

To GA Commissioners from the Presbytery of San Francisco

Copies to Nelson, COTE chair, Foundation president

I write as an honorably retired member of the Presbytery of San Francisco, having been on its Hunger task force and then its Hunger Action Enabler, an interim pastor of three of its congregations between periods of ecumenical ministry, holder of a D. Min from San Francisco Seminary, member of the seminary's committee for the H. Eugene Farlough Chair of African American Christianity, and spouse of one of SFTS's emerita faculty. Though now retired in southern California, and active here in a small urban Presbyterian congregation, I write to share my continued concern for the institution so much part of my life.

It is the wrong time for our denomination to be threatening the existence of one of its leading institutional expressions of struggle for equity for Black and LGBTQ Presbyterians. You should know that behind the murky defense of the actions affecting San Francisco Theological Seminary of the Committee on Theological Education as being all decent and in order is its threat to the continued existence of the seminary. Though reduced in size, among its seven tenured faculty are two distinguished African American women scholars, unmatched percentage in any other Presbyterian institution outside its historic black institutions. This is a result of more than 50 years earnest struggle by this seminary with the racism infecting all our institutions. Is now the time for Presbyterians to threaten that legacy, rather than embrace and celebrate it? This is the Presbyterian educational institution that paid a price in lost constituencies for its nurture of major leaders in the decade long struggles for the rightful place of LGBTQ Presbyterians in the full life of our churches. Should the denomination turn its back now as the seminary finds ways to be faithful to its educational mission so important to our denomination?

**Whatever action the General Assembly takes in these weeks regarding its seminaries must leave intact recognition of San Francisco Theological Seminary as the carrier of our Presbyterian tradition. Otherwise the GA will be out of step with the times through which God is calling us to faithfulness to our professions.**

The Committee on Theological Education (COTE), and the Presbyterian Foundation have questions about details of the governance of this Presbyterian seminary now that it is embedded within the University of Redlands, founded by Baptists but now secular. Details can shape the future, but so does much else going on that we are barely aware of. Instead of taking the intended action by COTE to suspend the existing covenant with San Francisco Theological Seminary—which warns off presbyteries from sending its candidates to the seminary, **let COTE simply report** to the GA that it does not understand this new governance, but also acknowledge clearly what is not at stake: this seminary's faculty and commitments continue its 150 year old tradition since its founding as an expression of authentic Presbyterianism. COTE could report it will study with this faculty and the new host what this new governance means and will report what it learns with recommendations to a future GA.

The Presbyterian Foundation has sequestered endowment funds meant for the mission of San Francisco Theological Seminary. The seminary is losing modest income counted on to support its existence. Thankfully for the seminary the support of its seven fully endowed chairs is not in the hands of the Foundation. The Foundation questions that the governance in the new setting for San Francisco Theological Seminary is Presbyterian enough. But has the mission its donors supported changed materially? It has not. For the sake of stewardship of donor intent the Foundation could find legal work-arounds to deal with its scruples, if it were convinced of the importance that it validate the mission of the seminary and not find itself on the wrong side history, undermining struggles for equity for Black and LGBTQ children of God.

This is but one item on a complicated agenda. But it seems clear the times call for no action that threatens this expression of Presbyterian tradition that is so well positioned to be relevant to God's call.

In Christ's service, Hugh Wire