

General Seminary board keeps dean, offers to reinstate faculty

by [Sarah Pulliam Bailey](#) in the [November 12, 2014](#) issue

The embattled General Theological Seminary will keep its controversial dean and is prepared to reinstate the majority of its faculty.

In late September, eight full-time professors quit teaching classes and attending official seminary meetings or chapel services until they could sit down with the seminary board to discuss concerns about the seminary's dean, Kurt Dunkle.

The seminary board accepted the resignations of the faculty, which the professors said they had never offered. The dispute left the flagship Episcopal seminary scrambling to find teachers for its classes.

The board of GTS—a New York institution that has produced generations of bishops and noted theologians—said October 17 that the terminated faculty would be “invited to request provisional reinstatement as professors of the seminary.”

The board also voted to keep Dunkle as dean and president, concluding after hearing an independent report and “after extensive discussion that there are not sufficient grounds for terminating the Very Reverend Kurt Dunkle as president and dean,” the board wrote in a statement. “We reaffirm our call to him as president and dean and offer him our continuing support.”

The executive committee of the board said it is willing to talk with the professors and “to negotiate the terms of their provisional employment for the remainder of the academic year,” the board said in a statement.

A collective statement from faculty on October 21 said they were ready to accept the board's offer. “We also commit with energy to the holy work of reconciliation which we understand to be very important for the health of the entire institution,” the statement said.

Pennsylvania bishop Clifton Daniel, a member of the GTS board, called for “a season of self-examination and repentance” for GTS.

“I am encouraged by the decision of the executive committee to engage a skilled, qualified Christian mediator who will call the dean, the board, the faculty, students (and perhaps representatives of the Alumni/ae Association) together to engage in a prayerful, structured and disciplined process of mediation and reconciliation,” Daniel said in a statement.

Daniel’s statement and that of the eight faculty members looked ahead to conversation after the May 2015 graduation to determine next steps for the seminary.

While committing themselves fully to reconciliation in the remainder of the academic year, the professors wrote that if in May, “we find that the collective process of reconciliation has not worked well, we ask that there be some understanding that appropriate severance will be made available to enable us and our families to make a transition.”

New York bishop Andrew Dietsche, an ex officio member of the GTS board, said that the earlier resolution terminating the faculty had “obscured the dynamic of debate and persuasion within the board itself, and hid from view the genuinely wide diversity of thought and conviction across the board.”

More than 900 scholars from across the country had signed a letter of support for the eight faculty members, saying they will not lecture or speak at the seminary. The eight had charged that Dunkle had made sexist, racist, and homophobic comments and that he had shared a student’s academic records with people who were not authorized to see them, which would violate federal academic privacy standards. —Religion News Service

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