



## The need to re-locate Theological Education

### *The Guatemala Appeal to Churches, Seminaries and Training Programmes*

15 June 2022

Ten theological educators from Anglican churches across Central and South America gathered in Guatemala City for a key consultation on the migration crisis and how churches and their seminaries and training programmes can respond. The Global Partnership Office for Latin America (TEC) and a representative from Latin Ministries (TEC) offered their contribution to the discussion. Hosted by TEAC, the consultation produced this Appeal to prompt further discussion and implementation.

The group in Guatemala were joined online by around 50 other participants for the first session, a webinar that heard from Loida Sardinias from Colombia and Gabriela Merayo from Argentina. They reminded everyone that there are now over 280 million migrants in the world, with 20% of this total moving within Latin America and many up to the US border. Many become victims of exploitation, xenophobia and racism and there have been over 100,000 disappearances in Mexico and Central America.

The consultation also heard how migration is at the core of the Bible, from Abraham and the Exodus through the defining episode of the Exile for the people of Israel. Elizabeth Cook from Costa Rica pointed out that the Bible had been written by migrants for migrants, and that migrants today are therefore brothers and sisters in need of respect, dignity and support. Neli Miranda from Guatemala reminded the consultation that missionary activity is the mother of theology and therefore theological education needs to be located within the realities of the crisis.

### **Introduction**

The many crises of our time are resulting in mass migration of peoples across the regions of the world, reckoned now to be around 280 million people on the move. Of these 100 million are refugees, the first time in history there have been this many. Furthermore many migrants face sharp challenges from exploitation, xenophobia and racism. To take one region as an example, Latin America, which has around 20% of the total number of migrants, this exploitation has led to over 100,000 disappearances in Mexico and Central America over the last few years. Many of these refugees were seeking a better life across a border.

Theological education has traditionally been associated with seminaries set apart from the world, where ordinands and others have studied in relative seclusion. They have left their homes and churches and become part of distinct and select communities of the like-minded. Now, however, there are calls to move theological education 'off the balcony and onto the road' (to use John Mackay's phrase), to ensure that study and reflection is based upon and refers back to the mission contexts from which students come and to which they are going, where the realities of the crises of our world provide the setting for education and formation.

This appeal adds its voice to those calls. It arises out of a consultation of theological educators from Anglican churches and colleges across Central and South America gathered in Guatemala City in May 2022, a consultation on the migration crisis and how churches and their seminaries and training programmes can respond to it. Hosted by TEAC (the Theological Education department at the Anglican Communion Office) the consultation was joined online by around 50 other participants for a webinar that heard from speakers from Colombia, Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, El Salvador, Panama, US and Costa Rica. The Global Partnership Office for Latin America of the Episcopal Church and one person from its Latin Ministries also offered their contribution to the discussion. Participants heard not only about the realities of migration today but explored the Bible and the history of the Church to help understand what is happening and then judge and reflect upon it, to find a way forward for theological education programmes. The paragraphs that follow comes out of this consultation.

## **Background**

Migration is part and parcel of the Bible, from Abraham's journey from Haran and the Exodus of the people of Israel through to the formative episode of the Exile and restoration. It can be said that the Bible was written by migrants for migrants. Migration is therefore integral to God's mission embodied by his people from Abraham through to Jesus and the birth and spread of the church. Furthermore missionary activity is the mother of theology, as seen in Paul, whose letters came out of his missionary journeys across the ancient world. Subsequent writings of the early church emerged out of the challenges and opportunities of church growth across the regions of the Roman Empire and beyond. Only with the creation of universities in the Middle Ages did theology acquire a more settled and sedentary character, though even here its most creative episodes were usually connected with the dynamic encounter of different cultural and historical traditions, such as when the rediscovery of Aristotle's writings in Arabic translation in the Muslim world led to Aquinas' great synthesis of this corpus with the theology of Augustine.

In more recent times many of the most creative and influential developments in theology have emerged from the missionary life of churches. For Anglicans the emergence of Evangelical theology can be traced back to the preaching journeys of John Wesley and George Whitfield in the mid 1700s in Britain and America as they preached to people who were migrating from rural areas to industrial centres or across oceans. Also Anglo-Catholic theology can be traced back to the encounter of traditional High Church Anglicanism with growing secularisation in British society and the need to plant churches in the growing industrial areas of Britain and elsewhere. In other parts of the world many of the most

creative movements in theology have emerged out of the struggles of shifting populations on the ground, such as Liberation, Black, Feminist and Minjung theologies. When it is recalled that mission is a broad and rich concept, as defined by the Five Marks of Mission<sup>1</sup>, the number of such examples can be multiplied many times.

Meanwhile in many parts of the Anglican Communion theological education takes place in university and college settings distanced from the life of local churches. The pressures on institutions to obtain professional accreditation and international academic recognition means that their programmes and the writing and publishing of their staff are often geared towards these objectives rather than the encouragement of the missionary life of the local church among migrants and others.

### **An Appeal**

We therefore make an appeal that theology and theological education be located within the missionary life of the church today, as expressed in the Five Marks of Mission and, especially, within the involvement of our churches in the migration crisis.

We appeal to bishops as well as provinces and dioceses to make this kind of theological education a priority in planning and resource allocation.

We appeal to our colleges, seminaries and training programmes to be intentional about locating the setting of their educational work in the missionary life of the churches they serve, whether students are resident at college or at home. This will mean study and reflection being based upon and referring back to the mission contexts from which they come and to which they are going, especially with the involvement of our churches in the migration crisis. It does not imply the closure of those institutions but a transformation of the outlook within them in this kind of way.

We call on students of theological education not to see their studies as an escape into an alternative reality separated from the life of their churches but as a means of seeing, reflecting on and acting on that life with renewed purpose and faithfulness to the mission of God.

We appeal to all Anglicans, female and male, young and old, to set aside time to see, reflect upon and act on the faith and life of their churches as they serve God's mission, so that they may enter into that life with renewed purpose and faithfulness one more.

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<sup>1</sup> The Five Marks of Mission

The mission of the Church is the mission of Christ,

- Tell - to proclaim the Good News of God's Kingdom through our worship and in daily life;
- Teach - to teach, baptise and nurture new believers through our local churches;
- Tend - to respond to human need by loving service in whatever ways we can;
- Transform - to work to transform unjust structures of society, challenging violence of every kind and pursuing peace and reconciliation;
- Treasure - to strive to safeguard the integrity of Creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth;

## **Follow Up**

We ask that the new Anglican Communion Commission for Theological Education encourages and monitors progress in this transformation.