

Saint Paul School of Theology Board Notes

November 1, 2019

Tex Sample, Chair of the Board of Trustees

The Board of Trustees of Saint Paul School of Theology meets three times per year for two days each. Our October 2019 meeting was an especially valuable time. On the first day we met with Loretta Summer as our consultant. With more than 40 years of experience in working with human resources in a great variety of institutional and organizational settings, she has consulted in union and nonunion environments, manufacturing organizations, banks, telecommunication companies, hospitals, not-for-profit organizations, restaurants, and state and local governments. During her session with us she addressed three major areas: responsibilities as a board, building trust, and enhancing communication. She reviewed with us our amended articles of incorporation and our amended and restated bylaws. In connection with these she discussed with us Board policies and procedures and the nature of our relationship with the faculty. She then turned to the central importance of trust dealing with practices that tend to break and those that tend to build trust. After a discussion of these practices she engaged the Trustees in an analysis of each person's communication style, which was broken down into four types: dominance, influence, steadiness, and conscientiousness. Next, she took these communication styles and worked through with the Trustees how each of these styles tend to deal with conflict and relationships. As one can surmise from the above, it was a very valuable learning experience. During this afternoon session we were pleased to have representatives from the faculty.

At the dinner meeting that evening the faculty were invited to be with the Board for a conversation. For the first part of the evening there was an informal gathering with representatives at each table of a faculty member, an administrator, a new Board member, and a returning Board member. The second part of the evening provided instructions for the conversation between the Faculty and the Board members (thanks to Nancy Howell). The Faculty instructions were: ask Board members a question based on what you would like to know about the Board and its work in order to enhance and facilitate your service to the seminary. (Examples: What are the next steps in defining the seminary's governance system? What is your vision of shared governance?) The Board instructions were: ask the Faculty member a question based on what you would like to know about the Faculty and their work in order to facilitate your service to the Board. (Examples: What are the benefits and challenges of the new FLEX course delivery method? What is the FLEX plan?) Then each table was asked: What key activity, issue, or project requiring Faculty/Board collaboration rises to the top from your table discussion? This led to the final part of the evening, a plenary discussion, not to report or to summarize the table talk, but to name any activities, issues, projects, or even inspirations that emerged during the table conversation (especially in responding to the final question above). This guided discussion was intended to build relationships toward the collaborations needed for successful achievement of the Seminary mission as well as the implementation of shared governance structures.

The second day of the Board meeting began with training, led by Leanne Walkowiak, on how to use Moodle, the Seminary program for accessing school documents, especially those relevant to the work of the Board of Trustees. We then turned to reports. Anne Walker brought us up to date on the happenings on the Oklahoma campus and the important work she is doing there. She reported that we have 21 students, including seven new ones, on the Oklahoma campus. She next stated five areas of her ongoing work: 1) strategic partnerships; 2) donor development; 3) student recruitment; 4) community presence; and 5) campus development.

Next, we heard from President Neil Blair who reviewed the accomplishments of the Seminary during the past three years and subsequently turned to future developments. He emphasized the need to stabilize all the changes the school has made and to complete the innovations that have begun. He named seven possible opportunities for the school in the future:

- 1) The idea of giving all current and new students the option to switch to a monthly subscription price for tuition. This will have a dramatic impact on net tuition and will probably take three to five years to fully transition.
- 2) Dramatically broaden the partnership with Church of the Resurrection with a focus on programmatic partnerships and at the same time continue to seek and develop programmatic partnerships with other organizations and schools.
- 3) Work with local Bishops to create a contextualized, competency-based track within the MDiv, DMin, and MACM degrees.
- 4) Work with Faculty to adjust their educational philosophy in order to empower them to live into their gifting.
- 5) Change the program development process/system in order to allow for experimentation without needing review or approval from Faculty and the Board.
- 6) Work diligently to create a different Governance structure. I think in our past it seemed as though everyone was trying to establish some level of control or ownership. The mission and values should be leading the way, not the Board, Faculty or Staff.
- 7) Eliminate all reporting that is not directly tied to the institutional dashboard. Items 2, 3, and 5 are only possible if item 4 is addressed. Item 5 and 7 are only possible if 6 is addressed.

The remainder of the meeting was spent on reports from various Trustee committees.

The Academic Committee reported that our current enrollment is up to a total of 101 students, with 80 of those on the Kansas campus and 21 on the Oklahoma campus. This is an increase of 11% overall and a 24% increase in Oklahoma. Our new degree-seeking students have increased to 29%, and we have eight new students enrolled in the DMin focus with the Church of the Resurrection and the Gamaliel Organization. Regarding Faculty effectiveness, Saint Paul professors produced 27 new publications and provided 131 presentations in academic, church, and community settings. Meanwhile, ten Faculty serve on editorial boards and five are in leadership positions. Also, the Faculty is working with Quality Matters, a higher education rubric designed to improve the online content presented to students at Saint Paul. Finally, evaluations of educational and Faculty effectiveness indicate that benchmarks are being met while Faculty continue to improve course offerings. Academic challenges remain such as increased enrollment and scholarship money needs; support of Faculty for their in-class and out-of-class activities, and for ways to improve Faculty and student involvement in the activities of the Board and for decision-making within the school. All of these are under consideration with proposals forthcoming.

The Governance Committee reported the naming of four new members to the Board: the Reverend Jennifer Ahrens-Sims, Dana Aldridge, Linda Shipman, and the Reverend David Wiggs. Trustee Craig Ramsey expressed his regret through President Blair that he is unable to fulfill his responsibilities as a trustee due to heavy commitments and his resignation was accepted. The Governance Committee has also reviewed the Presidential Goals for 2018–2019 and the President's performance. Presidential Goals for 2019 – 2020 are currently being discussed, and the Committee continues to study the process of presidential succession.

The Resource Committee reported that SPST remains in a strong position financially. The financial foundation established over the last year indicates that the school is positioned to maintain resources well into the future. Reports and documentation of the Seminary's financial situation are provided by CFO/COO Matthew Mills on a monthly/quarterly basis, and, when adjustments are needed, they can be made quickly because of the resources available. In FY2017-2018 the school only drew down 3.77% from the endowment (pending audit reviews). This is below the target that had been set at 4%. Moreover, the Seminary has operated with a balanced budget, which was validated by the Higher Learning Commission as having "strong processes." Further, the budget is linked to the SPST Strategic Plan, and other dimensions of the Seminary's work are in continuous communication with finances so that institutional spending and financial resources constantly take each other into account. Saint Paul has no debt and its endowment is nine to ten times the size of its annual expenses. This financial situation places it among the top freestanding Seminaries in the United States. Finally, SPST showed an increase of credit hours delivered at 6.5% when comparing summer and fall credit terms from this year to last. Budget projections were based on a 5% increase of credit hours, so the 6.5% increase was very good news.

The Strategic Planning and Evaluation Committee did an update at its last meeting and reviewed the strategic priorities for the next one to three years. Strategic priorities drive operational and academic investments. Further, the SPEC now works with an Annual Cycle of Planning, which is reviewed monthly. During the Committee meeting VPAD Jeanne Hoeft reminded the Committee that it is necessary to take more time in implementing current goals the schools has previously adopted. Each goal requires years to fully implement and complete and thus necessitates ongoing attention and action. For example, the Flex Initiative (Goal #4, developing innovative educational delivery systems) was established and will be executed and evaluated over the next year. Goal #4 has been a strategic priority and must not be dropped but rather continue to be implemented. The Committee heard reports from the Executive Team regarding progress on current strategic goals and made two recommendations to the Board of Trustees for its October 2019 meeting. Those two goals were:

- 1) to reconfirm Goal #2 (recruitment and retention) and Goal #8 (collaborations and partnerships) as strategic priorities for 2020 –2021, and
- 2) to reconfirm the annual Cycle of Planning.

The board did take action to confirm both the two strategic priorities and the cycle of planning. Thus, it is the responsibility of the entire school – Faculty, Staff, Administration, and Trustees to see that these priorities shape the ministry of the institution.

The Executive Committee renewed its commitment to bring more women, more racial/ethnic members, and more representatives of Oklahoma onto the Board. Further, the Committee recommended the resurfacing of the Shared Governance document for conversation with Administration, Faculty, and Board. The committee also developed specific recommendations for the Board of Trustees:

- 1) to hire Anne Walker as Executive Director of the SPST Oklahoma campus, which was done;
- 2) to recommend four new members to the Board of Trustees, which was done;
- 3) to set up conversations between the Faculty and the Trustees for the October 2019 meeting, which was done, as reported above;
- 4) to engage special consultant Loretto Summers to work with the Board on issues of responsibilities, trust, and communication, which was done; and, finally,
- 5) to prepare a long-range plan for presidential succession, which is in process.

In conclusion, Saint Paul has made great strides in the past three years, and the previous twelve months or so involved a great deal of work by the entire institution. We must not forget how much effort has been expended by the Administration, the Faculty, and the Staff whose work has been arduous and at times tension-filled. The school now needs time to consolidate the enormous gains that have been made. It needs time to establish and work out the innovations now in place. It needs time to take a breath, to deepen our collaborations, to build a culture of shared governance, and, always, to discover the will of that strange God who made Self known in Jesus and, we believe, spoke an important word to John Wesley.