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“Women and Men in Theological Education: Exploring the Present, Creating the Future”

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The 1993 Consultation

On June 17–20, 1993, ninety women and men—theological college faculty, administrators, students and graduate students, parish clergy, continuing educators and church officials—gathered at Wilfrid Laurier University to explore the impact of women on theological education. The Consultation was organized under the auspices of The Churches' Council on Theological Education in Canada, an association of the Anglican, Baptist, Evangelical Lutheran, Presbyterian, Roman Catholic and United Churches.

The Consultation was structured around three theme addresses, presented by Dr. Jean Stairs (Queen's Theological College, Kingston), Dr. Donna Runnalls (McGill University Faculty of Religious Studies), and Dr. Mary Malone (St. Jerome's College, Waterloo). Each theme presentation was followed by a series of responses, the responders representing a range of parish clergy, church officials, students and faculty. Worship, workshops, informal conversations, and a concluding panel entitled “Where Do We Go From Here?” rounded out the event. Included in the collection presented here are the three theme addresses, four of the responses, and two of the concluding panel presentations.

Perhaps the most important aspect of the Consultation, however, cannot be fully appreciated through printed proceedings alone. This was the richness of the constituencies represented and the utter graciousness, through some rather tense moments, of the participants one to another. The overwhelming consensus was that we may not know, with any sense of

clarity, where it is we are going, but we do know that we must go there together.

About the CCTE¹

Twenty-five years ago the boom years of the 1950s were over. Churches were in decline. Clergy were leaving pastoral ministry to become social workers, teachers, counselors. Many believed that too many colleges were serving too few students and that ministers needed a more professional form of theological education. Denominational staff of the Anglican, Baptist, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Roman Catholic and United Churches gathered to discuss common problems.

Out of these meetings arose the Coordinating Committee on Theological Education. It was active in supporting the formation of ecumenical theological education consortia across the country, in the transition from the B.D. to the M. Div. degree, the development of supervised field education and clinical pastoral education programs, and the establishment of the Doctor of Ministry degree.

Early, the Committee decided to seek funding from beyond the churches. The Ecumenical Foundation of Canada was incorporated and received several significant bequests. The money was invested and the Foundation funded the work of the Coordinating Committee as well as providing grants in support of programs which probed the leading edges of theological education. In 1990, under the leadership of Executive Director, Lloyd Gesner, the Coordinating Committee and Foundation were amalgamated to form The Churches' Council on Theological Education in Canada: An Ecumenical Foundation.

The council consists of 24 people, nominated by the six founding church bodies. Membership is national in scope and includes both people from the churches and from the theological schools/seminaries. The Council operates under a threefold mandate:

Consultation

To encourage the various partners involved in theological education to make decisions in dialog rather than isolation, through the establishment of communication networks and the sponsorship of national and regional consultations.

Research

To encourage the research necessary to undergird informed decision making about the future of theological education in Canada.

Funding

To provide grants to enable the consultative process, encourage the necessary research, and support experimental programs in ecumenical theological education.

CCTE believes that theological education belongs to the *whole* church but that university-level theological education remains a crucial element in the larger whole. It believes that it is the task of the colleges and seminaries to assist the churches in puzzling through new models/understandings of ministry and church leadership, and that it is the task of the churches to assist the colleges and seminaries in developing new models/understandings of theological education.

What does the future hold?

- More rather than fewer centers of theological education, locally based, centers which are truly at the center rather than the periphery of church life.
- Ecumenical partnerships which celebrate the richness of the larger tradition while paying particular attention to sound denominational formation.
- A multiplicity of models which will include distance education and field-based/contextual education as well as the more traditional university-based program, models which will increasingly integrate the formation of candidates for ordered ministry with the theological education of the whole people of God.
- Fewer full-time faculty; more adjunct personnel.
- Lighter, leaner institutions, a more creative use of land, buildings and endowments; but, as government dollars become more scarce, church dollars will have to increase.

These are guesses only. Though certain clues may be emerging, the way is not yet clear. In the midst of it all, the Churches'

Council's task is to so keep the theological education pot bubbling that the Spirit has a chance to work its way with us...

Notes

- ¹ A reprint, by permission, of "CCTE Reports" by Dr. Harding, from *PMC: The Practice of Ministry in Canada*, 11/4, November 1994, 32.