

SECTION 1 LEADERS REFLECT ON THIS SEASON OF CRISIS



Editor's Introduction

Because of our roles as spiritual leaders and educators, in the past year, many of us have had to find the strength to support our students and colleagues in their fear, loss, anger, grief, and helplessness even as we've been experiencing all of those same feelings within ourselves. If it is spiritual practice enough to manage one's own anxiety in times of crisis, and it is, what does leadership in a time of a pandemic, racial violence and reckoning, massive wild fires, and political upheaval require of us?

To begin our exploration of ministerial formation in a time of crisis, we asked leaders in experiential theological education to reflect on the ways the COVID-19 pandemic and the greater acknowledgement of our country's historical and present-day racial violence, enslavement, and oppression have impacted their leadership in theological education. We were curious what they saw as possible lasting changes in theological education that might come out of this particular time in our history.

Like so many in Association of Clinical Pastoral Education (ACPE), Trace Haythorn and Katherine Higgins each begin their essays with theory. In his role as Executive Director/CEO of the Association of Pastoral Education (ACPE), Haythorn found in Ronald Heifetz's distinction between technical and adaptive challenges a helpful theory from which to consider the changes required by the events of 2020. The former can be solved using existing understanding and thought. The later requires much more of people because they, themselves, must be changed. In the face of adaptive challenges, Haythorn notes, "it is the responsibility of effective leaders to resist simple problem-solving and instead help the people whom they serve imagine new ways of advancing their shared mission with integrity and authenticity." He offers us several concrete examples of how ACPE has met

the adaptive challenges throughout the year, ending with a story of his own willingness to be challenged and changed by his colleagues.

In her essay, Higgins, ACPE Director of Communities of Practice, brings Systems-center theory in as another lens from which to understand and respond to the current moment. As we have moved from the acute crisis into a time of chronic anxiety and uncertainty, she writes that the power of clarifying what we do and don't know, accurately assessing the sources of our information, and resisting the temptation to fill in the gaps in our knowledge with fantasies grounds her leadership in the here and now.

In her role as Steering Committee chair of the Association for Theological Field Education (ATFE) Barbara Blodget has found the language of "interim time" helpful in describing this historical moment. She reflects that particular practices that theological educators have always emphasized — *"the importance of naming what you don't know, the benefit of disciplines, and the need to distinguish innovation from mere disruption"* — have become valuable touchstones for navigating the work of theological education in a time of social distancing. She concludes her essay with the powerful reminder that "while it is often said that innovations are by nature disruptive, all disruptions are not by nature innovative." As theological educators it continues to be our work not to conflate or confuse the two.

To conclude the section, Richard Trist, president of the Australia, New Zealand Association for Theological Field Education (ANZATFE), shares with us results from an ANZATFE survey of field educators' perspectives on the impact of the pandemic on students, supervisors, and programs. While educators and students alike were challenged, most students and many educators were able to adapt to what the moment required and even discovered new goals and skills as a result.

These writers all suggest that the practices we've cultivated and the wisdom we've acquired through study and experience are our best resources in leadership in any moment, particularly this one.

Nancy Wood
Editor