

Women in Theological Education – Challenges and Opportunities

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Good day to all of you. Thank you for inviting me to share a personal reflection on the challenges and opportunities for women in theological education.

I like the combination of the words “challenges” and “opportunities” because it immediately gives the idea that there is hope in Theological Education. I would like to share my experiences in three areas: as an administrator (President and Dean of the seminary), second as a teacher and mentor (I teach New Testament Studies); and third as a wife and mother.

First as President and Dean – I must say that I am privileged to be given the opportunity to serve as the first woman President and Dean of St. Andrew’s Theological Seminary, the only Episcopal/Anglican seminary in the Philippines (which started in 1937). From the beginning, I was glad to receive the support of my colleagues, my friends, and my family. If there was something new for me, it was the administrative role, because I had been part of the seminary since 1997 as a teacher.

The challenge, especially at the beginning of my term, was the expectation some people have. Since I was the first woman President and Dean, I was always encouraged to do my best to show people what women are capable of. I understand that sometimes, fellow women are excited about this, but their excitement is sometimes matched with immediate discouragement if their expectations are not met. Yet, as a newcomer, I had to learn how to do things on my own, slowly, because no one has really mentored me to become President and Dean.

Another challenge is the administrative position in itself. I have to be very careful about many things: how to respond to invitations; what to say in social media or in talks/homilies; how to write letters; and others. I often remind myself that I am representing the seminary and not myself. This has taken a toll on me at first. If I was invited to give a talk/reflection, local or overseas, there is the pressure of giving my best because of the institution I represent. There is always the pressure that these are also opportunities to introduce the seminary to others. So, I have to do my best. Many times, I end up having headaches because of overthinking and overworking. I realized that I can represent the seminary at the same time be

myself. I also learned to say NO to some invitations, unless I can delegate these to others.

Another challenge is balancing admin work and the academe. We have a small seminary and it is manageable, but sometimes to be administrator, the President, the Dean and at the same time full time faculty member is very very stressful. I am happy that the faculty members are able to share the burden by doing well in their administrative tasks too. It was also an opportunity for me to learn about the skills and capabilities of my fellow faculty members.

When I started in 1997 as a faculty member at the seminary, I was the only full-time woman lecturer. When I became the President and Dean, there were two of us among 10 or more statutory faculty members. I saw this as an opportunity to encourage talented women to be trained and to join the members of the faculty. Today, out of 9 faculty members, 5 are women. Another lady will be joining us in July 2021 and this will really tip the scale, with 6 women out of 10 faculty members

The second aspect, as a teacher and mentor- If there is something I really enjoy, it is teaching. Aside from the fact that I love being a student of the Scriptures, I also enjoy interacting and listening to students. I would like to mention five challenges here:

1. ***Challenges of the 4th industrial revolution, especially the Internet of Things (IoT).*** Nowadays as younger students (especially straight from Senior High) come to the seminary, and we are faced with new challenges. Coming to the seminary without a background in Scriptures, in theology or in history is still understandable and many of our students in the past were like that too. However, today, many students do not seem to know anything about their denomination or anything about their local churches, and what it is happening there. This is in addition to the failure of the general educational system to respond to the signs of the time. Students who come do not know how to interact and would wait for the power point presentations or recorded lectures to be given to them. The “cut and paste” system in people’s works is common direct from internet. The seminary spends much money on good books, but students barely read them.

The internet of things (IoT) has brought both opportunities and challenges. In the case of the seminary where we offer basic theological programs and where training and formation of the students are very important, we see

more challenges than opportunities. We are addressing these slowly as we also discover more opportunities brought to us by the internet, especially at this time of pandemic when exposure and travel are very limited. It is a tough calling to mentor these students, but it is rewarding when you see them grow and become mature, disciples of Christ.

2. ***The second challenge is Mentoring*** - I must admit that since I became an administrator, I do not spend as much time mentoring students. Again, I am thankful that my colleagues are very helpful to me on this. Sometimes, I feel bad when I only have one-on-one talks with students when they are called to the Dean's office because of some violations requiring discipline. So, I really need to give more time for this.
3. ***The third challenge are the Mental and Emotional Problems among Students***. Aside from the issue of mentoring, we have noted that in the past 3 years, some students need psychotherapy. It came as a shock to us that committed young men and women who respond to God's call carry heavy emotional and psychological burdens. The sad thing is that not one of us is capable of addressing these matters. We then looked as an opportunity to work closely with the dioceses and consulted trained practitioners to help us. This challenge has also opened an opportunity for us to partner with our neighboring hospital for Clinical Pastoral Education. We believe that the interpersonal relations, their exposure with patients, and other experiences will help them develop holistically. However, activities on clinical pastoral education were stopped due this pandemic.
4. ***The fourth challenge is on the Courses on Women***. Among the many positive things, accreditation does is to make us look closely at the curriculum. After several notations from accreditation teams, SATS now includes a course on women and we now have in our library several resources on women studies. We were so much dependent on the availability of lecturers from outside that there were semesters when this course was not offered. However, we have already addressed this, and we will still improve it with our incoming faculty member who did her Master's thesis on women studies.
5. ***The fifth challenge is on Publications***. It may be difficult to believe when I say we have no time, or I have no time to write a book. I spend time at night doing lectures, paper works and others. Some of faculty member are even giver pastoral responsibilities during some days. This is over and above the

time for my family (I have a 12-year-old daughter) and of course a time to rest. Yet in the academy there is an expectation that at the very least one should publish (“publish or perish”). This still remains a dream for me. Of course, given the opportunity, I would like to write a book.

And then finally as a mother. This pandemic has not spared our children, especially as they go through the difficulties of online learning. Every time I come home from work, my supposed bonding time with my daughter became homework time and arguing time. I am not a monster Mom but this new normal has challenged every aspect of our lives, family lives, families are affected. Yet I realized that to be effective at work I also need to find time to relax and spend quality time with the members of my family, who are also struggling to cope up with the demands of this new normal.

Thank you.