**A First Text on Strategic Planning for the SCE**

From: Tim Sedgwick and Angela Sims

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1. Questions that have precipitated the call for a committee to address strategic planning.
2. *Funding and expenses*. In serving as interim executive director, Gina Wolfe has worked on getting financials in order. This has raised a range of questions about funding and expenses.
3. *The retirement of Andrea Taylor* as Executive Director in 2019 has raised questions about administrative needs and how best to address those needed.
4. *The needs and demands for administrative leadership* (that has been fulfilled by a SCE member serving as executive director) have been a matter of consideration for some time. In other words, what is the need for administrative leadership in terms of roles and responsibilities? In light of finances and the management of administrative needs, what is possible?
5. Developing a strategic planning process. 
   1. This is the *responsibility of the board and executive committee* in working with the SCE president, executive leadership, and administrative staff.
   2. *Mission is a matter of who an organization serves and for what purposes*. Identifying and developing programs that serve stakeholders is central to mission and membership.
   3. *Short-term planning* generally assumes present mission and stakeholders with changes in programming, membership, and finances clarifying that mission as informed by practical possibilities. In this regard, immediate actions may be agreed upon. These include such matters as financial budgeting, investment policies, membership dues, registration and meeting costs, extent of subventions, program development, and criteria for membership.
   4. *Long-term strategic planning* requires an account of changes in membership and stakeholders and with that an assessment of programming in terms of what interests it serves for members and stakeholders. [See Addendum A]
   5. *Data drawn together to describe members and participation* of SCE members (including length of membership, including at what point persons have withdrawn as members) is necessary in order to understand members’ commitments in terms of the stakeholders they serve or seek to engage. However, most important (in gaining information and in building support for the SCE and for future decisions) regarding strategic decisions are personal interviews, whether individual or focused group interviews. Interest and affinity groups may be one way to do such interviewing.
   6. *Whether or not to explore changes* from the present mission and stakeholders (resulting in changes in membership and programming) requires identification and conversations with possible stakeholders regarding interest in collaboration (planning, participation, and funding of initiatives). Not to engage in exploring collaboration with possible stakeholders is itself a strategic decision.
   7. *Exploring collaboration with stakeholders* requires an ongoing, deliberative process of vetting with and receiving from members possibilities for pilot projects and broader collaboration, exploring possibilities through personal consultations with others (including foundations such as Lilly Foundation, accreditation and professional organizations such as ATS, national church and ecumenical associations, etc.), and ongoing conversation and final approval by the Board.
   8. Long-term strategic planning is *a continuing process requiring ongoing leadership* and administrative support. This is likely not possible apart from an executive director with such leadership experience (as are most such directors in professional associations). Outside funding in support of exploring such collaboration may be available through the Lilly Foundation or other foundation.
6. *Interim operations management and administrative leadership*.
   1. *Creating space for adaptive change organizationally* that can support the development of a strategic planning process is a primary priority in effecting strategic planning.
   2. A critical point in decision-making regarding strategic planning is whether or not it is feasible and desirable to pursue long-term strategic planning that holds the possibility of transforming the SCE in terms of programs, stakeholders, members, and with that the mission of the Society. This holds the possibility of changing of the Society with a mission largely defined as a scholarly society supporting persons in their scholarly pursuits (with the primary stakeholders educational institutions hiring such scholars) to a Society with a mission addressing those for whom the discipline of Christian ethics serves (such as schools, churches, professions, and civic organizations). In this way, the Society would be more analogous to the American Academy of Audiology, the American Medical Association, or the American Historical Association. [see Addendum A]
   3. *Executive committee and Board need to make decisions* regarding administrative management of operations (membership communications and dues; financial reports; meeting, registration, arrangements, hospitality, support, etc.; etc.) and administrative leadership.
   4. If long-term strategic planning is to be developed, it is important that for an interim given the retirement of Andrea Taylor that positions aren’t locked into job descriptions and long-term commitments that assume a particular mission. Instead, interim administration and leadership need to have the skills and resources in order to explore long-term strategic planning options so that decisions on what to do can be made by the executive committee and board. The exploration of options should include consultation with others, such as persons from Lilly and ATS and with selected conversations with membership and stakeholders.
   5. Given scenarios presented, the executive committee and board is responsible for deciding whether to explore and develop collaborative projects with stakeholders and thereby set in course conversations and decisions about mission and programming or whether to continue with programming and hence mission focused on supporting the development of the discipline of Christian ethics that is (fill in the blanks) ecumenical, interreligious, cross-cultural, and that addresses both what has been the focus of moral theology or theological ethics and civil society and public life (what has been referred to as social ethics).
   6. We do not assume a normative answer to whether or not the SCE should or shouldn’t pursue a long-term strategic planning process exploring broader collaboration with stakeholders regarding program and hence shaping the development of the mission of the SCE. Instead, our conviction is that the Society should be self-conscious in deciding next steps in planning having gathered sufficient data to address the difference between short-term planning and long-term strategic planning and to decide how to proceed. In either case, this discussion should clarify outcomes and programs of the SCE and with that its mission.

**Addendum A**

**On SCE, Mission and Stakeholders**

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The SCE was formed to support seminary professors and has grown to support the range of persons who identify as teaching Christian ethics in their own work as informed by that of others. And yet, the discipline of Christian ethics is not an end-in-itself. Persons in Christian ethics see their work as serving educational institutions (from primary education through graduate and research programs), churches and other religious organizations, ecumenical and interreligious bodies, professions in addressing ethics, civic organizations engaged in the larger public, public officials and public life more generally. This is not to say the SCE should or could involve all these publics in membership and programming. However, such stakeholders indicate the broader mission that Christian ethics has served. Moreover, such stakeholders claim the time and commitment of Christian ethicist, especially as higher educational institutions and churches (traditionally judicatories and national churches and not only individual congregations) no longer are the mediating institutions that connect that connect Christian ethics to such stakeholders.

**From my correspondence with Gina Wolfe**

As I read the account of the committee on the future, on strategic initiatives, and on funding, I read these as assuming the goal of the Society is to provide and support the research and writing of its diverse membership of persons who identify as “doing” Christian ethics. This reflects the understanding of the academy as ecumenical, or we might say enriched by the variety of approaches and understandings of the field of study, in this case called Christian ethics. Hence initiatives have focused on diversity of programming and support of different groups with distinct interests (methodological, ecclesial, ethnic, advocacy, etc.). As I wrote in February, “The present mission of the SCE is presumably reflected in its program centered on its annual meeting with its plenary sessions, the delivery of papers in sharing current research and constructive work, the work of interest groups, and the general collegial conversations and support. The mission of the society is presumably further reflected in the publication of papers in the society’s annual. This suggests that the mission of the society is the development and support of work in Christian ethics and, correspondingly, professional education and development.”

This is all fine and good. Strategic planning, however, needs to include more broadly the question of mission and stakeholders. In other words, what are the goals, products, and outcomes that members of the Society as Christian ethicists seek and how might these be supported by the Society? What is supported will determine membership. This then addresses the underlying question (and concern) about what membership will decrease given the interests of members and other organizations that address those interests.

Envisioning possible mission and programs (so that decisions can be made one way or the other) may be, as I wrote in February, “stimulated inductively by imagining programmatic initiatives of the SCE beyond the present work of the society. . . [collaborating with other stakeholders such as ”(a) churches, congregations; (b) schools, and (c) civic organizations.” Such collaborative work has been supported by Lilly Foundations, among others. It might include work with national churches or church judicatories on moral matters informing church teachings; work with schools on educational material and initiatives; consultations with civic organizations and government agencies on reconciliation and justice, race and public memorials, issues of moral injury, etc. Actual initiatives can only be determined in consultation with members of the society and other stakeholders interesting in collaboration.

Such a broadened mission and programming would make the SCE more analogous to the American Medical Association than to the American Historical Association or the Society for Classical Studies (although both have a broad sense of mission beyond scholarly research and publication which includes education and is programmatic in terms of educational programs to the larger public and hence reaches and engages historians and classicists beyond those doing primary research).