

Preparation for ministry requires church/school partnership_50304

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Preparation for ministry requires church/school partnership

By Marv Knox

Editor

ABILENE-Preparing men and women for ministry is a partnership, insists Tommy Brisco, dean of the Logsdon School of Theology at Hardin-Simmons University.

At its basic level, ministerial training takes place between students and their teachers, Brisco explained. But more fundamentally, it's a partnership between the school and churches.

"I want Logsdon to be a resource for the churches in our region-Texas, New Mexico and Oklahoma," said Brisco, who is completing his first academic year as Logsdon's dean.

Tommy Brisco

"We're not just training young men and women in ministry; we're helping

churches achieve their mission and ministry.”

That requires keeping in close contact with congregations while keeping an eye toward the future, he noted.

"What do we need to be doing to train ministers for the 21st century?" is a question the Logsdon faculty ponder, Brisco said. "Churches are constantly changing. How can we continue to partner with them so the actual experience of ministry takes place in the churches, so our students keep pace with the change?"

A key to the answer is immersing ministerial students in the life of churches through internships and also providing mentors for young ministers, he reported.

Such congregational involvement “enfranchises the churches” in preparing ministers while it helps the students gain experience they never could find in the classroom.

Still, Logsdon will continue to emphasize close contact between students and their professors, he said.

Such contact is possible in a relatively small setting like the Logsdon School, which has 85 undergraduate religion majors and a similar number of students in Logsdon Seminary, the graduate program that offers master of divinity and master of arts degrees.

“One of the greatest things (about Logsdon) is that the relationships between students and faculty are really quite personal,” Brisco said he has discovered.

Larger schools offer some advantage in terms of a broader range of course offerings, he conceded, but added training for ministry should “be about the whole reality of our existence, and you have to know the people to

emphasize that.”

“That can happen here better than some other places, in part because of our size,” he said. “Logsdon provides a dimension of nurture and shaping of human life.”

That doesn't mean the Logsdon School doesn't intend to grow-within limits.

“Our mission is to prepare as many ministers as we can,” he acknowledged. “As far as (undergraduate) religion majors, we hope to increase to triple digits. We've been there before, and that's doable. And we'd like to have at least 100 (master's-level) ministerial students here on this campus.”

The strong majority of master's degree students—about 65—are working on the M.Div. degree and planning for ministries in local churches, he said.

Logsdon could train another 100 students at two remote locations—the Baptist Learning Center in Corpus Christi and through a new joint program at Wayland Baptist University's campus in Lubbock, Brisco predicted.

“We want to build Logsdon in terms of number of students without losing our strengths, particularly nurturing and relationships,” he said.

That concept fits with the Baptist General Convention of Texas' overarching goals for training ministers, he added. “The BGCT hopes for theological education to be available at all levels. We share that goal. Where our resources can match with needs and build partnerships, we want to do that.”

Brisco came to Logsdon last summer after teaching Old Testament and archaeology for two years at Baylor University in Waco and biblical backgrounds and archaeology for 21 years at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth.

He jumped directly into a self-study process that comprises a significant

aspect of maintaining the school's accreditation.

“We know there are needs” for ministerial training, he said, citing the desire by some Baptists for more options for training programs that specialize in Christian education, as well as youth ministry and childhood ministry. “We're looking at what we can do without stretching ourselves beyond what we need to do.”

Some ministers also have asked Logsdon to offer a doctor of ministry degree, he noted, adding, “We don't want to be presumptuous, but we would need to look at it in the future.”

The seminary particularly is going to focus on how best to mentor ministers, “to be a resource, teacher, friend,” he said.

And in addition to partnering with churches, Logsdon is building partnerships with other institutions, he said.

For example, Baptist-based Hendrick Medical Center sits across the street and serves hundreds of thousands of people across the Big Country. Logsdon also is partnering with seminaries in Russia, the Caribbean and western Europe. “And not so far away, but nearby, we're asking: 'What's Logsdon's role in our city?'" he said.

Brisco intends to seek a balance as he guides the Logsdon School into the future.

“The trick is to not get too far ahead of yourself, but still dream,” he said. “If we're not thinking 10 to 15 years down the line, we're not serving the churches. ...

“We have to keep the focus on the larger enterprise of the kingdom of God in partnership with the churches and many others. We all exist for the kingdom's sake.”

News of religion, faith, missions, Bible study and Christian ministry among Texas Baptist churches, in the BGCT, the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) and around the world.