

ITEM C.204
FOR INFORMATION

COMMITTEE ON THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION (COTE)
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)
Minutes
San Anselmo, California
February 23-25, 2016

1. The meeting of the Committee on Theological Education (COTE) was held February 23-25, 2016, in San Anselmo, California, and hosted by San Francisco Theological Seminary.

2. **The following persons attended, constituting a quorum:**

Members: Jeffrey Bullock (University of Dubuque Theological Seminary), Mindy Douglas, José Irizarry, Mary Elva Smith, Saundra Tracy, Tom Trinidad, Matthew Miles, Vilmarie Cintrón-Olivieri, Alan Bancroft, Craig Barnes (Princeton Theological Seminary), Michael Jinkins (Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary), Jim McDonald (San Francisco Theological Seminary), Ted Wardlaw (Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary, David Esterline (Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, Brian Blount (Union Presbyterian Seminary, and Frank Yamada (McCormick Theological Seminary).

Covenant Members: Gary Eller (Omaha Presbyterian Seminary Foundation), Doris J. Garcia-Rivera (Seminario Evangélico de Puerto Rico), and J.C. Austin (Auburn Theological Seminary).

Staff from the Presbyterian Foundation: Lee Hinson-Hasty (Senior Director of Theological Education Funds Development) and Nancy Benson-Nicol (Associate Director for Theological Education Funds Development).

Adjunct Staff: Michelle Bartel (Presbyterian Mission Agency, Coordinator for Theological Education), Timothy Cargal (Office of the General Assembly, Associate for Preparation for Ministry/Exams), Chip Hardwick (Presbyterian Mission Agency, Director of Theology, Formation, and Education), Charles Wiley (Presbyterian Mission Agency, Associate Director of Theology, Formation, and Education), and Catherine Reuning (Presbyterian Mission Agency, Meeting Planning Specialist).

3. **Excused Absences:** Katharine Henderson (Auburn Theological Seminary) and Leanne Van Dyk (Columbia Theological Seminary).

Wednesday, February 24

9:00 am

4. **Jeffrey** called the meeting to order with introductions around the table. **Michelle** led opening prayer. **Jim** offered welcome and shared a brief history of the SFTS and the San Anselmo area. Marin County, one of the wealthiest in the country, also has high rates of homelessness and poverty, notably among the elderly. Affordable housing is virtually impossible in the Bay area. Housing projects on the campus are coming to completion. There have been deaths in the SFTS family,

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including James Noel, etc. Wendy Farley has accepted a call as Professor of Theology and Christian Spirituality, Floyd Tompkins in homiletics, and a junior faculty member in Old Testament (not yet approved).

9:30 am

5. Jeffrey declared quorum.

Jeffrey offered opening remarks, framing the essence of the meeting. COTE is working in a time of significant change, including the shift of TEF shifting to the Foundation. A review of the transition was shared. The rotation of COTE members off the committee – Mindy, Vilmarie, Kathy, José – is also significant in many ways, a loss of institutional memory at a time of change that exists already with the TEF transition. There are other challenges as well: what’s happening in our denomination, and what is COTE’s role in that? How do we stay focused? What should we be focused on? We have a tendency to rush through and get to the other side, but we have to take our medicine and learn from it, with enough confidence and faith to see the challenges for what they are and what they are not. Embedded in this context for our meeting – what is our purpose?

Presidents are competitors and colleagues. At the same time, they are fiduciaries. This doesn’t get talked about very often: e.g., Jeffrey’s first role – required by law- is as a fiduciary “at the watch.” Doesn’t really manifest when things are good.

After the Princeton and Chicago meetings, and then at the presidents’ and board chairs’ meeting in January, it has become clear that we need to make sense of the shifts we are all feeling and sensing. And we need to sort through it without the leadership that is rotating off and has helped us come this far.

One of the worst things we can do with the church’s money is to meet for the sake of meeting. It’s not our money.

COTE exists because of GA, and the challenges taken up by the COTE of a couple of decades ago may not be the challenges of the COTE of the future.

If you don’t know where you’re going, you’ll end up somewhere else.

6. Michelle led a review of the COTE mandate and functions.

7. Review of TEF transition shared by members of the TEF task group.

Kathy reviewed the “why” of the transition starting in 2012 when Frank attended the PMA meeting and found out that there would be a “tax:” \$0.19 of every dollar coming in to the TEF would be taken out. Couldn’t do that in good conscience, and knew there had to be a better way to exercise stewardship.

Frank: COTE asked for time to study financial implications, and the board was amenable to that. The general consensus was that a new way forward could be created. This was brought to next GA: that TEF should be located at the Presbyterian Foundation, with staff being dedicated to primarily raising money for TEF.

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This was approved by GA. Integration has gone well, though there's more work to do, and disaster was averted. This also created new possibility for TEF to revitalize the TEF.

José: thinks COTE was a little reactive to the "tax." Now there's a need to move from aversion to taxation to actual funds development.

Jeffrey: The Funds advisory agreement, thanks to the work of Bill Scheu, sets up structure for this move to be successful. For example, Executive Committee of COTE, Lee, Nancy, other Foundation folks, and Michelle have a standing monthly conference call. There is need to have a solid structure in place for accountability and support. Some might ask what's the point? For example, at UDTS, the TEF allocation is not significant. But it's very important for others. Both entities are going to have to be all in for this to work, "this" being the TEF is wildly successful.

Kathy and Ted: we need to clarify that function 12 on COTE's list of functions hasn't changed.

Mary Elva: we need to keep in mind white privilege when it comes to the allocation formula. Frank – tithing from seminaries to JCSTS, and a small percentage for SEPR whose viability is dependent on the TEF.

Jeffrey: we've been figuring out where we've been.

10:50 am

8. **Michelle** presented guiding questions for discussion.

GIVEN THE TEF TRANSITION, HOW CAN WE CONCEIVE OF COTE'S PURPOSE NOW?

As you study the list of COTE functions, which do you see as priorities for the denomination?

Which do you see as priorities for the PCUSA seminaries?

Which priorities among the list of COTE functions are shared by the seminaries and the denomination?

If those shared priorities can be articulated in a single "theme" that begins with "The purpose of COTE is to..."

Review morning discussions

Based on review of morning discussions, what options exist for what COTE's common vision can be?

What are the possibilities of what shape COTE can or should take?

Since COTE is a working committee of the GA, with its own call to ministry in the denomination, what shape can or should COTE's work take?

What can COTE's common vision be?

Are there options for different common visions? How might the work be shaped according to the options?

WHAT IS THE CONNECTION YOU SEE WITHIN THESE OPTIONS BETWEEN THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST, THE WORK OF THE SEMINARIES, AND THE DENOMINATION?

What partnerships can COTE participate in that support the denomination and the seminaries?

FOR EXAMPLE, PARTNERSHIPS WITH THE VARIOUS PC(USA) AGENCIES: OFFICE OF GENERAL ASSEMBLY, PRESBYTERIAN MISSION AGENCY, BOARD OF PENSIONS, PRESBYTERIAN FOUNDATION, PRESBYTERIAN PUBLISHING CORPORATION, AND PRESBYTERIAN INVESTMENT AND LOAN PROGRAM.

WITHIN THE PRESBYTERIAN MISSION AGENCY: THEOLOGY AND WORSHIP, CONGREGATIONAL MINISTRIES PUBLISHING, WORLD MISSION, EVANGELISM AND CHURCH GROWTH, COMPASSION, PEACE, AND JUSTICE

EXTERNAL TO THE PC(USA): LILLY FOUNDATION, LOUISVILLE INSTITUTE, WABASH CENTER FOR RELIGION

How can PCUSA seminaries partner?

IN WHAT SPECIFIC WAYS ARE SEMINARIES PARTNERING RIGHT NOW?

WHAT RESOURCES DO SEMINARIES SHARE OR HAVE IN COMMON THAT COULD BE THE GROUND FOR A SOLID INITIATIVE OR PARTNERSHIP?

WHAT NEED TO SEMINARIES HAVE IN COMMON THAT COULD PROVIDE FOCUS FOR A PARTNERSHIP?

What is the way forward?

What next steps should COTE take?

9. For September agenda, revise nominations process for Award for Excellence in Theological Education.

10. 4:45 pm

11. **Michelle** introduced discussion of the Bible Content Exam (BCE), and **Tim** shared information. Briefly: in 2009, grade reporting changed to indicate how candidates did in various sections of the canon. Then the PCC moved to retire any questions that were publicly available. In spring 2015, the PCC retired all publicly available questions. Tim provided more history and statistics. The PCC is standing by its decision not to scale the grading. Fall 2015 passing rate was 28% and January 2016 was 39%. Much discussion ensued, including how cultural shifts in education are happening long before seminary.

Garnett: concerns about what low passing rates say about the church.

Jeffrey: if this discussion doesn't belong in COTE, where does it belong? It's related to seminaries, which are the best place to begin remediation.

Tim pointed out that the BCE results also affect biblical studies curriculum in general.

Michael: knowledge base for the BCE shouldn't be shoved off on the seminaries, and suggests the exams are trivia.

Tom: it's a COTE issue not because it's a seminary issue but because it's a whole church issue.

Matt: sounds like a CPM issue, and CPMs need to tell inquirers to read the Bible.

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Thursday, February 25

- 12. 9:00 am**
- 13. Jeffrey** opened the meeting with thanks to Gary Eller for his work and **Gary** opened in prayer.
- 14. Mindy** gave the Executive Committee Report.
Moved and approved SEPR covenant
Rotation of COTE delegates to Presbyterian Mission Agency Board meeting, moved by Executive Committee, described, approved
Meetings schedule and locations moved and approved
- 15. Tom** gave the allocation formula task force report. They are committed to moving forward with planning allocation formula, and will move ahead quickly. Tom noted impact disbursement has on raising funds as well as disbursing them.
Noted that this TEF task group can use funds for COTE to meet face to face that will not be used for a second annual meeting.
Lee – who should be involved in TEF conversation? Donors?
Jeff – this group should work with Lee and Nancy – how can donor instincts be leveraged for mission support.
Jim – Dan Aleshire says that the PCUSA seminaries are the crown jewel of theological education. All of our seminaries in their own ways are continuing to be at the vanguard, what we teach and how we teach it, leading theological education, so serving the larger church by example and interaction.
Tom – three guiding principles: institutional support for seminaries, symbolic for community, narrative quality of leadership development among students for service in the church to the world.
Jeff – Lee and Nancy, what do you need from this committee for your work?
Lee – renovating something that’s been in place for 25+ years. We need your stories – how would you make the case? Also, we (TEF) need to update COTE more. Monthly call is a tremendous help. We (TEF) think of COTE as their board.
Nancy – concurs with what Lee has said. Needs flexibility and understanding. The differentiating the market for this fund takes time, flexibility, and understanding. Used to be that institutional giving was motivation in and of itself, and that has changed. People want to support people. To the extent that COTE can put faces and stories that have impact together and share with TEF would be great.
Lee – section 2 in his report: 1) send gifts to the Foundation, not the PMA. 2) increase those gifts by connecting with your congregations 3) have to move beyond traditional patterns, and look for patterns of what we can do together and find the norms and boundaries (**Jeff** – this will be for the Executive Committee to do).
Frank – come and visit with us and our students, which churches give so he can thank them when he goes out.
Jeff – reemphasized the need for executive committee to be on top of this to strengthen things.
- 16. Nominating Committee report, Mindy** reported:
COTE GA-elected seats: five slots to fill, didn’t have enough candidates, so they chose to revisit the list. Ended up choosing five from ten applicants.
Approved slate of officers:
Chair - Frank Yamada

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Vice Chair - Tom Trinidad

Committee Chairs:

Theological and Church Concerns - Brian Blount
Interschool and Mission Cooperation - Leanne Van Dyk
Implementation and Interpretation - Sandra Tracy
Institutional Support - Mary Elva Smith

Executive Committee: All of the above, by virtue of their office, plus at-large member
Alan Bancroft

This slate was moved by nominating committee. No discussion. Unanimously approved.

17. **Michelle** led discussion of GA related issues:
 - 14 04 letters process
 - Overtures 11 and 52 re: evangelism discussion about how this affects seminaries, Michael observes that when confidence in faith in the gospel technique comes in and COTE has a role here.
 - Michelle will plan with Frank and Jeff to strategize about what COTE will do at GA.
18. **Frank** – thanks to Jeff and Mindy for gracious leadership. Moved, seconded.
19. **José** closed in prayer
We are adjourned.

Respectfully submitted on February 26, 2016,

Jeffrey Bullock, Chair, Committee on Theological Education

Michelle Bartel, Coordinator for Theological Education