

TASK FORCE ON THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION NETWORKING

Membership

Ms. Sarah Stonesifer Boylan, <i>Chair</i>	Washington, III	2021
The Rt. Rev. David M. Reed, <i>Vice-Chair</i>	West Texas, VII	2021
The Rt. Rev. Lucinda Ashby	El Camino Real, VIII	2021
The Very Rev. Don Compier	Kansas, VII	2021
Ms. Amy Cook	California, VIII	2021
The Rev. Maureen-Elizabeth Hagen	Oregon, VIII	2021
Ms. Rebecca Hall	Texas, VII	2021
Ms. Karen Meridith	Tennessee, IV	2021
The Rev. Dr. Altagracia Perez-Bullard	New York, II	2021
The Rev. Kit Wang	Maine, I	2021
The Most Rev. Michael Curry, <i>Ex Officio</i>	North Carolina, IV	
The Rev. Gay Clark Jennings, <i>Ex Officio</i>	Ohio, V	

Mandate

2018-A022 Create a Formation Networking Team

Resolved, That the 79th General Convention authorize a Theological Education Networking Task Force with membership appointed by Presiding Officers consisting of four lay persons, one priest, one deacon, and one bishop who represent the cultural and theological diversity in the Church, be established to serve as a networking and informational referral hub for the discernment, development, and dissemination of theological education and formation resources for lay and clergy leaders in small congregations; and be it further

Resolved, That the Theological Education Networking Task Force collect, assemble, evaluate, and publicize to dioceses and congregations the resources currently offered across The Episcopal Church for the training of commissions on ministry and discernment committees to focus on the education, training, and formation of leaders who serve in small congregations with a special emphasis on alternative theological education pathways; and be it further

Resolved, That the Theological Education Networking Task Force work with the House of Bishops, through agencies such as the College for Bishops, and with the Presiding Bishop's office and dioceses in collecting, disseminating, and encouraging the use of resources and best practices for identifying, educating, and forming clergy and lay leaders of small congregations; and be it further

Resolved, That the Theological Education Networking Task Force submit to the Executive Council Joint Standing Committee on Local Ministry and Mission a quarterly written report of its activities and complete its work by the 80th General Convention; and be it further

Resolved, That the General Convention request the Joint Standing Committee on Program, Budget and Finance to consider a budget allocation of \$60,000 for the implementation of this resolution.

Summary of Work

Executive Summary

The Task Force faced a three-pronged request within the mandate. Tackling these resolutions created a need for prioritization and streamlining of what was actually possible based on the networking and information during the three-year timespan available to complete the work. The Task Force, collectively, addressed the need to differentiate our work versus that of the Task Force on Formation and Ministry of the Baptized, which convened with sometimes perceived overlapping mandates.

With many different seminaries, universities, dioceses and other entities providing opportunities for ordination-track education, it became clear that documenting that current, available information on the programs and tracks would take up the majority of the triennium. Varying types of offerings (discernment, for lay leaders, or ordination-track) vary among regions. Overall, the alternative formation programs address the localized needs of ministry leaders, creating a focus on the unique circumstances found in that supporting area. There is a lack of cross-pollination, and simply, data on what each program offers and how they are forming their future ordained leaders. Thus, theological education networking and information gathering became the main focus of the Task Force's work.

The Task Force spent several months determining the most important information points to gather, as well as how to go about doing that. Starting with the Task Force's networking and researching skills, the categories became clear: Episcopal seminaries, non-Episcopal seminaries with Anglican year, alternative formation programs, Iona Collaborative programs, and competencies.

Data from these categories' programs and initiatives were then put into a spreadsheet that organized based on name, place, sponsoring organization, contact information, training focus, website, cost, description, and other pertinent details. The Task Force did a preliminary review of all diocesan websites to pull information about possible formalized formation programs. After this initial review, the Task Force then asked the diocesan contacts to edit and provide feedback on their own information as well as any others that were not included. The last round of requests went to diocesan bishops and canons to the ordinary.

Survey Request

The review request, in English and Spanish, went to the formation program contacts as found by the initial Task Force membership. In June 2020, the General Convention Office sent out a survey that was open for approximately five weeks to solicit feedback and correct details. Sent to a targeted group of 122 formation program coordinators, requesting to provide better viewpoints and details of programs and resources. As a follow-up, the diocesan bishops and canons to the ordinary were asked to review the information and/or forward the survey request to the relevant respondent. Out of those requests, the task force received 38 responses from the GCO survey and then the group followed up with personal requests.

Survey Results

The overview of the Episcopal seminaries, non-Episcopal seminaries with Anglican year, alternative formation programs, Iona Collaborative programs, and competencies documented information for over 116 programs.

The datasheets include as much information as possible about programs found beyond the continental United States.

Find the link to the full data set here: http://bit.ly/TF_Education

Observations

The survey requests and information gathering went out during the first six months of the COVID-19 pandemic. As of writing this report in January 2021, the long-term impact of COVID-19 has yet to be fully understood on vocational formation programs and initiatives. The short-term shift has provided opportunities to learn and experience community and pedagogy in online systems. The experimentation happening in some programs has breathed new life into vocational education for

students and instructors. A few programs have decided to wait until more “normal” in-person gatherings can resume. The fear is, much like community-based ministry, how will traditional and alternative education paths survive if they are not flexible to online communities and other ways of gathering?

The task force came to understand the more consistent need for exploring cross-pollination of students, instructors, platforms. Understanding that each program is unique for its own community context, what are the commonalities and overlaps that can be developed to create stronger ordination-track programs to promote community-building and skill-building? With the abundance of experience and trained teachers within local formation programs, there is the possibility of taking the best teachers and trainers and widening their impact and lessening the load within smaller, stretched programs.

Programs like CALL from Church Divinity School of the Pacific and Iona Collaborative housed at Seminary of the Southwest are heavily used across the Church. Relying on these adaptable offerings and curricula gives the main track of classes and foci to those vetted programs and teachers, allowing the local formation schools to shape contextual learning based on regional needs and initiatives.

With the increase of local, alternate formation programs, we are aware of varying standards and intensity of trainings offered. In 2020, the General Board of Examining Chaplains read 44 exams from candidates designated from local or alternate programs. This 2020 statistic is the first listed with this preparation option. In previous years, the General Board of Examining Chaplains included only “No Episcopal/Anglican Seminary”. In 2019, 52 exams fell into this category, an increase of 2 from the previous year. The exams in 2017, 38 candidates were under the “No Seminary” designation. This steady number, whereas other seminaries decreased, indicates the increasing use of local and alternate formation program options. As with all these statistics from the GBEC, these reports do not include those ordained whose dioceses do not require the GOEs. Beyond the GOEs, there is no agreed-upon standards across the church for ordination-track training programs.

Ultimately, does the efficacy of the formation programs result in a more diverse ordained leadership base that reflects the needs of the region? Or does it continually offer the same educational and formational experiences to the same group who is currently within ordained ministries? How do the parish and diocesan discernment processes accurately shift to raise up a wider population into discernment and then into ordination programs, whether traditional or alternative?

Proposed resolutions

A085 Creation Of A Digital Hub For Formation Resources (In English, Spanish, And French)

Resolved, the House of _____ concurring, that the 80th General Convention instruct Executive Council to implement the recommendations of the Task Force on Formation and Ministry of the Baptized and the Task Force on Theological Networking to develop a plan for a sustainable digital hub for Episcopalians to access formation resources for lay and ordained vocations; and be it further

Resolved, that Executive Council present a report with the plan (to include recommended structure, content, staffing, timeline, and budget) to the 81st General Convention; and be it further

Resolved, that \$30,000 be budgeted for the work of developing this plan over the next triennium.

EXPLANATION

The Task Force on Formation and Ministry of the Baptized and the Task Force on Theological Networking are short-term solutions for work that needs to be on-going at a denominational level. This online hub would provide vetted resources for leaders to adapt for their contexts. The curation by subject-area experts gives the opportunity to uplift voices from around the Episcopal Church and Anglican Communion. Given the variety of situational needs, giving leaders a place to begin will set them off on the right path as they explore their own spiritual discernment, help to develop others' discernment process, or prepare for ordination formation could be.

This online hub will connect seekers of discernment resources with proven formation processes, materials, and networks to facilitate vocational development, without having to develop tools on their own. To uplift exemplars and alternative ministry models' development processes would give leaders a more expansive resource list as they nurture faith communities for an uncertain future.

Refer to the resolution explanation provided by The Task Force on Formation and Ministry of the Baptized for more information and details.