

# **“Programs of Non–Formal Theological Education within the Traditional Seminary”**

**Conference XI: August 18, 2018**

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<https://aqueductproject.org/conference-room/>

## SUMMARY:

After his opening comments [1–3], Ramesh Richard (Dallas Theological Seminary) began the discussion by giving a brief overview of the current realities related to global theological education [6]. Here, he noted that one can document 50,000 newly baptized believers every day. As a result, 1,000 new pastoral leaders are needed on a daily basis [7]. In addition, of the current 2.2 million pastoral leaders globally, only about 5% have training for pastoral ministry [9]. Because of the inability of formal institutions to meet this need, programs for non-formal training have arisen [10, 74]. Nevertheless, Richard was careful to note that, as these programs are almost universally led by those who have had formal training, both formal and non-formal initiatives remain necessary [10].

Richard went on to discuss the current situation facing the traditional, formal campus. With the rise of online education and churches providing less expensive training [15–16], “experience, convenience, and alignment with technology seem to be the keys to the future when it comes to physical campuses” [15]. As a result, any conversation about supporting and starting non-formal and informal training initiatives must also consider how to support the survival of formal training institutions [17].

Here, Richard transitioned to allow panelists to discuss how they have seen formal institutions interact with non-formal training initiatives [19]. Richard Land (Southern Evangelical Seminary) began by noting that online educational initiatives are a particularly common method of training [24]. The advantage of such programs is their ability to reach people across the globe [24–25]. However, he commented that, though more people can be trained online, in-person training has certain advantages over online education [23].

Alan Cureton (University of Northwestern, St. Paul) noted that, even in the United States, there are communities for whom traditional, formal training is not a viable option [33, 60]. As a result, the institution he represented began a massive open online course built on their radio network [35–36]. The drawback of this program, he noted, is that it is not financially self-sustaining [37, 60]. Both Mark Bailey (Dallas Theological Seminary) and Junias Venugopal (Wheaton College) also briefly described the value of having programs to provide training for economically underprivileged communities [45, 49–50]. Richard added that, especially among immigrant communities in the United States, there remains a great need for theological training [61].

Gregory Trull (Corbin University) described the training work that Corbin’s School of Ministry conducts in West Africa. This in-person training program is beneficial to Corbin because it helps to maintain the school’s missional focus and it provides the opportunity for faculty and students to experience other cultures and expand their worldview [39–40]. In this program, Corbin comes alongside leaders who are already training at least five to ten others, teaches bi-annual intensives, and provides non-academic certificates [55]. Venugopal applauded this effort in that partnering with overseas institutions lends credibility to these institutions [65]. In turn, Cureton commented briefly on the value of collaboration within the kingdom of God [69–70].

Scott Cunningham (Overseas Council) noted that it may be beneficial for the seminary to begin to see itself as a resource institution [77]. Using the South Asia Institute of Advanced Christian Studies (SAIACS) as an example, he commented that the traditional seminary could help non-formal trainers think through curriculum to ensure the content is adequately contextualized [77–78]. Similarly, Manfred Kohl (Overseas Council) described the work of Reforma, which is seeking to help non-formal training programs develop basic courses to ensure they have “some substance.” In turn, the World Evangelical Alliance would be able to provide a certificate to those who have taken courses through virtually any training model [103]. Bailey added that Dallas Theological Seminary has also been working to act as a resource institution by providing interviews on “topics from human trafficking to sexuality to marriage and family” through their Center for Cultural Engagement [85–86].

Mark Young (Denver Seminary) sought to frame the conversation within a larger question. Rather than simply asking how to ensure the long-term viability of modern seminaries, he proposed that the better question to ask would be how to lend credibility to the gospel witness [92]. To that end, he noted that the conversation regarding the future of theological education is only valuable insofar as such education lends credibility to that witness [91].

Finally, Richard concluded the conversation with several suggestions for practical follow-up steps. For example, he noted that it would be beneficial to organize an effort to ask what accredited institutions around the world are doing in regard to non-formal pastoral training [20, 108–112]. He added that committees of faculty, students, and alumni could be organized to further generate ideas that could ensure the long-term sustainability of global theological education [113]. Jonathan Armstrong (Moody Bible Institute) closed the conversation in prayer [118–123].

## TRANSCRIPT:

[1] **Ramesh Richard:** Well, greetings, my brothers! It's 8:30 Central Time. I know we're spread across at least three time zones in the States. I'm very, very grateful to our dear friends at Aqueduct, Jonathan and Matthew, who have coordinated this set of dialogues. And this is our final dialogue. It's a capstone. Over the last two years, we've had about 15 of these with about 225 participants, not just observers and listeners, from over 100 countries. If there's any need for conference call support, reach Aqueduct and they can probably help you right away. And as has been the habit over the last two years, a full recording and written transcript of this conference call will be sent to everyone.

[2] And just in terms of process, if you have your sound muted unless you wish to speak, please let me know by chat or raise your hand, as you know. And then introduce yourself if I don't recognize you. I'm honored that each of you would join, and there are about six or seven participants whose faces will be seen. Jonathan may have to tell us about how many are going to be presented on the screens.

[3] The format, as the agenda was sent to you, is rather simple. I'd like to make some opening remarks for about ten or fifteen minutes, have discussion about the two questions that were sent to you, and then allow for some case studies that you might be ready with. I know a couple of you are. After that, we will open the floor for some interaction around the case studies, questions that might come up, then a couple of sections which I'm calling "Current Features" and "Future Possibilities." These sections will allow us to go beyond rhetorical space to definitive action at the end of these two years of follow-up in this particular format to the G-Pro Congress for the trainers of pastors which was held in 2016.

[4] All right, Dr. Richard Land, would you kindly open us in prayer, that the Lord would guide us in this whole process?

[5] **Richard Land:** I'd be honored to, thank you! Father, we come before you today and we're humbled by the opportunity and by the responsibility. We pray for your guidance, for your wisdom, for your direction as we seek to serve you and to have our institutions fulfill the purposes for which you raised them up: to equip the next generation of your servants to go forth and to share the gospel and to defend the faith once delivered to the saints. Help us to fulfill that purpose, and help them to fulfill the purposes you have for them. And we'll give you the praise and the honor and the glory for any victories that are won. We pray these things in the name of our Savior, your Son, Jesus Christ the coming King, amen.

[6] **Ramesh Richard:** Amen! Thank you, Dr. Land! Our focus today is writing programs of non-formal theological education within the traditional seminary. The realities don't change; instead, they just become more complex. The challenges are deep and wide all across our world as we obey our Lord Jesus' final commission to make disciples, of which theological education is a subset, and of which pastoral training is a subset of theological education, under making disciples.

**[7]** First, the current realities. Because the sheer size of human occupancy rates on planet Earth, we are looking for scalability of anything that we do in obedience to this final commission. The second is the world of people, and Thomas Schirrmacher, whom many know, of the World Evangelical Alliance Theological Commission, says that while we are not sure of how many become believers every day—you know, the numbers are 186,000 or 187,000—he says he can document 50,000 new baptized believers every day. This means we've got to preserve the fruit. It also means we need a thousand new pastoral leaders every day to preserve the fruit of 50,000 new baptized believers, if we had about 50 people for each pastoral leader. So, it's a massive challenge of preserving fruit that God in his Holy Spirit is birthing all over the world.

**[8]** The third current reality is the world of the Church, the Christian Church. All of us know that nominalism is the curse of the faith, but there are those who do belong to vibrant vital congregations, among 40,000+ denominations. There is a goal by a group called Global Alliance of Church Movements to see four million new faith communities planted in the next four years. They've actually surpassed the first year goal. And by faith communities, we're not actually talking about buildings and so on – these are just congregations, small, in apartments, and even some digital communities, which we might wonder qualifies the designation of a church. Yet, in the same breath, while we are thrilled with their goal, they also say that up to 70% of them will fail within the first year, and that is a huge loss. None of us would invest in anything which has a 70% failure rate. So, somehow, we need to look at durability issues and sustainability issues for the congregations that are planted.

**[9]** The final reality is the world of pastoral leaders, and I use the word “pastoral leader” of anybody who has shepherding roles inside a congregation. There are about 2.2 million pastoral leaders globally. Of those, there's a range of about 5% who have training for pastoral ministry. We have the need for both depth and breadth and speed and all of these. Historically, especially since the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, we've had great formal initiatives to be the infrastructure for pastoral leader development under the theological education rubric. Right now, there are about 1,200 schools of varied accreditation levels (all of us know all accreditation is not equal) who are across the world, serving the Church. But if every one of these schools were to go at full speed with every graduate becoming a pastoral leader (and there's no such place), we will really meet the world's needs by 1% over 10 years. That's really 0.1% per year.

**[10]** And so a whole industry—and I'd like to use that term in the most sanctified way—has grown, called the “non-formal training industry,” to provide speed and spread. And the good thing is that I do not know of a single, effective, non-formal initiative that is not led by somebody who has been formally trained, so every program is critical. And in the symbiosis there is synergy which has been discussed over the last two years. We're trusting that the Lord will help us to affect the rest of the 21<sup>st</sup> century if he doesn't return.

**[11]** Here is the big momentum, the push of the flywheel, which happened in 2016, based on the premise that pastoral health affects church health, and church health affects societal

health. If pastors are healthy, the church is healthy. If they're not, the church is not. All of us who have been watching the "Me Too, Church Too," movements have been significantly affected and saddened, but not shocked, by what is happening.

**[12]** So, in a ten year human capital campaign, we have set out to reduce the number of undertrained and isolated pastors by 5%. We started in 2010, finishing in 2020. I'm grateful at this point, we're running slightly ahead of schedule. And it was all significantly given a push in Bangkok in 2016, where there was an 8-day event with a 4-year follow-up. We have a conviction at RREACH that every event begins the day after, and if there's no follow-up, the event was a great party.

**[13]** Over 2,500 trainers of pastors met from over 100 countries. As a result of that particular event, formal and non-formal trainers got together, began to talk more intentionally in a high-energy situation right there, with a holy disturbance that all of us have at times felt in our own souls and spirits. And there have been four or five lines of follow-up, one of which has been this particular conference call dialogue hosted by the Aqueduct Project and Jonathan Armstrong.

**[14]** So, roughly speaking, that is the current situation and the history. Again, by the time we're finished today, I'd like to see if there could be one or two specific initiatives, broadly and for the body of Christ, but also specifically for pastoral leaders and theological education. I believe that would be also my context.

**[15]** Recently there was an article, in the *Financial Times*, about the problem of the retail Industry. I roughly equate theological education as luxury retail, and then we have some others that are premium and then there's affordable and mass market. The affordable ones are usually non-formal programs. President Bailey, a couple of years ago, spoke to the faculty retreat, and I know each of you are getting ready for your new semester, so thank you for taking time at the edge of your new terms and semesters to join us. I was reflecting on some of the stuff discussed by ATS on the perfect storm for theological education, and so in comparison to retail space, all of us are aware that the past is not going to the future. We're very grateful for it. We're all products of it. Even the present is filled with strengths and weaknesses, especially with technology disruption. Brick-and-mortar campus have seemed like an out-motor operating system in an increasingly digitized world. In addition, the business model is now hitting traditional seminaries. Experience, convenience, and alignment with technology seem to be the keys to the future when it comes to physical campuses.

**[16]** So the *Financial Times* was talking about a hopefully non-fictional, non-fantasy "Futureville," where upstarts are aspiring to reshape business education itself, and this has some translatability to us. They are alternative providers who are offering master's degrees without professors, without classrooms, or the cost. People are asking, "How do I get a ministry position in the church sector?" The churches themselves are starting all kinds of theological education initiatives, which are significantly cheaper and faster. The demands

are changing and even education pedagogy in learning models with teachers telling you things and you writing things down is a much more dynamic situation of teaching.

**[17]** My eight-year-old grandson this week said that he knew that Toys R Us did not exist anymore. Presumably, he was very familiar with Toys R Us, and now they even have business schools that are opening without MBA programs because of the sheer economic survival of course that is critical to the decision-making. So they set together a vision for the future, asking, “What can be done in terms of bricks and mortar retail space that is translatable to seminaries? How can we see renewal, vibrancy, and without draining the lifeblood of those who remain?”

**[18]** So that’s my fifteen-minute opener. I would like ask for your comments on these two questions that have been sent to you. Let’s have each of you say something. I noticed Dr. Manfred Kohl was on a second ago. I don’t know who else is on. Jonathan, I presume you can let us know.

**[19]** Welcome to everybody! When you are talking, if you would kindly mention your name for those who might just be listening. First question: What is the value of any initiatives on non-formal theological education and pastoral education within the institution you represent? Do you see any value at all?

**[20] Manfred Kohl:** It’s Manfred Kohl, I’m calling in and I have a question. Not so much an answer for what’s going on in my institution, but has anyone done research—you said there are about 1,250 theological institutions around the world. Has anyone contacted them and asked, “Who is involved the informal training outside what they are doing?” Do we have any statistics? Have you written to anyone to encourage them to do so, and who is in charge of that?

**[21] Ramesh Richard:** Dr. Kohl, we are looking at some definitive action pieces at the end of this conversation and I’m going to write that down as one of the definitive action pieces.

**[22] Richard Land:** This is Dr. Richard Land. I’m the president of Southern Evangelical Seminary here in Charlotte. When I came here five years ago, about 40% of our students were not residential. They were online, either synchronous or asynchronous. We are a little unusual in that we offer our classes at night, and so of the percentage of our students that are online, 70% or more are taking classes in real time. They’re taking classes by streaming them. In fact, there’s one going on right now. Dr. Norman Geiser, our co-founder, is teaching a module this morning and it’s being live-streamed. It has been live-streamed all week. About 65% of our students are online, and of that percentage about 80% are taking their classes synchronously, not asynchronously.

**[23]** I spent half my life in traditional education and I still think the best way to teach someone is to have students and a professor in a room together. But the trade-off is that for everyone you can educate that way, you can educate fifteen or twenty online. And I think, given the technological advances and given the opportunities, we need to claim

them. And we are doing everything we can to maximize that experience, and to let everyone around the world know, including working with a group to try to get solar power packs to people who may not have reliable electricity, so that they can at least use our asynchronous education.

**[24]** But the potential impact of this to meet the challenges of the future was brought home to me. Here in Charlotte, of course, we're the hometown of Billy Graham, and the Billy Graham Library is here in Charlotte. I've been out there about five times for the tour, taking people who want to go see it. And at the end of it—by the way I recommend it highly if you haven't been; it's worth a trip to Charlotte to go to the Billy Graham Library, and please come by and see us—but at the end of it, they have a huge map on the wall, and it's a map of the world. And every time someone makes a decision for Jesus online through their online evangelistic ministries in multiple languages, a little light goes on and it tells us a little about someone just made a decision for Jesus in Mexico, someone just made a decision for Jesus in Nigeria. The last time I was there, someone made a decision for Jesus in Erbil, Iraq. (They altered the location by about a mile for security reasons.)

**[25]** But then they give you a statistic that just blows you away. In the last 10 years, through sharing the gospel online, more people have made decisions to accept Jesus Christ as their savior than in all the crusades Billy Graham ever did. Now, that shows you the quantum leap and impact that we can have through the internet. I believe it's the way that God has provided for us to fulfill the Great Commission to go to every tribe and every nation with the gospel.

**[26] Ramesh Richard:** And Dr. Land, I am hearing that the value would be speed and local impact, if you had non-formal theological education.

**[27] Richard Land:** Absolutely! The sheer number that you can reach—

**[28] Ramesh Richard:** And train.

**[29] Richard Land:** —that you cannot reach otherwise. And you can train them. We have students who are pastors in Manila, pastors in Thailand, pastors in Taiwan, that obviously can't come to us, but, if they can speak English, we can get theological education to them.

**[30] Ramesh Richard:** All right, it seems we are going into both these questions with this experienced answer; I guess we should just do these two questions together. The first one: What is the value of any initiatives in non-formal theological education with the institution you represent? The second: How can non-formal programs and networks better serve the institution, towards spiritual institutional flourishing? And I think in terms of speed and local reach. Talk to us, Dr. Land!

**[31] Richard Land:** I teach these classes. Last spring, I had two students in real time, synchronously, in real time, streaming, I had two students from Uganda, I had a student in Tokyo, I had a student in Manhattan, and I had a student just south of the Arctic Circle. All

taking the class simultaneously, along with other students who were within various locations within the continental United States and about 10 students in class here in Charlotte. And just the ability to impact those people and to invest in them. We just had a faculty retreat, and I tell them every year at the faculty retreat: God raised us up to serve the students and to serve the Church. The students are the reason God raised us up. The reason we're here is to equip as many students as possible that God has called to evangelize the world and defend the faith. And that's our *sine qua non*. And the internet, non-traditional, and non-formal ways of education allows us to do that in ways that we could never, ever do it otherwise.

**[32] Ramesh Richard:** Thank you! I know we have some education experts here. Broadly speaking, we're saying formal leads to some sort of certification or degree; non-formal does not lead to a certification or degree, but we have to get some training across. President Cureton, I think you were going to say something.

**[33] Alan Cureton:** This is Al Cureton at University of Northwestern. About eight years ago we started a master's degree in theology here at the graduate level, and we had a significant amount of requests from area students because we're surrounded here in St. Paul, Minnesota by a number of seminaries that are formal training seminaries. They were requesting something that was non-traditional, much like Richard was talking about, that was online, at night, or on the weekends, where they could attend class.

**[34]** And we went ahead and started a program. It's what we call a hybrid or blended, which is partly online and partly face-to-face, and we have found that it is reaching a real niche out there for pastors who are pastoring a church who have not had formal training yet, and yet they are overseeing a congregation. This is especially true in an ethnic community, here within the Twin Cities. And so we found that we were able to meet the needs, like Richard was talking about, of our students, where they are at this point in time in their pastoral or, if you will, Church history.

**[35]** And what is interesting for us is that we found a significant amount of laypeople that are interested in some type of theological education, just to begin to understand what the Scriptures are about. Now, many of you may not be aware, but when Dr. Billy Graham was the president here back in 1948, we bought our first radio station, and over the years we have developed a radio network. We now own 18 radio stations across the upper Midwest. We reach from Kansas City all the way up to Winnipeg; we go from Milwaukee, Wisconsin, all the way to Rapid City, South Dakota. And we reach about 1.2 million people each week.

**[36]** We asked how we could partner our theological professors and our listeners. So we offered what is known as a MOOC (Massive Open Online Course) class last year and we're doing it again this year, to just make it open-ended and no cost. To capitalize on what Richard was saying, we now have over 1,200 people that signed up for that class. It's an introductory class on Christian thinking. These people are from all over the world because they're listening to our stations online, or they're listening throughout our radio audience. Talk about a unique approach!

[37] Now, the problem with the MOOC is that they don't pay to cover the cost. We've got to cover that some other way. But here again is another opportunity, a non-formal way of reaching to try to educate the kingdom in regards to Scripture and theology and understanding Christ.

[38] **Ramesh Richard:** Thank you, Alan, brother. I think you're saying—just to summarize it—that the values of doing some non-formal initiatives for a formal theological program include the reach issue as well as some public relations advantage.

[39] **Gregory Trull:** This is Greg Trull from Corban. I'd like to share a little bit about our perspective here from the School of Ministry when it comes to non-formal training. We have online programs as well, but our primary non-formal training is done in West Africa on the ground, and so we have teaching sites in Cameroon and other places. And when I think about the value, initially for us, primarily it's really about mission. Because if you can separate the idea about degrees and dollars from it, as far as accomplishing our mission of training people to make a difference in the world for Christ, it is a powerful means of doing that, and we're able to reach people who simply don't have access to theological training otherwise.

[40] But we've been surprised by two other values. One of them is the value of professional development of my faculty, because my faculty travel there and teach, and when they come home to the classroom, they bring a lot bigger world and a lot bigger Lord back with them. So we've enjoyed that. Plus, we've established a system of internships, where we take our students with us every year, and they're able to experience ministry in a different culture, able to study with students from a different continent, and so our students as well have been impacted. So we've seen a lot of values that go beyond the revenue and the degrees here at Corban.

[41] **Ramesh Richard:** Great, Greg! Very practical. So, it's about mission; I think that's what is underlying everything that's driving the whole GPro movement, especially in the training of pastors under theological education, formally and non-formally delivered. And the professional development of the campus, that's a great comment, because that's enriching going on and there are new illustrations and new hearts that transform as a result of the professors themselves traveling. And of course, the student exposure, that's part of it too, the educational experience.

[42] **Mark Bailey:** Ramesh, this is Mark Bailey, and our involvement with the Global Proclamation Academy in the summers with 25 leaders from 25 different countries has an incredible exposure factor as Greg was saying, that enhances those of us who get to participate. And with the exposure to their ministries—and I still was so marked by a Syrian pastor when I heard him say to me, or to our group, that the safest place for him to minister, having lost three churches and his home, was in the center of God's will. So convicting, so challenging, so visionary, an incredible blessing for us. And so it brings the world to our doorstep, it brings the world into our classroom, it brings the world into our heart. So that would be one value that I would add to that.

**[43] Ramesh Richard:** Great! To summarize, we have campus dynamics changed, we have staff develop, not even just faculty and students, but staff, as a beautiful part of a team. And then there's some spiritual perspectives input into our campus. Mark, thank you!

**[44]** I would like to now go into some case studies. I think Dr. Bailey has segued us into some particular projects that you are implementing inside your institutions which have generative multiplicative impact, both internally and externally. What might be a couple of case studies that will help us learn from you and possibly even extend what we're doing currently? Dr. Bailey, would you like to talk about the SETECA (Central American Theological Seminary) Initiative on our campus?

**[45] Mark Bailey:** Sure, I'd be happy to! One of the things that we're doing is that we are offering on our campus classes—last year we had about 60 students in the program. These are lay leaders in local Hispanic churches in the DFW (Dallas and Fort Worth) area, but we're actually offering a diploma program in cooperation with SETECA in Guatemala. So in essence we have an extension of SETECA on our campus, which then feeds the Spanish bachelor's program for those who want to go further. That's all at lay level; they can go further and sign in for the College of Biblical Studies, whether that's in Houston, another one of our partnerships, or SETECA themselves. And so it's sort of a symbiotic relationship of reaching the laypeople, out of that reaching those that want to go on for a bachelor's, which hopefully then would feed our master's, and we already have a D.Min. cooperatively with SETECA. And so it's a combination program that brings some great synergy to our campus from the Hispanic world.

**[46] Ramesh Richard:** Great, thank you! What might be another case study that we can hear?

**[47] Junias Venugopal:** This is Junias from Wheaton College.

**[48] Ramesh Richard:** Hello, Junias.

**[49] Junias Venugopal:** I got invited at the last minute, so I apologize for barging in, to people who don't know me. Wheaton College has the Billy Graham Center as a part of it, and the Billy Graham Center has a number of non-formal initiatives led by Ed Stetzer. I just got a new role as an Associate Dean at the School of Ministry, Mission, and Leadership at Wheaton College, which sort of bridges between some of these non-formal programs. And Ed has done some initiatives with lay pastors on the South Side of Chicago and other locations. I'm still getting familiar with that, but that's another attempt to serve the non-formal education population in terms of equipping them for the Great Commission as well as bridge them into undergraduate and graduate programs.

**[50] Ramesh Richard:** Thank you, Junias! I'm hearing about providing opportunities locally with the economically underprivileged in both the Spanish-speaking and African American communities. Is what I'm hearing? So the value of many non-formal programs is that they provide opportunities for those who cannot pay. There is an undercurrent that non-profit

academic institutions are really for-profit institutions because, after all is said and done, unless they make money they can't stay in existence. So, organizationally we are non-profit, but as a philosophy of existence we are for-profit. And these kinds of corporate social responsibility in our industry allows for further implementation of the mission to which we are called. All right, who else next would have another case study for us?

**[51] Gregory Trull:** In our case, what we do in West Africa is—

**[52] Ramesh Richard:** And who might this be, please?

**[53] Gregory Trull:** Oh, I'm sorry, this is Greg Trull from Corban.

**[54] Ramesh Richard:** Hello, Greg, go ahead!

**[55] Gregory Trull:** We have three-year non-academic certificates, which we teach there in intensives twice a year, and then in between we have national directors that oversee monthly meetings for accountability and for further teaching. There's been one key element that has probably helped us to be most effective. When we screen people coming into the program, we require that they document they are already training a minimum of five to ten leaders themselves, and that then becomes a part of our regular accountability. We also consider how they're training their leaders and strategic planning that they're doing. And so it's allowed us to realize a multiplication of our education really from the very beginning of our certificate.

**[56] Ramesh Richard:** And that's in West Africa. I'm hearing a feeder that non-formal initiatives can provide a filter and a feeding system, just like we have junior leagues entering professional leagues. Most of our institutions have selection problems because people just get onto our website and apply randomly. We don't have a strategic way by which we recruit, retain, and return students, especially from overseas. And if that can be streamlined through non-formal systems of feeders and filters, I think it will be a great help to who we get, who we train, and they will, in turn, multiply in their situations.

**[57]** All right, who might give us another case study?

**[58] Alan Cureton:** Professor Richard, this is Al Cureton, back from University of Northwestern.

**[59] Ramesh Richard:** And a brother!

**[60] Alan Cureton:** Yes! For a number of years we've had what we've called an "urban Bible institute" and have done very similar to what Mark was describing at Dallas Theological. And what we do is reach out to the Latino community and work with them in regards to educating their pastors as well as any of their laypeople from a theological perspective so that they can take a series of classes from us and earn a diploma. The cost is very low to them; it does not financially carry itself, so like you were just talking, in fulfillment of that mission, we have to cover that cost through gifts and private donations. But this is another

outreach for us, in engaging some of the leaders in the community here in the Twin Cities who are part of the ethnic diversity that we have. We're also trying to reach out to the Korean and Hmong communities, so that we can also establish a similar approach with them. So we're just breaking into that effort, but that's something very similar that we have to what Mark was talking about at Dallas Theological.

**[61] Ramesh Richard:** So I think we're saying: not just historic communities which are around us, but new immigrant communities. It's a huge opportunity. In fact, the only identifiably unreached part of this land are new immigrants. Everyone else is over-exposed to the gospel. And in our major cities great numbers immigrants. I was recently speaking to Bhutanese Nepalese, and these Nepalese who lived in Bhutan were refugees for twenty years, and suddenly they're finding themselves in America, as legal immigrants of course. There were 100,000 of them placed all over the West, in ten or twelve countries. America absorbed about 80,000 of them, mostly in Columbus, Ohio. They already have 22 Bhutanese Nepalese congregations, but not a single one of the 22 pastors have education. They cannot qualify for any formal programs that we have. We can eventually get them there, maybe in the next ten or twelve years, to take a course formally. However, all of our non-formal stuff can be of help to them now.

**[62]** All right, who might be another one who wants to interject? How about a case study that you are implementing, where non-formal programs are helping your institution flourish?

**[63]** Am I hearing the eloquence of silence right now? Anybody else?

**[64]** All right, is there anything we learned from another person's case study today that might be of us to our own institutions and programs? Anything we learned from another person's presentation today that could be of us to our own programs?

**[65] Junias Venugopal:** This is Junias. I appreciated hearing from Dr. Bailey about partnerships with institutions overseas, the idea that the overseas is the lead institution rather than our own American institution. That lends credibility and also advances the aspect of equipping people where the majority world lives, and where the leaders live who need equipping.

**[66] Ramesh Richard:** I agree, Junias, because most often we think that these external institutions are the ones hosting our programs rather than the other way around, and it's a huge gift that we give. What's another potential application point for us?

**[67] Richard Land:** Well, this is Richard Land, and it was an encouragement for me to hear the success of what University of Northwestern is doing because we've just put in place an academy that is non-credit, non-traditional, and free. We are putting online of basic courses in New Testament and in Christian Doctrine and in Apologetics. We just have done this in the last weeks, but we are very encouraged by the early signs. And it sounds as if we

are tapping into the same sort of customer base if you will, or ministry base, that they're tapping into.

**[68] Ramesh Richard:** Thank you, Dr. Land. One more application from a sister organization or institution.

**[69] Alan Cureton:** Well, I'm not sure this is an application, Professor Richard, but I love the fact that we collaborate within the kingdom of God. And I love the fact that a couple of us have already talked about how important it is to collaborate with other organizations, whether it be here in the U.S. or somewhere like West Africa, at Corban, or what Dallas has done with that one organization. For a number of years we had a collaboration with an organization that used to be known as HCJB down in Quito, Ecuador. HCJB has now changed its name to Reach Beyond, but we had a campus down there and did the same thing of creating a diploma, a degree approach if they wanted, in regards to Biblical Studies or Communications.

**[70]** We ran into some political issues due to the current presidential leadership of the country and had to shut down the campus at their request, but I love the fact that organizations across the world can partner and collaborate together to expand the kingdom of God. It makes more sense than striking out on our own and trying to create something. But if we can partner together in reaching communities both inside our region as well as around the world, then the kingdom benefits from that, and we should do more collaboration when the opportunity presents itself.

**[71] Ramesh Richard:** Great, a collaborative heartbeat precedes each of these, and then into a mindset and then definitive action. I see Scott Cunningham here from Overseas Council, an organization which has specifically worked with formal institutions. And Scott has been leading the charge. Overseas Council is now a ministry of UWM (United World Mission), which has been historically a non-formal group. And Scott, I would love to hear something from you now, and how this whole process has been, and tell us what we can learn from you.

**[72] Scott Cunningham:** Yeah, can you hear me, Ramesh?

**[73] Ramesh Richard:** Yes, I can.

**[74] Scott Cunningham:** All right, thank you. Thanks for the introduction. So, as you said, Overseas Council has historically focused on formal theological education at the seminary level, and those of you who know Overseas Council know that we work with over a hundred different seminaries around the world, trying to increase their capacity. And part of what we've seen over the last, I would say five years, Ramesh, is an increasing willingness—not just willingness, a real desire of these seminaries to go into more non-traditional forms of delivery. And the main reason for that is just because they see that formal theological education in the way that it's traditionally been offered—and when I say that, of course, we're talking about a residential three- or four-year degree program—is not meeting the

needs of the global Church, or the Church in their area. And so this need is driving innovation, which is delightful to see. And so let me just offer a few things that we're seeing, and these might be some ideas that could be transferable or that we would learn particular lessons from.

**[75]** Last week I was in Guatemala City with SETECA; many of you are familiar with that seminary there in Guatemala City. And this is not a new program, but for about twenty years they've been offering this Monday morning pastors' program, where 200 rural pastors and urban pastors come to the SETECA campus for training. They usually take a class on a passage of Scripture, and then another class that focuses on skill level. These pastors come in from hours-long drive or taxi or bus, whatever, and interestingly, some of these pastors have been coming for twenty years! And then they go back, and whatever they were taught on Monday, that becomes the passage that they preach on the following Sunday, and it's just a wonderful program that has been remarkably successful.

**[76]** I really like what our brother from Corban University—I believe it's Corban—was saying about multiplication. That is, students who themselves is involved in leadership development. A program like what I described at SETECA is sort of an addition, that is, additional, rather than multiplication. And I wonder if we need to think more about multiplication. How is it that we can use the resources, the students, the faculty that we have, and the alumni that we have in more of a multiplication effort rather than simply addition? That's a thought that I've been mulling around lately.

**[77]** In what ways can the seminary see itself more as not simply a teaching institution, which is critical, of course, but as a resource institution? So there's a little bit of a change of paradigm. Teaching then becomes one of the resources, but there are others. Let me give you an example from yesterday, actually. We were visiting with a new group in India, where—and Ramesh, you know Alex Abraham and Operation Agape—where they've got a new forum in non-formal theological education that's just emerging. And they're working with SAIACS (South Asia Institute of Advanced Christian Studies), the school there in Bangalore, which, again, many of you will know. But SAIACS now sees itself in this particular instance as a resource for this new forum in non-formal theological education, and they're going to provide some of their faculty to work with other organizations in curriculum development for non-formal theological education.

**[78]** That's a wonderful thing that the seminary can do! As you know, a lot of these organizations that are involved in non-formal theological education need help in that area. They need help in thinking through curriculum, or else they're just going to take whatever they were taught and then try to offer it in whatever program they have, and it's not a good fit. The very reason non-formal theological education is so effective and so needed is because it's so contextualized. It addresses the need at the time for these people. And so it's deeply contextual, but then there's that need of asking the question: How in that context, with these people, can we provide a curriculum and a mode of delivery that's really

going to meet that need? So SAIACS has some wonderful people in education that are going to help this new forum in this area of curriculum development.

**[79]** The other word that I heard, collaboration and partnership. I love what is happening with other seminaries. Probably the one—well, there are several that come to mind that are really doing a great job in this. FUSBC (Fundacion Universitaria Seminario Biblico de Colombia) in Medellin Columbia intentionally seeks, partnerships particularly with parachurch organizations that need training of their leaders. They come to them, not with a program, but they come to them with a question, “How can we help you train your leaders?” And then they design a short program, degree or non-degree, that would help to train the leaders of that particular parachurch organization.

**[80]** Fiat in Buenos Aires would be another great example. I hear they’re partnering primarily with churches. What, 10,000 students, and most of those are church-based students where there are partnerships with individual churches for the training of leaders.

**[81]** So, anyway, probably I missed some of the earlier conversation, Ramesh, and you already talked about these things, but I love to see what some of our sister organizations in the majority world are doing that perhaps can show us the way and give us some ideas in these areas. It’s certainly not a one-size-fits-all. There are a lot of lessons to learn, and of course we have to think about our particular calling.

**[82] Ramesh Richard:** Thank you.

**[83] Mark Bailey:** Ramesh, this is Mark Bailey again.

**[84] Ramesh Richard:** Yes, thank you, Scott. Mark, go ahead, please.

**[85] Mark Bailey:** I’ll cut off my video so it won’t be interrupting. Coming out of the Lausanne Conference in 2010—it seems a long time ago already—but it really became the cry from our alumni for us to become, as Scott was saying, more a resource than a teaching institution. Not to diminish the teaching but to add the resource component. How do we speak into today’s culture from a biblical perspective? And so one of the initiatives that we created was another arm in our Christian Leadership Center called the Center for Cultural Engagement, and of course with Darrell Bock sort of chairing that effort for us. Over 200 interviews have been done, 200 hours of conversation with ministry people around the world in various topics from human trafficking to sexuality to marriage and family. I just listened to Mark and Priscilla’s podcast that they recorded with Kim in our center, and it was a wonderful conversation.

**[86]** Everywhere I go, that's being appreciated because it's a resource of high-level conversation by knowledgeable people, experts in the field, bringing the biblical concept to bear on cultural issues. So that's just hitchhiking, Scott, on your comment, in terms of being a resource as opposed to just being dominated by teaching. And that's one of our other initiatives that feeds into being available for those that can't attend but can still benefit.

**[87] Ramesh Richard:** Great, thank you, both Scott and Mark. All right, we have a couple more minutes. Any other case study that you would like to share or present?

**[88] Mark Young:** Hello Ramesh, it's Mark Young.

**[89] Ramesh Richard:** Hello Mark.

**[90] Mark Young:** A couple of things come to mind. I think framing the bigger conversation needs to be the question of how an educational enterprise adds to a church or denomination's credibility in a broader setting. Traditionally education has been a way for populations to build social capital and credibility for their presence in that larger society. When you have marginalized churches, which many of us have been a part of in the past, formal education was seen as a way to build social capital and therefore credibility for the message of the gospel and the presence of the Church itself. I think that in many parts of the developed world, that is changing, and so the real question for, I think, many of us, is, "How do our particular institutions fit into broader cultural perspectives on the place on education, and particularly, on the place of education that grants degrees?" And, "To what degree is that necessary for credibility of our message and presence?"

**[91]** So, as we design programs, I'm not sure the question is always whether it should be formal or non-formal, or more accessible or less traditional or all those questions. I think we kind of start with that question. For the people we desire to help in the proclamation and presence of the gospel in their setting, we must ask what educational model, what educational process, and what educational content supports them in their desire to be credible witnesses for Jesus Christ. And it's going to be different, obviously, in many, many places around the world.

**[92]** For those of us who are part of formal education, I think particularly in a North American context, in the broader Church, the question of the value that formal seminary education brings to credible gospel witness is one that we haven't been necessarily willing to answer because the answers have been too threatening for that.

**[93]** So I think a lot of us have tremendous work to do, to step back from, "What is going to take for our institutions to survive?" And, "What is it going to take for our programs to be able to be viable?" And ask the question, "In what way can we support credible gospel witness in whatever context we find ourselves?" That's why I love what you're doing. I think the way you set up and talk about non-formal education gives us the freedom to create those forums and that presence which will create that social capital we need for gospel witness. So I'm thrilled at what you're doing.

**[94] Ramesh Richard:** Thank you, Mark. I've heard the words "social capital" several times in listening to you, and I'm going to hear it again, but the larger question is really, really important. I was at another accreditation agency, addressing 200 presidents and deans of schools. I've never seen a more discouraged group in my entire life. Everybody's thinking cessation, merger, acquisition, and survival. And you know, we have some options. We can

get bigger, but size doesn't solve it. Many of the questions remain the same. We can pursue consolidation, but a merger does not necessarily thwart what the needs and opportunities demand, as Mark has just mentioned, and Scott, the contextualization issues, which look completely different from place to place, except for a basic curriculum, which I think we can recommend. Not certify but at least recommend it and endorse for people to hear and learn.

**[95]** The real difference, as has just been mentioned, is the educational model. And the assets that we own, whether it's physical space or other assets, only exist as part of a total delivery so that rather than owning assets, we are really platform models and resource models that facilitate networks of users and students at an unprecedented scale. Platforms and resources will achieve faster growth, and for those that are needing economic margins, that will also help there, but we can't expect a huge amount there to completely underwrite everything we invest in.

**[96]** We cannot simply double down on the old model and say that will change the fundamentals. Lots of new platform models and lots of new resource models. And the biggest hurdle is not just mental, not even technical. It's not an easy task. But we hear from Mark, and we'll continue in this way. After the GPro Congress, we went on a four-year global initiative, called the GPro Commission, to facilitate, track, and report the training of large numbers of undertrained pastoral leaders. And right now we have the tracking of 370,000. We have an 80% attrition rate built in, so we have to get to 500,000 to get the 100,000 which is our original initiative view of untrained pastoral leaders being given some degree of pastoral training. It can be measured in training hours and training opportunities. Some of it's as little as two hours, but some of it's as much as four years in a traditional setting. It has generated many, many conversations.

**[97]** So the GPro Commission is bringing in the key human resources of both RREACH (Ramesh Richard Evangelism and Church Health) and TOPIC (Trainers of Pastors International Coalition) to maintain momentum throughout the world, in terms of pastoral leaders themselves. Not necessarily theological education but pastoral leaders. But we are connecting pastoral training leaders, pastoral training resources, pastoral training activities and pastoral training events, so that the end result of the mission is where there will be better pastoral health, better church health, and as a result, hopefully better societal health.

**[98]** So this is run by a global follow-up group, which is both personally encouraging, which is the human touch, and statistically tracking numbers of new pastors reported as trained and new pastoral trainers. The Aqueduct Project is one of those follow-up mechanisms, and again I want to say thanks to Jonathan for leading this charge. And each dialogue has a theme that has addressed a facet of the question of how we better support global pastoral training in the decades to come.

**[99]** One of the things GPro has pursued has to do with curated resources, all related to training of pastors. We now have over 9,000 curated resources, having to do with

preaching, living, thinking, and servant-leading biblically in context, in over 31 languages. And we are asking the Lord to continue to expand this. I wanted to share that with you so that you know that follow-up is the key to every event, and the Lord is allowing us to do this at a global scale, very wide and deep levels, with representation on every continent. And if we can continue to do this, we can possibly accomplish what most recently Mark and Scott have done and others have said.

**[100]** But I want to mention a couple of other presentations needed in our last minutes together. We have another 22 minutes to go.

**[101]** After the GPro Congress, I received a very passionate note from Dr. Manfred Kohl about how TOPIC, a group of us founded about 20 years ago, which had been dormant, might be the body to carry out the pastoral training established in Bangkok. TOPIC stands for Trainers of Pastors International Coalition, Community, Commission, and so on. And it is being hosted by the GPro Commission. However, as we continued to visit and talk, Dr. Kohl, as he discussed it with others in this strategic mind beyond the tactical paper and how TOPIC does it, had a few of us together in Canada. I asked him if he would present his concept right now. They have an important meeting early next week, but Dr. Kohl, might you be able to share that with us right now in terms of general biblical training and what is happening all across?

**[102] Manfred Kohl:** I'm very delighted to share that! I think the fact is that there are 1,000s, 10,000s, 100,000s of different training programs and everyone is doing what they believe is the best. Some have programs for just one week, some have programs for a month or two years or three years, some have Bible school, some have all kinds of programs, but there's absolutely no structure. There is no assumption that if you really want to train a leader for the ministry, for the pastoral ministry, for youth ministry, for women's ministry, you must have at least these four courses in New Testament and these courses in practical ministry and in counseling and youth work.

**[103]** So we have organized a group called Reformer to somehow help all these 100,000s of programs to get some kind of a structure. Not an accreditation, not a kind of oversight, but to help them to have some basic courses that they have to at least teach so that they have some substance and then the World Evangelical Alliance has agreed to giving them a certificate to each person if they have taken these six or eight or twelve courses. We still have the basic curriculum next week to work on that. And then they will get a certificate and have something to show, "We are trained for ministry." Not just pastors, but all kinds of Christian ministries. They are not just doing whatever they want. They should have some solid biblical training as the basis. And the thousands of mission agencies and churches and all groups who have started training programs, the [unclear] is just unbelievable. One of the outcomes was the whole prosperity gospel that was taught twenty years ago and today it's spread all over! Someone has to focus on real biblical training.

**[104]** So we'll come together next week and work on that topic and hopefully many 100,000s of organizations are willing to say, "Well, we will follow these kinds of basic

courses. We want to have that certificate from the World Evangelical Alliance.” We are working on that because Reformer, hopefully, will be a great help to non–formal education. We are not in competition to what you are doing of training pastors in connection with the formal seminaries. We are on a completely different level.

**[105] Ramesh Richard:** Thank you, Dr. Kohl! Sorely needed if the number of newly baptized believers are 50,000 every day. While differentiated from pastoral training and theological education, they are all part of making disciples, the final commission of our Lord Jesus.

**[106]** Well, I think we are almost to an end. I would like to share some potential definitive actions with the following question: What is scalable and sustainable? Especially when we can’t predict, but have to project and prepare for the future. And with this growing situation of lifelong learning, all of our seminaries have older students coming back to enhance life and skills. We have peers all across the world who are doing just as good or even better jobs, and we are not champions of closing full–time theological education programs. But this group is a champion for responding to new opportunities in the ministry space worldwide. I wonder if we look back, let’s say, in 2030, and saw in the long, hot summer of 2018 both North America and Western Europe when Futureville lost the era. The campus had been the flagship of theological education for decades. At that point things looked a little bleak. Several big campuses were struggling, and others were losing senior leaders to retirement or just basic tiredness or even death, which is the equalizer. Some have closed. And then online education was draining the lifeblood of many that remained, and discount theological education shops. “We have biblical education for free! Anywhere, right now, free!” With professors from our own schools, all over the world. And there were free, non–formal training shops which were multiplying. But in 2030 it began to bustle again, and returning in different levels and different ways. And when we wondered whether it could be done, the Lord has achieved a huge, symbiotic collaborative across the world which allowed for pastors to be healthier and churches to be healthier.

**[107]** I would like to mention a couple of things for definitive action. The models that were presented, whether it is the SETECA, the hosting here, or the Global Proclamation Academy—by the way, every selection that was made for the Dallas GPA, we asked them to commit to a national version, and then provide for resources in those, the second generation, the third and fourth generation. While our resources may deplete, they’re creating other resources all across the world. We would like to see national church health movements, especially as commissions under the World Evangelical Alliance, and we’re trusting that TOPIC can generate that kind of initiative using alumni, pastoral training leaders all across the world.

**[108]** A second practical comment I took away was how a brother of mine phrased the initial thought, asking, “Can we get these 1,200 apparently supposedly accredited schools all across the world to tell us what they’re doing in terms of non–formal initiatives?”

**[109] Manfred Kohl:** I think it will be important that we have figures, not just ideas.

**[110] Ramesh Richard:** That's correct.

**[111] Manfred Kohl:** That we know how many people are really being trained outside of our seminaries, like the one brother said, everyone who comes must have trained five other people. So we must have some kind of a figure to get a thing together in a proper way, not just ideas.

**[112] Ramesh Richard:** Correct. Ideas are good as concepts, and from concepts we must establish goals and action plans, and yes, I'm talking about definitive action plans, Dr. Kohl, and I'm going to ask for help in this particular area with the 1,200 accredited institutions.

**[113]** I'm also suggesting that every institution represented here—and as we go on into other places—can see innovative teams of faculty, alumni, current students, even others, speak into the questions of how can non-formal programs serve and ensure the long-term spiritual flourishing of our schools. That can be set inside as part of a temporary faculty committee, with alumni speaking into it, and current students who are so far ahead of us in terms of their context demanding our adaption or eventual death if we don't adapt. We can have some entrepreneurial innovative teams as a temporary committee that can be set up.

**[114]** So, we're talking about accrediting institutions and finding out details of what they do. Secondly would be the faculty, alumni, current student innovative teams that can say how non-formal initiatives can add value for the matters we addressed in the early part of the conference. Specifically, those were matters of speed and reach and impact, of the professional development of staff, of development of students, of dynamic campuses, which are flourishing as resource models and also platform models, all in a collaborative mindset.

**[115]** And finally, the number one question I'm asked all over the world is, "When are we going to have the next GPro Congress for trainers of pastors?" And I have a very simple answer to that, which is, "Brother, whenever you raise the money, we'll have the next GPro Congress for pastoral trainers." And that almost immediately shuts down the conversation. But we are hearing this, and we are considering it, and RREACH's board is considering it. We would like anything you want to say towards that. But a better question is the question we receive in Africa and Latin America, saying, "We had 800 Africans ready to come to Thailand. But we could not get them there, primarily because of governmental situations and local accessibility of Thailand embassies. Could we do something for Africa and Latin America? GPro regionals?" And we are looking at it very deeply. I'm sharing this as privy to you. If it happens, I will write to each one of you and let you know about potential dates for those.

**[116]** So thank you, my brothers, for giving us the honor and the credibility of your presence and your expression. You're much appreciated. God has placed you in your situations and time is running for all of us, so let's do all we should, all we have until we no longer can.

[117] So in a final thanks to Jonathan and the Aqueduct Project, thank you, Jonathan. We don't know where your future is in terms of the Aqueduct Project. We'd like to see it flourish as well. Would you like to close us in prayer? And any final comments you'd like to make in terms of the availability of these transcription recordings?

[118] **Jonathan Armstrong:** Good! Thank you so much, Ramesh, for chairing the dialogue. We will create a transcript and a formal report. And that concludes this series of dialogues that have followed GPro Congress in 2016.

[119] So let me offer a word of prayer. I'm just going to read Psalm 133 and in my mind I'm thinking not just of this group as brothers that are dwelling in unity, but as we serve the global Church.

[120] Behold how good and pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity! It is like the precious oil on the head, running down on the beard, on the beard of Aaron, running down on the collar of his robes! It is like the dew of Hermon, which falls on the mountains of Zion! For there the Lord has commanded the blessing, life forevermore.

[121] Let's pray. [Audio missing] in the opportunities and the successes that you've given to the schools represented here. So we praise you, Lord, for the work that you've given over many decades to be your Church. God, we praise you for the ways that you continue in these institutions and create pathways forward. God, we praise you for the faithfulness of our leaders and the continued presence of the alumni bases, of interested faculty, of new applicants to the schools. We thank you for what you're doing in the world through these institutions.

[122] God, it's our prayer because it's the prayer of your Son, Jesus, that we experience greater unity, that walls that have been in place be reduced and leveled, and that we experience by your Spirit greater unity with the global body. God, help us to do that. We openly acknowledge our need for you and your guidance, and we expect great things, Lord. We come before you with open hands, expecting that you would do something great something in our day that would rival any of your great works that you've done through your Church on earth.

[123] Lord, we pray that you would open up new doors, create new horizons, and, God, create new significant service for people to engage in. So it's with thanksgiving for your providence that we offer up this day to you. In your name, amen.

[124] **Ramesh Richard:** Amen! Thank you so much, my brothers, presidents, statesmen, spokesmen for the faith. As you start your new terms and semesters, I want to give you 2 Thessalonians 1:11–12, that he bring to fruition every good resolve of yours and work of faith, for his glory, by his grace. Thank you, and you will soon hear from us! Thanks so much for honoring us. Bye!

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