids think — they’ll get a big surprise. But for now, let them believe that nothing is impossible.

If we have convinced them, even before they are out of the gate, that they cannot improve the broken world, then maybe the world is truly broken. Maybe everything really was better before, when kids used to think that they could change the world for the better.

I decided to explore this idea with a group of intel-

ligent young Christians at a leading Canadian university. I asked them: “Do you think things were better before?” They looked at me blankly.

I goaded them to respond.

“Sure, of course,” one of them shrugged after a long oppressive pause.

“Why do you think that?”

“Well they were, weren’t they? I mean all we are told is how much better it was. The planet wasn’t dying, it was easier to live as a person of faith, easier to find a job, a house, make a living. Yeah, everything *was* better before.”

Have we hammered this idea into the minds of our young people so relentlessly that they’ve come to believe it? And if we have, how unfortunate to do that to a culture that is already chock-full of melancholy



“The enemy is something or someone we do not know, and nothing is more unknown than the future. If we make the future our enemy, then our identity must be found in the past.”

and malaise. Malaise is, after all, a general feeling of discomfort, uneasiness, or tiredness. It’s the feeling, more than the thought, that things just aren’t right. It’s the loss of a sense of meaning, of purpose, of hope.

There is nothing new about this. People have been feeling this way for a long time. We saw it in the French philosophers of postmodernism, in movies like “American Beauty” which reflected the ferment of its time, 21 years ago. But now this feeling seems much more pervasive and raw. It’s as if our culture is taunting us for not recognizing we were creating monsters, for not reading the cultural prophecies that warned us of the coming malaise. We are not only suffering from compassion fatigue, but full-blown *Weltschmerz*, or world-weariness. We are tired of it all, weary before we even get out of bed.

The Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor, professor emeritus at McGill University, is perhaps the first scholar to give this cultural mood a diagnosis and a language. In his now-famous book, *A Secular Age* (2007), he discusses the cultural malaise of immanence — that is, what happens when a sense of transcendence or the divine is lost, when all is reduced to the material and God is conjured merely to do the things we cannot do for ourselves. We dutifully say our prayers but hear no response. And when God fails to come through on the big things we cannot control, like tsunamis and pandemics, we decide God is useless and dispense with him altogether. A failure of theodicy leads us to throw God into the compost heap.

In such a naturalistic world, reducible to a closed box of cause and effect, we are left with a crisis of meaning. Without meaning, we lose a sense of purpose. We lose hope. Left with a broad cultural malaise, everything is meh.

Some scholars and activists have pointed out the limits of human progress. And while we certainly understand that not every generation can make the world a better place, by destroying the myth of progress, we may have killed hope too.

Gone with the wind

Our present condition is more than a pinhole in the balloon of human advancement. It is now a cultural campaign of nostalgia that trades on selected memories and turns our institutions backward. It speaks of

past greatness and present exile. It beckons us to find solace and root our identity in what went before — but this is a sepia, not a technicolor dream.

In his 1932 book *The Concept of the Political*, Carl Schmitt, political philosopher of the Nazis, tells us we gain political identity by identifying our enemy. The enemy is always the other, the outsider. The enemy is the stranger climbing over the wall or the foreigner with a virus. The enemy is something or someone we do not know, and nothing is more unknown and unknowable than the future.

If we make the future our enemy, then our identity must be found in the past. We long for the good old days when things were solid and right. And mostly we think they are good because we remember them. They are familiar. They are comfortable. They are a solace.

At least we think so.

Various theologies remind us that we can only go forward if we know where we’ve been. The Ghanaian concept of *sankofa* is one example of this — bringing the wisdom of the past to bear on the present in order to face the future. And it is important to look back so we can understand how we got to where we are now.

But who gets to tell the story of where we’ve been? Such a reflective exercise is useful only if we are being honest about the past and inclusive in how we interpret it. When we take a balanced approach to looking at what went before, we can look back and learn not to repeat past mistakes, let alone set up camp there under the guise of it being safer and therefore better.

So, for example, if we look back to the heyday of “Gone with the Wind” (1939), we need to recognize that whether we appreciate that classic film depends largely on our own place in the world today.

Were those the good old days? Were things better before? Maybe if you are white and privileged. Definitely not if you are Black, Jewish, Hispanic, or a single mother. A breadth of view, which tells a range of stories, challenges our sense of longing for the past.

An unsatisfied desire, more desirable than any other satisfaction

Yet nostalgia continues to define our culture and nostalgia feeds on this malaise.

Nostalgia combines the Greek *nostos*, which means



“We seek endlessly to replicate past joy. The feelings these memories conjure up are gold, our current reality drab by comparison.”

home, or homecoming, with *algos*, which means pain. It is a pain associated with returning home. In his 2012 book, *Heidegger and the Thinking of Place*, Australian philosopher Jeff Malpas of the University of Tasmania describes nostalgia as a mood of homesickness — an impossible desire to return home that raises questions about where human beings actually belong in the world.

And in a 2014 *Psychology Today* article titled “The Meaning of Nostalgia,” psychologist Neel Burton calls nostalgia a “sentimentality for the past” that “combines the sadness of loss with the joy or satisfaction that the loss is not complete, nor can ever be.” Nostalgia comes with a painful longing that the world is too beautiful, too fragile, too fleeting. Nostalgia is a flock of geese at dawn, a full moon shining on an open field, childhood memories of Christmas, and of school days that were always sunny.

Yet hard as we try, we can never get these moments back, and the longing is never fulfilled. We end up confusing the desire of the thing with the thing itself. We seek endlessly to replicate past joy. The feelings these memories conjure up are gold, our current reality drab by comparison.

In consumer culture, we are fed a constant diet of nostalgia because our longing is endless — or, as St. Augustine famously writes, we are restless until we find our rest in God. And in a culture bereft of God, what is there to fulfill the void of desire other than with material things? Advertisers not only prey on this human reality, they bank on it. They know, as C.S. Lewis writes in *Surprised by Joy* (1955), that nostalgia is “an unsatisfied desire which is itself more desirable than any other satisfaction.”

For Lewis, the longing is ultimately a desire for God, but we continue to try to satisfy that longing with other things. The longing becomes a desire that is always out of reach as we chase love, holidays, promotions, thrills, or victories — on the battlefield, in the boardroom, or at Black Friday sales. We are always disappointed, but still continue to seek.

A sunny, airbrushed place

The belief that there are no new ideas is itself a turn back to nostalgia. Movies and songs — popular culture itself — seem to be on repeat. But this is not acciden-

tal. It’s not that there are no new ideas, rather it’s that there is an assured return on investment in old ideas. Nostalgia sells. It is a sure thing in the market because marketers have come to know how the human psyche works. And the human psyche longs inconsolably for it knows not what, as C.S. Lewis reminds us in *A Pilgrim’s Regress* (1933).

Movie franchises, for example, repeat on a 20-year cycle, generating new nostalgic feelings for young people, and drawing on their parents’ peak spending power. When we see an old movie or hear an old song, we have a pang of sentimentality and longing. Rather than allow the moment to point us beyond the moment, we seek to replicate it, over and over. And it never fulfills. Marketers count on it.

The TV show “Mad Men” (2007–2015), set in the 1960s, reflects not only how advertising trades on nostalgia, but the fraud that it ultimately represents. The lead character, Don Draper, says in a speech:

Nostalgia — it’s delicate, but potent. Teddy told me that, in Greek, nostalgia literally means “the pain from an old wound.” It’s a twinge in your heart far more powerful than memory alone. This device isn’t a spaceship, it’s a time machine. It goes backward, and forward... it takes us to a place where we ache to go again. It’s not called a wheel, it’s called a carousel. It lets us travel the way a child travels — around and around, and back home again, to a place where we know we are loved.

When Draper shows pictures of an idealized past, his evocative words bring his audience to tears. Yet the pictures mask the reality of broken lives and relationships. We yearn for the past, but although it looks like a sunny place, that is because all the pain and bruises have been airbrushed out.

The big metal door

If we are truly honest, we must confess that even if some things were better before, certainly not everything was better before.

For C.S. Lewis, the natural human longing for nostalgia does not inherently lean backward. Rather, it leans forward into joy. And in Lewis’s fully orbited eschatological theology, future joy is a significant and legitimate longing, a search for God. In contrast, back-



**“Will we seek to recreate our past?
Or will we take the risk and lean in with abandon into an unknown future?”**

ward-facing nostalgia prevents us from recognizing the perils and opportunities of our current situation and inhibits the sorts of actions that will help us to lean into the future.

We may long for the past, but we have to live in the future. We can respond adequately to present challenges and opportunities only when we recognize our nostalgic past no longer exists, if ever it did. Nor can we conjure it up simply by longing for it. The longing we have is ultimately a longing for our home with God, and it encourages us to lean into the future with confidence.

Why is all of this important? And, why does it matter for seminaries?

In this global pandemic, we have a new nostalgic pressure. We have the immediate sense, the deep conviction, that surely everything was better before. Who among us would not wave a wand to magically undo these recent months of havoc, this hovering cloud of mortality? We were nostalgic before all of this disruption and death, but now we pray that soon things will be back to normal so we can get back to the way things used to be.

Seminary leaders are likely feeling this sentiment too. Let’s just put our heads down, survive this earthquake, and get on with our previous strategic plans after having a bumpy ride of it for a year or two.

But the future will not be like the past. We cannot know exactly what it will be like. It is risky and uncertain. It is unknown. The churches will not be the same. Ministry will not be the same. And perhaps we will brace against this future, regard it as our enemy, and avoid it at all cost.

Yet this disruption affords us unique opportunities. Will we give in to the pressures of nostalgia that have so formed our culture to this point? Will we seek to recreate our past? Or will we take the risk and lean in with abandon into an unknown future?

There is an apocryphal story of a Cold War commander who offered captured prisoners a choice: the firing squad, or whatever lay behind a big metal door. Time after time, prisoners chose the firing squad. Years later, a colleague asked the commander what was behind the metal door. “Freedom,” he said, “but I never knew a single captive to choose it. They would rather face the firing squad than risk the unknown.”

For some seminaries, the temptation may be to follow their supporting churches into a position of exile, to identify the enemy and circle the wagons. The enemy is the unknown future, so they seek the past, when everything was better. They hunker. They focus on survival. They do what they know worked before.

The alternative, of course, is to choose the big metal door — the door of risk and hope.

Right now, we are faced with an opportunity to rewrite our stories. We can hone and refocus our missions. We can tear down silos and break destructive patterns. At the very least, we — together with our boards and senior administrators — can ask hard questions about why our institutions exist, whether they need to exist, and what our existence ought to look like going forward. And those of us with resources should be asking how to share those resources with those who are most in need, for example, the Global South where the church is most vibrant and most in need of the resources we have.

And yet, as human beings, we are inherently nostalgic. Like the disciples straining their eyes upward after Jesus disappeared from view, we are being asked, “Why are you staring up into the sky?” We need to be reminded, as they did, that we must get on with what we have been told to do. Like them, we must allow the Holy Spirit to make our forward mission clear.

The temptation to turn backward is always there. Indeed, the first disciples not only stared at the sky, but they returned to their boats. They forgot their calling. And as they longed for the presence of Jesus, they almost missed the coming of the Paraclete. The God of old was about to do something new. As Jeremiah says, “For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope.”

Let it not be said of our seminaries that everything was better before. **IT**

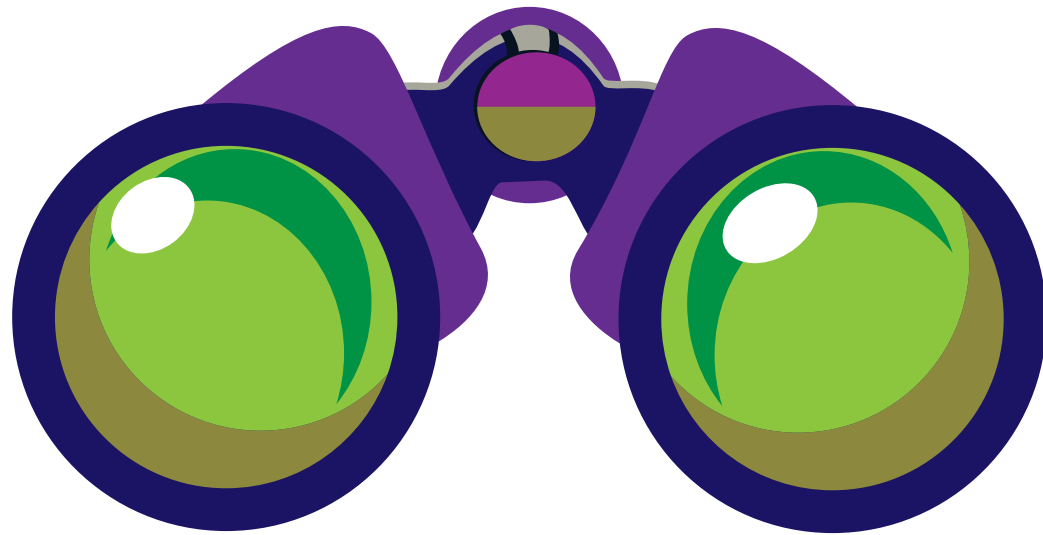
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PARADIGM SHIFT 2020

A theological perspective on changing times

By James Gimbel



IN THE SHORT RUN, the COVID-19 pandemic has been devastating. It has caused unspeakable loss, harrowing illness, early death. It has plunged countless people around the world into depression, joblessness, and poverty. It has challenged even the best of our coping skills. People are afraid.

And those things have happened just in the first half of 2020. What will the pandemic's long-term impact be?

Now more than ever, the world needs the hope that the Gospel offers. The Gospel message is rooted in God's love for humanity and care for the needs of his creation — both our physical and our spiritual needs. In particular, the Gospel provides all of creation with the opportunity to know God the Father, who provides for and protects the creation he has made, and through the Holy Spirit to know Jesus Christ, the life and light of the world.

The pandemic has made many of us feel as if we are prisoners of the disease. Yet when we feel we are *prisoners without hope*, the prophet Zechariah reminds us to return to God, our stronghold, who can make us *prisoners of hope*, locked into his divine love and protected in his providential care. There, even in the worst of times, hope can flourish.

Abrupt shifts

While people around the globe are coping with the many challenges the pandemic is causing — while,

with our faces covered, we alternate hand-washing and hand-wringing — the paradigm has shifted. In the new paradigm, churches are still carrying on ministry, but they are doing so in a different way. Humanity's needs, God's Word, and the Gospel remain the same, but pastors and church leaders are adapting. In particular, the pandemic is encouraging us, rather forcefully, to embrace the creative use of technology that the Holy Spirit uses to extend the Gospel message.

Seminary education has changed too. Over the course of two short weeks this spring, most seminaries moved their courses online. For faculty who have never before taught online, and for students who have never previously taken courses online, the learning curve has been steep. After shifting abruptly this spring, our educational models may never return to their previous patterns. The paradigm has shifted.

Similarly, boards and committees are being forced to make major decisions in a matter of weeks, and sometimes days — decisions that would ordinarily take months or years. It is almost as if God is giving us a rare opportunity to reconsider and change our systems and decision-making processes.

"And who better to shape the new realities than our students? They have been formed and prepared for ministry . . . and are now entering their most productive years."

Once the dust has settled, we will need to decide which of these new systems to keep and which to let go — which are essential to our strategic priorities and which were useful for a limited time.

By shifting from the old paradigm, we are given the space to develop new things.

Not as those who have no hope

Because the crisis of the pandemic has stripped away most everything that is not essential, we are having to reckon with our core values. For many of us, that means focusing on Christ, the church, and our own particular expressions of faith.

For me, this is a hopeful time. If the past looked bleak, this is a clarion call to make life in the new paradigm a better place. Reconstruction will require hopeful and committed input from everyone.

And who better to shape the new realities than our students? They have been formed and prepared for ministry in our institutions and are now entering their most productive years. I am beginning to see my new role as stepping out of the way, empowering students and graduates to lead and guide while still offering my help and support when it's needed and requested.

I am convinced that right now, during this crisis, God is redefining and reshaping ministry.

Churches and pastors are adapting their strategies to ensure that the gospel message of salvation, hope, and healing is being shared — a message particularly appropriate for such a time as this.

We are not stepping into the future alone, but rather as the hands and feet of the triune God: the Father, who has promised us (in the words of Jeremiah) "hope and a future." Jesus Christ, the personification of a paradigm shift, who promised never to leave us or to forsake us. The Holy Spirit, who empowers us for the mission that points the world toward Christ, the resurrection and the life, who can do immeasurably more than we ask or imagine.

There may be many reasons for feeling as if hope is muted or diminished, but God has called us to step out of the boat and into an uncertain future, one that is safe only because of the certain grip of his graceful care.

When all is stripped away

What is the role of seminary leaders during this

time? Perhaps more important than offering answers is the chance to raise questions and focus on the truly important components of leading a seminary. One way to approach this to follow a four-part process:

- *Reflect* on what is most important
- *Release* what is unnecessary
- *Retain* what is most needful
- *Retool* for what is essential in our mission and ministry


When problems are stripped to their core, when they are exposed, named, and assessed, we rely on God and the communion of saints to move forward as people of hope. If our core values still define us (and there is no better opportunity than now to ask that difficult question), then our core values can move us forward with hope to achieve what lies ahead.

This is a great time to consider what was, what currently is, and what will be. We must not think of ourselves as victims of circumstance but as proactive entrepreneurs.

What will the future ministry look like for churches and seminaries? Only God knows for certain, but most likely, each will retain the most important components of the past, and courageously move toward a hopeful future where, during a time of restoration and rebuilding, Christian leaders convey love, peace, and joy.

Ezra 3 tells the story of the rededication of the temple after the Babylonian exile. Most people celebrated with thanksgiving to God for restoring their fortunes. Yet, Ezra tells us there was also weeping — tears of sorrow from those who missed the glory of the old temple, and tears of joy from those who were hopeful in the new house of the Lord.

The weeping was mingled and indistinguishable, but it did not matter, because life went on.

In these days, there may be weeping from the old guard and from the young leaders alike. We can honor those who mourn the loss. But we are not a people without hope. New paradigms are under construction. God has raised up our students and our schools for such a time as this. 

James Gimbel, Ph.D., is president of Concordia Lutheran Seminary in Edmonton, Alberta.



At *Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary*, Kristin Lanier, Cole Knowlton, Ronnie Kurtz, and Mariela Martinez hit the books while looking over the Kansas City skyline.

Accelerate

Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and Spurgeon College

Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City, Missouri, and its embedded undergraduate division, **Spurgeon College**, created the Accelerate program to get students into ministry “as quickly as possible without clipping the substance of their education.”

Those are the words of Samuel Bierig, dean of Spurgeon College and assistant professor of Christian studies. While seminary leaders had been thinking about new and innovative educational models before creating the Accelerate program, which began accepting students in 2014, funding from the Kern Family Foundation enabled them to develop the program more rapidly.

“Our leadership team is constantly trying to innovate and think through how we can adapt to changing higher educational paradigms,” says Bierig. “This fits very easily with those plans. We would have likely made the step minus Kern, but Kern made it possible — gave a steroid shot for sure and a laser focus.”

The program coordinator of Accelerate, Taylor DiRoberto, adds that taking part in the program’s cohort structure, while valuable, is not an academic requirement for students. “It’s not something that’s going to show up on the transcript,” he says. “It’s program dinners with ministry experts and writers’ workshops — bagels and coffee and talking through papers.”

Preparing Accelerate students “socially and spiritually” for the tasks of pastoral ministry is an overriding concern for Bierig and DiRoberto, who note they are in the process of strengthening the program’s internship experiences.

Current seminarian Adrian Owen sensed his call to pastoral ministry as a junior in high school. He is currently an administrative assistant at Liberty Baptist Church in Kansas City as he works toward completing his studies in 2022.

Accelerated pastoral degree programs help young people prepare for ministry in less time, with less debt, and with vocational training along the way

By Gregg Brekke

FOR THE PAST NINE YEARS, the Kern Family Foundation has been providing grants to theological schools in the United States to help them establish accelerated pastoral degree programs (APDPs), in which young people can earn both a bachelor’s and a master’s degree in only five years instead of six to seven. By recruiting students who are interested in full-time ministry at the time when they are applying to undergraduate programs, or shortly thereafter, APDPs provide a way to enter ministry at a younger age, earn a professional degree, and get hands-on vocational experience, at a lower cost, before they turn 25.

The Foundation’s grants supporting five-year APDPs have ranged from a few hundred thousand dollars to several million, with grant periods ranging from three to five years. What started with a pilot Foundation grant to fund an accelerated ministry program to **Trinity Evangelical Divinity School** in 2011 has now grown to 37 schools. Interested in how these programs have been working out, *In Trust* recently talked with some of the schools that have established an APDP with grants from Kern.

While communication and collaboration among the schools receiving these grants are strongly encouraged, the programs do not look alike. “There’s a lot of diversity in the models, and that’s good,” says Fred Oaks, program director of the Faith, Work, and Economics program at the Kern Family Foundation, the division that oversees APDPs. The Foundation has already granted or committed \$20 million toward funding these programs. Jay Mason, senior program director at the Kern Family Foundation, says the long-term sustainability of the programs “depends on new approaches and new models that are meeting market need.”

Oaks and Mason say research from the first nine years has identified five essential elements that lead to a successful accelerated pastoral ministry program:

1. A passionate program director who dedicates at least half of his or her time specifically to the accelerated program’s curriculum.
2. Institutional ownership and academic coordination.
3. A cohort experience for students.
4. Spiritual and pastoral formation of students through mentoring and seminary-church partnerships.
5. Marketing and awareness-raising efforts that include recruiting within and outside the institution.

Six of the Kern-funded accelerated programs are highlighted below. (At the time we conducted these interviews — after the onset of COVID-19 restrictions — all of the programs had switched to online learning.)

In Trust last looked at the Kern Family Foundation’s accelerated ministry programs in “Fast-Forward Future,” which appeared in the Autumn 2016 issue. To read the article, go to www.intrust.org/Magazine/Issues/Autumn-2016/Fast-forward-future.

Owen says that he thought four years of traditional undergraduate education, followed by three years of seminary, was the normal course of study for ministry preparation. He feared that if he took part in an accelerated program, he might be missing out on some of the education and experience he needed for pastoral ministry. But now his mind is changed. “I feel like I’m gaining, not losing, by taking part in Accelerate,” he says. He adds that many of his friends who followed traditional 4 + 3 programs now wish that they had enrolled in accelerated ministry programs instead.

Vocāre

Azusa Pacific University

The Vocāre accelerated studies program at **Azusa Pacific University (APU)** began accepting students in 2017. APU offers two accelerated programs: a five-year B.A./M.A. in pastoral studies and six-year B.A./M.Div. program. There are 62 students currently enrolled, including 29 students of color. According to Jennifer Graffius, director of mentoring and formation, the goal is to increase enrollment to 150 students.

“I feel like we’ve got some of the best students in our school,” says Graffius. Building on 18 units of biblical studies required of each student, the program emphasizes four main components — academics, mentoring, vocational discernment, and community.

Compared to more traditional degree programs, Graffius explains that the Vocāre program offers students more rather than less; it’s an enhanced, not an abbreviated program.

“We’ve really worked to give [students] access to the leadership in our department and make them see that this is a really special opportunity for them,” says Graffius. Community building among students is encouraged, as are personal relationships with the dean, assistant dean, and professors.

Opportunities for students to get practical experience, such as engaging in leadership roles, are manifold. For example, some students work as resident directors, and others coordinate formation activities on campus or are already serving in ministry roles in churches.

“I really would love to see healthier pastors being launched into ministry,” she says. “We’re really working on that. We’re walking alongside them so that they are pastors who have a sense of community and are not so isolated.”

Community formation continued even while students were finishing the spring term at home because of COVID-19 restrictions. They took part in online mentoring groups and getting together with peers for socializing and online “watch parties.”

Summer Bakos, who graduated from the Vocāre program in 2019, is now director of middle school ministries at Flipside Church in Rancho Cucamonga, California. She attributes her successful experience in seminary to the quality of her undergraduate studies at Azusa Pacific and the contributions of her



Vocāre students from Azusa Pacific University on an educational trip to Jerusalem.

mentors. “The quality of the professors and someone coming alongside me, an adult who had worked in ministry, made all the difference,” she says. “It’s a scary thing going into seminary. I was nervous about it but quickly learned I was well equipped for it.”

B.A.+M.A. program in preaching and pastoral ministry

Biola University & Talbot School of Theology

Like many accelerated programs, the one at **Biola University**, a Christian liberal arts college in La Mirada, California, enables students to complete two degrees — bachelor’s and master’s — in five years. All undergraduates at Biola take at least 30 credit hours of biblical studies as part of their courses of study. Doug Huffman, associate dean of biblical and theological studies, says it is this foundation that enables the school to prepare undergraduate students for an accelerated theological studies program and integrate them into masters-level courses at Biola’s **Talbot School of Theology**.

After completing the requirements of the program during the sophomore and junior years, students begin taking seminary classes during their senior year. To qualify for this, they must apply to the graduate program at the end of their junior year. At the end of their senior year, they can earn a B.A. and then be on their way to a one-year M.A. in preaching and pastoral ministry.

In 2015, the program admitted its first six students, all of whom were sophomores. By the end of spring 2020, 24 students were in the program, says Matthew Williams, director of the B.A.+M.A. program and professor of New Testament.

He says relationships and mentoring set their program apart, especially as it seeks to form younger students for pastoral ministry. They hold an annual retreat for program students, on-campus events, and one-on-one mentoring with faculty. “I’ll grab students and say, ‘Hey, let’s go get a coffee. Let’s get a smoothie and just talk through life right now,’” he says. “I’ve only been in this program since December and I feel like I know probably two-thirds of the students really well already. The gifts the Kern Foundation has given us have made this possible.”

Current student A.J. Boncore gives Biola’s program high praise. He is only two courses away from completing his Talbot studies and is already serving on the pastoral staff at Saddleback Church in Yorba Linda, California.

“I feel like my seminary experience came more from Biola [the undergraduate program] than it did from Talbot, even though technically Talbot is the seminary,” he says. “By the time I got to Talbot, I felt like I was so prepared for whatever they had had to give me that I was just enjoying the fruits of my labor.”

Saying he would not change a thing about his experience at Biola, Boncore believes the connective aspect of the program was integral to his success. “I think more [important]



Talbot student A.J. Boncore (left) greeting members outside Saddleback Church in Yorba Linda, California, where he is already on the ministry staff.

than what I learned are the relationships that I formed. The wisdom that I gained from these professors — they opened up their lives to [students] in the Bible department.”

“The things we’re able to do because of Kern grant money are amazing,” says Huffman. “For the Kern Family Foundation, a million dollars probably isn’t that much, but the influence that money has had at Biola is, as the commercial would say, priceless. The 24 students we now have are the highest-quality students.”

Barnabas Pastoral Program

Grand Canyon University

The Barnabas Pastoral Program at **Grand Canyon University (GCU)** is open to students who enter before they are 21. Peter Anderson, assistant dean in the university’s College of Theology, says that before 2018, most of the seminary applicants were adults. With urging from the Kern Family Foundation, he explored how the seminary could bring the “vibrant sense of community” present in the undergraduate population of their school into the accelerated program. “It was super exciting to see this opportunity where we could get students into a traditional seminary space,” he says. “We could keep them around campus, and we could make it cost-effective, which is the heartbeat of what we’re doing here at the university.”

The program also advances one of the objectives of the university’s mission — providing quality spiritual leadership to communities in the Phoenix region.

Jason Hiles, dean and professor of theology at the seminary, is especially pleased with the internships, mentoring opportunities, and supervised ministry opportunities available to students in the program. He adds that it is important for local congregations to make an investment in students, to partner with them much in the same way Barnabas (the GCU program’s namesake) accompanied Paul in the New Testament. “We hope over the five years a number of students will learn to do ministry in this context and will learn to love Phoenix.”

To help the program continue to thrive, especially because of the large number of recruits to the program each year, Anderson says it will be necessary to increase placement opportunities for students to get practical experience. He is encouraged that area churches have expressed “incredible enthusiasm” about deepening their relationships with Grand Canyon students, especially in the areas of mentoring and internships. Referring to the Phoenix churches that are on board with the program, he says: “We think the opportunity to help prepare some of these young men and women going into ministry is going to be very healthy in terms of the long-term spiritual health of the Phoenix community.”

Hunt Scholars Program

College at Southeastern and Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary

The Hunt Scholars Program is a joint effort of the **College at Southeastern** and **Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary**, affiliated institutions in Wake Forest, North Carolina. The program prepares students for pastoral ministry through a five-year combined undergraduate degree in pastoral ministry and a master of divinity degree, and is now graduating its sixth class.

Scott Pace, dean of the College at Southeastern and associate professor of pastoral ministry and preaching, says students are engaged in an immersive program where intentional mentoring, special on-campus learning opportunities, cohorts, and ministry experiences are keys to success.

He says one benefit of accelerated programs is they eliminate the duplication of the material students are taught first in undergraduate school and then again in seminary. Even though it is an accelerated program, Pace says no compromises have been made on the quality of undergraduate or graduate education. “We didn’t compromise any of the core of our bachelor of arts,” he says. “Then on the master’s level, we’ve streamlined it and consolidated it so we’re not duplicating.”

While COVID-19 restrictions have introduced uncertainties — recruiting students for the upcoming year, moving all internships and mentoring online — Pace is confident that in the coming years, the program will continue to prepare pastors who are “theologically trained, practically prepared, and mobilized for mission.”

“The primary goal is that God would multiply their influence,” he says of his hopes for current and future program graduates. “That was Christ’s model for discipleship and mentorship. We’re putting students out there who are well qualified and well equipped to absorb whatever ministry challenges they face and to be faithful in those.”

Kairos

Sioux Falls Seminary

The Kairos program at Sioux Falls Seminary follows a competency-based educational model that combines classroom learning and contextual education. Like other competency-

based programs, Kairos focuses on helping students achieve mastery of a set of competencies that they will need in their vocations. The seminary recently received regional accreditation for its new undergraduate program.

“April was the first month with our first group of [undergraduate] students,” says Nathan Helling, the seminary’s chief financial officer and vice president of operations. “We have a group of students who are working their way through the application process, but the plan is to have another 10 to 15 students in this cohort that will be progressing through an undergraduate degree in Christian thought and practice.”

With an emphasis on contextual learning — that is, education that takes place in the settings where students already live, work, and worship — most coursework is accomplished remotely, although some intensive courses are on-site in Sioux Falls.

Helling expects that there will always be students who want to pursue more traditional theological educational opportunities, but those are not the students whom Kairos is trying to recruit.

“We tend to attract people who are developers by nature,” he says. “We’ve found that our five-year students often have already said no to the traditional experience for whatever reason. Many of them did a gap year on a mission field.”

According to Helling, Kairos students are already pursuing service opportunities, engaging in self-directed studies, and seeking mentors involved in ministry. Self-motivated learners especially thrive in the program. “They thrive in our system because we are building education around their life and ministry,” he says. In other words, the seminary provides additional mentoring and support for students who already want to chart their own paths.

A viable model for the long run

Kern’s Jay Mason says he certainly expects that by the time the Foundation closes its doors in 2035, that the grant-receiving institutions, and theological education as a whole, will have embraced accelerated programming as a “vibrant and sustainable model that plays a long-term role” in educating young people for pastoral ministry.

The Foundation’s goal is not to undermine traditional models, says Fred Oaks. “We have a deep respect for the riches of a scholarship in theological education.” Rather, the Foundation hopes accelerated ministry programs will serve as one way to get theological scholarship and training into the next generation of pastoral leaders. **■**

Gregg Brekke is a freelance photographer and journalist who is executive director of the Associated Church Press.

The Kern Family Foundation was created by Robert and Patricia Kern to “invest in the rising generation of Americans, equipping them to become tomorrow’s leaders and innovators.” This includes a special focus on current and future pastors who are considered instrumental in shaping the country’s leaders and national morals.

For information about the Kern accelerated pastoral degree grant program, contact Fred Oaks at foaks@kffdn.org or (262) 201-2023. The Kern Family Foundation has supported the publication of this article.



Carol E. Lytch at the pulpit of the historic Santee Chapel at Lancaster Theological Seminary.

What have you learned?

Exit interviews with four seminary leaders

By Heidi Schlumpf

DATA FROM THE Association of Theological Schools (ATS) reveals that in 1971, women represented 10 percent of students, 3 percent of faculty, and 12 percent of full-time administrators at seminaries in the United States and Canada. Today, those numbers are far different — 35 percent of students, 25 percent of faculty, and 39 percent of full-time administrators are women.

And as the number of women in positions of leadership at theological schools has increased, so too, of course, has the number of women leaders retiring or stepping down from those positions. In the past year, several presidents and deans announced they would be leaving. Interested in what these presiding officers learned while in their positions of leadership, we reached out to four of them, asking in particular how gender issues affected their roles, both earlier in their careers and more recently. (All of these departures were planned long before the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020.)

Each of these four chief executives was the first woman to hold the top leadership post at her school. Each says she's seen progress for women in the field of theological education, though the progress has of course been uneven. In Catholic and evangelical Protestant seminaries, fewer women occupy top positions of leadership (sometimes because seminary executives are often ordained clergy) and the Catholic church does not ordain women, nor do some evangelical Protestant denominations.

The women interviewed for this article agreed on several things. All say the ATS Women in Leadership project has been instrumental in their careers. Most of them report they had few female mentors themselves, and that they have been intentional about serving as mentors to the new generation of women leaders. And all express the need for more leadership roles to be open to people of color. Having benefitted from seminaries' progress on the issue of gender, they now want to expand the circle for others who may have been excluded from positions of leadership.

A cloud of witnesses made it possible

The Rev. Dr. Carol E. Lytch
Lancaster Theological Seminary, President, 2011–2020

Carol Lytch, a Presbyterian minister, says that being elected as a church elder while she was still a teenager initiated her into church leadership. Nevertheless, she still considers herself something of a reluctant leader. "Little girls don't say they want to be a theologian or seminary president when they grow up," she laughs. "But then you look back and realize that with all the leadership opportunities you've had, you're equipped to do this job that you never set out to do."

When Lytch became president of **Lancaster Theological Seminary** in 2011, she was the first woman in the seminary's top leadership spot — a fact that sometimes surprises those who know about the egalitarian spirit of the United Church of Christ (UCC), the denomination with which the seminary is affiliated. (Lytch has ordained standing in both the Presbyterian Church (USA) and the UCC.)

But female board chairs and deans at the seminary had paved the way, as had a previous generation of women administrators in theological education to whom Lytch feels indebted. "They were the trailblazers," she says. "I look to them as the 'cloud of witnesses' who made it possible for me to be a president."

After Lytch's nine-year presidency, women now make up a majority of students at Lancaster, and the leadership team, which includes three vice presidents, is all female.

Her latest priority is bringing more people of color into leadership. "I feel like women's leadership is pretty secure, but what I care about now is multicultural diversity in all sectors of the seminary — student body, trustees, staff and professors."

But she also admits there is "still a way to go" for all top seminary positions to be equally accessible to women. "It's very uneven across North American seminaries" says Lytch, who was assistant executive director of ATS at the time she was named president of Lancaster.

Lytch speaks fondly of a group of six women seminary presidents and senior administrators who have met regularly for more than 10 years, noting that they demonstrate varied leadership styles, some more outspoken, others "gentler" but still powerful. "I'm definitely a collaborative leader," she adds. "I'm not a solo star, but someone who works with people to advance the mission together."

After her June 2020 retirement, Lytch plans to shift her leadership skills from the seminary to the community, although

she has already volunteered to lead an accreditation visit to another seminary this fall.

She believes the next generation of seminary leaders must be willing to continually learn new skills — essential skills like strategic leadership and fundraising — to serve their institutions and move them forward. "Leading a seminary requires a person who really loves and is fascinated by institutions — and someone who would rather work corporately than individually — and someone who loves the church and wants to do something big."

But, as Lytch has realized, leadership also is a divine calling. "It certainly has to be sustained by God. To flourish in that role, you have to have a prayer life and practices that support you." That is wisdom she can continue to rely on, long into the next phase of life, whatever that may be. Lytch and her husband, the Rev. Stephens Lytch, who was profiled in the Spring 2020 issue of *In Trust*, plan to stay in Lancaster and use their gifts for the betterment of their adopted city, which they've come to love over the last decade.

Trust your own dignity

Dr. Mary Elizabeth Moore
Boston University School of Theology,
Dean, 2009–2020

After four decades in theological education, Mary Elizabeth Moore, dean of **Boston University School of Theology** and an ordained deacon in the United Methodist Church, is now able to take the long view. From that perspective, she sees that a good deal of progress has been made — institutions have become more amenable to women in roles of leadership — and she is also more confident in her ability to identify gender bias.

"One of the biggest challenges is to discern what is really gender bias and what is something else," says Moore, who became the first female dean of the Boston University School of Theology in January 2009. Age and experience have taught her to sort through the issue "in a more nuanced way," she says.

"I was not treated the same way as the male staff," Moore says about her time working as a young adult in the church. "I knew there were certain limits beyond which I could not go."

But today, the sheer number of women faculty members and administrators in higher education proves that the terrain has changed. Gender bias still exists, but sometimes it is subtler. "Many schools still bend toward men and are happy to have women who are good background figures."

Like many in her generation, Moore had few female mentors when she was a young scholar, so she has tried to be a men-



Mary Elizabeth Moore entering Marsh Chapel in 2019 for the final matriculation ceremony over which she presided as dean of Boston University School of Theology.

tor to younger women throughout her career. As dean, she has increased the number of women in leadership roles at her school. The administrative council, for example, has three times as many women on it as when she started as dean.

"One of my roles was to create space and open pathways for women and people of color," she says. "I tried to rethink positions as they opened in order to imagine new directions that would stretch our school and our ability to deepen and broaden our education and outreach. Together, the faculty and staff sought to open ourselves to the gifts and contributions of diverse leaders, including women and people of color."

She praises her current colleagues for the support they have given her but admits that her background and socialization as a woman have

resulted in a lack of self-confidence — a feeling she suspects many men don't have. "I have worked hard to give my best, not to prove myself to others, but to ensure the best for the school. I think I have pressured myself more than most of my male colleagues," she says. "When things go wrong, I immediately blame myself. I worry that I will fail to give what the school most needs. I have learned to accept and live with this self-doubting flaw in myself."

Her advice to women in the next generation of leadership: "Trust your own dignity as a human being."

She also encourages women to develop spiritual practices to help them remain centered. Moore begins and ends each day with prayer, and uses simple breath prayers throughout the day and during stressful situations.

Now, Moore plans to take a one-year sabbatical to work on two writing projects and to spend a lot more time with her children and grandchildren.

Self-awareness is the key

Dr. Lallene J. Rector

Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary, President, 2014–2020
Vice President of Academic Affairs and Academic Dean, 2006–2013

Women have been a major part of Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary since the 1930s, when the Chicago Training School, co-founded by Lucy Rider Meyer in 1885, merged with what was then called Garrett Biblical Institute. Later that decade, Georgia Harkness, the first female full professor at a Protestant seminary in the United States, joined the faculty at Garrett.

But it wasn't until 2013 that the United Methodist seminary in Evanston, Illinois, appointed Lallene J. Rector as its first female president. She is also the school's first nonordained president, which she sees as a plus, given the large number of lay students who now make up the student body both at Garrett-Evangelical and at many other theological schools.

Rector reports that at no time — not when she was a teacher, a dean, or a president — was her lay status or her gender a stumbling block. Yet she knows her experience is not universal among her "sisters in leadership."

"Being female has been celebrated at this school," Rector says, noting that about half the student body and 40 percent of the faculty are women. "To be perfectly honest, I grew up at Garrett-Evangelical, so I'm well steeped in feminist, womanist, *mujerista*, and Asian women's perspectives."

When she was a young faculty member, Rector was mentored by senior female professors during monthly gatherings. These days, the female faculty gather at least once a year for a retreat. In addition, Rector has found support from a group of female colleagues who have been meeting twice a year for more than 15 years. She has now mentored a new generation of students and advisees. And as a longtime participant in events organized by the ATS Women in Leadership program, Rector has encouraged other women to get involved as well.

She praises the progress women have made in leadership roles in seminaries but says today's "growing edge" is to help

Moore says she knows that today schools and search firms work much harder to find candidates from under-represented demographic groups than they used to. She's not sure if her replacement will be a woman, "but I do know I'll be replaced with someone who is open-minded and sensitive to cultural and gender issues," she says.



Social distancing at home, Lallene Rector issued an informal but emphatic "thank you" to donors who pushed the school past its fundraising goal during this spring's Georgia Harkness Giving Day.

women of color succeed as leaders. In 2019, Rector appointed Rev. Dr. Mai-Anh Le Tran, the first woman of color to serve as Garrett-Evangelical's vice president for academic affairs and academic dean:

Rector says that when it comes to serving in leadership roles, women face several challenges — especially in the field of theological education. Because of the challenges many seminaries are currently facing, a lot of search committees look for leaders who can "hit the ground running" — and for several reasons, typically, the kinds of people who are perceived to be safe and tried-and-true are often men.

On the other hand, some schools, full of good intentions, hire female leaders, but their institutional culture is not prepared to equip (or sometimes even to accept) women in leadership. "If the environment fails to be supportive, it can be very difficult to flourish and grow," Rector warns.

She adds that self-awareness is the key to success in leadership — for women and men. "There are all kinds of skill sets and knowledge, but I think attending to one's being is the most important," she says. "Why we're in leadership, what it means for us, what our personality and style are — answering those questions becomes the vehicle through which leadership happens."

Rector is not retiring but is rather returning to faculty status because she is committed to caring for loved ones who have serious health challenges. She says she sometimes struggles to maintain a work-life balance. "I love my work. It gives me great joy. But it's not something that I can bracket out very much. It's in my head all the time. So I have to pull myself out a bit, or I would do it 24 hours a day."

As she moves through this next transition, Rector will rely on her faith. "It orients me and grounds me. The more disciplined I am in my spiritual practice, the better I'm functioning on the ground."

A wisdom I needed to honor

The Rev. Dr. J. Dorcas Gordon

Toronto School of Theology, Interim Director, 2018–2019
Knox College, Principal, 1999–2017

Before her installation as principal of Knox College, Dorcas Gordon tried on the academic gown that had been passed down to her from previous principals. Her staff burst into giggles; it was made for her predecessor's predecessor, a man of significant size, well over 6 foot tall.

It wasn't the only thing that didn't fit for Gordon, who in 1999 became the first female principal of Knox, the largest theological college affiliated with the Presbyterian Church in Canada.

Her appointment as principal was contested, and throughout her 18-year tenure, Gordon, a biblical scholar, found herself using a "hermeneutic of suspicion" to analyze how she was being perceived by her colleagues. "This is what women have to do all the time," she says, referring to a question women in leadership roles have to regularly ask themselves: "Is it my gender? Is it me?"

Gordon says she felt an "undercurrent" of sexism. For example, while male leaders would receive praise for consensus-based decision making, a woman using this kind of approach was often seen as "not knowing her own mind."

"I had to be very astute in how I was reading things, because one can overreact or under-react," she says.

This kind of a "systems approach" is also necessary when evaluating the state of women's leadership in eminary education today, adds Gordon, who retired at the end of 2019 after a year and a half as interim director of the Toronto School of Theology, the consortium of which Knox is a member.

"I don't think the onus can be put on women: 'If only women would step up to leadership,'" she says. "Women need more fortitude than male colleagues to make it. We have to ask, 'How does the system change to allow for equal leadership from women and men?'"

Although she says there has been more openness to women in roles of leadership, obstacles still remain — and even more so for women of color. "There is still something in the system that causes women to have to work a little harder," she said. "My biggest disappointment is that these obstacles still demand significant energy."

Gordon, who served as president of ATS from 2012 to 2014, wonders how many women aspiring to leadership roles have been lost along the way. She recalls some of the women she has met through various ATS Women in Leadership events who did not move into seminary leadership roles. "Where are they?" she asks.



Surrounded by four of her eight grandchildren, J. Dorcas Gordon was honored at her 2017 retirement from Knox College.

In her retirement, Gordon will continue to work with doctoral students and serve on various church committees and boards, including one as president of the International Association of Women Ministers. And she'll continue to encourage people to think about "decolonizing" theological education, which she believes is still overly beholden to continental European modes of training and scholarship developed in the 18th century. "Is this proper training for those who are going to be leaders?" she wonders. "We have to think deeply and reflectively about what it means to be in seminary leadership and how we, as individuals and collectively as women, fit or don't fit into it."

Despite not having had a single female professor when she was in seminary, Gordon says she needed to develop a robust sense of self to remain in leadership over the long haul. "One of the things I discovered was that 50 years of experience in both church and seminary had given me a wisdom that I needed to honor." ■

Heidi Schlumpf is executive editor of the National Catholic Reporter.

How to wrestle with your own purpose

New book unveils a process to ask self-awakening questions and enact the “next faithful step”

By Holly G. Miller

IS IT POSSIBLE for an institutional leader to shepherd an institution to long-term change when that leader doesn’t have a crystal ball? What if “the changes we need to make” and “our founding vision and purpose” are at odds? How can you adjust to 21st-century realities while honoring the past?

These are the types of questions that are addressed in *Another Way: Living and Leading Change on Purpose*, a new volume from the **Forum for Theological Exploration (FTE)**, a Christian leadership incubator based in Atlanta.

“Too often we have made idols of our traditions,” says FTE president Stephen Lewis, one of the book’s authors. “We know that the business model for theological education is upside down, but we’re fearful of switching to something that is unknown. We’d rather ride this thing out until it can’t go any more than experiment with something different.”

Lewis and his fellow authors Matthew Wesley Williams and Dori Grinenko Baker offer guidance to people who are struggling with creating change in themselves so they can also affect change in their communities, in the organizations in which they work, and ultimately in the world.

They say that it is not easy to break free of a business-as-usual mindset and it may not happen unless “something drastic pushes us beyond our comfort zone to explore and discern” other options, as Lewis puts it.

The book describes the authors’ four-step process to help people provide effective leadership in times

of profound change. Known by the acronym CARE, the process emerged from the authors’ experiences at FTE, where Lewis is president, Williams is former vice president of strategic initiatives, and Baker is senior fellow. (Earlier this year, Williams was named president of the **Interdenominational Theological Center** in Atlanta.)

CARE stands for:

- Create a hospitable space where people feel connected and affirmed.
- Ask self-awakening questions that nudge people to think about their higher purpose.
- Reflect theologically together.
- Enact the next most faithful step.

The authors say that the CARE practices help bring a critical lens to issues of justice, equity, and purpose — those issues that are central to institutional and individual lives in 2020 and beyond.

“This book emerged as we were grappling with the deaths of Michael Brown, Philando Castille, Freddie Gray, Eric Gardner, Sandra Bland, and so many other Black men and women at the hands of police,” they say, and that it is “a primer for leaders hoping to build a more hopeful future in the aftermath of a global pandemic and amid an uprising for justice.”

The book’s intended audience is diverse. “We wrote it for individuals who are discerning their own meaning and purpose in light of change,” says Baker. “It’s also for the leader — faculty member, mentor, or advisor — who is helping others discern their vocations, meaning, and purpose. And it’s for organizational leaders who are grappling with the question, ‘How do I lead this organization to long-term change, especially when I can’t see what the future looks like?’”

The dedication reads: “This book is dedicated to . . . a new generation of people — the dreamers, freedom fighters, artists, and warrior-healers — who refuse to

accept things as they are as all that there is and pursue another way.”

The steps are adaptable and “give us a new default mechanism for leading in ways that we believe are more human, more humane, and more hopeful for human flourishing,” Baker adds.

Lewis put the CARE practices to the test several years ago when he led the effort to change both the name and the direction of the Fund for Theological Education, repurposing it into the Forum for Theological Exploration. Challenged by a budget crunch resulting from the 2008 recession, he began the change process by asking board members to answer this question: What aspects of our institutional life are we willing to lose so we may be responsive to what God is calling us to do now? “I don’t know if we have the ability or the courage to answer that question,” he told the board, “but I think it’s the question that is before us at this moment.”

Using the CARE practices, Lewis worked with the FTE board, and together they restructured the organization. He writes about the value of asking the kinds of questions that bring clarity to organizations that are willing to consider which programs or activities should be sustained and which should be retired. “Not everything needs to continue into perpetuity,” says Lewis. “Some things run their course.”

Baker stresses the importance of the decision-making process unfolding in an environment that encourages participants to share on a deep level. She and Lewis recall working with members of a South Carolina church and inviting them to form small groups so they could ask each other self-awakening questions. The goal was to help them envision a future for their church that didn’t simply mirror the past, with its familiar responses and predictable actions. “These questions took them beyond the hamster wheel and just doing the next thing,” explains Baker. “These are ‘why’ questions: *Why are you here? For what purpose were you born? How can you*

use your gifts to create a more hopeful world?”

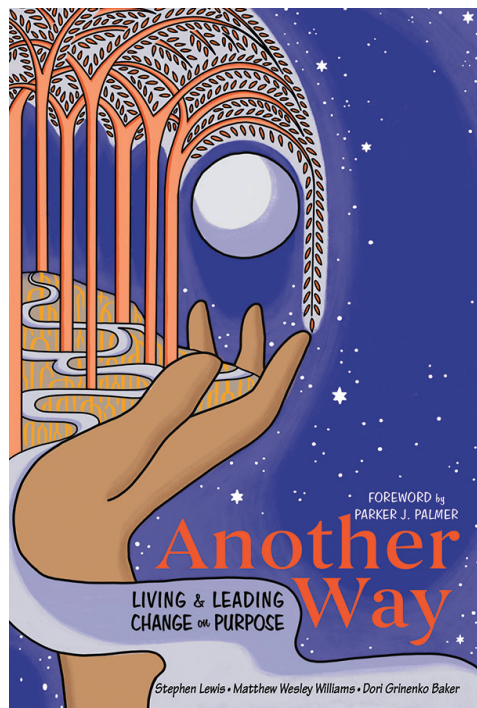
Next, Baker and Lewis asked the church members to revisit scriptures they already knew by heart, but this time, to reconsider those familiar scripture passages in ways that might provide insight to their current circumstances. Then, moving to the enactment step, the members began to plan their upcoming year as a church body.

In a campus setting, the enactment phase might involve the governing board making a motion, passing a resolution, or agreeing to a set of actions that address the school’s needs. “So it’s not simply asking questions, reading scripture, and praying,” says Lewis. “God calls us to *do* something.” The CARE practices lead to determining “what is the next most faithful step — not five things, not three things, but one or two things a board can act on when it comes together.”

Choosing these kinds of agenda items is generally the task of the board chair in consultation with the administration. “The question becomes: *How are the leaders keeping their ears to the ground regarding what’s taking place in the school, what’s taking place in the larger landscape, and what’s taking place among the board that give rise to what they must wrestle with now?*” says Lewis. All discussions take into account the school’s ecclesial and theological traditions and the impact that the current environment has on those traditions. “You’re trying to think about what the best kind of strategic positioning is for your organization, given where you are.”

The authors are quick to say they haven’t invented anything new. Instead, they’ve distilled well-tested lessons that they are passing on to Christian leaders in a time of great change. The goal, says Lewis, is to help a community, a board, a school, or an individual wrestle with their purpose.”

Holly G. Miller is a consulting editor for In Trust. This article was based on an interview with Stephen Lewis and Dori Grinenko Baker conducted by Jay Blossom.



Another Way: Living and Leading Change on Purpose, by Stephen Lewis, Matthew Wesley Williams, and Dori Grinenko Baker (Chalice Press, 2020, 208 pp., \$20).



From left, authors Stephen Lewis, Dori Grinenko Baker, and Matthew Wesley Williams



BETHEL UNIVERSITY

Ross Allen



LANCASTER THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

B. David Rowe



MEMPHIS THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

Jody Hill



UNIVERSITY OF THE SOUTH

James F. Turrell



THEOLOGICAL COLLEGE

Dominic Ciriaco



MICHAEL BARKER

Pamela D. Couture



WARTBURG THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

Kristine Stache



WESLEY BIBLICAL SEMINARY

Matt Ayers

Changes at the top

■ The board of trustees at **Bethel University** in Arden Hills, Minnesota, has appointed **Ross Allen** as the university's sixth president, effective July 1, 2020.

The first alumnus to lead the university, Allen succeeded Jay Barnes, who announced his retirement last year after serving as president for the past 12 years and, before that, as provost for 13 years.

At the time of his appointment, Allen was the chief financial officer and vice president for business and finance at Azusa Pacific University, where he had previously served on the board. For 25 years, until his retirement in 2016, Allen worked at Medtronic, a medical device company, where he led corporate transformations in Denmark, Switzerland, and across the United States.

Allen and his wife, Annie, have four adult children and seven grandchildren.

■ The trustees of **Lancaster Theological Seminary** in Pennsylvania have named **Dr. B. David Rowe** as interim president, effective July 1, 2020. Rowe succeeded the Rev. Dr. Carol Lytch, president since 2011, who retired on June 30, 2020.

Rowe is founder and president of The Windermere Group, a consulting firm that advises institutions of higher education about organizational leadership, finances, fundraising, and governance.

Before retiring in 2017, Rowe spent 25 years serving as president of Centenary College of Louisiana, vice president of LaGrange College and vice president of Wesleyan College, both in Georgia, and director of advancement and planning at Oxford College of Emory University.

Rowe is a graduate of Southwestern University in Texas, Candler School of Theology at Emory University, and Georgia State University. He is an ordained elder in the United Methodist Church.

The board of trustees of Lancaster Seminary will now embark on a nationwide search for a permanent president.

■ The Rev. **Jody Hill** was appointed president of **Memphis Theological Seminary**, effective January 1, 2020. He succeeded the Rev. Dr. Susan Parker, who had been interim president since August 2018.

At the time of his appointment, Hill was vice president for community relations at Blue Mountain College and pastor of Ripley Presbyterian Church, both in Mississippi. A former member of the seminary board, Hill is an ordained minister in the Presbyterian Church (USA). He is also a descendent of one of the founders of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church, the denomination with which the seminary is affiliated, and has led congregations of both Presbyterian denominations.

Hill is a graduate of the University of Mississippi and Memphis Theological Seminary. He and his wife, Monya, have two sons.

■ The Rev. Canon Dr. **James F. Turrell** has been named dean of the **School of Theology of the University of the South**, effective July 1, 2020. He succeeded Bishop J. Neil Alexander, who had been dean since 2012. After a one-year sabbatical, Alexander will return to the School of Theology as Charles T. Quintard Professor of Theology.

Turrell has been a member of the seminary faculty for 17 years, teaching liturgy and the history of worship. He is currently the Norma and Olan Mills Professor of Divinity, associate dean for academic affairs, and sub-dean of the seminary's Chapel of the Apostles. He is a graduate of Yale University and

Vanderbilt University and was ordained as a priest in the Episcopal Diocese of Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, in 1996.

The University of the South, commonly called Sewanee, is jointly owned by 28 dioceses of the Episcopal Church, and its School of Theology is one of 10 Episcopal seminaries.

■ The U.S. Provincial Council of the Society of Saint Sulpice has named Sulpician Father **Dominic Ciriaco** as acting rector of **Theological College** in Washington, D.C., effective July 2020. (He has been named "acting rector" because of a policy to appoint only "definitive members" of the Society of Saint Sulpice to the rectorship.) He succeeded Sulpician Father Gerald D. McBrearity, rector since 2016, who has retired and will be living at Villa Olier, the Sulpician retirement community in Baltimore.

Ciriaco was ordained in the Archdiocese of Newark, New Jersey, in 1999 and entered the Sulpician candidate formation program in 2015. In 2018 he was admitted to temporary membership in the society, and after he completes doctoral studies, he is expected to be admitted to definitive membership.

Ciriaco joined the faculty of Theological College in 2015 and served as vice rector and dean of men since 2019. Before joining the Sulpicians, he served in parish and high school ministries in New Jersey, Delaware, and Virginia for 14 years. He is a graduate of Caldwell University and Immaculate Conception Seminary at Seton Hall University.

■ **Dr. Pamela D. Couture** has been named director of the **Toronto School of Theology (TST)**, an appointment that became effective January 1, 2020.

She succeeded J. Dorcas Gordon, who retired after serving as interim director since 2018.

A graduate of Ashland University, Garrett-Evangelical Theological School, and the University of Chicago, Couture holds the Jane and Geoffrey Martin Chair in Church and Community at Emmanuel College of Victoria University, which is one of TST's seven constituent institutions.

Couture is an ordained elder in the Northern Illinois Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church and currently serves as a voluntary ecumenical associate at St. Luke's Anglican Church in Burlington, Ontario.

■ The board of directors of **Wartburg Theological Seminary** has appointed **Dr. Kristine Stache** to serve as interim president of the seminary, a position she assumed on January 1, 2020. She succeeded the Rev. Louise Johnson, president since 2015, who departed at the end of 2019 to become director of leadership development at LEAD, a ministry initiative started by the Texas-Louisiana Gulf Coast Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

Stache has been a member of the Wartburg Seminary faculty for 13 years. At the time of her appointment, she was vice president for administration, associate professor of missional leadership, and holder of the Wilhelm Loehe Chair in Mission.

Stache is a graduate of Luther College and Luther Seminary and has served in parish settings as director of ministry development, director of children's ministry, and youth director.


Wartburg Theological Seminary, in

Dubuque, Iowa, is one of seven seminaries affiliated with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Its board of directors is searching for a permanent president.

■ The board of trustees of **Wesley Biblical Seminary** has named **Dr. Matt Ayers** as the seminary's eighth president, a position he assumed in May 2020. He succeeded Dr. John Oswalt, who was asked to lead Wesley Biblical Seminary on an interim basis after the 2019 death of former president John Neihof.

At the time of his appointment, Ayers was a member of the faculty and administration at Emmaus University of Haiti, first as professor of Old Testament, then as provost and executive vice president, and then as president. A career missionary with the One Mission Society, he has served on the boards of Caribbean Graduate School of Theology in Jamaica and Moscow Evangelical Christian Seminary.

Ayers is a graduate of Asbury University, Wesley Biblical Seminary, and St. John's College, Nottingham (a British theological college).

He and his wife, Stacey, have four children. 

News summaries by Lauren Meltzer and Jay Blossom.

REQUIESCAT IN PACE

Gregg Alan Mast, 1952–2020

The Rev. Gregg Alan Mast, president emeritus of New Brunswick Theological Seminary, died on April 27, 2020, from COVID-19. He was 68.

An ordained minister of the Reformed Church in America, Mast served as the 14th president of the seminary from 2006 until his retirement in 2017.

Mast is survived by his wife, Vicki, three adult children, and four grandchildren. For more information, go to bit.ly/gregg-mast.



NEW BRUNSWICK THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

What clergy need to thrive in ministry

By Israel Galindo

MINISTRY IS A HARD and increasingly challenging vocation. Yet despite the difficulties clergy face every day, I have found they are a delightful group of people to work with. As a group, they are optimistic, confident in their calling, and genuinely interested in the welfare of the church and its members.

Some clergy members struggle. Others stand out because they know how to thrive no matter what their circumstances. Usually, thriving is the result of an ecology of factors, including having a sense of meaning and purpose in work and ministry, investing in self-development and growth, cultivating self-awareness, and enjoying a sense of authenticity.

But how can these beneficial factors be developed? In part, by having the luxury of a time and place to engage in the work of cultivating them.

This is what we try to provide at **Columbia Theological Seminary** through our Pastoral Excellence Program (PEP), which is part of the seminary's Center for Lifelong Learning and funded in part by a Thriving in Ministry grant from Lilly Endowment Inc. The goals of the PEP include providing a forum for clergy to explore the issues that are particular to their own contexts and ministerial trajectories; helping them redefine and re-envision their vocations in peer-oriented, supportive environments; and providing challenging and stimulating peer group experiences for renewal and challenge. More than 100 clergy participate annually.

What have we discovered from the conversations we have with participating clergy?

A good congregation makes all the difference. Clergy and their families need a supportive community of faith to help them thrive. When clergy feel wounded or frustrated, it's often because they find themselves in a difficult church situation with either a lack of support, a lack of responsiveness from parishioners, or acute conflicts in which they, and sometimes their families, come under attack. This holds true regardless of the size of the congregation or how financially fit it is.


Clergy face all sorts of challenges. In the past year, several of them have shared the challenges they have navigating political issues within their congregations. Some are politically at odds with the majority of their

parishioners, while other struggle with how to speak prophetically from the pulpit about critical social and religious issues. Being prophetic is risky business and can be costly.

Coping with transitions within the church is also important. They can be a cause for growth if clergy have supportive networks and receive help on the journey. This help can come from peers, friends, and families, but also from programs, like ours, that are designed to provide frameworks for interpreting the experience of transitioning.

For clergy who have been terminated, the PEP offers a wellness retreat. Pastors who have lost their positions often experience a sense of failure and betrayal, and they often question their own calling and competence. The pastor's spouse loses a church community, friends, and life structure. Their children experience trauma and a loss of trust in the church and God. We have found that clergy who decide to participate in the wellness retreat are wounded and are often surprised at the intensity of their emotions when they share their stories with other participants.

In all our programs, we have found that clergy are eager to learn, but they don't want to be treated as students. They desire time with peers in a supportive and affirming context. Clergy are hungry for collegial relationships that are deeper and more intimate than what most of them find in denominational networks. For too many clergy, peer support is hard to find and cultivate.

We have found that most clergy are facing the same kinds of challenges, regardless of context or demographic. The most common are transitional discernment, motivation and stress, life-work balance, family issues, money and finances, and dealing with conflict within the church. By identifying and helping to address these challenges, we're doing our part to help clergy thrive in ministry. 

Israel Galindo is associate dean for lifelong learning at Columbia Theological Seminary in Decatur, Georgia, and director of the seminary's Pastoral Excellence Program.



Preparing future ministers at an accelerated pace

Learn more about the **Kern Family Foundation's** initiative to support seminaries as they implement five-year pastoral degree programs. Join journalist Gregg Brekke as he interviews key players about their experiences developing, implementing, and evaluating the success of their programs, while answering your questions.

If you are considering an accelerated pastoral degree program (APDP) at your institution and would like to learn more — or you are simply curious about what other schools are doing — this webinar is for you!

This webinar is made possible with funding from the Kern Family Foundation

September 9, 2020, 1 p.m. EDT

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