

Letter from Theological Education Advisory Council (TEAC) Working Group

Dear Members of the ELCA Church Council,

Grace and peace to you in the name of the Risen Christ!

Responding to Church Council action taken at its November 2015 Church Council meeting, Vice-President Carlos Peña formed a working group to receive feedback from around the ELCA to the [report and recommendations of the Theological Education Advisory Council](#). This working group was charged with inviting and considering this feedback and with crafting specific strategies for implementing the recommendations in the TEAC Report.

The working group included Bishop Elizabeth Eaton, Robin Steinke (co-chair of TEAC), Herman Yoos (co-chair of TEAC), Paul Pribbenow (TEAC member), Randall Foster (TEAC member), Maren Hulden (TEAC and Church Council member), Stephen Herr (Church Council member), Wyvetta Bullock (Churchwide Staff), and Jonathan Strandjord (Churchwide Staff). Kenn Inskeep and Adam DeHoek from Research and Evaluation provided invaluable assistance in developing and evaluating the surveys used by the group. Work commenced in December 2015 with a first conference call meeting on December 18, 2015. Subsequently, the committee met on January 13, February 11, March 1, March 22, and March 28, 2016. In addition, subgroups assigned to certain tasks met to facilitate their work.

The working group identified seven tasks to receive feedback from around this church with the goal of receiving it by the end of February. The results of the feedback from leaders and constituencies prepared the way for drafting of specific implementing strategies related to TEAC's recommendations. Bishop Yoos engaged the Conference of Bishops inviting their input on TEAC Recommendation 1D (Continuing Education). Paul, Robin and Jonathan attended the Western Mission Network Consultation in January and Covenant Cluster Network Consultation in March where they engaged network partners from seminaries, colleges, synod lay schools, outdoor ministries and youth and young adult ministries. They invited them to consider what they see as most important in TEAC's Report and Recommendations and asked them to consider what actions they themselves could take to implement TEAC's recommendations. In particular, they received from these network partners feedback relating to TEAC Recommendation 1A (Advisory Committee), TEAC Recommendation 1D (asset mapping), and explored their thoughts on how the various components might be more thoroughly "church together" in the work pointed to in TEAC Recommendations 2A, 2B, 2C and 2D and 3B.

The working group invited the presidents of ELCA colleges and universities gathered at the Lutheran Educational Conference of North America meeting to share their views concerning what roles they believe their schools can and should commit to playing in the theological education network envisioned by TEAC. Participants in the Youth Extravaganza provided input concerning what roles they are already performing in the efforts called for in TEAC Recommendation 2A (vocational discernment) and how this work can be advanced. Outdoor Ministry and Campus Ministry leaders (both adults and youth/young adults) as well as the Youth Ministry Network were invited to respond. Bishop Eaton sought the wisdom from leaders of large membership congregations, especially concerning TEAC Recommendations 1B, 2A, 2B, 2C and 2D. The responses from these groups are found in the document titled, [TEAC Feedback](#).

Synod vice-presidents were surveyed concerning TEAC Recommendation 1B (staffing and resourcing), TEAC Recommendations 2A (discernment) and 2C (lay training). In addition, Research and Evaluation conducted a survey of rostered leaders in order to measure their support of the full set of TEAC recommendations and to invite their comments. All 17,000 plus rostered leaders with known email addresses received this survey with the aim both to gather input from these leaders and to foster their participation in strengthening this church's work in theological education. Summaries of both of these surveys can be found in the document titled, [TEAC Surveys](#).

In addition, the working group discussed with Vicki Garber and Clarence Smith, Budget and Finance chair and vice chair respectively, and Treasurer Linda Norman about potential implications of TEAC on the next triennial budget. Linda provided a helpful analysis of how the current budget supports TEAC priority areas as well as background information on the current seminary funding formulas. The background on that discussion can be found in the [Budget and Finance committee materials](#).

Finally, the working group very recently received a significant new report from Research and Evaluation on the results of a long-term investigation of issues related to the [Supply of and Demand for Clergy](#) serving in ELCA congregations. This is the most comprehensive and rigorous analysis of this to date. While its findings (that we do have a shortage of congregational pastors--and it's growing) are troubling, this report is very helpful in providing a clear picture not only of the present situation but also what we can expect in the next several years. It should both spark and resource important conversations across the ELCA on discernment as well as for the identification, preparation and support of leaders.

The working group was particularly impressed by several things as it reviewed all of this input. First of all, with few exceptions, leaders across the ELCA believe that the questions TEAC was tasked with exploring are very important. They are glad that close attention is being paid to the ELCA's work in theological education and they appreciate being invited into the conversation. Second, there is very broad appreciation for the four-page theological framework that opens the [TEAC Report and Recommendations](#) presented to the Church Council last November. It struck a chord with many who reported that they "heard a call" in it. Third, while none of TEAC's recommendations found support from every person who responded to an invitation to give input to the working group, all of the recommendations had many more supporters than opponents. As measured in the "Frequencies Report" for the rostered leaders survey, four of them—TEAC Recommendations 1C, 2C, 2D, and 3C—had very high levels of support and no recommendation had less than 72 percent of respondents indicating they support it.

The working group did hear from some who think that what is urgently needed is a complete focus on improving the efficiency of theological education by reducing expenditures. At the same time, the group heard from others who took the opposite view, believing that looking for efficiencies is a distraction from the task of expanding the reach of theological education. But the most common view expressed has been that we need both to steward our resources carefully and to expand the reach of our work in theological education. Similarly, most who want the partners in our theological education network to work together more closely also want to avoid a standardization that squeezes out variety and gets in the way of new experiments.

The [implementing strategies](#) recommended by the TEAC working group are the group's attempt to identify a set of initial concrete steps that can move the ELCA's theological education network toward being both more far-reaching and more sustainable, both more connected and more flexible. The working group recognizes that it is unlikely that all of these strategies will prove productive and that further

strategies will emerge along the way. As the working group, we commend these implementing strategies to the Church Council as measures with good potential to strengthen and renew the ELCA in its calling to the ministry of theological education.

Soli Deo Gloria,

Theological Education Advisory Council Working Group