

# InResponse: Five Loaves and Two Fish: A Response to Olive Oil, Theological Education, and Economics

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One day, the disciples found themselves in a situation that would be a nightmare for any president of a theological institution. They were challenged to provide food for thousands of hungry students! The disciples were troubled, knowing that vast resources would be required. However, Jesus urged them to first find out what was already available: “How many loaves do you have?...Go and see” (Mk. 6:38). This story, and particularly Jesus’ question, applies well to the financial sustainability of theological institutions.

In “Olive Oil, Theological Education, and Economics,” Larry Smith speaks of the differences between Western and Majority World contexts, and how they affect theological institutions. All institutions reflect the realities of the wider context in which they operate, and each context provides its own unique set of challenges and opportunities. In Majority World contexts, unstable political, economic, social, and sometimes religious realities make achieving sustainability an even greater challenge. Given this fact, Majority World schools may not, and perhaps should not, have identical tracks of development as Western schools. Contextual approaches are needed to equip institutions with deeper understandings of specific needs, appropriate approaches, and feasible sources of sustainability.

Smith proposes four considerations for leaders of theological institutions in the Majority World. Depending on the context and institution, these four issues may have varying degrees of relevance. Nevertheless, they are all important and encourage leaders toward “realism and credible planning.” As participants in the

*Vital SustainAbility Initiative*, a collaborative project helping schools to develop integrated and viable strategic plans in service of their mission, we at Ukrainian Evangelical Theological Seminary (UETS) have come to recognize the importance of realism. The first step toward credible planning and sustainability is to answer Jesus' question: "How many loaves do you have?" It is possible for an institution to have something and not even realize it. A thorough analysis of available resources, faculty, facilities, expenses, and profit is therefore very important.

Jesus' question motivates better stewardship by challenging us not only to identify resources, but also to value them. As a result of realistically analyzing our resources, we have become stricter in our enrollment policies. At UETS, no student covers 100% of the total cost of his or her education. UETS must therefore cover the deficit through a scholarship program. When the enrollment committee is not certain about a particular applicant, we must ask ourselves a very personal question: "Are we ready to pay for this student's education?" We know what resources we have available to us, we value them, and we therefore want to use them wisely.

The disciples found five loaves and two fish. Knowing what we have helps our institution to better address its needs. Indeed, realism, credible planning, and good stewardship can really help an institution to fulfill its mission sustainably.



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