

December 5, 2022

To Whom It May Concern,

Northern Seminary is at a critical juncture.

Since 2015, the Board and others in leadership have been informed of bullying, intimidation, retaliation, dishonesty, and other manipulative behaviors that have created an unsafe environment for employees and occasionally students and others by the president of the seminary. First, however, I need to affirm his many excellent qualities.

Dr. Bill Shiell is brilliant. He's an outstanding orator. He's entrepreneurial and a good businessman. He can identify talent and he is a quick read of people's strengths and weaknesses, and has a knack for saying the right words publicly to garner support or to spin a narrative. He has many abilities that are valuable for a leader and a president. These have benefited Northern Seminary and contributed to our steady growth, innovation, and success. I applaud President Shiell for his talents and his genius.

I also love Northern Seminary. I love her mission, her students, her faculty, and the dedication of her staff.

I wish I could end this communication with these affirmations, which are sincere and true.

If Northern were a secular business, *perhaps* I could simply walk away shaking my head and praying for him and all those who have been injured and, according to some, traumatized by their interactions with this President.

During my time at Northern, I communicated regularly with President Shiell. I participated in joint interventions on behalf of other staff and students seeking reconciliation who had been wronged in various ways. I also sought reconciliation personally for demeaning and abusive behavior toward me and sought an intervention jointly with a faculty member. I know Board members who have been informed of various situations. The response of the Board was always the same: no substantive action.

The one exception by the Board was the 2020 "360" chief executive assessment, which surveyed all employees, and presumably the Board as well. In the five-point range from Unsatisfactory to Needs Improvement to Meets Expectations to Exceeds Expectations to Exceptional, President Shiell generally met expectations. Regarding Northern's four "Core Values," he met expectations for only one. For the other three, he was assessed as "needing improvement" (these were, "Pastoral/Missional Mindset," "Servant Leaders," and "Teachable"). His "Interpersonal Skills" should have signaled a problem to the Board, if the many previous attempts to seek action from the Board had not done so already. Of the six skill sets in this category, one met expectations, two needed improvement, and the following three were "unsatisfactory": The ability to build trusting relationships; The ability to balance diverging and competing points of view; and The ability to accept constructive criticism."

These last three points underlie the creation and sustainment of the internal toxic environment at Northern, which has been predominantly but not solely levied toward women. The steady exodus and growingly shorter-terms of employment of administrators and staff at Northern further signal this, and that President Shiell's abusive behavior is getting worse.

Former Northern Consultant, Bobi Siemblida, informed that "people don't leave a job, they leave a person." This person has consistently been President Shiell or those carrying out his wishes in order to keep their jobs.

President Shiell has **violated the following Community Standards** of Northern Seminary (pg. 8):

Especially because a seminary seeks to develop leaders for the Church, we hold one another to high standards in our work, study, relationships, and ministry, seeking to develop spiritual maturity that evidences the fruit of the Spirit. . . . All members are expected to refrain from behavior that destroys community and the personal wholeness which Christ purchased through His life, death, and resurrection. These include, without limitation, misogyny . . . **physical, emotional or sexual abuse (including intimidation or bullying); threats to health and safety of others; disrespect to Seminary employees and students; academic or personal dishonesty** . . . (and possibly) financial misconduct.

As Board members, I can empathize with your primary concern for financial sustainability and success.

However, due to the severity and extent of bullying, intimidation, and the swelling numbers of those abused by President Shiell, the cries of the people have reached the tipping point in judgment.

We who teach the Bible and train leaders in the Church, should we not live the Bible and represent godly leadership?

Scot McKnight, et. al, in their 2020 book, *A Church Called Tov*, state, "it is tragically ironic that church leadership, formed as it is by the character of the leaders, can do so much harm," and point to "two early warning signs of a toxic culture: *narcissism and power through fear* . . . If we are to have any hope of developing a goodness (*tov*) culture in our churches, these narcissistic, unempathetic leaders must be resisted or replaced. "¹

Chapters 5-12 of this book describe what "tov" (good) church and leadership looks like:

1. Creates a goodness culture
2. Nurtures empathy
3. Nurtures grace
4. Nurtures a people-first culture
5. Nurtures truth
6. Nurtures justice
7. Service

¹ Scot McKnight, Laura Barringer, and Tish Harrison Warren, *A Church Called Tov: Forming a Goodness Culture That Resists Abuses of Power and Promotes Healing* (Carol Stream, Illinois: Tyndale Elevate, 2020), 40.

8. Christlikeness

Sadly, President Shiehl has failed to cultivate these qualities at Northern Seminary.

McKnight continues, “**WHEN AN ALLEGATION ARISES** against a pastor, a leader, or a volunteer within a church, what the pastor or leadership does *first* will reveal the culture. . . , The tendency of leaders in a toxic culture to deny, deny, deny in the face of allegations.”²

The Board has repeatedly called for reconciliation of the injured parties with Bill. But reconciliation must be preceded by truth. Rush to reconciliation without taking the necessary steps for reconciliation is an effort to delude both the offender and the offended of the reality and wrongness of the sin incurred.

John Stuart Mill stated,

Bad men need nothing more to compass their ends, than that good men should look on and do nothing.³

Northern is a toxic, not a tov environment. We can do better.

The Board is the only one with the power to make this right by upholding the Community Standards and the Mission of the Seminary.

As Abraham Heschel wrote, “To us a single act of injustice—cheating in business, exploitation of the poor—is slight; to the prophets, a disaster. To us injustice is injurious to the welfare of the people; to the prophets it’s a deathblow to existence; to us, an episode; to them, a catastrophe, a threat to the world.”⁴

I urge you, for Jesus’ sake and His Church, place the President on immediate administrative leave, hire an independent investigator and interim President, and watch Northern prosper like never before. This is a tremendous opportunity!!!

Sincerely and prayerfully,

Ingrid Faro

² McKnight, Barringer, and Warren, 58.

³ John Stuart Mill, Inaugural Address, University of St. Andrews, 1867.

⁴ Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Prophets*, vol. one (copyright 1962; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2017), 4.