

Feb. 12, 1960

Dr. Peter L. Berger  
Director, Institute of Church and Community  
The Hartford Seminary Foundation  
Hartford 5, Conn.

Dear Dr. Berger,

Thank you for your phone call of several days ago. I hope you have not been dismayed that I have been a few days getting a reply back to you. As a matter of fact, as you might imagine, your call caught me at a very busy time of the year, during the change of semesters, and due to my heavy teaching schedule, this is the first chance I have had time to write a reply. But the proposal you made has been very much on my mind, even though I could not respond immediately to it.

Your description of the nature and task of the lay institute program and its relationship to the seminary interests me a great deal. Several things remain somewhat unclear to me, however. Before making the long trip to Hartford, it seems appropriate to me that I should clarify some of my interests and concerns, and try to get a little clearer picture of your needs.

As I reflect upon the situation as you have described it, here are some of the questions that occur to me:

(1) Is your lay institute program already underway, or is it still in the embryonic planning stages? I would very much like to read any brochures, statements, published or mimeographed materials which seek to define and explicate the aims and nature of the program and its relation to Hartford Seminary. Or, if there are no such materials, I would very greatly appreciate your spelling out your own conception of the task at hand, if this would not take too much time.

(2) You have called my attention to the fact that this position for which I may be a candidate is not an administrative job or public relations activity. It occurs to me that the inauguration of such a program would take some considerable amount of planning and footwork, such as arranging meetings, making contacts with leaders of vocational groups, etc. I appreciate your suggesting that the major demand upon the holder of this office would be that of coming to grips with the issues involved in the confrontation of the Church with the contemporary world. My inclination would doubtless be much more toward thinking through these issues with my fellow conversants than in keeping the

the organizational wheels rolling. (I do not think that I would despise certain minimal administrative duties, however). Some of my questions in this regard are---would you and I be the full complement of the staff in this enterprise, or would other helpers or assistants or secretaries be involved? Proportionally, how much of our work would have to be done outside of our offices, trotting about Hartford and environs, and how much would be done in the locale of the Seminary proper? Neither of these questions disturb me greatly, but I would like to get a little clearer picture of what might be expected of a person in this Befufung.

(3) A more basic question concerns the relation of seminary teaching to working in the lay institute for this person in this position. I need not conceal the fact that I enjoy seminary teaching very much. I see no reason why working at the task of lay theological education should conflict with seminary teaching, and as a matter of fact it seems to me that they supplement each other quite well. Doubtless your thinking runs along these same lines too. In any event, I would like to do as much seminary teaching as work in the lay institute. It would please me to consider the position as having two equal tasks, seminary teacher and worker in the lay institute. Then, after having had some experience in the two-fold task, it might become clear in which direction one's greatest effectiveness lay. Now, my question in this regard is that I am not sure whether the position as you have described it has this kind of flexibility. I get the impression that it does, but I would like to have you clarify it. ✓

I think I would feel much more responsible about accepting an invitation to visit Hartford after getting your general reaction to these questions. Please do not infer from my inquisitiveness that I have grave reservations of any kind about the program. I don't. It is because I am deeply interested in the proposal that I want to get a clearer picture of it.

With all good wishes, I remain,

Yours sincerely,

Thomas C. Oden