

Hugh Spurgin on the future direction of UTS

Douglas Burton
May 24, 2015



On May 24, the day after the commencement ceremony, alumni and friends gathered in Lecture Hall I at the Unification Theological Seminary (UTS) to dialogue with Dr. Hugh Spurgin, the president of UTS. Spurgin began the discussion of the future direction of the seminary by asserting that UTS will prosper if its goals and agenda are united with those of its Founders and of the leadership of the Family Federation for World Peace. “The key to success is to mobilize UTS stakeholders, including alumni, to unite with our Founder and our church leaders,” Spurgin declared. “Indeed, a team of educators from the Middle States Commission on Higher Education indicated that it is essential for the leadership of UTS to be in alignment with the leaders of the sponsoring church,” he told the gathering.

Some at the meeting asked if the seminary could provide more practical and pastoral education, to which Spurgin responded: “To some extent, UTS is doing that. Our Founder said that the seminarians should graduate from UTS with practical skills. Also, the current church leaders are asking us to develop an online, distance learning program

that is substantial. Virtually the entire curriculum at the University of Bridgeport is online. Currently UTS is seeking to hire professionals to do something similar for UTS. The fact is, we need to go where people live and work. It is unlikely that graduate students will be willing to move to a remote area to go to school, since they have careers and families elsewhere.”



Dr. Hugh Spurgin and Alumni during a Q & A session

In response to queries as to whether the campus would ever be sold, Spurgin said, “I love this place. This is sacred, holy ground.” He pledged to do all that he could to preserve the Barrytown campus for posterity. At the same time, Spurgin said that he would seek to expand the amount of classroom and

office space for UTS in New York City.

Prof. Andrew Wilson, a senior member of the UTS faculty, pointed out that UTS has a unique interfaith body of students, including clergy from Roman Catholic, Protestant and Pentecostal backgrounds. “We want people of various faiths to be active as UTS alumni,” Spurgin said, and he urged alumni to recruit potential students in their local communities. “We are the owners of UTS. Alumni are the voices of UTS to the world. Our Founders want us to support others, especially young people, to enroll as students at UTS. Currently, we have contact information for more than 2,600 alumni and friends.”

Dr. Jose Ferrete and Matthew Goldberg volunteered to help to create an alumni advisory council that could be a source of ideas and support from the grassroots to help the trustees and the President and be a conduit for ideas to help the seminary to grow and succeed. Ferrete, Goldberg, Arthur Herstein and Doug Burton met in Washington, D.C. on June 2 and decided to call a general meeting of local alumni on June 27 in the Maryland area for further discussions. According to Robin Graham, UTS Director of Development, an ad hoc group of alumni and friends located in the Red Hook, New York area are holding a follow-up meeting to further the idea of a new Alumni council. Also, recently Dr. Spurgin discussed establishing an alumni council with Jack Ashworth, Dr. Dale Garrett, and others when he visited the West Coast.

During the discussion on May 24, Spurgin commended Henry Christopher for his unwavering efforts to protect the Barrytown campus of UTS over the last several years. He called upon Christopher and Robin Graham to collect ideas for creating revenue streams to support the maintenance of the 100 acre campus. Subsequently, Anthony Ferrantello submitted a range of development options for the UTS administration to consider, including arranging for investors to lease some of UTS’ land for development, in particular the 80 acres located on River Road. Spurgin said he favored the idea of asking the church to declare Barrytown a historic site that is part of a pilgrimage tour for alumni and friends. He pointed out that there are plans to make the Belvedere training center into a sacred museum and that visitors to that location could also come to UTS to walk Father’s and Mother’s trails and other places on the property that were frequented by our Founders.