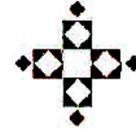


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From Matt Hisrich:

Resignation announcement, early December, 2020



**E A R L H A M**  
SCHOOL of RELIGION

Hello everyone,

Earlier this week I submitted my resignation effective December 31, 2020.

For years before I served in this position it was my dream to do so. Serving under then Dean Jay Marshall, he affirmed my gifts and leading and not only encouraged me to take the steps necessary to prepare, but granted me flexibility in my role as Director of Recruitment and Admissions to pursue a Doctor of Management degree. I was taken by surprise when he announced his intent to retire in May 2018, but felt that it was worth the risk to step into an interim role as a way to provide stability for ESR's students, faculty and staff, and donors. Then President Alan Price approved the recommendation of the search committee for me to do so. We were able to finalize our strategic planning process and then President Avis Stewart appointed me to the permanent position. During this time I regularly told people that I was having a blast in the job. That truly was the case. I loved working with faculty and students in a new way, bringing ideas into reality and engaging with donors and grantors about the importance of the work in which we were engaged.

As you know well, this has been an incredibly challenging year on many levels. ESR is doing very well under the circumstances. Thanks to a revised M.Div. curriculum, new Masters degrees in both Theopoetics and Writing as well as Peace and Social Transformation, and an amazing team of dedicated and talented employees and students, ESR's enrollment was double what it was last fall, and our enrollment credits this spring are set to be higher than they have been in seven years. At the same time, however, higher education generally, and our parent Institution in particular, faces daunting challenges that threaten its very existence - and ESR's. This is also the case for my family, who run a small business in my hometown of Canton, Ohio. After much consideration and discernment with my family here in Richmond and in Canton, we have made the difficult but necessary decision to move back to Canton to help them run their store and navigate the obstacles to continued viability.

Please understand that this decision is not one I take lightly and is not meant as me turning my back on my responsibilities to Earlham and ESR. Nonetheless, I must prioritize my family at this time. It is with a heavy heart that I think of all of the good people who I have come to know so well and who care so deeply about the mission and vision of Earlham School of Religion. You have made this the incredible place that it is. There will be much to figure out in the weeks and months to come, and I will do my best to assist this process. I will miss the faculty, staff, students, alumni, and supporters of the school greatly. I trust that the right leadership will come forward to continue the critical mission of Christian graduate theological education in the Quaker tradition.

Thank you for everything,

Matt Hisrich

Some reflections on the state of Earlham College and Earlham School of Religion as an out-going Dean and Vice President

Matt Hisrich  
Mid-December 2020

I am keenly aware as I write this that anything I have to offer may be taken with a grain of salt given that I am in the process of exiting a leadership role within ESR and the Earlham College. My perspective is also admittedly strongly skewed by my status as a graduate of ESR and having the care of the seminary as the primary focus of my professional life since I began working here in 2012.

As I look back on my time working at ESR, I am incredibly impressed with how innovative the faculty, staff, and students have been and continue to be on a consistent basis. New programs, new courses, new technologies, new uses of existing resources, new ways of thinking about and responding to long-standing issues and questions are standard procedure. Our 2018 5-Year Strategic Plan is well underway, and we are seeing the results: our fall 2020 enrollment was double that of fall 2019, and our spring 2021 credit hour enrollment is set to be the highest it has been in seven years.

I am humbled by our donors and the fundraising efforts that came before me to secure ESR's financial stability, support student enrollment, and relieve much of the year-to-year pressure of primarily tuition-funded education. As other seminaries close or merge or sell off property, ESR's steady in-the-black budgeting – supported by a combination of student payments, annual giving, and long-term endowments established for academic programs, scholarships, and operating needs – is inspirational and a much-needed source of stability in uncertain times.

ESR and its relationship with Earlham College

I have grave concerns that this model of education – while different but equally valid to a tuition-driven approach – is misunderstood or under-appreciated by some in College leadership. Shifting to a different model of funding for ESR – one that would purportedly be a revenue-generator for the College – neglects to account for the nature of ESR's mission within the larger seminary education landscape. While it is true that some seminaries can thrive through professional certification related to ordainment and ministerial credentialing, this is not the tradition out of which ESR as a Christian graduate theological school in the Quaker tradition emerges. Our students are often coming to ESR for its strengths in spiritual formation and vocational discernment – following a call from a place of limited means and toward a career that is unlikely to be lucrative. This by no means invalidates the important role of ESR for its students and graduates – it is in fact part of what makes it a necessary.

ESR has survived and thrived thanks to its partnerships – most notably the services and support it receives and purchases from Earlham College, as well as its joint seminary arrangement with Bethany. Unfortunately, the new administrative relationship between ESR and Earlham College undermines the long-standing partnership between ESR and Bethany. Joint positions that once

reported to the deans of both schools now report to College Vice Presidents. Campus-wide budget reductions impact Bethany without their (or ESR's) input or consultation. Campus-wide decisions are made that ESR and Bethany are only informed of after-the-fact. Strategic planning and implementation as two seminaries in partnership becomes hobbled under such an arrangement.

#### A sober assessment of Earlham College's situation

When unique institutions follow broader educational trends out of a need to increase tuition revenue, they face the very real risk of losing what it is that makes students and parents seek them out as places worth joining because of their distinct identity. In differing ways, this has unfortunately been the dominant path of Quaker liberal arts education in the U.S., and we are seeing the negative impacts play out before us.

While no further cuts are being projected, it is almost impossible to imagine this could possibly be the case given low current enrollment and worrying indicators about future recruiting including fewer high school students taking standardized tests or completing federal financial aid applications. Current efforts to pivot recruiting away from a focus on international and coastal students to regional students will take time to develop after years of neglect. Similarly, new program launches are unlikely to yield large incoming classes quickly. Of course, it is also helpful to keep in mind that most other liberal arts colleges both regionally and nationally are making similar moves. Attempts to appeal to the state Attorney General for greater access to restricted Lilly endowment funds only create further debts that the College will eventually have to pay back. Finally, morale on campus among employees and students given the lack of clear direction, always looming threat of further cuts and budget reductions, elimination of consensus- and consultation-based decision making, and toxic culture of fear of speaking out have debilitated the creativity, energy, and community so absolutely necessary to pull off a re-imagination of what the College could be in a radically new context. We can and should do better.

#### A path forward for ESR

Going forward, tying ESR's ability to survive to its ability to serve as a financial feeder to the College essentially pre-ordains a negative outcome for the seminary. As the only seminary of its kind, this would be an incalculable loss to the Religious Society of Friends – and many others who have and will find a welcome here. To avoid this outcome, the President and Board of Trustees need to intervene with the following actions – and do so with urgency:

- 1) Return the de-designated endowment funds Earlham's board had previously designated to ensure ESR's financial stability;
- 2) Return direct reporting of ESR administrative faculty to the dean of ESR; and
- 3) Restore the autonomy necessary for ESR to fulfill its distinct and board-approved mission and strategic plan.

If it is the case that Earlham College's viability is in question, it is unnecessary and both ethically and fiscally irresponsible to bring ESR down with it and do irreparable damage to Bethany Theological Seminary in the process. In this case, the Trustees should consider taking steps to decouple ESR from the College and grant both seminaries the freedom to fail or succeed on their own merits. Despite all of the challenges facing higher education and graduate theological education generally, there remains a strong chance that an Earlham legacy can continue to meet the needs of those seeking to prepare for lives of ministry and service in a context that remains uniquely Quaker.

Reply to Hisrich from Anne Housman:

----- Forwarded message -----

From: Anne Houtman <houtman@earlham.edu>  
 Date: Tue, Dec 15, 2020, 9:41 AM  
 Subject: To the ESR Board of Advisors

Cc: Matthew S Hisrich <hisrima@earlham.edu>, Ray Ontko  
*[Note: email addresses of the Board of Advisors have been omitted.]*

Dear members of the Board of Advisors,

Ellie shared with me the email that Matt sent to you, since he did not share it with me. To say I am saddened and disappointed would be an understatement. Matt never once expressed to me the concerns he shared with you, even when I gave him ample opportunity to do so. His "reflections" are filled with misinformation and misinterpretation, and reflect more than anything a deep misunderstanding of ESR's fiscal situation, its relationship to Earlham, and more broadly the state of higher education in the United States at this time. This is not the first time Matt has behaved unprofessionally in our work together, but I have previously attributed this to his inexperience. It is an unfortunate way to choose to end a working relationship. I do understand and sympathize with ESR faculty concerns about becoming more integrated with Earlham, and I will continue to be sensitive to those concerns as we make the "back office" changes necessary for ESR's successful future.

On a positive note, we now have the opportunity to conduct a national search for a Quaker theologian with administrative experience and expertise, who can lead ESR into a more engaged relationship with Earlham's wider community while addressing its enrollment and financial challenges. Higher education and seminary education everywhere are reeling from the effects of the global pandemic, not to mention challenging demographic trends. However, I truly believe that ESR offers an education - from gifted teachers and scholars - that uniquely meets the needs of this generation of progressive, spiritually and socially engaged world citizens. We have work to do to

reach them, but I am convinced that we can do that. And we can do it better with ESR as an integral part of the Earlham campus community. I look forward to working together with you to build ESR's future.

Please feel free to reach out if you would like to discuss any (understandable) concerns or questions you might have.

In friendship,  
Ann  
Anne Houtman, D.Phil.  
President  
Earlham College and Earlham School of Religion

I understand that your work hours may not be the same as mine. Please do not feel obliged to respond to this email outside your normal working hours.

Notice of Hisrich Earlham email termination:

From: Miriam E. Bunner  
To: employees, students, Access Students  
Cc: Karen M. Schroeder, Pamela Fenner  
Sent: Wed, 16 Dec 2020 08:45:24 -0500 (EST)  
Subject: [ESR\_Fac] Contact Information for Matt Hisrich

All,

As of this morning, Matt Hisrich's access to Earlham email has been revoked. You can contact him through [gmail].

**Miriam Bunner** (*she/her/hers*)  
*Assistant to the Dean*  
**Earlham School of Religion**  
228 College Ave.  
Richmond, IN 47374  
**bunnemi1@earlham.edu**  
**(765)983-1687**