

Stanley Hauerwas drops out of General Theological Seminary lecture series after controversy

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(RNS) Theologian Stanley Hauerwas has declined a series of lectures he was scheduled to give at New York City's General Theological Seminary in November in the wake of the crisis roiling the school.

On Wednesday (October 8), the Christian ethicist said he does not want to get in the middle of a controversy involving the resignations or firings of eight faculty.

Two weeks ago, the eight faculty members stopped teaching classes and attending official seminary meetings or chapel services until they could sit down with the Board of Trustees.

Hauerwas, who is professor emeritus of divinity and law at Duke Divinity School, said he pulled out of the lecture series so he would not appear to take a side.

"I was looking forward to going because I've known of General for my whole academic life, but I had never been there. At one time, it represented a commitment to an Anglo-Catholic tradition with which I'm very sympathetic," said Hauerwas, who attends an Episcopal church in Chapel Hill, North Carolina "I think the situation is one of deep pathos."

GTS, the flagship seminary that has produced generations of bishops and noted theologians, is the only Episcopal seminary where some trustees are appointed by the national church's General Convention.

"It's been the seminary of record for the national church," Hauerwas said.

"Symbolically what's happening there has reverberations throughout the church. I think that's the primary reason people are taken aback by the fact that in some ways what has happened is the death toll of General Seminary. What student is

going to go there?"

During the turmoil, the board said it accepted the faculty resignations, but the faculty members said they never resigned.

Hauerwas was invited by Joshua Davis, one of the professors whose positions were terminated, to give the seminary's Paddock Lectures, but Hauerwas wrote Bishop Mark Sisk, chair of the GTS board, to bow out.

"I have not wanted to do anything that might be interpreted as 'taking sides' because I am on the outside of this situation," Hauerwas wrote on Friday. "However, I am aware that the faculty has made a constructive response that might offer a way forward. As things now stand, if there is no possibility of reconciliation, I would find it very difficult to give the Paddock Lectures."

Hauerwas said that Sisk responded, saying the board is seeking a way forward.

"This is truly sad if not actually tragic situation," Sisk wrote in his letter.

Hauerwas also wrote to the seminary's dean and president, Kurt Dunkle, on Monday, saying he saw little hope in a constructive way forward.

"Bishop Sisk's letter in return offered little hope that a resolution would be possible between the faculty and administrators," Hauerwas wrote. "I very much regret that this is the case."

Dunkle has yet to reply to Hauerwas. A representative for the seminary said Dunkle would not be available for comment.

The eight faculty charged that Dunkle shared a student's academic records with people who were not authorized to see them, which would violate federal academic privacy standards. The faculty also said that he has made racist and sexist remarks on several occasions.

"As a longtime faculty person, I can't help but feel sympathy with the faculty," Hauerwas said. "I do not know enough about the details of their concerns and about Rev. Dunkle to be able to say I'm on the faculty side."

Some 900 scholars from across the country have signed a letter of support for the eight faculty, saying they will not lecture or speak at the seminary. Noteworthy

scholars who signed the letter include James H. Cone of Union Theological Seminary, Gary Dorrien of Union Theological Seminary, and Francis Schüssler Fiorenza of Harvard Divinity School.

During the 2013-14 school year, GTS enrolled 70 students and had \$10.6 million in expenditures and \$27 million in investments, according to the Association of Theological Schools. GTS had faced about \$40 million of debt that it was attempting to pay down through property sales and redevelopment.