

Anglican Communion Theological Education
Topic: Leading Seminaries and Theological Colleges
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When I received the invitation to write this paper, I searched for the address that I gave on the service of my installation as Rector and Principal of the College in March 2015. The day was historic as this was the first time a woman was appointed to be the head of the College in the 116 years of its existence, a year that also marked 145 years since the Anglican Church was established in South Africa. I was being asked by the church and I said yes to lead an institution in which I was a student 16 years earlier and served as a member of its governing board for 9 years. What I knew both when I was a seminarian and a member of the Board meant that I possessed some information about the college and the town that I was coming to work in. Soon I realised that that information was not adequate for what I thought I was coming to Grahamstown to do and be.

The College of Transfiguration NPC also known as CoT is the only residential seminary for the Anglican Church of Southern Africa (ACSA). CoT is called to educate and train those who sense God's calling to serve within the structures of the church (Anglican Church in particular) as ordained or theologically informed people. In doing so, CoT is committed not only to produce clergy and lay theologians for their contexts of origin but also for the wider church and community. Ultimately, CoT aims to *Form-Inform-Transform* spiritual leaders that are social activists and positive transformers of communities. To realise this goal, CoT offers an integrated, rigorous, and holistic educational and formative programme that promotes independent thinking, criticality, and cognitive depth.

My appointment came at a time when the Anglican Church of Southern Africa (ACSA) had only one theological college after amalgamating 3 other colleges into one. Before the amalgamation, the Province had 5 theological colleges, and all of them in their initial stages were only accepting males, and others for a long while were catering to a particular race. The amalgamation of the remaining colleges in 1993 was influenced by both financial and the changing political landscape in South Africa. The hope was that this new set up would be fully supported by all, would be financially stable and thrive, and reflect in its faculty and student body persons of all races, ethnicity, and gender. This spoke to the winds of change that were blowing in the church and country. In 1992 the Province ordained women to the priesthood. In 1994 the country held its first democratic elections.

I came to lead the college at a time when it was experiencing a decline in enrolment. We were offering only one qualification – the Diploma in Theology. The college was constantly compared with long-distance learning institutions – this was an unfair

comparison. There were discussions at multiple levels about the relevance of residential training, and whether this college is needed.

As I grappled with these issues six months into my tenure, the students in South African universities were demanding free access to the institutions of higher learning, which birthed the "*fees must fall*" movement. This was a turning point in the education sector in the country. And there were questions asked regarding whether private religious institutions like us will offer free access to education, that question still stands with no answer. And as I write this paper there are demonstrations across the country of students protesting and fighting for free access to tertiary education and demanding that outstanding tuition fees, fees that prevent the returning students from registering for the 2021 academic year, be scrapped.

In 2015 the college was partially registered with the Council of Higher Education (part of the Department of Higher Education and Training in South Africa). The work towards full registration had been going on for more than 12 years before partial registration was granted in the year 2013. The matter of accreditation negatively impacted the credibility of the college.

With the arrival of democracy in 1994 and the emergence of a new education system, the issue of accreditation and quality assurance began to surface as extremely important. Higher education systems have previously been characterised by fragmentation, uneven provision and decades of racial segregation. New institutions and mechanisms were put in place to deal with accreditation and authorisation. On the one hand, the legislation created new opportunities for private providers like CoT to offer degrees, but on the other hand, it imposed stringent requirements on providers outside the public system. Non-compliance carries the real threat of the refusal of registration and enforced closure.

The longer it took for the church to assist the college to fulfil all requirements for registration, it risked the closure of the college. The partial registration has a short life span, if the college does not comply and address outstanding issues it faced permanent closure. I took up the leadership of the college when an "all hands-on-deck" approach was called for to address the outstanding issues including an inspection of the property and its records by a delegation from the government. And then we had to wait for almost a year before hearing the outcome.

I found inspiration in the words of a document that came out of the World Council of Churches Theological Education Consultation held in Oslo in 1996, on why we need this theological college to survive. This is an extract from the document

Theological education and ministerial formation enable church and community leaders, theologians and theological educators to become interpreters of the

gospel in the world and to build viable bridges of understanding between churches of different traditions and the fractured societies of contemporary times. There is a consensus among us on the holistic character of theological education and ministerial formation that is grounded in worship and combines and interrelates spirituality, academic excellence, mission and evangelism, justice and peace, pastoral sensitivity and competence, and the formation of character. For it brings together education of:

- The ear to hear God's words and the cry of God's people.
- The heart, to heed and respond to the suffering.
- The tongue, to speak to both the weary and the arrogant.
- The hands, to work with the lowly.
- The mind, to reflect on the good news of the gospel.
- The will, to respond to God's call.
- The spirit, to wait on God in prayer, to struggle and wrestle with God, to be silent in penitence and humility to intercede for the church and the world.
- The body, to be the temple of the Holy Spirit."

I choose not to wallow in my circumstances and/or question my decision of accepting to lead this institution. I choose to be part of those who were willing to save this institution and lend their resources and expertise to launch us on a road to success.

What have we achieved thus far?

Finding rays of hope, inspiration, unexpected support, and collaborations we did it. Since 2016 the college has added two qualifications Bachelor of Theology (degree) and Advanced Diploma in Ministry. We are now fully registered as a private religious institution of higher learning. We have seen the number of young seminarians increase and more women are now enrolling to study and be formed for ordained ministry. Opportunities for partnership with other colleges and seminaries in the country and the Anglican Communion have been created.

Impact of Covid-19 Pandemic on the College

The pandemic impacted us heavily and negatively like many other institutions. It hit us when our mode of teaching was the only in-person format. We had previously explored the idea of online teaching. On the 16th of March 2020 when we closed the college as the country and the world was preparing to go on lockdown/shelter in place. We had 4 days to find a Learning Management System that we would use for online teaching and for training faculty and students on its use.

Not having in-person classes meant that the tuition and accommodation fees had to be decreased, this has hurt the already troubling financial status of the institution. The

2021 academic year enrolment has declined by almost 30%. A year later we are fully teaching and doing formation online, and even when we do return to in-person teaching we will continue to utilise and apply to the authorities to have online teaching be added as a mode of teaching. The pandemic has made me learn all over again how to lead a theological college.

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