



SAN FRANCISCO
THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
Whole Leaders for the Whole Church

SAN FRANCISCO THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

REV. DR. PHILIP W. BUTIN
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We're all painfully aware of the economic challenges facing our nation and world in these anxious times. Here at San Francisco Theological Seminary, we're facing an historic moment this Spring, too. The resources we've known to support the seminary have diminished significantly. Some of this is changes in the global economy. Some of it is broader changes in theological education, its funding, and its patterns and paradigms—changes that the national economic downturn now require us to address directly.

In the midst of this challenge, I believe God is asking friends and supporters of SFTS to focus—along with Jesus' disciple Andrew in the story of the multiplication of the loaves and fishes (John 6:1-21)—not on what we don't have, but on what we do have.

In particular, we have some exceptional resources that I've come to think of as the distinctive "charisms" (gifts) or the "DNA" of SFTS. These are the founding purposes and motives that have given us our core identity, emphases, priorities and themes that run all the way through our history from our founding in San Francisco in 1871.

The first charism is **commitment to responsible interpretation of the text and context of the Christian scriptures**. This charism has always found its expression in a curriculum built around the Bible, studied in the original languages. It has consistently been manifested in graduates who preach with biblical seriousness and depth. It has sometimes led to controversy, as we have insisted that the Bible be interpreted in ways that faithfully reflect its historical, linguistic, literary and cultural context.

The second charism is **cultural contextualization of the Christian Message**. The Seminary was founded amidst the felt need to have a unique theological institution that responded to the cultural challenges of the American West. Though immature by today's standards, SFTS showed sensitivity to Hispanic and Asian cultural and spiritual realities from its inception. As the years passed and understanding increased, SFTS has maintained a strong focus on a multicultural faculty, students and graduates serving diverse and immigrant cultures, a global Doctor of Ministry program and cultural proficiency as a prerequisite for effective ministry in all contexts.

The third charism is a perspective of **both/and rather than either/or**. There was a pragmatic ecumenical emphasis in our early history that promoted Christians working together to help Westerners honor God and form communities with stable values. There was an emphasis on unity in common mission and evangelism. Presbyterians of the Old School, the New School and the Cumberland denominations all gathered into the orbit of the Seminary. This is one reason that the Graduate Theological Union—with its broad ecumenical vision—was an extension of the Seminary's initial charisms. The attitude I'm lifting up here is **generosity of spirit—a genuine liberality**, if you will.

The fourth charism is **holistic service of the broader society and culture as an intrinsic manifestation of the gospel**. This spirit came to full flower in a much-remembered trip to Selma, Ala., in March 1965. Our president, faculty members and students marched with Martin Luther King, Jr., and stood in solidarity with African Americans seeking a peaceful path to racial justice. At SFTS, we believe that God's purposes are for the wholeness of the whole world; they don't end with the church. The church exists for the sake of God's reign and the restoration of the whole creation.

A fifth charism is the **commitment to stretch our curricular requirements to accommodate and serve the unique learning and life needs of students**.

As I travel, one of the things our alumni mention most is the flexible way SFTS worked with them so they could earn their degree and seek ordination within the geographical, financial and timing of their lives. An impressive recent example of this charism is the SFTS Southern California program. Founded in 1990, SFTS/SC courses are taught evenings and Saturdays. Students from a variety of cultural backgrounds—who need to minister and work during the day—can earn their degree and be ordained without leaving their current social location. Our Southern California enrollment is now 37 percent Anglo, 18 percent Asian American, 13 percent African American, 9 percent Hispanic American and 23 percent international, representing 14 denominations and non-denominational churches.

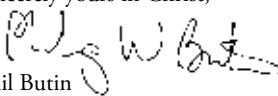
There are three charisms of SFTS that have been present in some fertile combination from the very beginning. **Christian spirituality, regular corporate worship and the praise of God in music have always worked together in the Seminary's programs to shape leaders deeply rooted in the life and love of God**. We're all familiar with the national regard for our Program in Christian Spirituality. But it is important also to recall the historic focus on worship and music that led to such traditions as "Lessons and Carols" and chapel worship as the daily center of an SFTS education.

From the very beginning, SFTS also emphasized **the constant integration of theory and practice—of church and academy**. SFTS first met in St. John's Presbyterian Church in San Francisco. Our founder, Dr. William Anderson Scott, was the pastor of this congregation throughout the founding period of the Seminary. At SFTS, we've always believed that church and seminary are inseparable. Our Practical Theology faculty is our largest department. We believe seminaries exist to serve the mission of the church, and that healthy churches depend on a well-formed and well-educated ministry.

When you combine these last three historic emphases (**spiritual formation, theory and practice**) it's an easy step to arrive at the current SFTS mission statement: **"Whole Leaders for the Whole Church."** Our mission statement articulates our emphases of "spiritual formation, critical theological reflection, and the skills and arts of ministry." It's an approach to leadership formation—and a trilogy—that are deeply rooted in our heritage.

But there's one more enduring quality, which I mention to encourage us as we enter into a time of reallocating our resources to keep as tightly focused on our mission as possible. This charism is about **leaders, students and supporters committed to self-sacrificial generosity**. Throughout our history, there have been thousands of faculty members, administrators, staff, trustees, alumni, students and volunteers who have put the mission of the Seminary ahead of their own ambitions and advantage. In our first 20 years, we moved from place to place, meeting in churches and other schools. But we were San Francisco Theological Seminary. There were many sacrifices. But through God's strength, our leaders and supporters have remained sacrificially faithful. Through their generous self-giving, God has protected our mission from unacceptable compromise. As we continue to give sacrificially of ourselves to enable the Seminary we love to continue God's work, we stand in a great heritage, reflecting a final charism that runs deep in our DNA.

Sincerely yours in Christ,


Phil Butin
President and Professor of Theology