



TREC's Seminary Proposals? They Are Already in Place

by The Very Rev. Roger Ferlo, President of Bexley Seabury Federation



The picture above features the Episcopal seminary deans at their January meeting in Columbus, Ohio.

I enjoy the odd distinction of running an Episcopal seminary without benefit of a seminary degree. Thirty years ago, having escaped relatively unscathed from a terminal junior faculty appointment at an Ivy League college, with both a Ph.D.

and considerable debt in hand, I spent a splendid, if somewhat tumultuous, four semesters at General Seminary, a place where splendor and tumultuousness have historically gone with the territory.

So as a quasi-seminary-trained priest with a lifelong habit of self-motivated learning, I know from my own experience that there has always been more than one way to prepare intellectually and spiritually for leadership in the church. I applaud the spirit of the proposed resolution from the Task Force on Re-Imagining the Episcopal Church (TREC) seeking increased flexibility and accountability in theological education. But the good news is that the kinds of flexibility and accountability envisioned in the TREC report are already in place, and in fact are hallmarks of our seminaries as 21st century institutions.

To find out more, I would invite you to download one of our course catalogues, or to visit our websites or our booths here at General Convention. Better yet, talk to one of our students. Register for an online or

hybrid course, and experience the unique community of learners that a combined online and face-to-face format can create. Enroll in a course with students drawn from one of our many ecumenical partner seminaries, or sign up for one of our executive leadership programs taught in collaboration with one of the country's leading schools of non-profit management. Take one of our graduate courses in leadership theory and practice, or community organizing, or strategies of evangelism, or methods of conflict resolution.

Join us as we explore the possibilities of an M.Div. degree based on two years of intensive academic work followed by a two-year parish curacy in a teaching parish. This new direction in seminary education promises to revolutionize clergy training, while strengthening those congregations, chaplaincies and Episcopal institutions that seek to take a more creative hand in shaping what it means to be a person called to full-time or bi-vocational ministry.

You might have seen the unanimous joint communiqué we issued after our January meeting, at which all seminary presidents – from Episcopal Divinity School to Nashotah to General Theological Seminary to Trinity – were present. Our seminary deans and presidents have a long history of collegiality: a spirit of community and mutual support—and, occasionally, generous critique—which has been especially helpful in this time of crisis for two of our institutions.

So I would urge that the first sentence of the TREC resolution be amended to encourage our seminaries to continue to develop new platforms for learning and increased accessibility.

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Latino/Hispanic Ministries and the Future of the Episcopal Church

by Aisha Huertas Michel, Communications Director, Episcopal Diocese of Virginia



For years, millions of Latino/Hispanic immigrants and their children have been an integral part of the U.S. population. In fact, today they comprise 17.1 percent of our population, making people of Latino/Hispanic origin the largest ethnic minority in our country today. Latinos will make up nearly 30 percent of the U.S. population by the year 2060 (statistics from U.S. Census Bureau).

This population boom has businesses and organizations paying attention and thinking strategically about how to engage these communities. The Church is also engaged in the work of determining how it can respond to the needs of this community and involve its members in the ministry of the Church. As General Convention prepares to elect a new presiding bishop, Episcopal Latino/Hispanics are paying close attention to the PB nominees' vision for their communities.

All of the nominees are aware of this growing need and have already engaged in some of the work. The Rt. Rev. Thomas E. Breidenthal, bishop of Southern Ohio, says he has high hopes for the work of the Church in the Latino/Hispanic ministries. "I'm interested in how to bring that community into the light and into the presence, particularly to provide a sense of safety and refuge for the undocumented who are particularly afraid of being seen."

The Rt. Rev. Dabney T. Smith, bishop of Southwest Florida, sees

a "wonderful growth for the Latino/Hispanic ministry in the Episcopal Church." Southwest Florida has a number of initiatives to reach out to this community, including a program that teaches Spanish to first respondents so they can better treat people in need of critical assistance.

Speaking more broadly about their hope for Latino/Hispanic ministries, the Rt. Rev. Ian T. Douglas, bishop of Connecticut, and the Rt. Rev. Michael B. Curry, bishop of North Carolina, each had thoughts about the way in which Latino/Hispanics enrich our community of faith. Bishop Curry shared his vision of an Episcopal Church that will look like the face of all of our people, and stated that when the Episcopal Church resembles those faces, "then we are truly catholic and truly universal." Echoing that sentiment, Bishop Douglas shared, "My hope and prayer are that Latino/Hispanic people among us will continue to claim their space, speak their truth in joy and help us all live into the fullness of what it means to be the body of Christ."

Of course, the Episcopal Church has struggled with including Latinos, both at the parish level with involving Latino/Hispanic members in mostly white congregations, and at the diocesan and national level with including Latino/Hispanic leaders in governance. Center Aisle will take a deeper look at some of these struggles in a later issue.

Regardless of what Saturday's election determines as to who will be the next leader of the Episcopal Church, it is important, not just that our presiding bishop has a vision for the Latino/Hispanic community, but also that all Episcopalians, clergy and lay people alike share in a vision of a Church that is diverse, inclusive, and open and inviting to all people.



Ferlo, continued

A more serious flaw in the TREC report and resolution, though, is the assumption it makes about who bears responsibility for oversight and assessment of our seminaries. As accredited institutions, all 10 of our Episcopal seminaries are held accountable to rigorous regional and national standards of assessment, reporting and peer review. These assessment vehicles and their yearly results are public record. Along with Episcopal schools, which are held to equally rigorous accreditation standards, Episcopal seminaries exercise more robust assessment practices than, say, parish- or diocesan-based formation programs or programs of continuing education, for which standards of assessment and accountability present a continuing and growing challenge.

The resolution incorrectly assumes that either Executive Council or General Convention as a whole has a mandate or right to exercise some sort of supervisory authority over these schools. This has never been the case. I would strongly urge that this part of the resolution be dropped. The Episcopal Church, unlike many other Protestant denominations, provides no financial support of the seminaries. As independent institutions of higher learning, Episcopal seminaries answer to their boards of directors or boards of trustees. These boards invariably include a large number of bishops, all of whom are keenly aware of the seminaries' (and

their students') fiscal challenges in the new century, and who provide our boards with an essential lifeline to the needs of the new Church now emerging.

Theological education is a process of radical adaptive change throughout North America, not just in the Episcopal Church. The real formation crisis in the Church lies in the challenge of recruiting a racially and ethnically diverse cohort of candidates for lay and ordained leadership in a very different Church than the one I was ordained to serve 30 years ago. In my experience, our seminaries have been able to adapt to these changes much more rapidly than the Church at large.

Re-imagining leadership formation is what we are all about these days. It is time to recognize that we are all in this together, for the sake of the Gospel.

Roger Ferlo is president of the Bexley Hall Seabury Western Theological Seminary Federation (Bexley Seabury). He also serves as president of the Board of Trustees of the Anglican Theological Review, and is the former chair of the Board of Governors of the National Association of Episcopal Schools. He is a priest of the Diocese of New York, and licensed to officiate in the Diocese of Chicago, where he lives with his wife, Anne Harlan, in Hyde Park.

Baptism before Communion and Hospitality to Seekers Are Not Mutually Exclusive

by Justin McIntosh, Rector, Leeds Parish, Markham, Va.



Should we invite unbaptized individuals to receive Holy Communion, the consecrated bread and wine? Although Canon 1.17.7 currently forbids this practice, many Episcopal churches nevertheless explicitly welcome all people – baptized and unbaptized – to receive the body and blood of our Lord. Propo-

nents assert that limiting communion to the baptized is inhospitable and unwelcoming, which is antithetical to the example of Jesus, who ate with all people, even “sinners and tax collectors” (Mark 2:13-17). Additionally, they argue that the canonical restriction is an impediment to evangelism: If we don’t practice open table, the common name for administering the elements to all, then we turn away unbaptized seekers who are eager to learn more about Jesus and the Church.

At Leeds Parish in Markham, Va., where I serve as rector, we seek to be an inclusive, welcoming community. Our mission statement makes this clear by stating that we “welcome all seekers.” Undoubtedly, like all congregations, we could do more, but we are unequivocally committed to the principle that the Gospel is for all people—no exceptions. And yet, our normative practice is to restrict communion to the baptized. Is this a contradiction? I don’t think so.

Jesus absolutely calls us to be practitioners of radical hospitality – to transcend the tribalism of our society – but I think that we misread Scripture when we view Jesus’ table fellowship with seekers as the model for Holy Communion. I believe the right model is the traditional one: the meal our Lord first shared with his disciples on the night before his death.

We err when we conflate seekers and disciples. The former are still searching; they are on the sidelines. The latter have made the commitment (or had it made on their behalf as infants) and they have experienced the transforming grace of God through baptism. Seekers and disciples are simply in different places with regard to the Body of Christ. It’s not exclusionary to acknowledge that distinction.

Our general policy is to limit communion to the baptized, but I should note that I am not fanatically rigid about it (e.g., I don’t examine baptismal certificates) and, on very rare occasions, I will make exceptions for pastoral reasons. If this approach hindered evangelism in my ministry, I might question it. But to the best of my knowledge, it has never led any seeker to walk away from Leeds. We are able to offer a welcoming and inviting experience on Sunday mornings without open table.

Humans of General Convention

This take on the popular photo blog “Humans of New York” focuses on the body of The Episcopal Church as a whole, one member and one story at a time. Visit centeraisle.net.



Leeds, like many parishes, prints a full bulletin. If a parish wants to be genuinely welcoming on Sunday mornings, making our ritual more accessible is a good place to start. I offer the following welcome message, picked up from the parish that confirmed me: “Whoever you are, and wherever you find yourself on the journey of faith, you are welcome here, just as you are, to receive the blessings of new life in Jesus Christ.” Both the baptized and unbaptized are welcome to kneel at the altar rail, whether they come for communion or a blessing. I encourage the unbaptized, both in person and in the bulletin, to talk with me if they feel called to baptism.

Leeds is not only for Christian disciples; a person need not make a commitment to Christ to participate in our worship and ministries. We invite all people to hear the Word of God and to let it penetrate their hearts and souls.

The last thing I want is for anyone to think that baptism is only for some people and not others. As Jesus directs us: “Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19-20a). He doesn’t say “some nations” or “some people,” but “all nations.” Baptism is open to all.

It may be that open table is necessary to be inclusive and welcoming in some ministry contexts, but I have my doubts. Nevertheless, what I do know is that it is not necessary in all ministry contexts. Leeds Parish is living the radical hospitality of Jesus without undermining the centrality of baptism. It can be done.

Tomorrow, Center Aisle will feature the perspective of a rector whose parish practices open table.

